

POEMS FROM PRAGUE

**A collection of poems from the Beef Stew Poetry Readings
in Prague from November 1999 to April 2001**

Prague 2001

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Introduction

When I came back to Prague in the autumn of '99 my friend Becky from Oklahoma set me up with a place to stay and a job teaching English at the school where she worked. It was a hell of a welcome home, especially as the last leg of my Asian trip was a stint in a Malaysian prison, but that's another story.

Prague really does feel like home to me, even though I'm not from here, have no particular ethnic connection that I know of, barely speak the language and spend 90% of the time when I'm not teaching hanging out with other foreigners. If home is where the heart is, here I am.

Becky took me along one Sunday night, after I'd been back just a few days, to a pair of poetry readings. The first was in a jazz club near Old Town Square in a brick basement with an arched ceiling, like so many basements in Prague. There was a pianist on stage accompanying the readers. It was dark, it was smoky, it was a parody of Greenwich Village in the Beat Generation.

Some of the readers were rather interesting, a few of them sucked pretty bad.

The second one was about a half an hour walk away, at a cafe called Radost FX. When you were with Becky, you walked everywhere. She would let a perfectly good tram rumble by just for the pleasure of walking through Prague streets at night.

There was no Piano at Radost nor, for that matter, a stage. It was in a basement, of course (so much of Prague's night life happens in basements) but it wasn't the classic brick Cask of Amontillado basement. It was the bar of a discotheque and it was a utilitarian design with bad 60s decor. There were leopard skin couches, low metal kidney shaped tables and a wall of broken bottles behind glass, with a pale orange light shining through them. It was dark, it was smoky, it was a parody of Greenwich Village in the Beat Generation.

Some of the readers were rather interesting, a few of them sucked pretty bad.

After a couple of weeks, I summoned up the courage to read one of my poems at Radost. Pretty soon, I ran out of poems and had to start writing new stuff, if I wanted to read every week. So, for the last year and a half almost, I have been writing at least one poem a week and often more. Some of them have been fairly interesting and some of them have sucked pretty bad.

Just having the venue to read has created an incentive to write, and the need to write something new every week has meant that I have written more than ever before in my life, and I now have enough poems to put together into a book.

So, I'd like to thank all of the people who have listened to me on all of those Sunday nights, some of which were pretty horrible. I would also like to thank Helena, who helped me put it all together and was the inspiration for more than a couple of the poems, besides. And, of course, Becky.

The Beef Stew Poem

On a street in Vinohrady
on a street called Belehradská
on the red, I.P. Pavlova
on the green, Namesti Miru

Stands a café known as Radost
trendy, artsy-fartsy Radost
very popular with expats
and the self-appointed in-crowd

There they serve the fruity waffles
with whipped cream and maple syrup
there they serve the “Big-brain scramble”
stupid name, but very filling

Seated low, on comfy couches
decadent as ancient Romans
and the waitresses are gorgeous
but that’s normal, in this country

There’s a room, off to the side, where
hopeful artists hang their paintings
or their photos, mostly photos
and their friends all come to see them

Sometimes we sit there for coffee
when there are no empty tables
there the waitress seldom ventures
it could be another planet

Down the stairs, beyond the bathrooms
which are often locked or broken
in the basement, there's a disco
and the dance floor's small and crowded

Hot young girls with bodies bursting
with the power of their gender
moving like a swaying ocean
feel the power of their motion

But the bar is cool and spacious
with a wall of broken bottles
brown and ugly, eerie lighting
someone must have thought it trendy

But it's cool and you can talk there
on the leopard spotted couches
that have felt a thousand assholes
on a thousand drunken evenings

It is quiet in the daytime
in the haunted disco dungeon
Monday nights, they schedule movies
which are almost always canceled

So, there's mostly eerie silence
that the ghost of disco leaves there
leaves a void that must be filled there
filled with words as yet unspoken

So we gather, Sunday evenings
those of us who would be poets
those of us with massive egos
gather to dispel the silence

Like the tree that falls unwitnessed
in the forest of the proverbs
are the words of nameless poets
who are neither Blake nor Shelley

Here, our words can fill the silence
here, our words may have a meaning
in the basement of a café
on a street in Vinohrady

Random Thoughts

If you drop an egg, it doesn't bounce
30 grams is the same as an ounce
and I live on a street that I can't pronounce
at the top of a flight of stairs

It takes 24 hours for one full spin
you have to go out if you want to come in
and I didn't ask him to die for my sins
I wasn't even there

The world is a stage, the world is a screen
there's always something we haven't seen
and how can we know what anything means?
or what is right and wrong?

The Taoists, the Buddhists, the Christians, the Jews
are arguing over yesterday's news
every point has a different view
can't we all just get along?

Hate contracts and love expands
each reward has its own demands
it's only a little bit of sand
in the oyster that makes the pearl

Sometimes I'm out walking and I don't know why
to circle a square is as easy as pi
from wherever you are, if you look at the sky
you're standing on top of the world

What is the link between beauty and art?
Does it come from the head, does it come from the heart?
I don't know the ending before I start
but the setting is so sublime

I'm for open markets and global trade
and I love the way these old buildings are made
but, let's face it, I'm here 'cause I want to get laid
the rest is just passing the time

The sweet golden nectar that deadens the brain
fairy tale castles and cobblestone lanes
and the girls are so pretty it drives you insane
how long can this fantasy last?

We toke on our reefer, we guzzle our beer
but where will we be this time next year?
Why should the future be any more clear
than the present was in the past?

If you wrestle a pig, you're gonna get muddy
a joint or two never hurt nobody
sometimes we learn without having to study
we all get more than we earn

Life is easy if you don't try
to understand the reason why
you live, you laugh and then you die
and it's somebody else's turn

Though Vincent may have lost his mind
the pictures that he left behind
are like a map to help us find
the vision that made him insane

You may be wrong, you may be right
but once it's down in black and white
it becomes a bit, or perhaps a byte
in the universal brain

Eight times eight is sixty four
there's a value to every square on the board
and everyone seems to be keeping score
but what is the point of the game?

A pair doesn't have to be two of a kind
there's nothing finer than unrefined
and life before death is a word undefined
there's a hell of a lot in a name

But the object is not the same as the word
lines on a map seem so absurd
there are no borders if you are a bird
adrift on the afternoon breeze

The world is a place where we all live together
in all kinds of places, in all kinds of weather
the swamps and the prairies, the forests, the heather
the deserts, the mountains, the seas

Whatever will be, will be unplanned
but you have to be flying before you can land
Reincarnation is out of our hands
a pig is reborn as a ham

Space is as black as the time before birth
and as full of potential and infinite worth
the meek may well inherit the earth
but by then it won't be worth a damn

I think about food until I've been fed
a rose is both beautiful and red
a step to the side will get you ahead
and tomorrow's a beautiful day

Sometimes I drink coffee
sometimes I drink tea
admission into the future is free
and wherever you're going, that's where you'll be
I'm glad to be on my way.

People in a Can

I watch the trams as they rattle by
and try to catch somebody's eye but,
oblivious to all outside
They ride, they ride, they ride, they ride

Sitting, standing, they fill the spaces
with blank and non-committal faces
What morbid genius hatched this plan
for moving people in a can?

Those who are here are going there
(we won't concern ourselves with where)and they have to
leave, to leave space clear
for everyone who's coming here

moving containers back and forth
west to east and south to north
shuttling from here to there
in a constant game of musical chairs

if we want so badly to be somewhere
why is it we aren't already there?

Walking Through Nusle at Night

It's two a.m., I need to get some sleep
but the night bus is a half an hour away
I'd rather walk than stand around and wait
and so, at night, I walk the city streets

When all the trade and traffic of the day
has disappeared and all the streets are clear
the static's gone away and we can hear
the click of shoes a block or two away

I feel compelled to silence and to stealth
the night is black in mourning for the day
and all that's bright has faded into gray
the city is a statue of itself

each building is a piece of that design
and here and there a screen is glowing white
but the action's mostly hidden from our sight
the human drama plays for private eyes

it's only in the darkness of the night
we see the true significance of light

September

We were rowing on the Vltava
about a week ago
straight across from Letna Park
moving kind of slow

I could see right through the trees
the people walking there
that formerly solid wall of green
was thinner than my hair!

The summer went by in a flash this summer
this summer went by too fast
and all those bright tomorrow's
have become the timeless past

Springtime's hopeful projects
that we never did begin
join the leaves along the sidewalk
as they fly before the wind

I'm sorry we never got together
I'm sorry I never called
Now that summer's almost over
and we're headed for the fall

Last May seems just like yesterday
when the sun shone on and on
but now the day is almost over
and the sun is almost gone

It was a summer of being together
a summer of being apart
a summer the sun lit up the walls
of the cave within my heart

It was a summer of love and joy
it was a summer of death
and now it fades into a puff
of Autumn's frosty breath

Some things will last forever
some things won't even last
the summer went by too fast this summer
this summer went by too fast

Left Bank, Vltava

I've heard it said, again and again
that Prague is now what Paris was then
where artists and writers congregate
like birds of a feather, like fish to bait
If that is true, as has been stated
and the zeitgeist has been reincarnated
I'll just sit in a Prague cafe
until I start writing like Hemingway

Riegrovy Sady

Each one's a little different
Each one's a little the same
I love this park
but I don't know its name

RIP

Under this street, there lies a hill
sloping gently to the top
and every year, there'd be a crop
of grass and leaves and tangled brush
and fox and squirrel and lark and thrush
a pretty hillside in the wood
and people saw that it was good
and built their homes there, one or two
just so they could admire the view
and two or three soon grew, you see
for everyone so loved the trees
that thousands soon were living there
in the wood so green and fair
built their schools and stores and churches
amid the oaks and elms and birches
and so they wouldn't strain their feet
they went ahead and built the street
and writ on the stones, so quiet and still
is: Under this street, there lies a hill

The Legend of Libuse

Between two sloping banks the river flowed
about a river deep and river wide
an ancient forest covered either side
one fall, a couple thousand years ago

One day, a princess walking through the wood
ate some mushrooms growing from the ground
(the kind that make your head spin round and round)
sat down on the bank and it was good

The evening sun so red it looked like fire
belied the coolness of the evening breeze
and in the light it cast upon the trees
she saw a city of a thousand spires

Whose beauty reached up to the very sky
there by the river, with its steady flow
she sat and watched the golden city grow
and her vision was completed, by and by

How could Libuše so exactly see
the way things really did turn out to be?

A Czech Christmas Carol

The tree is up in Old Town Square
the lights are nice and bright
there's boiled wine to warm the blood
through chilly winter nights

Rosy cheeks are glowing
with the season's effervescence
as young and old both contemplate
the coming of the presents

Joyous music fills the air
with lovely Christmas song
and the checkout line at Tesco
is a half an hour long

Yes, Christmas time is coming
everybody's baking sweets
but there's still something missing
It isn't quite complete

Soon the basins will appear
on every city street
with frigid, running water
that turns to ice beneath your feet

and fat men wearing waders
will fulfill your Christmas wish
and slam a mallet on the head
of an unsuspecting fish

Oh, the blood is running through the streets
their knives are long and sharp
it is the time for peace on Earth
and the killing of the carp

You can keep your ham and turkey
your Santa and his sleigh
because, for me, it isn't Christmas
without carp on Christmas day

Prague Spring

It's Spring! It's Prague! I feel alive!
there's magic in the air
I'm walking down the street
without a worry or a care

The wicked wind of winter
has lost its frigid bite
if it weren't raining like a bastard
it'd probably be bright

Chains of wet, green buds adorn
each brown and barren branch
as full of hope and promise
as a budding new romance

Pink and yellow jackets
are replacing coats of black
yesterday I smiled
and somebody smiled back!

Prague is really pretty
under a blanket of fresh white snow
but in the sunshine of the springtime
certain things begin to show

The sights that greet this poor boy's eyes
are so beautiful it hurts
as I ride the escalators
and I look up women's skirts

So, if you were to ask me
why I keep coming back
I'd say "It isn't the hash at the Chapeau Rouge,
the ecstasy or the crack.

It isn't the beautiful buildings
the operas or the plays
it isn't the salaries, or the galleries
restaurants and cafes

It isn't the view from Charles Bridge
it isn't the Old Town Square
it isn't the parek v rohliku
that you can buy anywhere

It isn't the flowers in the park
it's not the birds who sing
but the flower of Czech womanhood
that blossoms every spring

The Yellow Line

The yellow line is as low as you can go
if you're riding the red, there is still another level below
in the event of a nuclear war
I know exactly where I'm heading for
the yellow line is as low as you can go

When it's time to go home
we head down into a hole
just like the rats and the snakes
the weasels, rabbits and moles
It'll get you anywhere in town
it isn't alternative, it's just underground
the yellow line is as low as you can go

The escalators going down so slow
with all the blank faced zombies
standing all in a row
It's like you're falling down into a well
and if you keep on going, you'll wind up in hell
The yellow line is as low as you can go

Logos and Theos

In the woods, a tree falls to the ground
but no one's there, so does it make a sound?
If sounds defined as something that we hear
the answer must be negative, it's clear

If God created man, and not instead
the other way around, as some have said
it may have been because he had no choice
Does he exist if no one hears his voice?

From the seed, the reaching, looping vines
never, ever grow along straight lines
Yet plants whose leaves are twisted, random, tangled
are seen as fields with even lines and angles

From the mountains towering above
the pattern's only clear when you're clear of it
the credit for the universal plan
in fairness, must be shared by God and man

The Logos is connected to the Theos
What else but order could come out of chaos?

Walking Home in the Evening

Walking home in the evening, a pain in my feet
I see street after street after street after street
of buildings in concrete, so gray and so tall
wall after wall after wall after wall

It seems so frustrating, each life in a box
block after block after block after block
then one by one, but all the same
in frame after frame after frame after frame

The lights come on, dispelling the gloom
in room after room after room after room
off and then on, in a binary code
in node after node after node after node

And so it has been from the time of creation
in generation upon generation
from the first spark of life, which grew so well
in cell after cell after cell after cell

It grew and it changed through trouble and strife
in life after life after life after life
created the grasses, the massive yield
in field after field after field after field

Created the trees, so solid and good
in wood after wood after wood after wood
the birds and the fish, from cradle to grave
in wave after wave after wave after wave

created a creature who stood upright
in fight after flight after flight after fight
a lifetime to live and a lifetime to learn
as turn after turn after turn after turn

They plowed their fields and they built their homes
in Cairo and Carthage and Athens and Rome
Each struggling peasant fell into his niche
in ditch after ditch after ditch after ditch

And from father to daughter, from mother to son
one after one after one after one
bear the code of the species, the mark of the race
upon face after face after face after face

Without any planning, without our design
and yet line upon line upon line upon line
of the human parade is passing the stand
in band after band after band after band

If you look too close, you see nothing at all
but wall after wall after wall after wall
yet, as I stare out at the infinite light
and see light after light after light after light

I long for the day we will make it that far
to star after star after star after star

Patterns

The polished wood reveals the grain
an open book that could explain
the heart of a tree, the soul of the wood
unfelt, and so misunderstood
or the visible flow of a running stream
with Flo's and Eddie's to me it seems
a visible sign put there to show
the way it goes, the way it goes
or the lines and the waves of the drifting sand
which may be random and unplanned
but yet, look closely and they could
be said to resemble the grain of wood
the reason isn't clear to me
it doesn't seem like it should be

Words

There are words like “please” and “thank you”
that we use to be polite
Or “Dear Sir” and “Quite Sincerely”
which are useful when we write

There’s “good morning” and “how are you?”
to help start out the day
and words like “left” and “right” and “straight”
to help us on our way

There are verbs to say what’s happening
and nouns to say what’s what
and the short ones called conjunctions
such as “if” and “and” and “but”

Sometimes you change an accent
and a verb becomes a noun
They will record our record
sounds like they like our sound

There are gestures which have meaning
just as much as any word
like the upraised middle finger
known as “giving one the bird”

or the arching of an eyebrow
or the cocking of an ear
that says you’re saying something
that I really want to hear

The way you walk into a room
can show the way you feel
hesitation in a handshake
can ruin a major deal

So much of what we mean to say
depends upon our style
The most important word in any language
is a smile

Carrot and Stick

The carrot and stick, it's easy to choose
it seems like an offer you can't refuse

We seek the pleasure, avoid the pain
Follow the sun, stay out of the rain

Pavlovian parrots who've learned what's good
and do the things we know we should

The mule gets a carrot, the dog gets a bone
Everybody gets a cellular phone

I'd like to find an alternative pick
but I still don't want to get whacked with the stick

Alienation

I was in a crowd of people
but I felt so all alone
Everyone around me
was talking on the phone

Time Lapse Photography

Time lapse photography
catches the clouds as they
move on the wind like the
waves of the ocean

Koyanishqatsi, the
streets of the city, where
people are moving like cells in the bloodstream, we

Still

Hear

The roar of the ocean
recorded in cells that have
covered the Earth in un-
checked procreation
fight or flight chemicals
leaping the synapses
writing the software
of civilization

Or

Are

We like bodies of coral
that grow into atolls
and just, through attrition
have gained our self-consciousness
right answers saved and the
wrong ones deleted
per the original
binary postulate

It's
Clear
That nothing is random here
everything's meaningful
choreographed in a cosmic ballet that goes
Koyanisqatsi, the
flowers that close at night
open each morning to
greet the new day, and

What
Do
We see when we look through the
lens of a microscope
everything's moving and
interconnected but
all of the data which
we have received shows us
there is a pattern to
what we perceive
and that's

Good
But
Does it have a purpose, I
don't know the answer, I
don't know the answer and
you don't know either, I'm
sure that that's true, Buddhist
or Hindu or Christian
or Jew, I have no reason to think
that you do

So

If

The world is a circle and
life is a spiral that
always goes forward when
moving through time, and we
all the while, in fear and
denial, live out our lives
though we know we will die
and nobody, nobody understands why

How

Did

We conjure the creed that we've
labeled our consciousness
demons, damnation and
negative attitudes
where did we locate
the Gods that we follow
filling a space that we
cannot leave hollow

With

All

Our totems and talismans
channeling energy
out of the synergy
nature, reality
these are the reasons
the cycles, the seasons
our thinking has followed
the path it was put on

The
Heart
Beat of all our mythology
lies in biology
Oedipus Rex was the King Motherfucker and
that's what is stored at the
root of our consciousness
that's what is stored in our
Jungian memory

Deep
Down
There, Morrison knew it, he
told me one evening
when I was on acid
and he was on video
better in context than
taken alone, from the
"Doors of Perception" to
Oliver Stone upon stone

We
Build
Each generation u-
surping the last one in-
herits the world as a
matter of course
We are the Lizard Kings
We are the core of a
growing anthropo-
centrifugal force

But
We're
Still basically animal
savage, irrational
governed by urges we
can't understand...if we
understood them...and we'll
understand them...then our free
will will be at our command

So
Where
Is the Tao we must follow
the road to enlightenment
spiritual covenant
sudden Satori or
path to perfection? Well,
where do you think it is?
Just where it always was
stretched out in front of us

That's
Why
Our consciousness matters
that inner awareness
with which we can look at
ourselves in 3rd person
We are the picture
that's painting the picture
We are a song that is
Singing itself

So
You
Can say what you want to say
We're what we're meant to be
living our lives is fulfilling our roles but we
want to have meaning, so
we have created it, we
are the ones who define
our own souls

It
Does
Not matter if it was a
conscious decision that
lifted us out of the
primordial agar or
random, sequential
a chain of coincidence
we can't deny that we
are what we are

We
Are
The Lords of the Universe
Masters of Everything
we are the owners of
all we survey, we stand
here at the threshold, the
start of the future, a
future that will be
whatever we say

Cybertreehouse

I'd like to build a cybertreehouse
in a spreading cybertree
on a sunny cyberisland
in a southern cybersea

We could live on nuts and berries
it would be a lot of fun
we could watch the cybersunsets
when the cyberday is done

High among the cyberbranches
all our friends would live next door
in our little cybervillage
high above the jungle's floor

Everyone you know and love
and half the folks you've never met
and quite a few you're going to like
although you haven't met them yet

complete unto itself, we'd have
a never ending list of stuff
No, man, wait, delete the island
That just isn't big enough

We should build a cyberpalace
in the heart of cybercity
where the cyberbeer is good
and all the cybergirls are pretty

everyone could come and join us
in our growing cyberstate
cyberwine in all the glasses
cybersteak on every plate

Cyberparks and cybergardens
cyberhouses, cyberschools
After all, we wouldn't want to
raise a bunch of cyberfools

It's a simple simulation
of concrete, plastic, glass and steel
The fantasy is much more vivid
for the fact it could be real

I'd like to draw a cybermap
that leads us to a better place
draw the blueprint for a heaven
in real time and in real space

There would be no need for hunger
there would be no need for war
We'd have everything we needed
Isn't that what this is for?

Lipstick

Lipstick may be red as a beet
on the lips of the girls on Perlová Street

Purple as paint or green as gunk
on the pouting lips of a petulant punk

Or black as sin, le couleur du mal
put on by a wannabe femme fatale

Sometimes it's attractive, sometimes it's a waste
I suppose it's all just a matter of taste

But sweet as the nectar the hummingbird sips
is the taste of chapstick on my honey's lips

My Social Life

My social life is like a tram
that runs along the tracks
I go out and then, some hours later,
I come back

Ice Tea

I see a porch with a wooden rail
painted a pearly white
where I can sit all afternoon
and well into the night

Or a hammock where I could be lying
under a coconut tree
watching the sun as it slowly sinks
into the western sea

or perhaps a green expanse of lawn
somewhere on the side of a hill
the air is thick with the sweet, rich smell
of the steaks that are on the grill

I don't need an airline ticket
to get where I want to be
all I need is a place to relax
and a glass of cold ice tea

Nail Polish

I say “you don’t need to paint your nails”
and sure enough, it never fails
they paint their nails

I beg them not to dye their hair
but if they hear me, they don’t care
they dye their hair

I say “please don’t kill yourself with heels”
but do they listen to my appeals?
they wear high heels

They never listen to a word I say
and that’s O.K.

The Speed of Thought

The pen is always a half step behind
the thoughts that are racing through your mind
and you lose your grip as you try to find
a word, an image, a way to define
a thought that's moving, that's still in flight
The faeries in Mr. Blakes garden at night
How many words did he fail to write
when the vision came at the speed of light
We use 10% but there's so much more
Our need is great, our grasp is poor
What lies in store behind the door
what new frontiers, what distant shores
what golden keys, what tribal lore
You can churn out novels by the score
the words you'll never write are more

The 13 Different Definitions of the Verb “To Get” (plus a few phrasal verbs)

Get is not the past tense of go
Even though it seems it should be so
You have to go if you going to get
Somewhere you haven't been to yet

Firstly, “get” means to arrive, as in “she always gets here late”
Or “I first got to Prague in the Spring of 98”
Can you tell me how to get there, is it left or is it right
By the time I get to Phoenix it will be the morning light

Of course, “get” starts some phrasal verbs, get around, get along, get by
get set, get wet, get late, get dark, get scared, get sick, get better
Or “to get” can mean to receive: I got a card, I got a letter

“Get” can mean to have: I've got a car, I've got a flat
she's got a brand new boyfriend and his mother's got a cat
I've got a brand new pair of roller skates, you've got a brand new key
I hope you're as happy that I've got you as you are that I've got me

Before we get too far with this I think what we should do
is get relaxed, get settled down and have a short review
When he got here he got drunk because he'd got a letter
“I'm sorry,” she had written, “but I've found somebody better.”

To arrive, to become, to receive, to have, it's getting plain to see
“Get” gets to be almost anything, you can get “get” to be
another common meaning is to obtain or to acquire
get a job, get a raise, get a new TV, get whatever you desire

Sherlock's trying to get a clue, the actor to get a hand
The boys all want to get a girl, the girls to get a man
get a prize, get wise, get a little or, get lucky, get a lot
If you're going to come and get it, come and get it while it's hot

"Get" can mean get started, let's get moving, let's get rolling,
let's get walking, let's get talking, let's get dancing, let's get strolling
get up, get down to business, get out of bed, you lazy toad
let's get to work, let's get this so called show out on the road

"Get" can mean to be allowed, I got to meet the band!
I got to get his autograph, I got to shake his hand!
it's like :to have a chance" - I got to go to Disneyland!
(this poem, by the way, got a whole lot longer than I'd planned)

To get can mean to cause it to be done, to make it so
I got my girl to wash my clothes, to iron and you know
she had a lovely flat and I was living there rent free
I wonder why she suddenly got so pissed off at me

"Get" means to escape: get away, get loose, get clear
If it's the last thing we ever do, we've got to get out of here
Or simply "git" where I come from, skedaddle, do not stay
get out of my face, get off of my case but please, just go away

"Get" can mean to catch, as in the bastard by the throat
you get a train, you get a plane, you get a ferry or a boat
or to send: I'll get that report to you, that file, that fax, that note
or to get can mean to irritate, she always gets my goat

gets on my nerves, gets to me in a way that's quite unpleasant
not everything we get in life has got to be a present
we don't always like the things we get, we'd like to give them back
I've got the blues, I got bad news, I got the shaft, I got the sack

I know this poem is getting rather long and out of hand
but there's just one more, "to get," you see, can mean to understand
to get the joke, to get the point, of something that was said
thanks for being here, I hope you got what I just read

Synonyms

You could say he's portly, chunky
chubby, less than trim
fat, obese or out of shape
these are synonyms

We need them when we're saying
all the things that must be said
but it sounds too bad and so we say
something else instead

It's cruel to say she dumped you
kicked you out or left you flat
split, vamoosed, skedaddled
and she won't be coming back

to minimize the impact
you could say you had a spat
a difference of opinion
(as between a dog and cat)

You could simply say you're single,
on your tod, or all alone
to speak about your solitude
would elevate the tone

And so you drown your sorrows
when the liquor brings no bliss
but you're in the pub with others
who are simply on the piss

Some imbibe and some partake
and some will hoist a glass
some get tipsy, some get drunk
and some fall on their ass

Shitfaced, schnockered, blotto
hammered, stinko, loopy, tight
beyond the legal limit
pissed as parrots, high as kites

Drunk as skunks and seeing double
happy, giddy, having fun
talking loud and causing trouble
until the evening's done

Some are joyful and elated
as they're heading for the door
some are quite inebriated
passed out on the floor

(all of them intoxicated,
but some a little more)

But life goes on, you persevere,
continue, muddle through
and do the things you know a man
has really got to do

For every state of being,
for every time of day
there are a dozen words or phrases
you might choose to say

Some are pissy and complaining
when everything is wrong
some are mournful and lamenting
like in a country song

Some are perky, joyous, happy
when the tune is more upbeat
some are cheerful, some are snappy
when you want to move your feet

You can whimper, you can whisper
you can scream and shout and curse
but whatever words you choose to use
it always could be verse

You Can Call My Apartment a Flat

You can call my apartment a flat
I don't really care about that

You can call the bog a loo
if that's what you want to do

Stand on queue if you're so inclined
but where do we draw the line?

I'll go so far, but I'm sorry
I won't call a truck a lorry

and corn is corn, I will state my defiance
Mays was that guy who played for the Giants

Aubergine for eggplant? That's O.K.
I don't really like them anyway

But french fries are french fries, if you want chips
they come in a bag and they're meant for dips

Belly or tummy, it matters little
but that's a belly button, there in the middle

and fanny is just an unusable word
unless we can agree on what part is referred to

A bonnet goes on a baby's head
that's a hood on the front of your car instead

Speaking of cars, that's a trunk in the rear
boots are for walking, that should be clear

and you might think we've got no class
but petrol is too refined for gas

Your Hoover may be quite the Lux
but my vacuum cleaner also sucks

and speaking of sucking, it would be a real drag
if you wanted a cig, and you got a fag

It would make a woman angry, I don't
know how you'd face her

If she said to use a rubber
and you reached for an eraser

There is a simple solution to this linguistic plight
You all could just admit that we are right

Five Words

If I learn just five words a day
that'll never be enough
to name the flowers and trees and birds
and fish and all that stuff

If I only learn ten words each day
I'll never comprehend
the range of her emotions
and the signals that she sends

One hundred words a day will not
explain, decode, unwind
the grammar of the universe
the meaning of mankind

Perhaps it's just as futile
as a castle in the sand
but it doesn't take that much to say
I want to understand

Salt Water Music

The ocean rocked, the ocean rolled
across the lifeless planet's face
there was liquid, there was light
and there was movement in this place

The crashing surf, the rising swell
the love of ocean for the shore
a shallow pool, a single cell
a thing that wasn't there before

The world has changed a lot, of course
since that amoebic virgin birth
but the sun still rules the heavens
and the ocean rules the earth

We have grown and we have changed
far removed from ancient oceans
Still, it shouldn't seem so strange
that we should feel the ancient motions

The rhythms of the human heart
are like the waves that break apart
Having risen from the mud
we feel the ocean in our blood

Reality Rhymes

Is this infernal or sublime?
Depends upon your point of view
There is no rest, but at the core
nothing's ever really changed
We try to break out, go beyond!
To pass the point of no return!
The line extends, and soon we find
it is reality that rhymes

Puddle

In view of the reflection that they make
a puddle is the equal of a lake

How to Win Debates

You've made your point
you've made it clear
I've heard all that I want to hear

It should be plain
for you to see
that I quite simply don't agree

Excuse me for being
so abrupt
but it's my turn to interrupt

I'm sure you'll see my point of view
if I can talk louder and faster than you

The Streetlight

The streetlight shines down
spotlighting the falling flakes
the snow must go on

The Urge

The Myths, the religions
the legends, the lies
the clothes that we wear
are a thin disguise

The buildings, the cars
the web that we weave
all of the things
in which we believe

have been created
have been designed
by human hand
by human mind

The natural world
has been replaced
but the natural urges
have not been erased

First among these is
the urge to survive
to defend one's existence
to grow and to thrive

To thrive, to grow
to profit, to gain
to seek the pleasure
avoid the pain

Accumulate
a lot of stuff
It's not enough
It's not enough

There's an itch, a yearning
an inner demand
to explain it all
to understand

But it's all so big
and we're so small
How can we possibly
get it all?

And so the left hand
seeks the right
there's an urge to merge
to link up, to unite

The yin and the yang
the dark and the light
the heat of the day
and the dark of the night

Like a key fits a lock
like a foot fills a boot
the water is driven
to find the root

The man and the woman
the need , the desire
the passions, the need
of the ice for the fire

There's a need of each part
to be part of a whole
to join with another
is good for the soul

The Medium is the Message

The medium is the message
that's what the wise man said
How did that thought you're thinking
ever get inside your head?

If you read it in the paper
and you think that makes it true
your experience with papers
is the only thing that's new

If you heard it on the T.V.
or on the radio
the only things you're learning
are what they want you to know

If you heard it on the Internet
your case is very slight
there are a lot of people on the net
who aren't all that bright

I might be getting cynical
I guess that's how it goes
but I only believe my own two eyes
and sometimes not even those

The medium is the message
that's what the wise man said
How did that thought you're thinking
ever get inside your head?

Toy Guns

Kids have fun
when they play with guns
with a rat-a-tat-tat
Take that, take that!
It's O.K., it's no big deal
They aren't old enough to kill
for real

Journey to Ixtlan

We took a journey to Ixtlan
We opened the doors of perception
Was that the road to enlightenment
or the path of self-deception?

Have I learned anything at all
on this flight of understanding?
I don't know, but I'm low on fuel
and I'm coming in for a landing

Life at the Improv

If the world's a stage, as Shakespeare said
is there a script I haven't read?

That explains my role, contains my lines
or do I have to improvise?

Does the one who has the most toys win?
Or perhaps the one with the fewest sins?

If you pledge your life to silver and gold
you will have comfort when you are old
a beautiful house and a color TV
a life of pleasure, a life of ease
but if gold is the substance of your soul
the ferry man will take that toll

You can study hard, read lots of books
it's not as easy as it looks
you may learn a lot of stuff
you may learn that learning's not enough
Though wisdom is a worthy goal
You've learned the part, and missed the whole

Or you could do a lot of deeds
planting gardens, pulling weeds
building buildings, writing books
but someday you will have to look
back at all the things you've done
and wish that you had had more fun

You could live for fun and games
and blind your eyes on beauty's flame
love and laughter, song and dance
may well ensnare you in their trance
it may be gentle, it may be sweet
but still, it leaves you incomplete

Money, knowledge, success and love
or E, for all of the above
there's so much withing our reach
that we should try a bit of each
a little sample from the plate
some to love and some to hate

So, when we exit from the stage
we leave our mark upon the page
the work of our lifetime is writing our role
as we struggle to achieve our goals
frozen in time in the world of today
the work of a lifetime is also the play

Space Station Alpha (Saturday, November 11th, 2000)

They're calling it Space Station Alpha now
because it's the very first one
They're calling it Space Station Alpha now
the journey has begun

Alpha's as big as a jumbo jet
but Beta will make it look small
Gamma will be bigger still
and Delta will dwarf them all

When we look up at the sky at night
in 2045
Epsilon will be
the brightest object in the sky

They'll be as big as shopping malls
and it won't seem so strange
to hear somebody say
they have a home upon LaGrange

Still, we'll keep on building
ever better, ever greater
there will be resorts of brand new sorts
on Zeta, Eta and Theta

Iota, Kappa, Lambda, Mu
will hover over Mars
while Nu and Xi and Omicron
will take off for the stars

Pi and Rho will boldly go
where none have gone before
and Sigma, the enigma
will accomplish even more

Station Tau won't have the flaws
of these preceding stations
and Upsilon will carry on
the great investigation

Phi and Chi and Psi might try
to break the speed of light
so that the one they'll call Omega
could come back tomorrow night

and when the 25th station's built
to name it something new
Oh, what the hell, it's just as well
Let's call it Alpha 2

The Bower

Arches and trellises covered with flowers
a place designed for summer hours
when summer's gone, they'll still be there
Skeletons in the winter air

The Attic

Like sweeping out the attic
of its cobwebs and its bugs
sometimes I try to clear my mind
of alcohol and drugs
but when it's neat and tidy
I find to my despair
there really wasn't all that much up there

Future Imperfect

When I was a lad I read lots of stories
of space exploration and all its glories
of people who came from distant stars
of gleaming cities and flying cars
The future seemed like quite an amazing place
There'd be cities under the sea and in outer space
We'd have unlimited solar power
New York to Chicago would take one hour
by monorail, I thought it was planned
they already had one at Disneyland
The future was bright, it was understood
Some people even said we could
control the weather, but they lied
Quite frankly, it's cold as hell outside
There is no bubble city on Mars
and everybody's still driving cars
Robots have fallen short of my wishes
I still have to do the dishes
Sometimes I almost feel like crying
I know the calendar isn't lying
The future has arrived at last
and looks a whole lot like the past

She Asked if I Loved Her

She asked if I loved her, I should have said yes
It's what she wanted to hear, I guess

I didn't want to say it, if it wasn't so
and the plain truth was, I didn't know

I hesitated, I waited too long
she said, "If you can't say it, there's something wrong."

I said "Honey, I need you, I have to, I must..."
She said "Honey, that isn't love, that's lust"

I blew it, I know, but it's really absurd
how much meaning we put into one little word

There is love that is fickle and fleeting and fast
or love slow and steady, determined to last

There is love that's one sided, and love that's unspoken
and love that lies dormant and needs to be woken

There's love of a challenge and love of the game
There's love of the other and love of the same

There are girls who love girls and boys who love boys
and some who love leather and some who love toys

There is love based on friendship and love based on trust
There is love based on longing and love based on lust

There is love that is tender and love that is mild
and love that a parent has for a child

Or a boy for a dog or a friend for a friend
The list goes on, love never ends

There is love of great music and love of great art
There is love in your eyes, there is love in your heart

Every kind of love is good
and I never get as much as I wish that I could

Faces Carved in Stone

Faces carved in stone
silent, cold, expressionless
reflecting our own

Lost in the City

Lost in the city
Lost in the rain
Lost in contemplation
I'm getting wet
but it isn't yet
an uncomfortable sensation

Monkey

The feel of the bark
the green of the leaves
the scent of the jungle
a moving breeze

are a long, long way from these iron bars
these shitty, gray walls
this concrete floor

I've never known what it means to be free
but I know this isn't home to me

Time Travel

For traveling into the future
I have a simple plan
I'll keep on going one second per second
and get just as far as I can

Just Another Day

I didn't want to get up out of bed
the other day, a couple days ago
there was no particular place I had to go
A single thought kept running through my head

“It doesn't really matter if I stay,
after all, it's just another day”

Monday, Tuesday, what's there in a name?
Sunday doesn't know it's set aside
The world just turns and takes it in its stride
allowing each and every one the same

but there's so much the calendar doesn't say
There's no such thing as “just another day”

Weather wet and cold or warm and dry
the patterns change - they twist, they turn, they toss
The whimsical wind is wafting clouds across
the great big lava lamp up in the sky

Sometimes it's mostly blue, sometime's it's gray
There's no such thing as just another day

And all that's just the changing of the scene
each actor has to improvise their role
each player aiming for a different goal
and a lot of things can happen in between

So many factors coming into play
There's no such thing as just another day

There's a world contained in every point of view
a mystery that has yet to be revealed
a piece of fruit that's waiting to be peeled
The day will be defined by what you do

Each sculptor molds a different piece of clay
There's no such thing as just another day

I.P. Pavlova, May 15th, 2000

I get off the train and start to walk
toward the exit, moving with the flock
I can see the people still on board
in a moment, I won't see them any more

Lined up like the beads of an abacus in a row
Faces of people I will never know

Bertramka, July 23rd, 2000

From the top of the hill we enjoyed the view
the grass was green, the sky was blue
and in between the earth and sky
we went walking, you and I

The Solution to All of the World's Problems

Give jobs to the jobless
and aim to the aimless
Building homes for the homeless
Cooking food for the hungry
Pouring drinks for the thirsty
Educating the uneducated
Entertaining the bored
Massaging the weary
Loving the lonely
Driving the restless
Curing the sick
Planting forests
Planting gardens
Raising crops
Raising children
Raising consciousness
Raising the tone of the conversation
Doing the undone
Exploring the unknown
Filling the world with art
Filling the air with sound
Anything, anything at all
instead of killing each other

Millenium

We're spinning as we're turning round the sun
in 24 hours, each and every time
one year and then we're back where we began
it's a pattern, it's a system, it's a rhyme

About a hundred thousand years ago
we marked the seasons and we named the days
planted seeds and stayed to watch them grow
got a bit more settled in our ways

Began to shape the earth to our desires
killed for profit - killed for power - killed for fun
scarred the earth with fences and with fires
as year by year we turned around the sun

Somehow, we've managed to survive this far
the sun still shines upon us as we dance
Weak and undeserving though we are
each day presents us with another chance

Spinning, spinning through the cosmic night
We've got another thousand years to get it right

Swimming Lesson

That summer I was only 5 years old
the water looked so deep and felt so cold
so I held on to the shallow edge of the pool
kicked my legs and thought that that was cool
One sunny day, I got a terrible shock
My big brother threw me off a dock

I gasped, I gulped, I thought that I would drown
I felt the world had been turned upside down
I couldn't see a thing before my eyes
the sky was gone, but much to my surprise
I popped up to the surface pretty quick
I learned to move my arms and how to kick

Well, that was a pretty nasty thing to do
but on that day I learned a thing or two
You're halfway there the moment you begin
so put aside your fears and dive right in
In sports, at work and especially with women
If you ain't in over your head, then you ain't swimmin'

I'm in too deep, but don't you worry 'bout me
over my head is where I want to be

The Universal Puzzle

In the universal puzzle
all the pieces have to fit
the only trouble is, we haven't found them all as yet

There are some that are so tiny
they are hidden from our sight
and some so contradictory
we don't know which is right
and some we have discarded
that we thought we wouldn't need
and some we can't imagine
and some that we can't read
There are some that seem irrelevant
why should we even care?
and some that do not seem to match
the other pieces there

it might take a billion years to work
this puzzle to the end
That's O.K.
We've got the time to spend

The Prince of Prague

I don't fit in the blank spaces
I'm not that kind of guy
at least 50 percent of the shit on these forms
I mark "that does not apply"

I have a restless spirit
I have a wandering mind
when I take a 12 step program
I take it two steps at a time

Perhaps it's avoidance behavior
Perhaps it's missing the point
but pass those peanuts over here
and roll me another joint

My biggest fault is ego
'cause I can plainly see
that I am better than anyone else
who's not as good as me

I look down from my balcony table
at the people down below
all of the amateur actors
in an improvisational show

I like to ride in the back of the bus
and pretend it's a limousine
you can ride along if you like
I'm arrogant, not mean

Life's not an uphill struggle
we don't even have to climb
the world keeps turning under our feet
a single day at a time

If the universe is infinite
however you slice the pie
I have the perfect point of view
The center is the I

I'm glad you all could be here
ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls
jso I could have this chance to say
"You're welcome in my world"

The Prisoners

They're tenured, they have got their chair
in their office, at the store
behind the bar or at the door
They aren't going anywhere

Even some of the things they say
Their words, their gestures and their quirks
because they've learned to use what works
remain the same from day to day

They've found a place to park their mind
a harbor, safe from winds of change
where nothing's bent and nothing's strange
a prison of their own design

And here they sit,
year in, year out
and mark the seasons as they pass
Each day is very like the last
a choice of comfort over doubt

But...

There's something missing from their face
They have forgotten how to smile
and like a no longer relevant file
all trace of humor's been erased

There's something missing from their eyes
They know the future all too well
and like the prisoner in his cell
they mark the days until they die

I'll tell you now and it's a fact
I never want to be like that

Diary

It wasn't anything I said
or even how I said it
but my baby found my diary
and she read it

There could be no redemption
couldn't say I didn't mean it
but I was sincerely sorry
that she'd seen it

A diary is as dangerous
as what you put inside it
Like a loaded gun at home
you have to hide it

Rainbow

The light flows through the water
that is falling through the air
a rainbow is a picture
on a screen that isn't there

The Trolley

We were in a crowd of people
waiting for a light
I barely even noticed she was there

I guess she was a gipsy
Her hair and skin were dark
and most folks here are rather pale and fair

She had a wooden trolley
with a suitcase flat on top
held on by a bungee cord or two

With wheels of yellow plastic
it didn't look too hot
but I suppose it was the best that she could do

The light turned green, the traffic stopped
We all began to cross
She wasn't there and so I looked around

I could see the twisted yellow plastic
bent beyond repair
lying there quite useless on the ground

a crowd of people gathered round
and they were dark like her
I can't tell you how this story ends

I had someplace I had to be
and so I carried on
but I was glad to see that she had friends

Skylight

There is a skylight up here in the loft
so I have a good view of the sky
the snow's coming down and it's coming real soft
it's an image that pleases the eye

There's a sauce on the stove that has scented the air
with a smell that is good to the nose
the carpet is deep and my feet they are bare
it's a texture that pleases the toes

I have no obligations and no place to go
there are plenty of books on the shelf
I think I'll just sit here and look at the snow
It's good to be good to yourself

Michelle

You could have gone either way that night
there were two ways you could have gone
the tram came quick, you took your pick
you went ahead and got on

I was going home alone
You were going out with a friend
We briefly kissed, I nearly missed
The End

I spy with my little eye

I spy with my little eye
something beginning with apple pie
long, wooden tables out by the lake
potato salad and chocolate cake
baked brown sugar on brown baked beans
and more fried chicken than you've ever seen

I spy with my little eye
something beginning with touch the sky
up in the mountains, where things are so pretty
far from the traffic, far from the city
far from the pressure, far from the crowd
things are so quiet, up here in the clouds

I spy, with my little eye
something beginning with let's get high
smoke a little reefer just to feed the brain
then a little acid just to go insane
look at all the dots on the TV screen
and try to figure out just what they mean

I spy with my little eye
something beginning with me, oh my
I caught my breath, I turned to stare
when I saw that girl with the long, brown hair
ain't nothin' better lookin' than a good looking girl
anywhere in this beautiful world

I spy with my little eye
something beginning with don't be shy
walk on over and ask her to dance
you never can tell if you don't take the chance
offer a drink, or just say hello
the worst that she can say is no

I spy with my little eye
something beginning with boy's don't cry
riding the night bus, all alone
couldn't even get the number to her mobile phone
sometimes you win, sometimes you lose
sometimes you end up singin' the blues

Say a Prayer for Robert Johnson

When he went down to the crossroads
he was looking for a sound
and he didn't have to look so very far

He could hear a whispering in the wind
a rumbling in the ground
he could feel it in the strings of his guitar

Well, say a prayer for Robert Johnson
say a prayer for that man's soul
because his bargain with the devil
created Rock and Roll

Well, he played it in the shanties
in the Mississippi night
and he played it round the fires, 'neath the stars

And he played it on the corners
in the cities and the towns
and he played it in the juke joints and the bars

Say a prayer for Robert Johnson
say a prayer for that man's soul
because his bargain with the devil
created Rock and Roll

Robert Johnson died one day
but his music stuck around
like a shadow in the Mississippi night

The devil tried to keep it
but he couldn't keep it down
and Rock and Roll began to see the light

When a white boy out in Texas
and one in Tupelo
started in to lay that rhythm down

They got it in the record stores
and on the radio
and Rock and Roll was heard the whole world round

Say a prayer for Robert Johnson
Say a prayer for that man's soul
because his bargain with the devil
created Rock and Roll

Well, they say the devil taught him
they say he went to hell
and there's no call to think that they would lie

But we have the devil's music
and it's doing pretty well
because we know that Rock and Roll will never die

So say a prayer for Robert Johnson
Say a prayer for that man's soul
because his bargain with the devil
created Rock and Roll

The Farmer in the Dell

The farmer in the dell went down to the city
'cause everybody'd told him that the women were so pretty
so, he met a little woman and he took her for a wife
and he took her to the dell to start a new life

The summers got hot and the winters got colder
and the farmer and his wife got a little bit older
They raised 'em up a daughter, such a pretty little girl
with big blue eyes and long blonde curls

Just turned 13, they don't come no hotter
than a wide-eyed innocent farmer's daughter
she never saw that there was trouble brewin'
and the farmer in the dell didn't know what he was doin'

One day the farmer's daughter went down to the creek
and he hid behind some bushes and he took himself a peek
When his daughter took her clothes off, his heart began to pound
so he reached out and he grabbed her and he threw her on the ground

Well, the daughter took offense at this, but the farmer paid no heed
because the farmer in the dell had a mighty urgent need
but her mother came a-runnin, that is the farmer's wife
and the wife took a pitchfork and she took the farmer's life

and they chopped up his body, and they threw it in the well
and that's what became of the farmer in the dell

There's Something About a Matinee

When you jump into a swimming pool
the water's deep, the water's cool
when you get out and face the sky
the air is warm, the air is dry

There's something about a matinee
You enter, from the brightest day
forget the world two hours, and then
you come walking out again
and it always seems so strange
to notice that the sky has changed
the heat of the sun and the glare of the light
have been replaced by the cool, dark night

From time to time, from place to place
the world presents a different face

Five

Sight

Matter is energy, energy light
We know existence through our sight

If I were suddenly struck blind
and lost the image
would I lose my mind?

Hearing

Whether faint, or loud and clear
each sound's a signal that we hear
across the air
from here to there
Our interpretation of these vibrations
is the basis of communication

We get the signals
whether or not we wish
the ear is a very primitive
satellite dish

Smell

Smell is perhaps the most visceral sense
the feelings it causes are quite intense
a steak on the grill makes you salivate
but other smells are not so great

Taste

We have to eat to stay alive
and we may grow and even thrive
but food consumed in haste
lacks taste

A meal that's well prepared
is like a song that's been well sung
taste is the music of the tongue

Touch

The tongue, the eyes, the ears, the nose
are lovely methods, I suppose,
to let the information in
but let us not forget the skin

for directness of perception, there is much
that can be said for the humble sense of touch

The Westward Moving Line

The westward moving line can move no more
broke like a wave upon the western shore
though mystery has left the western sky
the westering spirit hasn't really died

The globe has been explored from north to south
each river to it's source up from it's mouth
the question is arising more and more
where is left, where no one's been before?

The new explorer's dream, the quest, the goal
is to seek the inner secrets of the soul
and there are many pathways that we try
and some of them may get there, by and by

Some do drugs and some of us read cards
Some miss the point and some just try too hard
in meditation or hypnotic trance
There's ecstasy for some in tantric dance

Some try to study and investigate
to analyze, record and calculate
but solid facts have no more weight than vapor
the soul has never yet been put on paper

Some pin their hopes upon the ancient gods
Quite frankly, I don't think much of their odds
Some of them play cymbals as they chant
and wear long, orange robes instead of pants

Shapes and symbols can be seen as signs:
the pyramids, the power points and lines
Regressive therapy or altered states
Some take 12 steps, some say 5 or 8

These tools and little tricks have been designed
to help us find the mind within the mind
the garden that's behind the secret door
the chamber where the secret treasure's stored

A deep blue lake so clear, so cool, so good
in the darkened middle of the wood
there reside the creatures of the deep
who come out to play when you're asleep

I haven't found it but I don't despair
I'm close enough to know that it is there

The Signal Flare

Like a firefly in a jar
or a fish in a little glass bowl
we're trapped within our atmosphere
and there's little doubt we're staying here
we can't reach the nearest star
we're not anywhere near that far

There are other world's, all right
we can see their suns
wobble just a hair
as their spinning there
information that's blurry and light
with our newly developing sight

Through the void so black and clear
our sun could be seen the same
a beacon light
through the endless night
that's blinking "we are here"
and has been for the last 5 billion years