

Classic Poetry Series

**Terence Winch**  
**- poems -**

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# Terence Winch(1945)

Terence Winch is an Irish-American poet, writer and musician.

Terence Patrick Winch was born in New York City in 1945. He grew up in an Irish neighborhood in the Bronx, the child of Irish immigrants. In 1971, he moved to Washington, DC, where he became involved with the Mass Transit readings in Dupont Circle. He published the first issue of Mass Transit magazine and co-founded Some of Us Press with Michael Lally and others. His writing, which shows New York School and other influences, has been widely published and anthologized. Primarily a poet, he has published fiction and non-fiction as well. He was the subject of a profile on National Public Radio's All Things Considered in 1986, and has been featured a number of times on The Writer's Almanac radio program. From 1975 to 1981, he was a regular book reviewer for The Washington Post and has also been a contributor to The Village Voice, The Washingtonian, The Dictionary of Irish Literature, The Oxford Companion to American Poetry, and other publications.

Terence Winch has also played Irish traditional music from childhood, and co-founded the band Celtic Thunder in 1977, writing much of the band's material for its three albums. His best-known composition is When New York Was Irish, which has been covered by many other artists.

# Ancient Footprints

Where are the old ladies of the old neighborhood  
shoveling the snows of yesteryear off the sidewalks  
and stoops—Mrs. Keenan, overweight mother of ten,  
dead too soon, or Mrs. Kennedy, also overweight,  
mother of cops and garbage men, and her youngest  
who died at 40, or Aunt Tess, my beautiful old Aunt  
Tess, whose apple pies I want always to be available  
to me, as I want her wise, funny, complaining voice  
right now on the other end of this phone?

Where is Mother Augustine and her 4th grade students?  
There are desks for them and lessons to be mastered.  
There are pretzels and cookies, ink wells, Pope pictures,  
Jesus incantations, pledges of allegiance, multiplication  
tables, mite boxes, catechism questions, lunchtime  
in the street, with tag, and johnny on the pony,  
and points, and stickball, until the bell rings  
them all back inside for more.

Where are Maria, Barbara, Mary Ann, Pat, and  
Bernadette? Round, ripe, smart, tough, full of nerve,  
they have wandered far away, to California, New Jersey,  
Connecticut, to a secret village by a river or lake  
where they lie awake at night examining their consciences,  
their bodies, their moonlit memories of lost nights  
in the forgotten Bronx of our earliest delights.

Terence Winch

# Blind Date

Ask yourself whether you are crying because  
it is always raining in the vicinity of the library  
or because there is a very scary allegory of torment  
staggering out of the bar and heading for you

I wish you didn't feel compelled to spray everyone  
at the gallery with the aerosol version of Wordsworth's  
Prelude or pixelate their emotions into tiny red balloons  
of melancholia, which you know causes weight gain

My ungratefulness is as big as one impossible parking space  
on Saturday night when we detonate the metaphor just for laughs

Terence Winch

# Bourgeois World

At the party, we shouted insults at the hostess.  
She served us raw fish/ we wanted red meat.  
She hated our jokes about the dry heaves.  
On the way home we saw a bunny in the headlights.

You smash the windows and toss the feathers.  
You sit in the kitchen weeping in the dark  
listening to the debate on the Senate filibuster.  
Time is immemorial if the self is inconceivable.

The ceiling fans all fixed and going at once,  
the house on the runway ready to take off.

Terence Winch

# Brain Music

Everything was exactly the way it had always been:  
the limos waiting at the hotel in the square, the boutiques,  
scalpers, the patter of salespeople, the elaborate  
legal structures. Most of the celebrities of the time  
came from the stillness of the local swimming pools,  
moving forward like subterranean homeowners  
in search of slow rivers. There was scarcely any sound  
save the melancholy cries of husbands collapsing.  
(There can be no transcendence.)

All the way back to New York, the management tried  
to determine each person's sex by the view of the city  
and mountains from their sick beds. The ear doctor  
diagnosed all our ailments as simple misunderstanding.  
There was nothing really wrong.

After California, the swarm of boys assembled at the station.  
They were trying to do everything as 'New York' as possible.  
They waltzed with their companions, retribalized,  
in the last available hotel room in town.

I believe in omens. When the road reached  
the sea, I looked for a place to stop before  
the storm smothered us. Everyone worried  
that the light might be unnatural.

Terence Winch

# Captions

Left to right: Sigmund Freud, age sixteen, with Schopenhauer, Glenn Miller, and a naked girl, in front of Wal-Mart, pondering psychic disturbances. Freud had just completed electrolysis treatment and was feeling an active desire to investigate the sexual hereafter.

Fig. 27: Kierkegaard, once again, after his conviction on multiple fraud counts, just before his famous discussion with Wittgenstein on the hidden meaning of brain travel, ca. 1873. Photo courtesy of the Dark Network of Light, © Curtis S. Edward (deceased).

(Opposite) These high-definition 3-D mock-ups of the man standing on the bed were thought initially to prove that amazing things can and do happen.

Terence Winch

# Civilized Atmospheres

The bar is filled with a foul odor, something to do with the sewage system. People don't mind one bit. They smoke, talk, make time, drink, dance. We don't mind either. We like to see people having fun. We think there should be more fun in all our lives. And more sex and money. We want everyone to have more power, as much power as they would like, because we know how important power is to people. We want everyone we know to be the boss on the job and at home too. We want them to get what they want because when they do, they're happy and we're happy. We want them to have bigger and better houses and apartments. More beautiful lovers. We want them to have lean, hard bodies and perfect cardiovascular health. We want their health clubs to be radiant and spotless. We'd like to see their children turn out radiant too. It is threatening to rain. We hate rain. We hate even more the heavy oppressive atmosphere that precedes rain. We hate the bad smell in the bar and we don't like the people in the bar because they seem so pompous. Their breath is horrible and they have pot bellies and their clothing stinks of cigarettes. It is getting dark two hours before it should. That really makes us mad and depresses us too. Darkness. We hate darkness because it is so scary.

Nobody calls us anymore, so we call them because we don't want to be left alone up here in the dark with no one to talk to. But there's no answer, or we get the answering machine and leave a message, or they are there but they just can't talk to us right now because they're too busy, or even worse, they're expecting a more important call than ours. It's pouring now. Thunderous skies are opening up. Everything is wet. We hate to get wet. We closed the windows just in time, but now it's airless in here and we can't breathe.

We don't like work. The coming and going, the politics, the give and take.

We can live without it. The mindless routine  
day after day: the bus, the coffee break, the paperwork.  
We don't want anyone to have to go to work  
with those disgusting bad-smelling people  
who think they're so important. Don't they know  
that no one is indispensable? What about when you die?  
Do they ever think of that?

We don't want to have to come home from work  
in the scary wet darkness and then have to leave again  
for the smelly bar where those absolutely horrible people  
drink their drinks. We don't want anyone  
we know to have to do it either.

We'd like everyone to stay home where it's dry and peaceful,  
where they can watch movies and eat whatever they want,  
sleeping in a chair, listening to the sound of a car horn,  
the scary wet darkness enveloping them in its dream.

Terence Winch

# Comfort

Father Ray Byrne quickly became a star. He played sports, danced, sang, told jokes. He was a man of the people, and we loved him for that. He came to our apartments and brought us comfort.

He even came to a high school graduation party one night. I was a little drunk. Father Byrne came up to me and asked 'Are you thinking about it?' I panicked. What did he mean? Sex? Booze? Basketball? Could he read my mind? Then I realized his tone wasn't accusatory, so I said, 'Yeah, I'm thinking about it,' not having any idea what he was talking about.

'That's great,' he said, 'I can always tell when a young man is thinking about it. Just let me know if I can be of any help.' Now I was positive he wasn't talking about sex or money or any of the things I actually did have on my mind. Father Byrne thought I might have a vocation.

But I wasn't considering the priesthood. I didn't even think professional basketball was a possibility any more. God had walked out the door about a year before, when I was sixteen, and never looked back, even though I begged him not to leave me, alone and weeping in this valley of tears.

Terence Winch

# Easter 2016

Was it the brave men dying  
or the sad girls crying that made  
all those bells ring out? A million  
of us climb out onto the big hands  
of the clock and turn it back a hundred  
years. There we see the bodies piled  
high and the buildings laid low.  
We hear someone on a street  
corner singing a song about  
the strangers, how they came  
to stay and would never go away.  
We are marching up the avenue.  
We are drilling and training in secret  
in the countryside. Someday the hands  
will spring us back into the lap  
of the everyday, where we find  
ourselves right now, alive and free,  
scanning our debit cards  
with nothing, it seems, to fear  
in the spring time of the year.

Terence Winch

# Fishbowl

I can't think of anything else  
to talk with you about. We have  
discussed our jobs, our daily commute,  
the foods we like and don't like.  
You have ordered wine. I get a Pepsi.  
People have died. We acknowledge that.  
We're here and they're not. You get up  
early. I get up late. I want to tell you  
that I see your special dead person still,  
mostly in the subway. She was wonderful.  
Your new girlfriend is also a gem. How is  
it possible to love people who no longer  
exist? But they're everywhere, coming  
and going in the world of the dead  
as though they haven't torn us in pieces  
with their absence. They observe us  
intently. We are fish in a fishbowl to them.  
They watch from afar while we struggle to swim.

Terence Winch

# Full Disclosure

The way things come apart. Information leaks  
all over you. Sharon was nude. We refused to eat  
on the basis of video surveillance dogma. My salad  
is in a persistent vegetative state. Meat means war.

The drums joined in from up above, as though  
our scans matched your phone records. Everything  
is legal, everything is wrong. I get a bad result  
out of you. I can't give you anything but habeas corpus.

Imagine you are playing tennis. Now imagine the ball  
breaks the window in a blue house where violins lurk unseen.

Terence Winch

## Germ Plasma

Using verbs that bite, the cold period stands  
in before the troops. Snow is on the way:  
we tell our fathers that we love them. He spies  
a spear on the hard ground. Never give up  
your weapon, he says. Destroy it or bury it

If you are about to be captured. The maps  
are being redrawn as he speaks, drunk with  
promises of victory. Even if I decide it's time  
for a haircut, newspapers proclaim the dawn  
of a day that will never reach its own edges.

Terence Winch

# Ghosts

In the rain falling on her.  
In wide open space I think of.  
I wake up without you, smoking  
a cigarette, without a moment.  
I have no name. The street without looking.

I am awake. I get done in a day.  
I try to remember your faults.  
The ghosts are covered with footsteps,  
without memory, that open like  
editions of Vogue in the small room  
without you where you see everything  
without her, without emptiness  
without turning to someone in bed.

Terence Winch

# Grace

Didn't know if he was a retard or a drunk.  
He would lurch around Gaelic Park  
during game days, grinning like an idiot,  
dribbling onto his filthy cassock. First time  
I saw him it was a shock. And then his  
name, which had a funny sound to it:  
Father McMenamin. The drunk priest,  
the embarrassment to the whole community.  
Happily staggering onto the field, being gently  
ushered off again, scolded as one would a  
child: now, now, father, mustn't go there.

The shame of it all. An affliction from God.  
The shepherd, the authority, the man of the cloth  
as moron, bum, joke. The meaner ones  
would buy him drinks and make fun of him.  
Give us your blessing, Father. Forgive me  
my sins, Father, and I'll give you a glass.  
McMenamin forgave them all,  
wondering where he was. Somewhere  
far from home it seemed, searching  
for grace in the darkness of the Bronx.

Terence Winch

## In Relation Against

The molecule bore a remarkable resemblance  
to Elizabeth Taylor in a bikini shaving her legs.  
I thought I was in Paris and behaved accordingly,  
analyzing unnatural music videos from 1985.

My release mechanism cannot be compared to Madonna  
Tina Turner, Hulk Hogan, or Willem de Kooning.  
They swim about, lashing their tails in the aquamarine pools  
of a mythic past that mocks the Beach Boys where they live.

'We are bored and lonely,' they chant. 'Bored and lonely.'  
In return, men's inner lives emit incomprehensible signals.

Terence Winch

# Incidents of Travel in the Minivan

I wake up in a car park at the airport  
in Darbytown, a medium-sized city  
125 miles from Wellington, New Zealand.  
I have only just landed, and it is a  
beautiful, sparkling day. I find myself

Sitting behind the wheel of my rental  
van, consulting a map, when the only  
other motorist in the car park, a few  
spaces away, yells over to me, &quot;Hey,  
mate, there's a condor on your roof.  
Best beware.&quot; As you probably know

Condors are about as big as the average  
sized man, and they are known to  
snatch drivers right out of their cars,  
who are never seen again. I immediately  
hit the button to close the window

And that's when I hear it. The condor  
growling like a mad dog, angry  
that I have closed the window before he  
can grab me and make off with his prey.  
Until then, I did not know a bird could growl.

Terence Winch

# Irish Town

The drunken girls are in the ocean.  
When they come out it will be time for Mass  
and communion at St. Camillus. Our souls  
are scrubbed clean by now, though we eye  
their lovely curves outlined in tight white skirts.

There are no strangers here. We are all immigrants  
to the 20th century and we learn time  
with our feet. We can smell the music  
like the new mown meadows of the homeland.  
Over here, we have too much to eat  
but never enough to fill us up.

We talk incessantly in our sleep  
and we are always asleep. Our dreams  
are ridiculous cartoons about monsters  
that nonetheless wake us with our own screams.  
We are stupid about love, dumb about sex,  
and captured for life by the rapture of loss.

Terence Winch

# It Takes All Kinds

we lived one flight up in our  
apartment building and whenever someone  
would ring the downstairs bell  
my mother would tell us to stay put  
she would say 'if they want to see us bad enough  
they can walk up the flight'  
my brother Kevin used to tell me  
to never answer the phone  
if I was eating  
my father always told us  
not to worry too much about money  
he would say 'money won't buy you happiness'  
my mother would occasionally remark  
'it takes all kinds'

Terence Winch

# Jennifer Connelly Sestina

The boy returns home with blue hair.  
The dog understands everything we say.  
He is wearing an lampshade around his neck.  
His left hind leg is stapled closed.  
The veterinarian says there is no reason for God  
because the universe is just a dog" dream.

We can all agree that Jennifer Connelly is a dream.  
Almost naked, in a thong, cloaked in her long black hair,  
her every move is proof for the existence of God.  
The boy with blue hair is not willing to say  
why his lips are sealed, his mind made up, his door closed.  
I am not wearing a lampshade around my neck.

My wife once owned a jacket with 'Great Neck'  
printed on the back. Before we met I had a dream  
about her name. I waited until the restaurant closed  
to tell her she had dazzling movie-star hair.  
In fact, she is just as beautiful as, let us say,  
the astonishing Jennifer Connelly, so help me God.

The boy and the dog are friends with God.  
They claim they feel his hot breath on their necks.  
Unfortunately, they don't like what He has to say  
I'd like to take this occasion to daydream  
briefly once again about Jennifer Connelly's hair  
and the rest of her: extraordinary. That's it. Case closed.

When I got to the church at midnight, it was closed  
tighter than the eyes and ears of our good friend God.  
Frankly, in that proverbial foxhole, I'd take Madalyn O'Hair  
over the Pope. The boy's upstairs playing bottleneck  
guitar. The dog is drunk on pain-killers, dreaming  
that if he could talk, he'd know just what he would say.

O, Jennifer, there is still so much left to say  
but my time is up, it's late, everything is closed.  
I want to crawl into bed, past the dog, and dream  
of the sex palaces of Heaven, where everyone is the God

of love, and you and me and my wife are racing neck and neck  
with the erotic angels of Paradise, but I win by a hair!

New Orleans, like you, is now a dream. Maybe I'll call this 'The Hair  
of the Dog,' who, by the way, has become an incredible pain in the neck.  
What more can I say, except that in Waking the Dead, you played God.

Terence Winch

# Memoir

I remember a party, he remarked. Her underwear signified the grueling rehearsal. Infectious. Outgoing. He picked the place. He whispered excitedly, in a trashcan. He was really angry.

I remember the spaces stuck out like an armchair, she said. Small light green masterpieces went back and forth. He said a mask on the face in distress is like seven chains around his neck.

She said some people have it, some don't. He was among the last explorers to reach her, not the first.

Terence Winch

# Money, Food, Love

He keeps offering me money.  
Three thousand, five thousand,  
whatever. Name the amount.  
I say forget about money.  
It's love I'm after.

He says what kind of cosmetic  
surgery would you get if  
money were no object.  
I would get my nose  
straightened.  
Or maybe get the two frown  
lines erased from my brow,  
because people always  
think I'm angry. But in truth  
I am incredibly serene.  
The only thing I'm after is love.

She says eat as much of these  
tasty slices of turnips frying  
away on the stove as you'd like.  
Slather them with butter and salt.  
They are the world's most unpopular  
vegetable, but that is so wrong.  
They are really very savory.  
But I don't want any food.  
I'm never hungry any more.  
All I want is love, just love.

Terence Winch

# Morning Prayers

Old people cry too much.  
They walk in the morning  
to the railway station.  
Their hearts are breaking.

You can be old on the inside  
or old on the outside.  
Your heart can beat like  
the heart of a young dog.

The railway has been closed  
for years. The tracks end  
in the middle of nowhere.  
Old people get the senior discount.

When God was young our hearts  
were on fire with our love  
for him. He too is now an idiot  
and we scorn his heartless ways.

Terence Winch

# My Work

In my work, at any given point,  
the great issues of identity politics  
and dialectical absolutism assume  
a tight coherence, a profoundly  
threatening total awareness  
by which I seek to mediate  
the conflict between meaning  
and the extremes of deconstruction.

I never strike a false note  
I believe in savvy artistic  
incandescence as a constitutive  
enhancement of racy sexuality,  
all as a way to examine the  
necessity of self-love.

It's always dangerous to underestimate  
my work. I insult the intellectual  
dignity of the French. They arrive  
in my brightly colored landscape  
right after quitting time only to discover  
an empty stage set in which all the clueless  
actors have wandered off to an installation  
of obsolete Marxist sloganeering.

Yeats was deeply immersed in mythology  
and so am I. T. S. Eliot preferred Dante  
to Shakespeare, but I don't. Charles Bernstein  
loves the way my sentences decompose.  
John Ashbery will read my work only  
while naked. Everything I do is the pure  
output of brains, speed, and skill.

A couple of weeks ago, I digested  
Aristotle. I found him to be electrifyingly  
ahistorical, and he has now been subsumed  
into my work. I have open-ended stratagems  
when it comes to the Germans, particularly  
Goethe and Kant. They live now in my

imagination. I go way beyond alienation  
into a new synthesis of desire and content.

My work stands for something invisible,  
something inner. I attempt to explain  
the risk of appearing. Foucault would know  
how well my work succeeds in revealing  
the discourse between power and structure.  
When you read my work, you may think  
&quot;simile&quot; and &quot;metaphor,&quot; but what you really  
get is the storm, the dark mansion, the servant  
girl standing alone in Columbus Circle.

Triumph and loss permeate my work.  
People should try to pick up on that.  
My technical virtuosity is unrivaled.  
Don't talk to me about subject matter.  
My work takes &quot;narrative&quot; and turns  
it into whatever happened. In my work,  
&quot;story&quot; becomes language contemplating  
its own articulation in a field of gesture.

There is a higher reality at play in my work.  
Sacred memories resonate with perceptual  
knowledge of the body as primal text. Yet  
my work is never subservient to the dominant  
ideology. It circulates warmly and freely  
through all variable channels. My work  
is like the furniture you so much want to  
sink into, but must wait as it wends its way  
from distant points in a giant moving truck  
screeching across the country  
to your new home.

Terence Winch

# Mysteries

All last night I kept speaking in this archaic language, because I had been reading Poe and thinking about him. I read 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' which is supposedly the first detective story. Who dun it? I wondered. It turns out an orangutan was the murderer. Its looks to me like the detective story genre got off to a pretty ridiculous start. I used to visit Poe's house in the Bronx. I used to think, God, Poe must have been a midget. Everything was so small. Poe died in Baltimore and I can see why. In Baltimore, all the people are very big and sincere. During dinner last night, I told Doug and Susan about 'Murders in the Rue Morgue.' I said I hadn't finished it yet, but it looked like the murderer was going to turn out to be an orangutan, unless the plot took a surprising new twist. Then Doug suggested that he and I collaborate on a series of detective stories in which the murderer is always an orangutan.

Terence Winch

# Noise Under Glass

An old man arrived at my door with light bulbs.  
I opened the door a crack  
and asked what he wanted. He said he wanted  
to tell me that when a man dies,  
his body is placed in the middle  
of the men's lavatory, with two urinals side by side.  
I had never heard this before, and was happy to get  
the word. I stood in the hallway with him,  
hoping my friends couldn't hear him. Finally, he departed.

The old man crept through the mysterious grass  
of the bush and put the coffee right here  
on this table. We sat on French chairs  
in the middle of the hut while the bodyguards  
walked around the body sprinkling milk and murmuring  
'I'll have some coffee too, I'll have some coffee too.'  
Nobody said anything about the funeral.

I am restless, now that the old man is gone.  
My entourage yeses me to death.  
I am bored. As the soul of my mother was taken  
into that greater territory of the self, I lay  
on the bed watching 'Entertainment Tonight'  
with the sound off, trying to remember  
something, anything, about her.

Terence Winch

# Off the Map of Love

Everything can be explained by contextualisms.

Everyone has to give something up. Time. Space. Old clothes.

History tells us about the meaning of love, which is the sun  
of human emotion. We pour it over our thirsty memories.

A few kisses, a few embraces. Stealing each other's favorite cereal  
at midnight. The dust settles, things pile up on the floor next to the bed.  
Thank you for the bushes, trees, plants, your back-up piano work.  
I put everything into a box and then put that into a bigger box.

We are ridiculous. You say typography, I say geography.

I pull the shades shut. You record all the silences on our old recordings.

Terence Winch

# Opera Lesson

These Indian pictures never lie.  
Their rules against extravagant innocence  
are always religiously obeyed. Old people  
must smoke in a room without glass,  
standing next to white window curtains,  
thinking of men who 'walk like trees.'  
Clocks are forbidden. People who tend  
to suffer too much are always housed  
with drunks in apartments filled with gas  
from thousands of candles. Infidels gather  
in meeting rooms, all absolutely clean and tidy,  
all bathed in moonlight, where they study  
the art of percussion, sitting apart  
on heavy benches.

There is no anxiety here. The skies are pillows  
of spotless white. As you walk the streets,  
you think about milking cows or you plan  
on baking something later in the day. Deviation  
is not uncommon, however. That is why many villagers  
copulate on the dining room table. There is also  
an admonition against falling asleep in the cellar,  
where unclean spirits may embellish your faults.

When I got here, I lay down beside your wreckage  
and rubbed your clothing all over my body.  
Later I watched strangers, their eyes wet with  
forgiveness, embrace in stark hallways,  
as if some instinct compelled them, like animals  
or lovers, to mark the night in ancient whispers.

Terence Winch

# Plums

You bring out your articles and pronouns  
your justifications and protestations.

I will not fight against the embarrassments  
that we have so carefully accumulated.  
I'm prepared for carnage.  
That's the way I roll.  
Leave now, if you want,  
and we will stuff our history in storage.

I do not want to sacrifice desire for a good meal.

It's March already, and nobody seems to be hungry.  
Why, I don't know. Should I sing a song about  
plums? They are mysterious and full of magic,  
and I am falling asleep in a dream of their sweetness.

Terence Winch

# Proclamation For My Father In 1965

Whereas time has caught up with me and the boiler  
broken down again, and day after day it snows and snows  
and there I am, with my shovel, in the dark  
cold night waiting for day, and wishing I was in New Jersey

with Ethel and P.J. & Marion having a drink and taking in a play.  
Maybe later eating oysters at the Oyster Bar  
and dancing until four at the United Irish Counties Ball

Whereas I am now sixty years old and don't feel so good  
much of the time, like right now, while fat Father Hammer  
just turned fifty and I know is getting set to fire me  
but I've been here for fifteen years and am ready to go

my own way, into the secret America I never knew before.  
The banjo-playing lesbians, the depressed school teachers  
who tell me Paddy, Paddy, Paddy, you're our man

Whereas I feel it all coming apart, the hard years  
in this country, the loves gained and lost, the tough jobs  
the gigs, the booze, the dearly departed friends  
the wife whose absence never ends

while I never mend, always sensing the ghosts so near.  
The thing you most fear in life all boils down  
to your own invisibility, there for all to see.

Therefore be it resolved that tomorrow will be eighty  
degrees and sunny. My children will visit me. My grandchildren  
will sing me songs. The Bronx will float on the clean, sweet air  
of paradise. I will feed a basement full of cats.  
The future sprawls out like a drunk on a bed.

Terence Winch

## Q & A

Q. How important is theory in this poem? It seems as though it just starts, goes nowhere, tells us nothing we need to know.

A. The concern here is with necessity, not fact. The poem could tell you everything you wanted to know, but doesn't. Some poems begin in the rinse cycle. This one goes right to spin.

Q. We noticed how marvelous the upper strata of the poem is. It suggests the appeal of authoritarian faith in the old-fashioned middle class. Did you write it on a train?

A. One day I heard laughter coming from some mysterious source. First I thought it came from several people who were stuck at the bottom of a well. Then I speculated it could be a group of teenagers on the level right above me. After a while, however, I wondered if it might actually be weeping. I got out my address book and started calling around. In fact, people were crying when I managed to get in touch with them. Where are your social contracts now, I snarled, your precious theses on the absolute? I averted my gaze as their beliefs unraveled.

Q. We can't help but notice how you seem to be suppressing what you really mean. Are you naked in this poem?

A. I have these pastes and mud packs that I smear all over me, so I'm never really naked, even when I have no clothes on. The same thing goes for this poem. It's beautiful, stark, totally blank, yet colorful, like a sin you're considering but haven't yet committed.

Terence Winch

# Recoveries

At first, the same old disintegrating memories  
the significant details of his past, the you know  
what I mean. Not bad for a guy who made himself  
out to be excessive, deeply irreplaceable, the life

Of the party. The plot is full of revelation. The forest  
remains unchanged. He laments. He sees God in a foot  
note on sex and blood. Americanism hangs in the closet  
with a suit of old clothes, the green hill just a dream.

The morning sky has a trace of it where he prays.  
In the clearing, the right word breaks out across the gap.

Terence Winch

# Sex Elegy

My lovers have vanished. I used to have many.  
One moved to Boston and married a Japanese photographer.  
Another became a famous actress. Another one, who for a long time  
I mistakenly believed to be dead, now lives in Manhattan.

We used to know each other so intimately,  
sucking and munching on each other, inserting,  
penetrating, exploding. Becoming as one. Funky  
smell of sweaty bodies. Clothes strewn on floor  
and bed. Candles burning. Smoke of cigarettes and joints  
curling up the bedroom atmosphere. Now we never touch,  
barely talk. Some I have lost all contact with.

But memories of our pleasure together, my dears,  
still play in my mind. My body can still feel your touch.  
My tongue still remembers your taste.  
Everything else I seem to have forgotten.  
The present is the life insurance premium automatically  
deducted from your paycheck, while the past burns  
out of control in a vacant lot on the outskirts of town.

Terence Winch

# Sic Transit Gloria

Guy asks me for \$1.80 on the subway.  
White guy, bald, shirt and tie.  
Says they towed his car with his wallet in it.  
He is sitting in front of me. All the men  
in the car have been stealthily eyeing  
an astonishingly beautiful young woman  
in a very short skirt, who has been  
drawing in a big sketchbook. She is luminous.  
Summer is almost over. I can't concentrate  
on reading because I have to sneak looks  
at the gorgeous artist. The day is flying  
past in the fading sunlight.

Big bald oval head right in my face.  
I'll pay you back, he says. That's okay,  
I say. I give him two dollars. He says thanks  
and turns around. We all resume studying  
the woman. Two young black guys sit  
across from me. One of them keeps  
snapping his gum so loud it's like  
a cap gun going off.

An enormous fat guy says to the beauty as he heads  
for the door: I don't know how you can draw  
with the train bumping around. She smiles  
at him. We are all overcome with the radiant  
brilliance of her smile. I think about music,  
I think about my godson smashing nine windows  
in New Jersey yesterday. We are always trying  
to break out. Sex is better than religion.

She gets up at Metro Center. The doors slide open  
for her and she's gone. It's back to real time.  
The Yankees are one and a half games out of first.  
Someone's cell phone rings and he squawks:  
Can't hear you. I'm on the subway. What?  
The bald guy rises up. I know he will turn  
around before exiting and thank me again,  
give a further gesture of appreciation.

It's the right thing to do. Two bucks  
is not nothing between strangers.  
I'm sure he'll give me that bonus nod.

Terence Winch

# Small Potatoes

We went out to eat.  
It was like walking on eggs.  
The waiter spilled the beans  
and then we ordered.  
I had the sour grapes  
with the spilt milk,  
which made you cry.  
You wanted tough  
muffins. How do you  
like them apples?  
the waiter asked.  
He was the apple  
of our eye. But every  
thing in the end seemed  
like small potatoes.

Terence Winch

# The Banalities

The contest is over. I lost, you lost.  
I had an intensely anatomical body  
and gave it to you. Thirty years ago  
you dropped the bomb on me. I submitted.

I like the exam, as long as it's tasteful.  
You remember personality? How it posed  
naked at all our meetings, till the bulb lit up?  
What was so wrong with that? What was so wrong?

The stigmata felt weird, especially during the love-in  
when we noticed the beautiful pariahs across the yard.

Terence Winch

# The Documents

The Documents are weeping, fading,  
fearing the worst.

They are the messages  
that keep coming.  
They are promises, dreams, hymns,  
i.o.u.'s. Proclamations.  
Declarations.

They are word-flags.  
Language  
security blankets.

You could wrap yourself  
in their giant pages.

They want to tell us who we are  
or who we should want to be.

They are sails made of speech.

You could navigate  
the vessel of your inner life  
with their words propelling you along to the horizon.

The Documents tell their stories  
over and over, even when you're asleep,  
even when the dark government temple  
where they are entombed has shut  
down for the night. The Documents never  
tire, never shut down. They never expire.

They keep up their endless arguments,  
hoping to be heard. Take heart, they insist.  
Resist your worst impulses. Fight on,  
even against invincible power. Listen  
to what we have to tell you, they say, ancient,  
faint, yet stronger than a wall ten miles thick.



# The End of the World Polka

There is a story about a ghost who knelt in the attic with his mouth open, his tongue hanging out, and even the wind was frightened of him, and even the moon and stars were frightened of him. He could extract all the wisdom out of everyone in the house and devour all the holiness and knowledge that ever hath been embedded in the hearts of all who dwelt in that dark place of pestilence. Oh, who would ever deny it? Who would have enough air to inhale the necessary antidotes of fierce courage and forbidden thoughts of everlastingness?

The constellations wink and the deep and terrifying dark of the unthinkable universe, the one, you know, that keeps expanding further and further out into the farthest reaches of the tiny molecule that is the actual universe wherein all the other supposedly infinite universes reside, that deep and terrifying dark releases its hot, uptown electricity into the cosmic, comic fallen world of light, where people get married, daughters talk back to their fathers, and one spidery ding in the windshield spreads everywhere throughout the kingdom until the ground cracks open and the priests fall in to their doom.

Terence Winch

# The Sacrifice

The crowd exploded. The room cheered.  
The moon made its rulings stick. The stick  
struck against the necessity of argument.  
The argument held the impossibility of salvation  
outside the delights of the great forest of long hair.

My wife and I danced on a stack of fresh tortillas.  
We moved on to the river of supply boats and obscene  
counter attacks in new underwear and clothing.  
False articles of faith fogged the new dawn.  
Survivors dumped the headline on the dark lawn.

Terence Winch

# The Sisters

One sister is leaving for Sweden.  
Two sisters are arguing in the living room  
while a third sister makes furtive  
phone calls from the bathroom.  
Another sister has died.

The sisters are all beautiful.  
They knit, they cook, they write  
books about the meaning  
of life. They always look  
good, even on a bad day.

Even the word sister is  
insistent. Some sisters live  
in a convent, some lie naked  
on a bed in a dark room,  
waiting for a caress.  
They dress and undress  
twenty times a day.

If I had a wish it would be  
to have been there on the day  
my sisters caught a giant fish  
in Florida, and afterwards  
began beautiful lives of  
mystery in the female  
universe, where the laws  
of science are known to sway.

Terence Winch

# The Welsh People

The Welsh People are waiting for me  
in the Childe Harold. It is 1973. The Welsh People  
have been drinking and playing Pac Man.

2

I go out carousing with the Welsh People.  
They are all on strike because the authorities  
want them to stop stealing books. It is two hours before  
closing time and the Welsh People have already had 18 Irish Coffees.  
They do not like the authorities. These are my Welsh People.  
The Welsh People stop by with all the music of the 1940s  
re-arranged Welsh-style onto hundreds of cassette tapes  
and we listen all night amid the stolen books. We are  
smoking a lot of cigarettes and dope with the Welsh People.  
Welsh People like to make lists that have thousands  
of items on them and that go back many years.  
List-making is an ancient Welsh art, dating back  
to Richard Burton, a Welsh person. Some of the other  
Welsh People are called William, Anthony, Ivor, Allan,  
Dylan, Bob, Tristram, Romney, Meredith, Lucky, Sluggo,  
Gwynn, Gwyneth, Glenda, Lloyd, Llewellyn, Puff Daddy,  
Becky, Andrea, Mary Ellen, Sandra, Cordelia, Calvin Lewis,  
Anthony Hopkins, Tom Jones, Boom-Boom, Rocky, Ringo,  
T-Bone, J. J. Lyly, Lefty. But mostly they are named Doug.

3

I see the Welsh People eating Welsh rabbit, or is it  
rarebit? This is cheese and beer on toast. It is very healthy,  
the way the Welsh People like everything to be. To build  
up your Welsh vocabulary, simply type "LI" close your eyes,  
and randomly hit letters on the keyboard. Many Welsh People  
are known to get angry and set fire to their homes if the landlord  
replaces the deluxe toilet bowl with a much smaller one.  
The Welsh are called "The Fire People" because of  
their magic Chevrolets, which they are not licensed to drive.

4

Some of the favorite places of the Welsh People are  
The Cozy Corner, Kramer's, The Hotel Wallaby,  
The Rondo, Folio Books, The CafZ Splendide, The Fox and Hound,  
The Tabard. The Welsh People smoke while playing soccer  
near the castle ruins. They prefer taking drugs  
and listening to jazz over working in the coal mines.

5

I want to explain how the Welsh People have phone bills bigger than  
their rent, but I can't.

6

I am with the Welsh People and they say to me  
the trouble with the future is that it doesn't stop  
when it gets to the place you want to be.  
I agree.

7

I am thinking of the Prince of Wales, a royal person.  
When he calls his girlfriend and tells her he'd like to be her Tampax  
the Welsh People finally accept him as their prince.  
Not since Gruffyd ap Llewelyn and Owen Glendower  
have the Welsh People been so pleased with a leader.

8

The Welsh People are riding in a cab, which is  
the only officially sanctioned Welsh means of transportation.  
I used to worry about the Welsh People until I realized  
that they are at one with the universe and are protected  
from all harm by their impenetrable spiritual armor  
and by all the things they learn by watching cable t.v.  
If the food is good, the Welsh People will eat  
every last molecule. They will smoke all the cigarettes,  
drink all the drinks. This is the secret of their success,  
which is itself a secret.

9

A long time ago, the Welsh People came to America and began biting Americans on the ass. This delayed the issuance of their green cards for many years. I used to think the Welsh People were a bunch of freaks, wandering around Dupont Circle leaving tips that were often really just too generous for the service they got, but now I have come to realize that where there's smoke and fire, there's Welsh People throwing a party.

Terence Winch

## Three Addresses

1642 Argonne Place, NW

Alley of giant air conditioners, you roared  
your ill wind our way day and night. We burned  
you down, little house, but you rose right up again.  
We played guitars by candlelight and sang songs to the cat.  
We stole each other's cake and dope, dancing  
all night, sleeping late, driving down Columbia  
Road to the Omega for Mexican-style chicken,  
which two lovers could live on for an entire day.  
We threatened you  
with a sledgehammer  
if you wouldn't let us go.  
Enough, you finally stammered,  
be gone from Argonne!

1920 S St. NW: The Chateau Thierry

If you opened the door without thinking,  
the entire neighborhood gushed into the apartment  
like an open hydrant. We gathered around the black  
and white tv like it was a tabernacle containing  
the secrets we yearned to know. The first Gay Pride Day  
made the building tremble so violently the roaches  
scurried from the cracks and crevices looking  
for safer quarters. Theodore, Edward, and Al  
ran the only manual elevator still going in our  
part of town. Casey, violent and crazy, dealt coke  
out of his first floor apartment. Mara owned  
a dozen petite dogs to be avoided at all costs.  
Zoltan Farkas wrote *The Baltimore Poems*  
and disappeared completely from the landscape.  
I had a brass bed, my altar of love, and a cat  
named Spooky. People yelled my name  
up the side of the building, I threw them  
a key out the window, and they rose  
up to the fifth floor and through that open door  
into my abode of bliss, which I still miss.

3701 Massachusetts Ave. NW: Cathedral Court

They told me I was moving to the geriatric district.

No Metro up there, they warned. But I was now  
on top of the hill, across the street from  
one of God's most prestigious addresses.  
I would stare at the naked bodies carved above  
the Cathedral entrance, like a page torn from  
the Playboy version of Genesis, thinking  
yes—this is the way religion should be.  
A bus took me back to Dupont Circle  
in three minutes. At night I'd walk home  
up Mass Ave, past all the embassies,  
loving to touch down momentarily  
on Irish soil, salute the statue of Gibran,  
great poet of wedding-vow love, hail Mary and Tom  
and Cyn and Steve. Pick up the mail.  
Waltz with Susan in the enormous living room,  
then lie in bed at night, by the window,  
hypnotized by the big cake of a church bathed  
in its rosy blush of light, fireworks  
erupting somewhere in the city's distant dark.

Terence Winch

# Urban Turtles

Small green couch in the living room. I come home at night and sit in it. 'Law & Order' is on TV. I have a glass of cheap cabernet and make eggs for dinner. It gets later and later. I hit the mute button and listen to the old clock on the piano tick, then tock. I wash my dishes. I choose tomorrow's work clothes.

I said to my barber, 'Give me a haircut that looks exactly like Frank Sinatra's wig,' and he did. My barber is a very nice, gay Egyptian. I take a hot bath and listen to right-wing talk radio, which I find very relaxing. I keep wondering where everyone went.

The dog was just here, I'm positive. I can smell dog. There's another strange odor in the bathroom. Perfumey. Or maybe it's Lysol or 409. The toothpaste is cinnamon flavored. I spray a 'Fresh Outdoors' scent throughout the house.

Maybe I am all alone. Which is not what I really want. I want a party going on in every room. I want guests in the guest room. I want people taking baths in the bathroom. I consult Each Day a New Beginning for today: 'We have judged our world and all the situations and people in it in terms of how their existence affects our own.'

I remember a conversation I had this afternoon with a colleague about urban turtles. Could they really survive in the fast-paced city? Sure, he said.

I don't really care. A friend of mine died in November and I think about him all the time. I stopped calling him because he never initiated contact with me and I didn't like that. But a week or so before he died, he said to me: 'I always loved seeing you. I loved being in your presence.' Now he is always talking to me from the beyond, as he had threatened to. It's his voice, then the tick tock of the clock, then his voice again.

Terence Winch

# Winter Babies

Maybe it was the cars crashing tonight,  
the full moon, that made us wild.  
In the living room there was a big fight  
featuring father and mother with child.

Restrooms, elevators were all crowded  
with strange-looking nurses and physicians.  
Everyone likes these awful mysteries shrouded  
behind a wall of grinning technicians.

All regret is symbolic, everyone agreed,  
desperately in search of parking spaces,  
whining, bickering, picking up speed.  
You could see the rebellion in our faces.

Later, our sinus cavities full of antihistamine,  
we lie down, embrace, in the bed's fertile deep,  
our focal point some tranquil distant scene,  
as we surrender, hypnotized, to the thrill of sleep.

Terence Winch