

[Home](#)

[Summer 2009](#)

[Spring 2009](#)

[Autumn 2008](#)

[Summer 2008](#)

[Spring/Summer 2008](#)

[Winter/Spring 2008](#)

[Autumn 2007](#)

[Summer 2007](#)

[Spring 2007](#)

[Winter 2007](#)

[Autumn 2006](#)

[Summer 2006](#)

[Spring 2006](#)

[Winter 2006](#)

[Fall 2005](#)

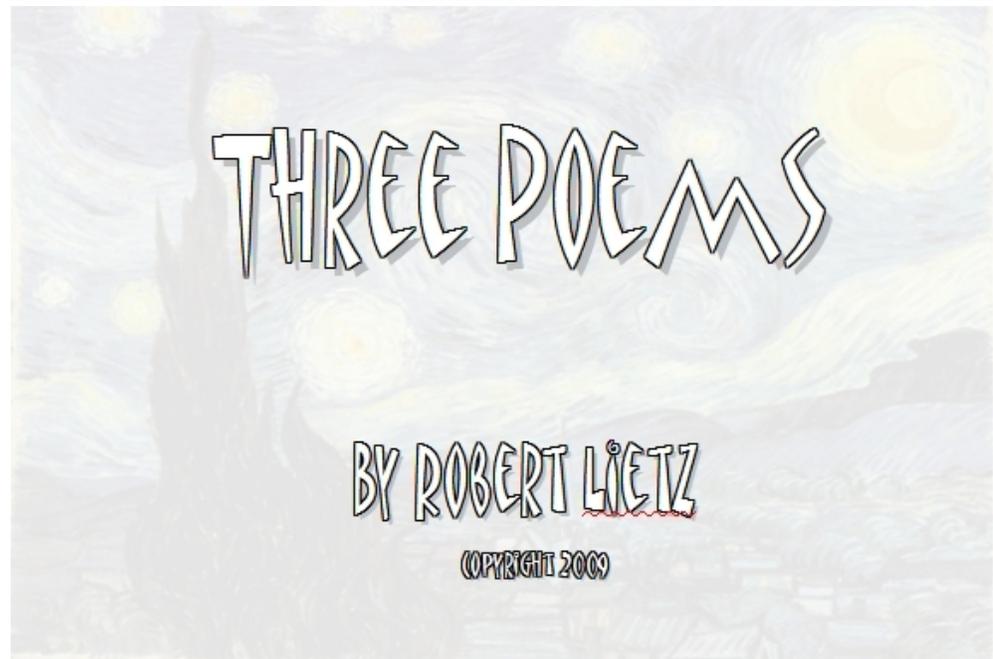
[Summer 2005](#)

[Editor's Note](#)

[Guidelines](#)

[SNR's Writers](#)

[Contact](#)



Different Strokes

For Mary "Mayme" Egle Lietz, our grandmother, after her stroke, that autumn my older cousin and I would drive to the nursing home in Ithaca to visit her and hope en route for healing.

The coppery and red-wrap vines ring deadwood round / the colors of labels kids could tell you with the B-sides. And October's deepening – clearing space -- a measured and easy rhyme -- favoring the one then one more common argument.

Imagine the trees made up on losing leaves ahead – and on the leaves' return -- when somebody dressed like that stands up in front of us – putting the points aside -- assuming we understood the falling leaves and the allusions.

But these -- for all the resemblances they measured – were leaves alone -- and only leaves again – turning on themselves -- stirred in these hills and littering the lawns along the route – there where the steeples spoke to her -- and the pilgrims queued to kiss the image after service – and the thought-grooved brows decided surgeries / surgeries put off -- among the alarmings

serialized -- because it's the Fifties after all -- and

kids like ourselves -- inspired by news –
by leaves the winds were bringing from all corners –
appeared in fantastic camouflage -- in words
we had scarcely heard / could not make tails of –
so much as prescience or reason meant to tell
/ or the poems -- like one more
giving-in to measure.

So maybe it's fun or tragedy -- by any other compass –
a hospital or empty space -- haunting
me still this afternoon -- remembering the insignia
and boys with fishbowls on their shoulders
/ ray-guns on their hips -- climbing in trees still full
overhanging lowland water -- waving to us
as we drove through -- and waiting
with us through years / when
all our expectations failed.

I think I could listen and almost know -- could fathom
the vectors haunting afternoons
and restorations -- could say what a fieldgoal
/ or lover's question meant -- left
in the stroke-warped lyrics a woman wept for us
/ singing like autumn winds
rapping on the porch-stones -- so much
as the torque then even harder
questions worked
through it.

*

And what if that chevy never was -- if that hospital –
blocked out in memory -- had not
invited traveling? And what if those cars came back –
aqua or mauve / spring hued –
oceanic almost in island names
and sentiment?

How would this sigh translate -- depending
as is / as then
on local referents -- on Haberle's
/ and nothing like –
on Heid's and P-Z-O's and submarines
and Onondaga –
October snows on limbs -- paling
the shoulders still
/ Pulaski south
to Ithaca?

A grandmother's lost -- like one more ruin –
with the mid-century?

So maybe a chevrolet's this much -- a chevrolet's
restored -- with reinvented
panels -- as much as the kids Time raised
on Korea could admire –

with its static and heater maxed -- warming
our hands again to grasp –
to think of that fieldgoal and turns ahead
and understanding –
signalling

/ and waiting out the reds -- the score
we would hear again
and then again till we believed it -- as real
as the sounds snows made
in that space behind the dial / the sounds
that a woman darkened to –
remembering the beers and Saturdays
/ the voices of friends
that German still could feel
at home in -- searching
the dawns for language
after the lightning
silenced her.

Weekends in Between

Christmas/New Year's, '98/'99

This weekend grove's too thin for anything to hide in.
And the year's end -- the year's first chill
icing in the farm-yards -- settles the snow on farms
bought cheap and built upon.

But where the slope lifts groves -- and groves
drop down to pond water –
I find this pick-up idling -- and this one now –
where these figures step
in hunter's orange and camouflage -- thinking
to spook some bird / discover
some buck God's meant for them -- to
follow that form from thirst
into this figure of forever -- sudden
with bows / with shares
/ in an imperfect
yielding.

So many kinds of song. And so many kinds
of singing to believe in!

And the holidays -- about as quickly done as started –
leave us this wind
like one more set mind trifling -- this smouldering
trash and wrapper-fire -- smudging
the ice laid down around the bale-snug farm parlors –
this snow in the grove beyond –
where an undressed fir stands yet
on second-story porchboards -- a splendor
that pays our thinking on –
as the window-lining lights --as the ice-lights
hanging over and behind -- wave
when the wind thrums

/ shoots through appearances –
stretching the neatly glazed
and (almost) atomic
wilderness.

*

Maybe the fire-light moves the fire-warmed skin
toward comfortable –

where the kitchen lights come up / where hunters
are home ahead of time –

ahead of the storm (still) miles / counties
/ a state away -- but

bringing these fierce lights up -- in the mallward
eyes behind the wipers –

these fingers of clouds -- gang-signing now –
smudging the gaze

of New Year's moon -- until the yellow's
out of it -- and

the moon's drawn clear -- of all
that oldest wagering.

*

So wheel-ruts / slush / the wheel-melt
routes
stretch measured miles
we know by heart.

*

And the State cops (paired) spot-check for drunks –
as friendly as much
as beds with just so much to give -- distracting
a mind from Sonny Til
/ from these blue-green and salmon-hues
dressing the first weathers
/ these miles to you

Elizabeth / these words that must try to say
whatever the driving feels like –
to say what goes on in winter-trees / in the yards
behind white-pillared
or sadly-bricked farm houses -- these yards
like our own
where six / where eight or so seem cheered –
glad with their plaids and cigarettes –
and charmed as the flames aspire -- as

something that once had wheels
flares / finishing off
in flecks
to blueprint specs
and ashes.

*

This driving (I think) could almost do for resume.

And this cop tonight -- pulling me off for fifty-seven
on the by-pass -- probably thinks
I missed the joke -- too sure in his own iron tastes
to think of Orioles or doowop --
but sharing his wit at my expense -- unable
to hear these lines
his old man might have wept for -- and
cold / too cold -- too young
to be standing cold
/ indulging these iced pastels
and foxy questions
on the music.

So maybe the wind's another mind miscentering --

another mind's own aftermath. And maybe I'm older now
than I was doing Syracuse --
as sober as humors circling -- bringing
me away and home --
to you the finest feature of the traveling --
and under this moonlight after all --
walking your mother's airedale / your shepherd --
and entering rooms I know
to warm yourself by firelight / to brighten
this sentence begun --
begun and kept on track and seeking
finish -- linked
in this way to your own
slow-cooking
richnesses.

Mixed Weather

Another weekend driving, hearing the news from Kosovo, remembering your mother's death last year and all the other suicides. This poem is especially for Jan Dean Fogel (of The Skyliners) and, of course, for Elsie Schweitzer Roy.

We hiked over limbs / through briars
spring noons
thicken around the pond -- grasping
that spindly stuff --
and chainsawing thigh-wide tree-long lengths
of blowdown -- tractoring
weeds and wildsprawl -- even

as the John Deere
groaned through low wet places
up the pond-grade –
sinking and coaxed
some inches
/ then ahead up solid lawn --
leaving behind
cut brush --
and something more
of water
the mallards scout
to make
their homes
on.

So Time stands ancillary -- whispering
centuries to us
/ and centuries away -- the limits
of dreams
we'd known -- and of the dreams
we came to see to --
as limited as minds alone
/ or as
the ash explaining
right as one
perspective.

And should I complain about the drive --
the miles
our hearts dissolve -- rounding
a weekend out --
delivering these stand-up
and sit-com
weathers we're the stars of -- I think
how
you stepped through light snow
falling
over and around -- smiling
to share the spell
/ the nature of extending -- even
on days like this --
directing travel into flat-lands –
on mornings
our eyes meet wishing well
and watching weather –
sipping the weekend
yet / and
reasons still
to linger.

*

And here
-- where the thresholds
count / the quick lanes
-- I'm trying for words

misapproaching -- and (always)
their surprises
-- trying for more
than this I swear
-- minding these posts
/ this stapled
something
where the redwing blackbird
sits
-- like a brace of panes
some further vision
could get used to
-- where
the sovereign light
pours through
-- where the snows
/ the fullness
of luck
and best intentions
of the builders –
the morning itself
comes clear
/ the voices
drawn
through air
-- through
ample air
as on
ghost
-soldered
radios.

*

And now that the weekend -- that this complaint
I raise to no one but the dash-panel –
this morning news is finished with -- I think
of the tractored / transferred earth –
filling the sink-holes buried trunks have now dissolved in –
maybe to jump-start one and one more spruce
in the low corner -- and think how the chain-saw
smoked and grabbed -- hanging up
on trunks before we had a chance to finish –
and think how the music
now -- how this group that hasn't charted
since the Sixties -- this trail
of *yous* -- and only a room or less
apart -- speaks for these robins
picking early through the woodlot
/ for these tenors settling
into day-jobs close
to home.

*

In and out of bounds -- on this drive beyond

the nature of complaining –
I think how the kids worked bricks and short streets
under rails -- in fours
and fives worked blocks and corner lamps
to club-dates.

The records conclude as *leisurely*
as Monday's driving time –
while the hawk performs -- commanding
every inch of venue -- and
the mind re-shapes itself -- marking
this Amish ride
/ this steaming horse asked halt
to watch and wait
for traffic -- and these blotched
woods now –
overlooking water -- where
the hawk
withdraws / and a mind
(re-made)
sampling its
pictures

believes in history -- in Saturday's pick-up
say -- tailgating space -- crushing
that van at 53rd and Ivanhoe -- in the likelihoods
of snow -- following that van
and morning thunder
over rails –

in refugees again -- distracting an eye
from premises --
from villages the daylight moves
to esoteric rhythms –
with pictures to show for all of it --
where
Law the Florist's apt
and seasoning
arrangements / where Toad's
Used Cars / the
"Store and Lock It"
argue
security for
cheap –

where this shag of wild-dog / these early
daffodils / this twisted wood
a fine hand's fashioned into lawn figures
impart
a depth of field -- remind
me there's you
Elizabeth –

and weekdays / weekends ahead --
nights when the sides put on
might just as well be acappellas

/ when the garlic chives
(moved now) / the lamb's ear and oregano
/ the moonlit brick
make room (as we have planned)
for the new roses –
remembering a year ago this time --
and bringing the feeders
/ the roses indoors another night --
knowing
what frosts / what
banditry
/ what the minds of men
made known
/ when the seasons
moved for
them.

*

She lifts a hand / lets go -- too tired
for one page more -- slipping her bookmark
snug into the stillness at mid-chapter.
And now that her hand sits still -- far as it is
from this year's fish-grinders
and french-fries -- I'm coming to you
Elizabeth -- seeing these blues
and smears of cirrus
trading places.

Fat Tuesday's settled it. And Wednesday's ashes –
spread on bawdy stumps
/ in bleary taverns -- Wednesday's sandwiches
and fries -- all of the details decades
orchestrate and stratify -- affirming
a brightness after all -- coming
to you Elizabeth –

with moonlight intoning foyers and encyclopedic fields –

and haunting these mallards nesting
among the briars near low water -- a corporal
the woods subtextual -- easing a voice
to all the plainer ways of saying things –
and easing the heart to love -- like
grain beheld so long it let me enter –
straight to the heart alive
/ in someone else's
world.

*

And now that the room comes clear –
the porch we swept
and vacuumed for the season -- now
that the crew's
said long enough -- letting our lane

go by -- I think
of the wine and (later) bananas foster
with champagne / think
how that girl could sing / how
her friends
kept up their doubts
after they found her
/ the subject of stories
kids
who are no longer
kids
remember.

*

And when wasn't love provocative? And when
wasn't loving more
than we had ever sense
to measure?

*

But then you are novel / near --
are all the excitement

I could hope for -- more
than the weeks

/ weekends ahead -- and more
than this charred stone

/ firebrick -- than this ridge
above / overseeing

the slow water -- calling me home
to weekends

/ Wednesdays in mid-summer --
until there are maps

(and words) to speak the curves
of our becoming -- words

an approach improves -- begun
in this stillness now --

wrestling around themselves --
the ways

a child's mind -- searching
some way

through thoughts he hasn't
thought of owning --

feels the words begin
he knows

he'll never
finish with.

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Nearly 500 of **Robert Lietz's** poems have appeared in more than one hundred journals in the U.S. and Canada, including *Agni Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Epoch*, *The Georgia Review*, *The Missouri Review*, *The Northern American Review*, *The Ontario Review*, *Poetry*, and *Shenandoah*. Seven collections of poems have been published, including *Running in Place* (L'Epervier Press.), *At Park and East Division* (L'Epervier Press,) *The Lindbergh Half-century* (L'Epervier Press,) *The Inheritance* (Sandhills Press,) and *Storm Service* (Basfal Books). Basfal also published *After Business in the West: New and Selected Poems* . I have completed several print and hypertext (hypermedia) collections of poems for publication, including *Character in the Works: Twentieth-Century Lives*, *West of Luna Pier*, *Spooking in the Ruins*, *Keeping Touch*, and *Eating Asiago & Drinking Beer*. Besides the print publications poems have appeared in several web zines.