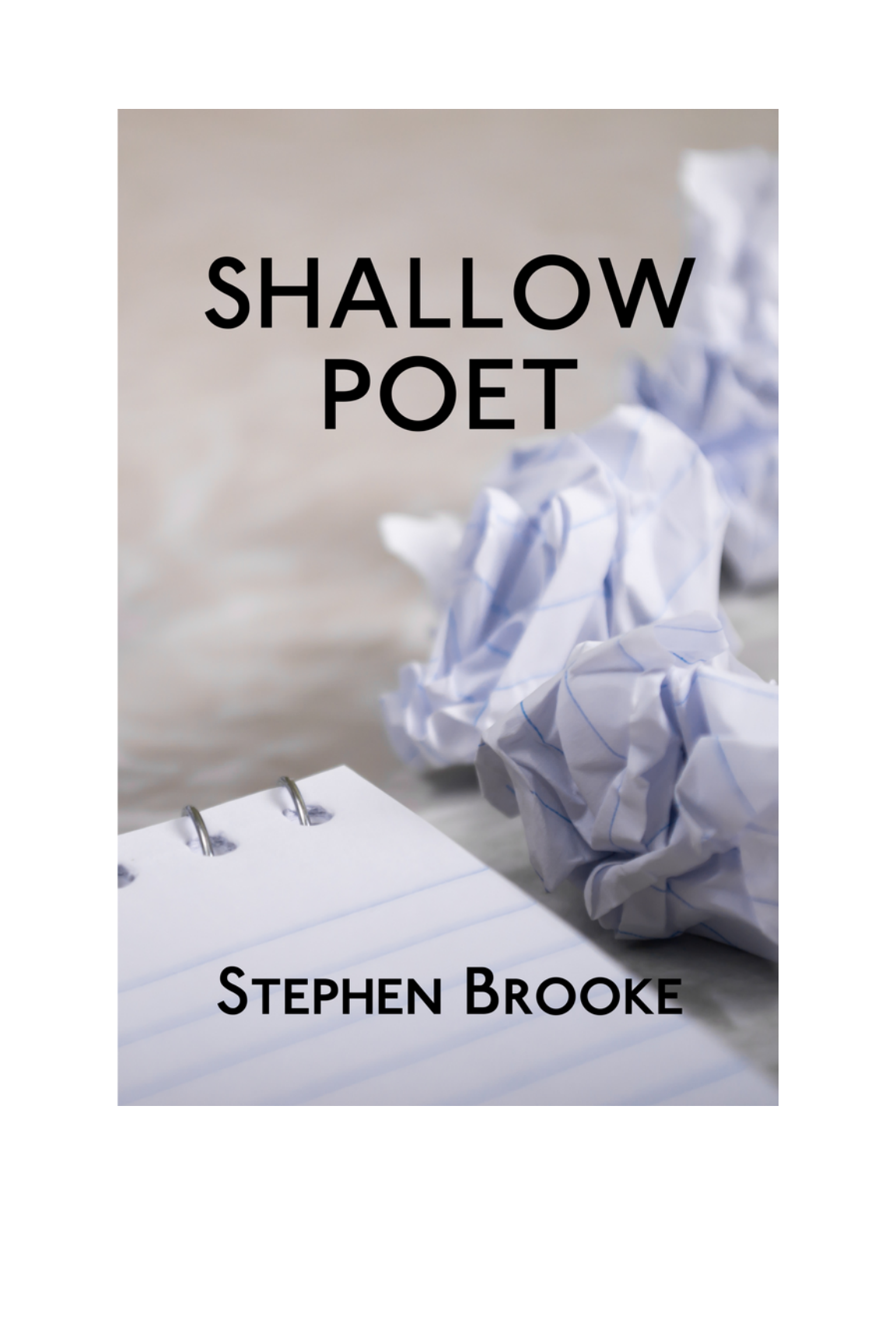




SHALLOW POET

STEPHEN BROOKE

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Arachis Press 2024

Art is life, glimpsed in a fun-house mirror

SHALLOW POET

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SHALLOW POET

NOTHING

I have learned much about nothing
and wish to know even more;
to stuff my head full till it's empty—
more so than it was before!
Creating the finest of vacuums,
one nature will surely abhor,
perfect to pack with the nothing
I'll have even more space to store!

My life keeps coming apart.
Maybe I shouldn't
use duct tape?

WHO

I'm not completely sure
I'm who I claim to be,
though I assure myself
I am just what I see.
But sometimes I will ponder
the possibility
that I am someone else
impersonating me!

once I believed things
then I believed other things
what an improvement

asterisk
believes it is
a star

SHALLOW

I too can be a shallow poet,
To say that I am sad and show it
And how each love has left a scar;
Oh, I'll make certain that you know it!

I'll tell of mountains spied afar,
The night I wished upon a star;
It's all part of the shallow poet.
For such clichés are what we are

And our use of them never ends,
Our every thought on them depends!
So let me post another verse
For all my shallow poet friends

(Whose work is, by and large, much worse).
A shallow poet's rarely terse,
Still each and every poem ends—
But then so does the universe.

Yes, I can be a shallow poet
If I don't think deep thoughts and blow it!

Do

Do not believe all that you hear,
some of it might be true;
and then you have to deal with facts
and learning something new!
It's better to take everything
with a grain of salt (or two),
and to simply keep on doing
what you already do.

At times, I may cheat so I win,
and have led myself into sin;
there's no one to blame,
I know to my shame
that I am my own evil twin!

EXISTENCE

Why does existence exist?
Why does existence persist,
insistently insist
on being?

Wise men who ponder this riddle
(dismissive of each others piddle)
rarely meet in the middle,
agreeing.

Yet it seems *being* will be,
stretching to infinity;
stretching beyond all that we
are seeing,

and every dawn's golden mist
and all the lovers who've kissed
still insistently insist
on being.

HERE

If I am not here
I hope I am there;
either is better
than being nowhere.
At least when I'm there
I still can be near,
but nowhere is just
too distant from here.

THE PEEVE

I once had a pet peeve,
it followed me home one day;
it would lie on the floor and growl,
it never wanted to play.
But it ate much less than a dog
and never needed the vet;
I do believe that peeve
was the very best pet yet!

BOWL

Kittens are cute and so are puppies
But here I am with a bowl of guppies.
Pets are fun but I do wish
I'd something other than these fish.

I've watched and watched and I have found
That all they do is swim around.
They're very small and always wet;
They're quite impossible to pet.

Could I have something with four feet
Or even two, like a parakeet?
A loving creature that wants to play,
That I could care for every day?

Yet here I am, I guess it's fate
That I am stuck with a bowl of bait.
And now I must go feed my guppies
But I do wish they were kittens or puppies.

Cat sleeps in the guitar case.
Why else did I leave
it open?

MEOW

Meow! said the cow,
and jumped in my lap;
just how did that cow
come in through the flap?
And now the old cow
has decided to nap—
with luck the duck
won't start to yap!

cat on the threshold
chooses neither in nor out
my warm air escapes



MICE

Mice do get caught,
they can't be taught
to always elude the cat.
Their little feet
may not be fleet
enough, and that is that.

Here they hurry
and there they scurry,
seeking a crumb or a mate,
knowing today
but not what may
be tomorrow's fate.

Cats do catch mice—
that is a price
the species has payed before.
But my, oh my,
how mice multiply
and soon there will be more!

another dead rat
somewhere under the floor ~
the stench will not last

KITTY HEAVEN

My cat has gone to Kitty Heaven,
Where all the mice are fat and slow,
And naps are never interrupted,
And shaded catnip gardens grow;

Where people stop to scratch your ears
Just long enough, not a moment more,
And never forget to buy a treat
Or toy when they go to the store.

My cat has gone to Kitty Heaven,
Where the moon is full each night,
And the Toms are handsome and virile
But not at all inclined to fight.

And she'll forget the fleas and dogs,
All the turmoil, all the strife;
All but the touch of a soothing hand
In dreams of a long distant life.

PESTS

Lice and mice and other pests
have long plagued mankind,
and they say our little guests
were by God designed.
But I think the devil may,
on some day God rested,
have let those vermin out to play
just so we'd be tested.

Yet the greatest pests of all
the Lord God created,
and their numbers should appall
for they frequently mated!
Mated and procreated they did,
now they're everywhere;
the human pests we live amid—
the others can't compare.

honking ~
need I pull over?
only geese

passing overhead
on a gray morning

My CATS

My cats I've named Pukey and Poopy;
they leave behind messes quite soupy
from one end or the other
for me to discover—
those felines are making me loopy!

Those things that go bump in the night
no longer can give me a fright;
it's just what cats do,
they knock things askew—
in the morning I'll set them aright.

company ~
brush cat hair
from the chairs

swimming with dolphins
will never bring the same thrill
as surfing with sharks

angry wasp ~
hand becomes
balloon animal

THEORY

All history can be explained
in economic terms, claimed the theorist.

Why, we could do without any human beings
at all, agreed his students.

Good idea, said the politician,
they can be quite bothersome,

and he immediately initiated
a five-year plan to eliminate them.

It is for your own good, the police
told the people. When you are gone,

things will move much more smoothly.
Everyone will be happy, at last.

All history can be explained
in economic terms, claimed Spot.

I prefer the 'great cats' theory,
replied Mittens.

LOPSIDED

My nose is rather lopsided,
my glasses all list to the left;
it's taken too many right crosses
(as a boxer, I wasn't that deft).
But things, of course, might be worse,
of my senses I could be bereft;
I can only give thanks my opponents
were bigger on skill than on heft.



GOLDEN GLOVES

I was only a lightweight,
but I was Golden Gloves,
and carried myself with pride,
knowing wherever I went
I could take down the biggest.

Not that I did—
the knowing was enough.

Though I've moved up a class
or maybe two since then,
approached my golden years,
I do think I could handle
most of you youngsters yet.

Not that I would—
the knowing is enough.

I've broken a few noses.
Did some illusions
shatter too?

GOLD

Gold satin trunks
and a lopsided nose
are my mementos.

No trophies,
no framed pictures
of me in triumph,

just memories
and the nagging question:
what was I thinking?

baby~
AM and PM
BM

THE WIND'S GONNA BLOW

a song

That storm's moving closer to the coast
and all we can do is raise a toast:
Here's to the hurricane, whatever it's named
and here's to the folks who live where it's aimed!

It's no good to sit and worry,
go nail up plywood, better hurry!
The wind's gonna blow and it's sure to get wetter,
it's gonna get worse before it gets better.

Worse than I hoped, better than I expected,
got no reason to feel dejected.
Preparations thoroughly inspected,
family safe and all collected.

Make sure we're ready for the gale;
Tie everything down or it will sail!
And make sure to stock up on the liquor,
though it won't make it get here any quicker!

Got the radio to inform;
nothing to do but wait out the storm.
The wind's gonna blow and it's sure to get wetter,
it's gonna get worse before it gets better!

Worse than I hoped, better than I expected;
hurricane has to be respected.
If we're lucky, it's redirected
and our maps can be corrected!

I pour myself an RC.
Did someone eat all
the moon pies?

My heart is very heavy.
Might a wheelbarrow
be of help?

INVASIVE

When it comes to invasive species
the Northern Human's the worst;
they've descended on Florida in swarms,
until the state's ready to burst.

Build nests behind the walls
of their gated communities;
I fear they are breeding in there—
they sure do whatever they please!

Observe them on the golf courses,
displaying for their mates,
in flocks of three or four
bright plumaged heavy-weights.

And every year they gather
to elect more of their kind;
they always seem to be
the craziest they can find!

We complain about the pythons,
the Melaleuca trees,
and even big green iguanas
that fall on us during a freeze,

but of all invasive species
none is so quite annoying,
none other closes off beaches,
generations have been enjoying

with rows of towering condos
like hills of fire ants;
none other changes Florida
as much as these transplants.

I reckon it's too late to stop 'em,
there are far too many to shoot,
so we'll live with the Northern Human
wherever they've taken root.

WEEDS

I water my garden daily,
I tend to all its needs,
And am rewarded with
A vigorous crop of weeds.
To gaze on their profusion
Inevitably leads
Me to wonder why
I bothered to buy seeds.

JAY-BIRDS

Some naturalists are naturists—
 some, of course, are not—
and some go bird watching in the buff
 when the weather is hot.
So if you seek our feathered friends,
 you may see more than sought—
a handy pair of binoculars
 do reveal a lot!

They go as naked as the jay-bird
 they might hope to spy,
but it is true they rarely are
 as pleasing to the eye.
If you happen onto one,
 keep looking toward the sky,
and try to keep your focus only
 on the birds that fly!

Whacking and hacking in the yard;
mowing, the going is much too hard.
Sweating, regretting I came outside—
I'm quitting! I'm sitting! I'll say I tried!

CORN MAZE

There is a young fellow we warn,
don't get yourself lost in the corn;
our poor lad weighs ways
to escape the maize maze,
while wandering rows all the morn.

I'm cultivating new friends.
Should I plant them all
in neat rows?

PARROT

Each pirate should have his own parrot;
it sits on yer shoulder, ye wear it.
Though it may be taught
to talk, it means naught,
like most of me crew-mates, I swear it!

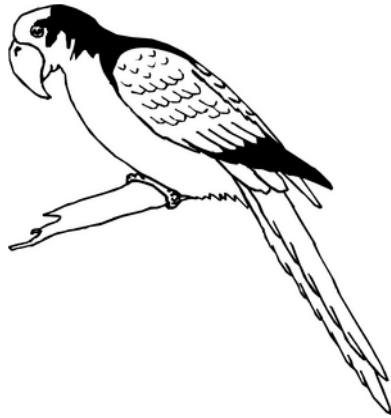
Batter bread rises slowly.
Am I too lazy
to knead now?

KEYS AND PARROTS

It's fresh and wholesome for some,
meals of peas and carrots,
while I'd choose bottles of rum,
a life of Keys and parrots!

They boast of how early they're rising,
how much they can bench and curl,
but I've more interest in making
some winsome wench my girl!

And then there is meditation,
the level of calm they might reach;
I've come to the same destination
beneath a palm on the beach.



On all these things we must part;
it's simple why this would be:
always the Key to my heart
is bounded by the salt sea.

Be healthy and work and run
but keep your peas and carrots,
while I grow old in the sun;
I choose Keys and parrots.

green tea, cranberries,
oatmeal—I'm so damned healthy
it's sickening

There was a young lady who shifted
large weights and was physically gifted;
her idols were girls
who pressed and did curls,
and judged guys by how much they lifted.

GROG

I takes me Vitamin Cee
in the sailor-style;
a little lime in me grog
at sea or on an isle!
Oh, yes, I drinks it down
each and every day,
for, Mate, I likes me rum
and it keeps the scurvy away!

I takes me Vitamin Cee
in the sailor-style;
Atlantic or Pacific,
I takes it with a smile!
For rum's the life of man
and a healthy man I'll be;
let's make me even healthier—
another one for me!

MARBLES

I am going crazy
and not coming back;
I have far too much
of everything I lack.

I've lost all my marbles,
the entire bag;
I'm 'it' in my own
private game of tag.

I need some time off
but got caught in a recess;
I'd write myself a letter
but forgot the address.

I'm my own best friend,
we talk every day,
But I can't get myself
to come out and play.

I can't remember losing
the things that I have found;
At the end of my rope,
I have come unwound.

I am going crazy
and you may come, too;
My imaginary friends
will make room for you!

EPITOME

I am the very epitome
of unmitigated stupidity;
I never do anything wrong just once—
it's twice or three times for this dunce!

I forget to look before I dive
yet somehow I manage to survive
to go right back and repeat my mistake;
I'll keep on going till something might break!

I should have gone into politics—
for each of our problems I know the worst fix—
and let you all follow me down the wrong road;
the worst that could happen is we all explode!

FOR QUITE SOME TIME

I woke up feeling just a tad weak,
certainly I'm at less than my peak!
Back into the comfort of bed I may climb
for I've not felt well for quite some time.

I stuck out my tongue and it wasn't good,
looked like a piece of weathered drift wood;
I'm all stuffed up and full of slime,
and I've not felt well for quite some time.

I've searched for an ailment that explains
my many and myriad aches and pains;
a tick once bit me—perhaps it's Lyme,
for I've not felt well for quite some time.

I'm feeling my age, yes, quite old—
I hope it's nothing more than a cold;
I'm no spring chicken, I'm past my prime
and I've not felt well for quite some time.

They say if we're feeling under the weather
We'd best avoid getting together;
So I'll stay home if going out is a crime—
I've not felt well for quite some time.

WE WILL

We will not hug
when next we meet,
should we venture
onto the street.

We will not kiss
but only nod,
keeping our distance,
not tempting God.

And hurry home
till time permits,
we will no longer
need be hermits.

No milk nor eggs on the shelves.
Can wine and ice cream
replace them?

It's the end of the world.
Should I put on clean
underwear?

Box

The genie is out of the bottle;
Pandora has opened her box.
A dead hand is gripping the throttle;
the hen-house is home to the fox.

They've halted the human race,
as entropy slowed all the clocks.
The gorgon has shown us her face;
we turn one by one into rocks.

An earthquake has brought down our city;
we brace for the aftershocks.
And I must still strive to seem witty
when it's me the universe mocks.

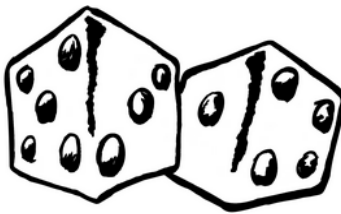
Nature laughs at man's conceits.
Should I swim upstream,
spawn and die?

MASK

By now it is widely expected
A safe distance will be respected;
And we'd best wear our mask,
Or be taken to task
For no one wants to be infected!

the heat is doing
what the virus could not ~
keep me in my house

Today I'm not feelin' so spry—
could be I'm a-fixin' to die.
Each part of me aches,
my legs have the shakes,
and I'm much too tired to try.



IN PLACE

If I stay in place
I'm allowed to touch my face,
And nobody demands
That I wash my hands.

But I'm careful of the mail,
Disinfect it without fail,
And give the neighbors a wave—
Who knows which life we save?

So I'll sit here on my keister—
The president tells us till Easter—
But other voices say (what a bummer)
This exile may last all summer!

FOUND

I found myself at last—
I was hiding under the bed.
I knew I must be somewhere;
surely I wasn't dead!
"Why am I hiding?" I asked me,
and answered, 'Just look everywhere!'
I saw at once I was right,
and joined myself down there!

SYMPTOMS

I looked up my symptoms,
it turns out I'm dead,
if I'm to believe
all the stuff I read.

It's bad from my footsies
right up to my head—
poisoned by mercury
and also maybe lead!

There's no hope for me,
I'll take to my bed;
my cold has been starved,
my fever has been fed!

My doctor came by
and then promptly fled;
he said, 'Keep away
and don't let it spread!'

Just look at these symptoms—
they're all that I said—
and then you'll agree
that I must be dead.

JOIN

Won't you join my cult?
We have the best Kool-Aid!
Don't mind that aftertaste—
it will quickly fade.
No need for apprehension,
no need to be afraid;
you'll get by just fine,
as long as I'm obeyed.

Won't you trust my word?
It truly is inspired;
all my wives agree
and the forty-two kids I've sired!
I'll sell you the robe you need
to be properly attired—
that and abject submission
are all that is required.

Won't you join my cult?
I know the end is near—
the aliens await us
far beyond this sphere.
All your earthly possessions,
you can leave right here;
I'll take good care of them—
that you should never fear!

SIEGE MENTALITY

Come join me in my bunker,
there's room for two or three;
I'd be glad to have you here,
as long as you're just like me!
It's dangerous out there—
that's something we all see—
and if we stay locked up
we'll know that we are free!

Oh, come and join us in
our siege mentality!
As long as we stay locked up
we'll know that we are free!

You know it's us against them,
those folks who disagree
with all that we believe—
they're our enemy!
Just give them half a chance,
they'll take our liberty
and our God-given right
to treat them differently!

Oh, come and join us in
our siege mentality!
As long as we stay locked up
we'll know that we are free!

There's still room at the compound,
join our company;
and once you're safe inside
we'll throw away the key!
Never look outside—
We all know how it will be,
but as long as we stay locked up
we'll know that we are free!

Oh, come and join us in
our siege mentality!
As long as we stay locked up
we'll know that we are free!

PESSIMISM

Pessimism is no fun
in these dreadful times;
it's when the sun is shining bright
that this poet does delight
in crafting doleful rhymes—
my prophecies of gloom are done!

PROPHETS

The Prophets of Profits have spoken—
war must surely come!
All wishes for peace were but token;
now we're beating the drum.

The lives of a few (or of many)
do not count when we sum;
No, to us they're not worth one penny
and soon we all will be numb.

The Prophets of Profits have spoken
(would that they were struck dumb)—
we must break what's already broken;
war must surely come!

Despair is a mortal sin.
Could Zoloff get me
to heaven?

LET'S GO

Let's go to war with the world,
I'm sure we can beat them all;
Like rows of little toy soldiers,
Just give 'em a flick and they'll fall.

Let's go to war with the world,
We'll win with the greatest of ease;
Our boys can vacation in Bagdad,
We'll watch it on our TVs.

Let's go to war with the world,
They're planning to do something bad;
We're paying too much to gas up
Our SUVs and we're mad!

Let's go to war with the world,
Let's not give a thought to the cost
Of telling ourselves we're the greatest
And forgetting all that we've lost.

enough snowflakes
packed firmly together
form a snowball

choosing a suitable target
should not be difficult

SURVIVE

The universe should survive
several billion years
beyond the next election
(that's how it appears)
or even the one after
(yes, indeed, it nears),
so maybe by the end
I'll come to terms with my fears!

FREE

The truth tried to set me free
but I liked it better here;
I said, 'Get away from me—
there's too much out there to fear!'
I'd rather watch my tee-vee
and have another beer;
Let the truth be as it may be—
I'm free to choose not to hear.

THE TENANTS

The Landlord's come, we're long overdue,
our debts are great, our assets few.
We can not pay, He'll send us away—
our time here is thoroughly through.

That He has cause, never doubt;
He's seen what mischief we've been about.
We cut the trees, we poisoned the seas,
and now He's come to turn us out.

We've nothing left to pay the rent;
our capital has all been spent.
Yes, all our cash, on gaudy trash—
what we received as quickly went.

Oh, He's been lenient, not strict,
and ever urged peace when we conflict,
but we made a mess and now I guess
there is no choice but to evict.

We've been the worst of tenants, it's true,
a thankless and disreputable crew.
We broke the glass and killed the grass;
the Landlord's come—we're thoroughly through.

ALIEN WOMEN

Were I a Klingon, I would adore
the Duras sisters, Lursa, B'etor.
But being human, I know the score—
one would be lethal, two even more!

In every Vulcan, hidden away
is a Romulan—there she'll stay.
There's the pointy-eared devil to pay
if they let her come out and play!

Ferengi women go quite nude
but it's not considered lewd,
nor is it even one bit rude.
It's the law—they could be sued!

On star ships, men voyage far and near,
meet women quite unlike the ones here.
Blue or green, clad scanty and sheer—
Alien women, the final frontier!

today's programming
has gone from Twilight Zone
to Outer Limits

BLOBS

An amorphous blob met a gelatinous mass
and oozed aside to let it pass
when it felt the caress of pseudopod—
a caress that made it feel quite odd!

It set its mitochondria a-tingle
as their formless forms began to mingle
and the two of them began to throb—
the gelatinous mass and the amorphous blob!

They seeped, they crawled, slow as molasses,
for that's the way both of blobs and masses;
they flowed together, then flowed apart!
But alas such have neither head nor heart

and it must be when they chance to collide
they can not join but only divide,
leaving shapeless little shapes as they slide away.
Gelatinous? Amorphous? I can't really say!

Stains on the vampire's jacket.
Is the dry cleaner
still open?

JUST THE FACTS

I've been told to believe in facts
but I've never actually seen one;
do they climb trees or dig deep burrows
to hide themselves from the sun?
I'd like to find the place those facts
come out to play and run;
till then I'm not sure that they exist
and weren't made up just for fun!

blood on my shirt?
it must be from the pizza
I murdered last night

the earth is round
but a big-enough bulldozer
could make it flat

our ancestors went
into trees and came back down
~ we are humans

or maybe ground squirrels
or ostriches. Who can say?

APOSTROPHE

The inappropriate apostrophe
was placed in a place where it shouldn't be;
it's usage was wrong, a grammatical crime,
yet it seems to happen too much of the time!

Apostrophe's aren't to be done that way,
they do have their place, they shouldn't stray;
so take care whenever you add those curls—
its not quite right to use them for plural's.

Now its a sure sign your usage is poor
if Grammar Police pull up to your door;
so fix it quickly if you should see
an inappropriate apostrophe!

I ask my poems to sing.
Why must they also
tell bad jokes?

My dreams are sinking balloons.
Should I have put in
more hot air?

CRIME

Your rhyme scheme
is a crime scene,
said the poetry police.
It's doggerel,
as you know well,
this activity must cease!
Please desist
and don't resist,
no, not another verse.
When write is wrong,
the right to song
only makes things worse!

I sometimes write
a pretty good imitation
of poetry

Please bear with a poor poet's ways
if you find that sometimes he plays,
creating odd rhymes
in uneven times,
for these are his doggerel days.

THERE WAS A POET

There was a poet, once upon a time,
Who felt that every line he wrote should rhyme.
He shunned the penning even of blank verse,
While noting that the free stuff was much worse—
Such are, he said, a dozen for a dime.
I'll never turn my hand to such a crime!
But this, you see, would prove to be his curse;
No publisher would open up his purse.

So, once upon
a time he said *what the heck* and
churned out fifty-seven lines
of different lengths and only
the twenty-second and thirty-
ninth rhymed (and that was
an accident). Now young lonely
girls buy his books and write
him love letters in bad
rhyming verse.

ku coos the pigeon
ku ku cuckoos the cuckoo
the poet haikus

IRONY

To be earnest to a fault
marked the Nineteenth Century;
the Twentieth brought that to a halt
and preferred its irony.

Now we're in the Twenty-first
and neither one, I clearly see,
has prepared us for the worst—
so I'll opt for apathy.

I've reached a fork in the road.
Might it puncture one
of my tires?

CRITIC

I should have been a critic
for I hate *everything*—
the way that people write,
the way that people sing!
It's all the work of fools,
everyone should see—
and, of course, the greatest
fool of all is me!

ASK ME

Ask me anything,
I'll answer by and by;
but anything you ask
I'll answer with a lie.
You will not find the truth
no matter how you try;
yet someone will believe me—
I've no idea why.

TRICK OR TREAT

I've decided on my costume
for this Halloween:
I shall be a poet,
a star in my own scene!

I'll read dramatically
to unsuspecting kids
who knock upon my door.
I'll flip their little lids!

Poems before candy—
oh, they will get their fill.
If that doesn't scare them,
I don't know what will!

EMPTY PAGE

I had a page with nothing on it,
So I sat down and wrote a sonnet;
This is not it, I know you can tell,
But I assure you that it's swell!

The lines are longer than in this poem,
With lots of words, just 'cause I know 'em,
And deep thoughts thrown in by the dozen—
Enough to keep the critics buzzin'!

Perhaps I'll let you read it some day,
Or maybe decide to toss it away;
That happens sometimes, I am afraid,
I go and rain on my own parade.

But don't believe that I would think
Of quitting when my poems stink;
I'll find another empty page—
I'm not about to leave the stage!

My life story seems boring.
Maybe I should grow
a new tale?

OPEN BOOK

My life is an open book
but most of the pages are blank;
you're bound to be dreadfully bored
if you bother to take a look.

Although a bit worn with age,
the covers are nicely done;
yet nothing at all's inside—
it's page after empty page.

But since you're leafing through it,
scribble something for me.
If you could leave a nice note
or witty saying, do it.

Please keep it interesting,
so the next who reads
may be entertained—
that's all I'm suggesting.

And if it's good, they might
not put me down so soon;
in fact, I just might curl
up with myself some night.

VILLAIN

I am (alas!) a better person
than I'd like to be,
and am quite sure I would enjoy
a life of villainy!

I'd laugh and snag that one last cookie,
refuse to ever share;
then plot world domination
in my secret lair!

It can not be (again, alas!),
for really, I'm quite good:
all my friends will tell you so—
or at least they should!

So I create that not-so-nice
version of myself,
to stroll through every book I write,
the dozens on my shelf!

The author wrote just what he knew,
as we are advised oft to do;
at the end of page one
he said, "I am done,
for the things that I knew proved quite few!"

LAUGH

Laugh with me. Laugh anytime,
when we work, play, make love.
The serious, the joyless—
I have known them. Let them
find their own misery.

Cry with me. One can not laugh,
truly, if one can not cry.
Cry for your losses, and mine,
remembering the laughter
and all that we have loved.

And love with me. Every song
will be a love song,
whether it laughs or cries.
We will laugh and cry with it;
we will love so long as it plays.

I said that I'd take just a second
But things ran on longer than reckoned
I made a mistake
Please give me a break
I think I need a second second!

PERFECT

I am far from perfect—
far beyond it that is!
At least two betters than best,
the whizziest sort of whiz!
And if you don't believe it,
why, give me your toughest quiz;
I'll show you how far from perfect
a fellow like me is!

I am never myself—
no one likes that guy—
and all I know about me
would seem to be a lie!
So if you ever meet me,
I hope that you would try
to introduce me to myself
I'd like to meet that guy!

therapy is fine
but drugs are more effective
don't I look happy?

REPEAT OFFENDER

I keep making the same mistakes
because they're so much fun—
I want to make them all again
as soon as I am done.
Lapses become relapses, for
I am inclined to run
right back, my resolutions broken,
to all that I should shun.

yes and no
is the perfect answer
to any question



THIS FELLOW YOU SEE

I come from good-looking people,
handsome as handsome could be;
but when I look in the mirror,
I wonder what happened with me!

My dad cut the finest of figures,
on Mom's beauty all could agree;
but alas, the fruit of their union
was this fellow you see!

All my brothers and sisters
are the sort folks love to see;
one glance my way they look elsewhere—
something went wrong with me!

THE SLACKER

I never intended to shirk,
The slacker explained, with a smirk;
Opportunity knocked
But I kept the door locked,
For it was disguised as hard work!

VICES

My vices seem small ones—
a good cigar, a glass of wine,
mocha chip ice cream.

Comfortable little failings
that hardly hurt me,
much less anyone else.

I'm just this boring guy,
really, too wrapped up
in myself. And if I might

convince you, for a moment,
for an hour, that there
is more, then I have

indulged in yet another
small vice.

I was getting mixed signals.
Should I have bought her
more mixed drinks?

ICE AGE

We all need someone to hold tight
through the long, cold Ice Age night;
Neanderthal? Doesn't matter at all—
it's better to love than to fight!

We're apples and oranges.
Do you think we make
a good pear?

the perfect woman
passed me by on tip-toes ~
she had brains, too

dyslexic player
wagers all on two sixes
and two nines

MONASTERY

My aesthetic is ascetic,
fit for a monastery;
I choose to pray each and every day
at Vespers, and not tarry.
I think I look good in robe and hood,
and I'm thankful I needn't marry;
for having a bride at my side
seems quite unnecessary!



MONKS' NIGHT OUT

The monastery has a back door and so
sometimes the boys will just slip out and go
to town and have themselves a little fun—
don't tell the abbot and no harm is done!

We'll mosey down to the grill and have a brew
or two or three, wash down some barbecue,
and try to find our way by morning prayers—
for God is perfect but man, after all, errs.

POVERTY

I took a vow of poverty,
it's been quite easy to keep
when income is so low
and prices are so steep!

COAL

Time may turn coal to a diamond
but also a plum to a prune;
I'm gaining not facets but wrinkles—
it's happening too soon!

It's rarely we are at the dusk
the same as we were at noon;
The instrument that once played well
must go out of tune.

All gods of marble will soften,
no matter how well they are hewn,
and time erodes even mountains;
nothing is immune.

I look in the mirror and see
a poorly drawn cartoon
of the likeness vanity made;
time's burst my balloon.

SATURDAY MORNING

I liked Abbot and Costello
but she preferred the Stooges.
How could we hope to last
another Saturday morning?

I built my walls very high.
Would I break something
if I jump?

A THOUGHT

I had a thought,
A naughty thought,
But I'd been taught
I shouldn't ought;
It came to naught,
That naughty thought.

Achilles sulked in his tent.
Should he have taken
more Zoloff?

TURN

This direction is misdirection
but that direction is too;
any direction's the wrong direction
if I listen to you.

Away I turn and then return
and each turn's for the worse;
yet, I turn and once more turn,
forward and in reverse!

Which direction is my direction?
Should I turn around?
Each turn intended as correction
serves but to confound.

Though I turn and turn anew,
each turn a new selection,
it seems I ever turn to you—
still the wrong direction.

Artists ask for Hooker's Green.
Do they go there to
meet girls?

To Go

If it's time that I must go,
at age a hundred and ten or so,
I would choose to slip away,
surfing on a sunny day.
Waves double-overhead, of course—
thrown at last, by that wild horse,
driven into the patient reef,
neck broken in a moment brief.

Yes, that's the way I want to go,
at age a hundred and ten or so,
and who's to say, I just might!
Or failing that, a barroom fight—
a jealous husband knocks me dead,
bottle broken over my head
(let it be anything but Merlot!)—
that's a suitable way to go.

I know when all is done and said
I'm likely to die in my own bed
stricken down by heart attack;
as long as I'm not alone in the sack,
I'll consider it well enough played
and hope the girls aren't too dismayed,
when it's time that I must go,
at age a hundred and ten or so.

FUN-HOUSE

Art is life, glimpsed in a fun-house mirror,
twisted, stretched. Yet we say, *That's me!*
Who could guess I looked so funny? Laugh
and move on. Each image warps its way

into truth. *See how long my nose*
is! Tomorrow our reflections peer
from the mirrors of the morning, asking,
Do you know me now a little better?

the voyeur watches
the exhibitionist
in the mirror

CLOWN CAR

ups, downs,
rides with clowns;
car's too small.
another pratfall?
therapy, pills,
fever and chills—
doing time
for the climb.

so it goes.
everyone knows
life's not fair;
don't much care.
why should you?
tell it true;
tell it, man.
who else can?

tell the crowd;
make it loud.
check your paint,
your restraint,
honk your horn;
it's why we're born,
who we are—
we ride the car.



HAIRCUT

My hair is growing out
to the 'head-banger' lengths
I would shake back casually

(making sure you were watching)
when I was younger. Maybe
it doesn't look that good on me,

really, but at sixty-six
I still have it all and as they say,
if you've got it, flaunt it.

I wonder if some ninety year old guy
will look at me and say,
'Get a haircut, hippie.'

out for delivery
expect me before the end
of your business day

I put it all on the line.
Will my shirts and socks
soon be dry?

CORNER

Too long I've gone in circles,
round and round and round;
perhaps I'll switch to squares
and by four walls be bound.

And if I like one corner,
why should I not stay?
I'll think inside the box;
I'll rest there while I may.

HUMAN NATURE

There are few greater wastes of time
than complaining of human nature;
folks grumble at the dinner table,
hold debates in the legislature!

They fill books with their thoughts on man,
the good and the bad, the hopes, the fears,
but I suspect the only solution
will come from genetic engineers.

I DIDN'T KNOW

Once I didn't know enough
to know I didn't know enough,
but now I'm quite aware.

Yes, now I know all kinds of stuff
I didn't know I didn't know—
my ignorance laid bare!

broken toys around me ~
I await playtime's end
and my nap

LOST

I found the truth but then I lost it;
that's why I'm searching now.
If I thought it was junk I might have tossed it—
said who needs it anyhow?
No, it must be in plain sight,
I always kept it around.
But it's missing just like wrong and right—
those also can't be found!

HURRY

I'm not the sort to saunter nor amble,
to aimlessly stroll nor even to ramble;
I'll always hurry to go nowhere
and never stay once I get there.

I'm easily bored, I must admit,
not at all inclined to sit,
to shoot the breeze, to watch the stars,
to count the headlights of passing cars,

not even when I'm next to you—
I shouldn't say that but it's true.
There's someplace else I ought to be;
You wonder where? Don't ask me.

Perhaps I'll know when I arrive,
perhaps I can no more than strive
and never find the place I'm bound.
Perhaps that place can not be found.



AN AFTERWORD

I thank you for reading this book of (for the most part) not very serious poems. I hope you have enjoyed

This collection includes several 'plague poems,' as I name those I wrote in the first year of the Covid pandemic.

Stephen Brooke

The typeface used in this book is Antykwa Torunska, designed in Poland in the mid-Twentieth Century by Zygfryd Gardzielewski.