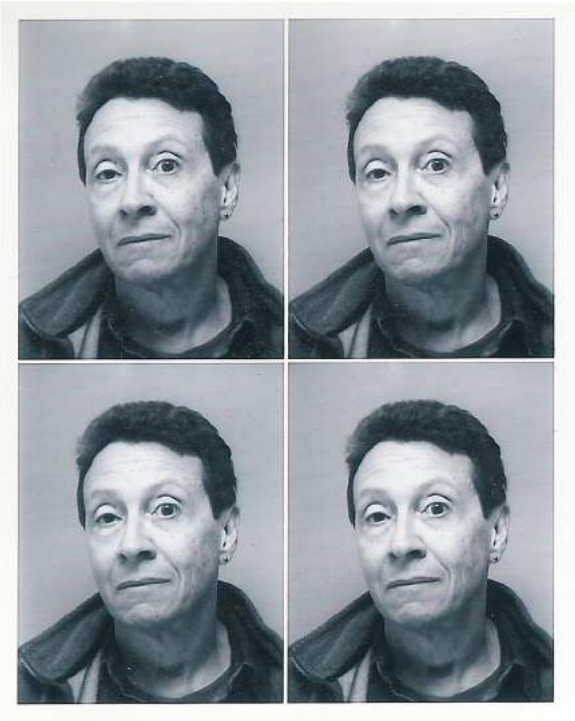
Like Father

Like Son



New and Selected Poems

Allan Douglass Coleman

Like Father

Like Son

New and Selected Poems

Allan Douglass Coleman

Villa Florentine Press

To my father, Earl M. Coleman, writer, publisher, and teacher, role model and mentor.

"The lyric does not seek meaning through extension, it accepts the enigmas of confinement. It strives for a rapid unity of impression, an experience rendered in its wink of immediacy."

-- Irving Howe[1]

A Villa Florentine Press book.
Villa Florentine Press is a division of
Flying Dragon Cultural Enterprises Ltd.
Suite A 11/F, Ho Lee Commercial Bldg.
38-44 D'Aguilar St., Central, Hong Kong
flyingdragononline.com

ISBN: 0-9789437-0-8
ISBN: 978-0-9789437-0-7
Library of Congress Control Number: 2006940452
Printed on acid-free paper in Shenzhen, China.
First edition.
Like Father Like Son has also been published in a limited edition of 26 copies lettered A-Z and signed by the authors.

---

[1] Introduction to *Short Shorts: An Anthology of the Shortest Stories*, edited by Irving Howe and Ilana Wiener Howe (New York: Bantam Books, 1983), p. xii.

Contents

Common Senses

Body Language

Watch and you'll see:
flesh molds spirit
as spirit shapes flesh,

character defines itself
in the way one leans
against a wall;

by the swing of an arm
the soul declares
its condition,

shows us grace
as an act of will
or else reveals

the lack of it,
a whole life
up till now

distilled in the way
that girl steps
down from the curb.

Just pay attention;
you can imagine
the rest.

Shy Bricks

Talking to himself
once an unloved child
good conversation
can be hard to find

Fluttering her fingers
wave away demons
what her father made
of the dark

We each build a safe house
best we can make
use what's at hand
no instructions enclosed

School of Crafts

Hoping for news
from the Andes,
the three llamas graze
in the gloaming. Unsure
still of their mission
here, they await
the passing bird
whose message will
explain it all. Meanwhile,
the thump of a nearby
volleyball does not
assuage their longing,
but the steady tap-tap
of a woodworker's
tool reassures them,
as does the view of
the Blue Ridge Mountains.
And of course they
have the grass, green,
thick and plentiful
as their coats, there
for the taking, for
the lying down on
and the rubbing
of their heads along.
So they attend
the revelation,

perhaps tomorrow,
ears now perked
to the quiet song
of the contented
teacher across the road,
seated on a cabin
porch in the warm
damp, smoking his
Nicaraguan cigar.

(Penland, North Carolina)

Language Poem

Out of habit
I cover surfaces
with paper,
paper with words,
but last night
I froze the letters
of my alphabet,
so today
they could blend
with sweet and tart
fresh fruit
to nourish me
as I begin
to purge and cleanse;
because tomorrow
I start to teach
my first class
of this new century
and commence
my first essay
of the third millennium
of the Common Era,
and I will need
my health and strength
since I plan
to live at least
another hundred years
so I can see some
goddamn justice done.

Stay Hungry

bread and salt

still hungry

bread and butter

still hungry

bread and circuses

still hungry

bread and water

still hungry

bread and chocolate

still hungry

bread and roses

still hungry

bread and wine

still hungry

Cold Shower (a note to my jailors)

(for Irina Ratushinskaya)

Line by line, etched into
my bar of soap, then memorized,
two hundred fifty poems. Yes.
You cannot stop a poet
save with death, and poetry
will never cease,
and poems do not die. Send them
up the chimney and their ash
will drift down on your shoulders,
settling there, betraying you
like scalp flakes. Scrub them out,
they'll foam on down the drain
toward their readers, swimmers
in a sea too rough, too deep for you.
Mine scour me, coarse to fine,
new skin for old, opening my pores,
then float in scummy glory
past your guarded eyes, right
down the prison pipes, into that fecund
sewer where tomorrow breeds
and only those like you
are left unwashed, unclean.

Going Postal

Write down killing words,
then fold the paper neatly,
slide it into hiding,

seal the flap
scribe the address
lick the stamp

and drop it in the box:
surprise surprise
I hope you die.

Kafka to his father
neither first nor last:
we've each been Una-

bombers once at least,
and all that murder
bleeds through envelopes

into post-office air —
small wonder some sad
mailman grabs his gun,

returns to sender,
forwarding expired,
addressee unknown.

Juarez Kindling

A memory of running once
through rusty water, fine-
sprayed from a leaky garden
hose, his father's thumb
for pressure on the free end
in the summer's hottest oven,
keeps Paquito almost cool
tonight, but the trash mountain
behind *la colonia* is on fire
as usual: waves of heat, bright
flicker like the blue light
from the tv that feeds on
stolen juice atop a busted chair
in front of Tina's tent;
and while he watches tales
of lives he knows already
he will never get to lead,
smothered in white snow
from Hollywood or bad reception,
he can feel a spark somewhere
inside him deep, as flames
nothing can douse begin to burn.

Bildungsroman

Arachnophobe

When I was ten or so
my mother parked me for July
on the southeastern farm
where she'd been born.
I ran amok in leafy woods,
leaped down from haymows
into thick barnyard mud,
inhaled ammonia
from the chicken coop,
spent time alone.

I made a pocket weapon
from a rubber band, some
wooden matchsticks, a notched
spool emptied of its thread.
Armed with this cannon-bow
I hunted spiders, creeping
close to webs till
I could spot them motionless
and near enough to touch,
then slide a missile through
the spindle hole, pull back
the rubber band to let it go.

Seems silly now, no
contest to be sure,
yet I remember otherwise,

each spider large as my
own crawling fear of it;
although I never lost
it felt as though I could,
as if the slightest brush
of one could shudder me
to death. So every victory
seemed sweet, each prance
back to my hammock
and adventure book,
the safety net of words.

Today if I can help it I kill
not a thing, yet on the page
I'm shooting spiders still.

Taking the Field

Cut grass, sandlot
or tarmac, but always
the smell of first inning:
possibilities wide,
no damage too great
to recover from,
and all your promise,
no matter how limited,
not yet broken.

Downtown Local
(for John Harriman)

The trace of autumn in a musky
subway leads me back, and back —
to younger nights, adrift on
stutters from a muted horn, chianti
drunks, and fires in the flesh
that charred my bones. For love
or money, I'd not pass that way
again; I never was a happy child,
nor ever knew one. And yet so
certain that I would come through . . .

I did, you know. The price,
of course, was high:
these scars, that numbness
of the heart, and then this
living in some stranger
whom I hardly know. The room's
not bad, but the food's meager:
I grow thin. If I survive
this fast, perhaps I'll find
myself at home, at ease
enough to hear a doorbell ring
and tremble down the stairs
to let me in. You see, I still
have hopes we can be friends.

For Malcolm, February 1975

I saw you
once in a college hall
I was no more
than twenty

You gave me a key
the right to my rage
odd gift from black man
to white boy

It took me time
to find the lock
but I did

I see by the papers
it's ten years since
they cut you down
I never got to
thank you

Turning Thirty

Three long-time friends, my dear
son, a lover who would leave me
in two weeks — these were the company
on that red-letter day. Michael
and Debbie brought rum; Richard, just in
from Baltimore, had something to burn;
Leslie cooked lasagna while Edward iced
the cake. "Man was not meant to deal
with numbers," the bloody oracle
of Market Street had told me over french fries
in a San Francisco diner weeks before.
No arguing such wisdom; one day's
much like the next, time's not for taking
seriously. More to the point,
I was at home with those I loved,
my life in my own hands. They gave me
jokes and pictures, shared rituals and sang
my name. Standing above the flaming cake
I thought, "Maybe this time," then
closed my eyes and blew the candles
out. Always wanted to not be
a kid anymore; finally got my wish.

Deal

it's a long story but I
never thought I should cost
anyone anything at all

grew up in used clothes,
got taught in free schools
ate what they fed me

beyond the usual childhood
tantrums, made no demands,
voiced no expectations

not till I neared forty
did it occur to me to say
I come at a price

what am I worth? well, that's
negotiable, of course,
but there's at least

a raw cost for materials to cover, plus
the skilled labor, not to mention
storage and delivery of goods

a long story, as I say,
so if you want to hear it
understand for starters

that whether it's a purchase
or a swap, I now drive
hard bargains

and on whatever level
we'd be trading, if I've got what
you're after then

I come as is, no guarantees,
and we'll be talking
the big bucks

Bone Voyage

Traipsing this flesh around:
fifty years of sensational
journey, shank's mare
to jet propulsion,
land, sea and air.

Name it and this skeleton
has ridden it, freighted
with meat and muscle —
determined, patient, restless
and unsatisfied. Three

continents, two million miles
so far, still counting, all
in search of germination:
seed seeking fertile soil,
always heading home.

Blood Ties

Family Album

I. Photo by Frances Coleman

We lived on 70th then,
east of the Hudson, west
of the park. Not yet
twenty-one, on leaving home
the academic novelist-to-be
stands in the garden
before his mother's eye.
She places him, she sees him
so: sunglasses, slightly-too-large
jacket in whose corduroy
he had hopes of wearing
elbow holes to patch, behind him
on the wooden fence
that stick aimed like a cobra
at his heart. "And you thought
you were smiling," Michael says.

Family Album

II. Photo by Fabian Bachrach

My father told me once, "Real life
is lived from nine to five." Yet I know
he had dreams, though he confused them
with illusions and so
lost them both. Now he wears
masks within masks, and this one's
not the last: the very picture
of success, unruffled upper half
belying all that rumpling below.
One Christmas I received it, cased within
a silver standing frame. I keep
it on my bookshelf. It shows
up now and again in annual reports.

Family Album

III. Photo by Arnold Eagle

Looking (to me) a bit like the young
Kate Hepburn, Fran poses for her portrait,
1939. Her teeth were crooked, so she hid
her smile. I never saw it much. Last night,
after two years' absence
and twelve hours on the road,
I strode at midnight through
her ranch-house door. We'd talked
an hour when she realized
she hadn't put her teeth in,
and was shamed. I'd hardly noticed,
only saw the smile.

Family Album

IV. Photo by Frances Coleman

Twenty-five years it took to say,
"He was the favorite son." (Of course
I knew; I used to tickle him
until he choked, such gentle murder
in my fingertips.) None of it was his fault;
we simply stood five years apart
and never closed the gap. Here,
going on sixteen, he wears
a borrowed shirt of mine as our ways
part. I still have the shirt — still have
the brother too. Somehow
we've learned to talk.

Concerning ice cream on Mom's side of the family

Her father Jim's my childhood
memory of love. Daytimes
in summer I would ride
the cowflop-crusted flatbed
of his truck or sit the cab,
his sawdust sweat combined
with turpentine into the finest
aftershave, as he'd go paint
a barn or build a porch or wrestle
a reluctant bull-calf
to the ground. Sometimes
he'd have me clean the henhouse,
heave some bales of hay.
Then we'd soap up, scrub off
in a fraternity of foam.

Evenings after dinner he and I'd
sit at the kitchen table, there
to play casino for an hour or so.
Her mother Emily would bring us
each a heaping dish of ice cream
homemade in a freezer tray:
the cream from cows I'd watched
him milk (I never did learn how),
mixed in with chocolate pudding
from a box. Dense, crystalline,
it fought the spoon and stayed

forever on the tongue, taught
patience to a young boy feeling
cherished, chafing at affection's
always steady pulse but oh so slow.

I didn't know that once
I was in bed and they'd closed
up the house, Grandma
would don her nightgown
and then wash her feet
on the announced assumption
that she'd die in sleep that very night
and didn't want the neighbors
finding her extremities unclean.

Years later, over ice cream
at my mother's place, I told her
I walked through my city
like a prince. It shocked her
that I felt so good: she blurted out
"Not like a prince!" to strip me
of my joy. It was a reflex action,
uncontrolled, unplanned, her way
of warding off the evil eye.

Her long-dead mother is alive
and ill in her. For ten years now
Mom's plotted her own end,
rehearsed the where and how of it:

pills, alcohol, a leap to the ravine
or slow submersion in the lower
pond. Then there's the when,
the advance notice given, ceaselessly
revised, like the horizon sometimes
near but always beyond reach:
on her next birthday, two years
hence, before the winter cold
sets in. She's a sly huckster, shilling
her own shuffling off the coil.

Most recently it was to be this fall,
once her grape arbor's harvest
had been pressed for wine. But she
misplaced those words. Into
that vacuum of forgetfulness
rushed other shards of memory, dense,
crystalline, and what popped out
was this: "I think that I will kill
myself when they've made ice cream
from the hens." I had to laugh, and you
can too; it doesn't bother me.
What else is there to do?

Time pivots on its heel, and suddenly
I'm back inside that farmhouse kitchen
forty years ago. Knowing what I didn't
know, I watch Granddaddy Jim
drink sunrise coffee, Grandma fry

an egg I gathered — hear their rooster
crow while, silent in the freezer,
dessert hardens for the evening
meal. In this dominion of slow melt
I'm only a pretender who'll renounce
the throne one day and vanish
from the hall. This prince
of ice cream is no prince at all.

Points of View

I sit in the room
with two women. One
was my wife. The other
is my lover. I watch
them. I have been
cuckolded by both.

I sit in my living
room with the woman
I once married
and the one who hopes
to marry me. We watch
the children play.

I sit in the dining
room of my house with two
who've claimed to love me.
I trust neither as we
celebrate my son's
twelfth year. He plays
with his half-sister
as her parents watch.

We sit in our home,
my son and I, with two
women who've claimed
to love us. His mother

has brought her daughter
and her lover to his party.
We watch them play.

We sit at the table,
my lover and I,
who've claimed to love
each other. We watch
my son on his birthday
play with his sister
and his mother, once
my wife. My lover's
lover is not there to see.

Wearing my double
crown of horns, I sit
in the center of my life,
watching its ironies.
Outside there's rain.

In the Widow's House

Closets dripping
folded thunder

greasy floorboards
past all waltzing

noisy stain
on memory's armchair

teapot mumbles
go unanswered

pointless keyhole
mail like snowflakes

ants keep dancing
dust just grows

Ukiah Afternoon

Small-town August California courthouse:
I'm stuck in summer school again, this time
for repetition of a course I didn't fail,
relearning what I know too well: she's here
and yet she's gone. On the stand an expert
offers gifts of truth that no one would unwrap,
explaining massive insults to the brain,
dementia, and such. My brother breaks;
he has to leave the room, but I stay on.
It's not my time to cry. I'm here to watch
my mother sit and smile, look aimlessly
around, then catch my eye and wink. Inside
me a balloon fills drop by heavy drop
with grief, but meanwhile I blink back,
answering her call on the duty of blood —
thicker than water, thinner than tears.

Floater

Yesterday at dawn in a small-
town hospital I held
my mother's fingers — thin,
skin papered, tube
needling her vein,
taped on her fragile arm.

Soft morning filtered
through a curtain
as I spoke my fear
she'd end up trapped
in life. Slowly, looking
straight at me, she said,
"I will go for a swim
in the pond," then
smiled. We both knew
exactly what she meant.

Heading south by bus, the light
of western afternoon lay
on my hand so gently
I could count my years.

At twilight she returned
to her ranch. Now I
arc into evening,
between the clouds

and sun, fly east
toward night, in my ears
a ringing and the quiet
riffle of my seatmate's
playing cards.

Soon, on the far
coast, an old woman
will enter the water.

On First Beating My Father at Chess

Sitting in low chairs at my niece
and nephew's playroom table,
family preoccupied,
his casual proposal of a game
accepted just to pass the hour,
I had no thought of victory. I'd never won
at chess against him, he not at all the type
to throw one just to boost a kid's
morale, even his own, myself too
caught up in my inside wars to learn
to plan three moves ahead. Back then
I did it mostly to buy time with him,
though that meant his attention mixed
always with his triumph, my defeat.

It taught me to hate games on boards.
I played such things reluctantly
with my own son, preferring other modes
of dialogue, do somewhat better
with my brother's kids; I still
don't like to lose, don't get much
pleasure from the win, the kill.

My father needs these tests, he always
has, they're life to him, while I
have gone some other way. And so
I made the moves as best I could,

merely to do something, till
a pattern showed itself, awaited
finishing. At "mate" I gave him
a brief glance, but he was unaware
that anything momentous had transpired
beyond his momentary irritation
at himself. We played again. I lost.
Yet since then nothing has seemed
quite the same.

Theory of Relatives (after Einstein)

Now that we know
within a given stone
the atoms dance
and interweave,
        consider the obdurate
        unchanging family —
        its seeming stasis,
        all repeated endless
tropes, meanwhile
aswarm with particles
that choose for their own
reasons to maintain that
        shape, contained within
        which your bright dream
        of falling off the roof
        might bring surprising joy.

Loves and Lusts

Salvage Rites

(for D. L.)

Barrel, stock, and lock this woman takes him,
warts and all — the barely managed chaos
of his life, the dusty cluttered house,

the adolescent needful son, the baggage
of the growing past. She has such space
inside her, waiting to be filled, that these

and more can fit. Her touch is cool,
deliberate and soothing, yet when
they merge their flesh she comes

from every pore and drenches them
to quench their common fire.
He does not understand his fortune,

no longer tries to sort it out,
but learns to take it and assume
that it's his due. She knows her mind,

and says he makes her happy; he does
not ask her how. Observing them, I marvel
she is she, rejoice that he is me.

Glossolalia

(for T. A.)

After I've had her
front and back —
        preacher's daughter,
        Georgia-born, grinning,
down on her knees, mutters
"Yum — hot and nasty,"
        swallows the root . . .
        ears in my hands,
both of us wordless now,
speaking in tongues.

Fogbound

(for M. H.)

Summer twilight, Cleveland Park,
mist oozing in, cool windbreath
down from Canada contends
with daylong heat. The lot

has emptied, other cars all gone;
haze rises from the earth
as we unclothe each other,
heads and torsos floating

on a cloud in which we seem
to sink until we're edgeless
shapes from head to toe. You dart
off, trailing laughter, hide

and seek until I spring a trap
to find you, pressed to rough bark,
panting, opened wide. Kissing
I cannot even see your almond

eyes before mine, use your scarf
to bind your hands behind you, lift
and carry you to my car's hood,
warm still from our drive, arrange

you as I will, then bend
to taste. Your dewy landscape

dim before my eyes, damp to my touch,
you simmer; slowly, letting pressure

build, I bring you to full boil,
small teakettle steaming, keening
my name out into Lake Erie's
moist, pearlescent night.

I can tell Lovely can't believe her luck
(for L. T.)

I can tell Lovely can't believe her luck
by the way she wraps around me
when we sleep, holds on when we fuck
for dear life, slips up behind me
while I'm doing dishes at the sink
to slide her arms around my waist
and lay her head against my back.
Sometimes I think she thinks
I'll disappear if I'm not within sight
or reach. (Sometimes I fear she's
right. But I don't tell her that.)

Knowing Beans

He made her wear them
all day tucked inside
        white silk, smooth velvet —
        thin, hard, fragrant, brown;
slightly rasping, they
slid down to gather
        dampness, flavoring
        slick heat, nestled there
till after dinner:
ready at last, brandy
        by the fire, savor
        of vanilla sex.

Original Sin

Whenever I, balloon, am blown lifesize
by tender lips of oh so gentle maid
and, burgeoning, swell with her heated breath,
I am outstanding only in her eyes;
this tense expansion leaves my root afraid
that I will burst, explode to life or death
before her breath is ended, or that some
unnoticed puncture will not let me come
alive, but keep me dangling, limp and stilled,
and leave her feline purpose unfulfilled.

Whenever I, balloon, am blown full height
by tender lips, and start my upwards float,
I am as Adam, apple bulge in throat,
expecting panther Eve to take a bite.

Aubade

(for M-A.S.)

Chill morning, campfire glowing
on that Mendocino mountain-
top, you on all fours, full
breasts asway, skin damp with sweat

and dew, deep groans when I slide
up into your ass — just as
the rising sun first warms my side,
then sends our writhing shadows

out across the gilded valley
to the hill beyond, and for
that endless minute we are opaque
giants screaming in the light.

Hot Dog

Across the street there lives a dog
who wants to fuck a rock. Each time
        he's let out in the yard this small
        beast finds his paramour — heavy
at least as he — and, yelping ceaselessly,
humps it down the slope toward the street.
        No one has taught him he can't mate
        with minerals. Like Sisyphus reincarnate,
with canine mind and metaphor awry,
he rolls his love around and noses
        underneath, finds nothing new, pants
        quietly, then leaves with ardor unrequited,
yet seems satisfied. His eager bounding
from the door is evidence he waits
        for this each day. Thus lust gives
        meaning to his life. And mine.

Some Bagatelles for Satie

"I think," he said

Old home week
at the anger factory —
reunions don't make me
cry, and why should they?
"Never wished anyone dead,
just out of my life, not
quite the same thing,
I think," he said.
In the men's room,
zipping up, some-
one whose face I could
not place asked: "Are you
still a Trotskyite?" That's
exactly why I came, you know,
to see what they'd held
on to and what I'd long
since let go. Unlike the
ant, some fail to spot
the sap that traps them,
oozes over double helixes,
slow-coating with amber
silence. "I'll dance with
the ones who recall my
name, but it's always
a roomful of strangers
I barely knew who never
clearly saw me once,
I think," he said.

Pushing Ink

A tattooed man will come
to love this poem, especially
that it was written first in ink,
indelible, its images impressed
by hand into a pseudo-
vellum with a stylus point,
embedded in the page
unalterably, not unlike
the buxom naked woman
gracing his right bicep, she
who bumps and grinds
suggestively whenever
he decides to flex.
I'll watch him find out how
these words get underneath
the skin — how they shake that
thing and shimmy even when our eyes
look elsewhere, then get down
and dirty in between the covers
while the book is closed.
Once he realizes that they'll live
right there forever, in the flesh,
just over muscle, I'm quite
sure he'll understand.

The Tossed Dwarf Speaks

No, what embarrasses me is you
who patronize and pity, you
with your yammer of my rights,
my pride, your pretense
of knowing how I feel. I'm small,
not helpless — not some cause
that needs a champion. I choose
my course, I volunteer; I'm padded,
and I'm paid. Then hefted,
hoisted by a giant of my kind,
I'm hurled and sent aloft,
spun through the smoky air.
Projectile, ejaculate, I hurtle
toward an impact I'll survive,
a whirling focal point, looming
for that breathless moment large —
then land and roll and stand
to cheers. Whatever size you are,
can't you imagine how I love that ride?

Microscope

Straining,
roaming
unexplored country.
Give wings to
the pupil
of the eye.

(from the Arabic)

Dead Letter

Committed to memory:
heavy rain,
green sour grapes,
oysters,
silk petticoat,
your honor,
the veil.

Postscript:
pearls
covered with verdigris.

(from the Arabic)

Dream Poem 3: New York 7/30/95

Swallow, my chicana, with the obsidian
blade of her love, pierces my breast,
thrusts my heart back in.
I'm trundled to her Singer, stitched up,
good as old.

Dream Poem 4: New York 9/23/95

Three happy neighbor children speaking
all at once to me: incomprehensible
delight. Then: small sandwiches,
an entire party tray of Italian
chocolate cookies all for me,
brought by a flirting woman.
I'm partial to those
shaped like leaves.

Dream Poem 6: New York 3/11/96

I am a woman
on a sunny day
walking up the avenue:
handbag, red dress,
high heels,
looking good
enough to eat.

Romance, Rue

Samaritan

(for J. K.)

Tossing lifelines overboard
I hadn't noticed that my boat
could hold no more than one.

Nor was she drowning whom
I thought to save, strong
swimmer briefly caught

in a slight undertow.
I never planned to do more
harm than good, yet broke

the rhythm of her stroke,
abandoned her confused
and coughing as I paddled

off, all wet but heedless on
my helpful way, not seeing
that I needed bailing out.

Chomutov Snapshot, July 1996

Pulled to her bare-chested boy,
        black hair windblown, kissed
right there in the railroad yard
        among the tangled tracks
under the cloud-strewn sky
        as the Karlovy Vary train
pulls out on its last leg —
        only one passenger stands
at the window watching,
        witness to memory.

(Prague)

Short Leash

(for J. H.)

To describe herself today, at the end
of marriage, she firmly plants the tip
of one forefinger on the café table,
to stand for a tree, then with the right,
just a thumb's-length away, draws
a six-inch arc over and over, as if
inscribing with a compass; talks mean-
while of the dog long chained to its thick
trunk, accustomed to restraint, which
if released at first won't venture
out past that imaginary stop.
I do not tell her you can hold
a chicken with its beak pressed
to the ground, draw a line straight
from it and the bird will stay there
till it topples. Small hope for those
dumb clucks, yet I know dogs who'd tug
and yelp for years, then bolt first chance
they got, and cannot help but wonder
now what kind of beast is she, the metal
links still there, still shining brightly on
the ring finger of her immobile hand.

Someone Extraordinary Speaking
(For B. J.)

This night she gives me poems
(she has never before
written) in a voice
I recognize but an aspect
I've never seen
familiar, new

They are of us, of me,
her muse she says
and I feel seen
this stranger
who knows me

So hard to separate
of course
but authenticity
is there
the bones can tell

I tell her
this, I say:
    Sounds like poetry
    to me, that's how poetry
    is, the clean spare
    chime of someone
    speaking, someone
    extraordinary speaking

Polaroid

(for R. K., deceased)

They're not the same at all, wanting to love

and loving.

One cannot be more than one-

self.

Even circles have a second side.

Roles hold their life beyond their curtain's fall.

Forever ends.

There is much more than all.

Tears are what's left of those for whom they're cried.

The blade can sink far deeper than the bone.

What dies is all we never rise above.

These fragments of our civilization

(circa 1963) unearthed by

your picture — in the wake of a sea change

cast up at its final destination —

with you caught as you were: arms wide, some strange

rose between your teeth, hair hiding an eye.

Analphabetics

Consuela, he could simply say,
my heart runs like a rabbit
in my chest to see you,
but he feels a need
for the formal, so after
he haggles a price not
too bad for the onyx set
he'd carved for chess,
a game he cannot play,
and knows no one who can,
he walks on past the *zocalo*
to the colonnade
where they print the invitations,
sits down shyly on the
battered chair across a type-
writer from the thin scribe
in his necktie and thick
glasses. *What kind of a letter?*
he is asked; then, reading
his silence, *For your girl?*

No girl, he thinks, *a woman,*
and my soul flows like a
river when she walks, but
that is not how courtship
goes back in their town.
And so he simply nods,

approves the flowered
envelope and paper,
consents to fancy phrases
he remembers vaguely, chosen
from the menu that the man
reels out like lengths of string,
until the noisy old machine
has filled the page. He pays
a little more to have his name
and hers in stylish script adorn
the sheet, inspects it, tucks it
carefully inside his pack, hurrying
now to catch a free ride home.
Once there, he slips this overture

beneath her door, where,
blessed by fate, it narrowly
escapes her mother's notice,
not her younger sister's, she
who goes to school,
for whom they have such
hopes, who swiftly squirrels
it away, then runs to find
its addressee, who cannot
interrupt her chores even
for this astonishment. But
at siesta in the room they share
she has it read to her
at least a hundred times.

They whisper, blush, and,
giggling, compose her answer
out of phrases from *fotonovelas*
and the tv and the one *pelicula*
they saw for consolation down
in Taxco after Abuelita's funeral.

Like his, this note says nothing
even close to what her heart
would speak: *When you step in*
the room, Jorge, I am a pink balloon,
your smile the sun
that swells my inner
air, your voice the wind
that carries me away.
Still, he gladly takes that missive off
to Tito, his best friend, who can sound
things out at least, and they go on
like this for months, circling through
another's language ever
closer until, caught by chance
in a crashing summer storm,
sheltered in a hay-sweet barn,
they finally with their own tongues
and hands inscribe their epic
poem together on the unlined
night, and want no more for words.

No Way

I can't believe
that I will never find
you, little needle
in the haystack
of these streets
and turnstiles

Unthinkable
I came across
then lost you years
ago, discarded
in the search
forgotten now

Impossible
that you did not
choose me
but turned aside
that doesn't sound
like any kind of plan

Specific Gravities

Holding the Fort

(to my former colleagues at the *New York Observer*)

Perhaps it is born in the hands,
that ache in the knuckles, the pain
in the fingertips after your long day
of working so hard, a hurt so
bone-deep you can no longer bear
to touch and hold on to whatever you love.

Some feel it first in the shoulders,
the sense that you've carried the world
by yourself for too long and must
stoop down to hoist it again
the next day, and the next, and the next,
with too little rest in between.

For others it strikes at the feet,
turns agonizing this walking erect
which tells us from dumb beasts,
so they think only of soft chairs
and long soaks, not of daring
to stand up and fight for themselves.

Then again, it can afflict the eyes,
leave them dry like ball-bearings
unoiled, grinding down in sockets
of grit, so what you want most
in the world is your lids to close fast,

shut out the world that you're in.

You may notice it squeezing your heart
till it feels like a fist, till it tightens
so much you can no longer look
at the face of a child, your own or
another's, and, smiling, tell a true tale
of the world their children will know.

I found it seizing my mind, toxins
screaming "Look out for yourself,"
making it hard to think as one
must, and I knew myself sick,
so I called to ask for your help,
your help, which did not come.

These are the symptoms of that plague
which needs a name, so I name it now,
calling it something we all can remember,
naming it what it makes us feel: *alone
and at their mercy*. And I tell you
it will only end, we will only begin to heal

whenever one of us — child, woman or man —
eyes open wide and shoulders back, hand
raised, heart beating fast and mind on fire,
steps out of line to say "Enough
is enough," and another strides
forward to stand alongside.

Bird of the Summer Solstice

Finding you fully fledged
but blinded, turning
in your tracks upon
the bricks below the library,
what could I do save stroke
your sightless head and pluck
a bit of trailing feather
from your clotted eye,
then place a handy crust
of bread before you
for a final meal?

You showed no fear;
I knew no cure to heal
you, went away,
then followed impulse,
doubled back — to find
you flown and flying in
short bursts, direction-
less it seemed, first
to the edge of dappled
sidewalk, next to the sun-
bright street, and as I
moved to steer you
from harm's way
your fate turned smoothly
on four wheels,

resolved your plight.

I think you knew
where you were going
on that final flight,
and I was only there
to watch your medals
ruffle in the breeze.
Bring on the night.

The Gravity of Ash

Death does not want me,
not right now, this Saturday,
so I can sit on my terrace
listening to distant midnight
salsa, drinking cognac,
smoking my cigar.

Death took the form
of a souped-up matte-black
1980 Pontiac Trans-Am,
then turned its head away
so I would not see its face
but could pass this afternoon
walking in the hot sun
beneath my new Panama hat
to spend my last four dollars
on a blue glass hand.

Death wanted me to see it
there on Tompkins Avenue
so I would understand
the importance of manure
to my trees and hedges,
the need to reclaim my garden
from the weeds and vines.

Death punched me in the chest

to get my full attention,
so I would recognize
the value of watching closely
this ash grown impossibly long
as airplanes cross the indigo sky.

Death may have me anytime,
if it so chooses, but tonight
I rejoice in the buttercup
yellow of my house,
the unexpected survival
of two rose bushes and
a Japanese maple, the finding
of my son's handprint
from 1976 in a chunk
of discarded concrete.

Frieze

At year's end,
time

tastes like mother's
salty ashes
in my mouth,

or the cupfuls
of fresh snow she
would scoop off city
windowsills to mix

with milk, vanilla, sugar, and
a farmgirl's memories

At century's end,
winter

has the heft
and texture
of a middle-aged
lover's breast

in my palm,
drapes itself
around my house

like soft death
laying me to rest

At millennium's end,
silence

takes the shape of white,
allows the scrape
of futile shovel,

then envelops that
and more, to focus
all the world's ears

on the sound of steam
rising from a bowl
of split-pea soup

with a golden dab
of mustard
at its heart

Out of Here

You have it all wrong.
You think you will stop
while the others go on.
Here is what happens:
You just continue,
the rest disappear.

You get to keep hold
of yourself if you
need that, but most don't
wait long before casting
off. Because it proves
pointless to worry

about it, once you
tease out the pattern.
And of course there's no
time; it's hard to explain.
Nothing's the matter;
that's what's important.

Allan Douglass Coleman: A Self-Interview

August 2005—June 2006

Q: Where is your creative writing now?

A: In a state of transition. Unlike my father, who moves steadily and almost daily between lyric poetry and fiction both long and short, I've primarily written lyric poetry, with occasional forays into short fiction and creative nonfiction. That's aside from my professional work as a prose essayist, which absorbs most of my writing time and energy.

In the spring of 2005 I gathered the poems I've published to date, for the purpose of seeing how they looked together and with an eye toward making a book out of them. That process led indirectly to this collection. It also gave me, for the first time, a sense of what I'd done as an on-again-off-again poet up till then — a certain summing up, which I found very useful.

At the same time as I was pulling those pieces together, by coincidence, I re-read two books: Ezra Pound's *An ABC of Reading* and Donald Allen's anthology *The New American Poetry 1945-1960,* which contains work by Ginsberg, Creeley, Levertov, Duncan, Spicer, Olson, Koch, and many others, as well as some germinal texts on poetics, including Olson on "Composition by Field." Pound's book in its way traces the genesis of that tendency, and many of the poets in that anthology look to Pound as a precursor.

I'd owned this collection by Donald Allen when it first came out, knew the work of those poets, had been much affected by them — Ginsberg particularly — and had even read some of the manifestos and commentaries on poetics that book contains in its appendix. But I don't think I'd understood what these poets were after and had achieved until now. I'd felt the fresh air they'd breathed into poetry, and enjoyed it, and been nourished by it creatively and culturally. But I hadn't recognized what they'd accomplished structurally and

infrastructurally, the formal and ideational aspect of it: breath, syllable, line, the page as canvas, even Olson's percept of the function of the typewriter as an instrument for poetry. I hadn't written enough poetry to realize the consequences of their methods. I'd enjoyed the outcome of the praxis, as a reader, without grasping the underlying theory.

This sudden if belated insight dovetailed with my reading, a year earlier, of Greil Marcus's *Invisible America*, a meditation on Bob Dylan's "Basement Tapes," which goes beyond Dylan to weigh the transition that *he* represents between what Walter Ong, writing on the difference between spoken and written language, would describe as first-stage orality versus second-stage orality. The music that Dylan studied and absorbed as he came into his own voice was created to be passed along directly and acoustically from the singer's mouth to the listener's ear, and was only incidentally recorded, whereas the contemporary music of Dylan's day — classical, pop, jazz, rock, r&b, country, even folk and blues — was conceived with the assumption that it would reach its optimum audience through electricity/amplification and/or recording: oral transmission at one remove.

Between absorbing Marcus and coming back to Pound and the Allen anthology I read Dylan's own autobiography, *Chronicles Vol. 1*, a remarkable and surprising piece of writing that gave me numerous other useful clues. (As this suggests, Dylan plays a central role in my thinking. I wouldn't call him an influence, in the usual sense; I don't think you'd hear him identifiably in anything specific I've written. For me, he's a reference point, a fulcrum, the single most important artist of my generation in any medium.)

Anyhow, the mix of all of this somehow helped me to understand a number of things, including the sources of my own voice(s) as a

writer. It highlighted an element of constraint I could see in much of my own poetry, and explained certain poems of mine from recent years that I'd considered eccentric to my way of working but that I now see as unplanned experiments in moving toward what Olson calls "open form" and "composition by field." Simply put, I began playing with the line and organization of the page in ways I hadn't tried before.

Look at this one, from 1998:

License

The eye
lusts
& I
let it /
see what
it
can /
unable
to imagine
ever
saying:
I
have seen
enough

I didn't know what to make of this when I wrote it. I saw it that way in my head before I put it down on paper, and it felt (still feels) absolutely right to me that way. But it was entirely untypical of my work — even though my work takes numerous forms, or at least has up till now. So it seemed anomalous. Now I can look back and see it as pivotal: a starting point, small in scale, from which several other poems came, even before this epiphany or shift in awareness happened in spring 2005.

There have been a dozen since then — "Frieze," for example — that move further along this path. So some change has come along, an approach to form that's new to me but feels organic, right. And though I doubt that I will ever become an epic poet, I begin to grasp what Olson meant when he suggested that composition by field might lead to work in longer forms.

Q: Do you consider yourself an experimental poet?

A: Hardly. I'm definitely more interested in radical formal innovation than my father. I read more widely among the experimental poets than he does: Jackson MacLow, concrete poetry, Bernadette Mayer. I have poet friends and acquaintances whom I certainly consider radically experimental: Richard Kostelanetz, the late Armand Schwerner. I've pondered the implications of hypertext forms, and played with them a bit. I've used Tristan Tzara's Dada cut-up method for making poems, and a computer-based version of refrigerator-magnet poetry for other poems, and built poems out of found elements. (For example, "Dead Letter" and Microscope," in this collection, are composed of definitions taken from a discarded portion of an Arabic-English dictionary that I came across on the street outside my house.) I've distilled oneiric messages in the "Dream Poems" series. And, employing more conventional means, such as page layout, I've produced a few pieces I think of as experimental in one way or another, such as "License"or "'I think,' he said," elsewhere in this book.

But compared to the people I just named I'm a traditionalist, or at best mainstream, at least so far. After all, the paradigm shift I feel myself pulled toward lately, as just mentioned, defined itself half a century ago. I could argue, as have others, that this approach

constitutes poetry's own permanent revolution; and obviously I haven't wrung out all the juice in it for myself. Still, as experiment goes, it's hardly news.

However, experiment for one poet is not necessarily experiment for another. And experiment lives wherever you find it — sometimes in surprising places. In '97, on a residency in Tucson, I attended a reading by the language poet Ron Silliman. Tucson has a strong poetry scene; Silliman had come there, I recall, at the invitation of Charles Alexander, who runs a small press in that city.

In addition to his reading — and Silliman's an excellent performer of his own work, by the way — he talked theory for a while, poetics. He based that commentary on a distinction that he sees in contemporary poetry between what he called "identity poets" and "experimental poets." He didn't propose this as a value judgment, just a set of polarities, though predictably enough he placed the language-poetry movement of which he's part on the experimental end of that divide.

I introduced myself after the q&a had ended, thanked him for his work and his ideas, then told him I'd been reading Adrienne Rich — surely an "identity poet" on his sliding scale — and a passing reference she makes in an essay to what she calls "columnar poems" had recently nudged me into reconsidering how I organized at least some of my poems on the page. So the comment of an "identity poet" had led me to formal experimentation. I didn't pose this as a question, merely made an observation, and left Silliman (and myself) with its implications.

One reason I feel free not to let any of this worry me is that I have no affiliations or allegiances within the poetry world, thus no image of myself as a poet of this or that tendency, nothing to maintain

in anyone else's eyes or my own except a level of quality to my output. Over the years I've met and talked with various poets — Robert Stock, James Ragan, Charles Damon Catlett, Sandra Alcosser, David Antin, Michael Heller, Marie Howe, Gerard Malanga, Carolyn Forché, Nathan Whiting, Dick Gallup, Bob Holman, Lewis Hyde, even Allen Ginsberg. My father knows quite a few others. But he and I both stand outside the nexus that some people call the "po biz." We don't represent or belong to any clique or movement. We have no exploitable connections to those in power within that microcosm. We're not anyone's lovers, ex-students or ex-teachers, academic colleagues, contest judges, editors, publishers.

That doesn't make us naïfs. We read poets past and present, we follow the discourse, we engage in discourse between ourselves and with the poets we know. But, at his age, my father hasn't got the luxury of engaging in po-biz politicking and networking, even if he wanted to — which he doesn't. Nor do I. We operate on the premise that it should remain possible in today's poetry world to write solid poems anywhere along the spectrum from classicist to experimental and get them published in reputable journals strictly on their merits. Earl's results surely prove that; I hope to follow in those footsteps.

Q: When did you start writing?

A: Thanks to my father, I can date this fairly accurately. We were living in the south of France in 1951, a town called Golfe-Juan on the Côte d'Azur; I was eight years old, and I came in one day from school and recited the following to him from memory:

First Poem (age 8)

A dog will bark
when it is dark.

He will not bark
when it is sunny.

When it's sunny
he'll call you honey.

But when it's dark,
he'll bark.

He immediately wrote that down, and also preserved a segment of a slightly later poem of mine:

Fragment, 1951 (age 8)

Flowers, flowers,
in the towers —
oh how beautiful are they
in the midst
of all the day.

Humble beginnings, but there you have it.

I should add that, having no alternative, my parents put me into a local grade school, so I learned French by the total-immersion system, becoming not just Francophone but truly bilingual. Once we returned to the States I didn't make much use of it for the next 30 years. But I returned to France for the first time in 1980 and immediately felt at home in a Francophone environment. I've spent a lot of time since then in Francophone cultures; I speak French fluently

once again, and read it easily. In the past decade I've begun to develop some awareness of the extent to which that bilinguality shaped my worldview and my unconscious. Nothing I could name, exactly, but I know this profoundly affected my relationship to both written and spoken language.

So I learned to read in French as well as in English during that period. When we left France we moved to London, the Stretham Hill district, for about six months. There I got exposed to British English, spoken and written. Not exactly bilinguality, but further tacit evidence that language emerged from culture, unfixed, slippery, mutable. It took years to get the British *u* out of my spelling of words like *favor*.

I also have vivid memories of going numerous times with my parents to see the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company performing Gilbert and Sullivan in repertory in London. I loved the spectacle, the music, but mostly the librettos. At that age I didn't catch their social and political and cultural references. However, the fluidity of the verse, its intricate meter, internal rhymes, assonance, alliteration, seeped into me as a source of pure pleasure.

Q: What were you reading then?

A: Mostly what I was given, what people thought of as classic children's literature: *Hans Brinker, Heidi, Robin Hood, Swiss Family Robinson, Huckleberry Finn*. Plus other stuff, including comics. Like my father and mother, and in part thanks to them, I became an avid early reader, and a bookish child. Writing as a practice came later. Beyond those two short pieces in France, I don't remember feeling the impulse to write till high school. (I was precocious, so my high-school years — a nightmare — happened between the ages of 13 and 16.)

I found adolescence an almost unmitigated misery; writing began to serve as a refuge and outlet. During those years I produced some lyric poems, one or two short stories, a few speeches I wrote for political-activist purposes, and a manifesto for a short-lived satirical street-theater collective that the FBI closed down.

I entered college early, a few months before my seventeenth birthday. By then I knew that writing would form an important part of my life, though I wasn't sure how. This was Hunter College in New York, Bronx campus, 1960-64. I worked on the campus newspaper, which I ended up editing in my senior year. I also worked on the school literary magazine, which in 1963 published "Midnight Mass," a one-act play of mine about the death of God that almost got censorship imposed on the entire City University of New York system.

There wasn't much available at Hunter in terms of creative-writing courses, but my classmates included David Zane Mairowitz, John Allman, Ken Wolman, Barry Jay Kaplan, John Chioles, Harvey Perr, Carole Getzoff, and Richard Goldstein, who variously went on to publish poetry, fiction, nonfiction, stage plays, radio plays, translations, criticism, and cultural journalism. So we had a contingent of people there already extremely serious about their craft as writers.

Mairowitz graduated a year ahead of me, went to Berkeley to do his graduate work, and urged me to come out to the Bay Area. I applied to the creative-writing M.A. program at San Francisco State — one of comparatively few in the country in 1964 — and got in. A great stroke of fortune, in some ways. I could just study English and American literature, take writing courses, and write. My cohort there included the playwright Ed Bullins; novelist Thomas Sanchez; the poets Philip Dow, Bill Siverly, and the late Stan Rice; and Stan's wife Anne, now by far the best known of us all. Good people with whom to

spend time. I also got to stay out of the military, try my hand at playing rock & roll in a band, and do the other things that mid-'60s San Francisco made possible.

Q: Was that your first experience in a writers'-workshop context?

A: Yes, it was — aside from a class or two at Hunter. I'd observed the workshops my father ran, but I wasn't writing seriously during that period of his writing life. And in those days, even in New York City, we had none of the writing programs for teenagers that would emerge at the end of the Sixties.

I'd read some early poems of mine at a few of the downtown coffeehouses, including Les Deux Mégots in the East Village. I knew some of the Tenth Street Poets; John Harriman was a close friend. But I both looked and, more importantly, felt way too young and insecure to seek out and hang with Ed Sanders and Taylor Mead and the other looming and emerging luminaries of that scene. So, aside from my parents and my writer chums from Hunter, I didn't have any circle of writers with whom to exchange ideas and work.

And though I keenly appreciated the honor of finding myself among the select few admitted to the SF State program, I didn't really enjoy the experience, or thrive in that hothouse environment. I hated feeling those other people's fingerprints all over my work in progress. Maybe if I'd had a stockpile of finished work with which I'd already come to terms on my own, I could have accepted bringing that resolved output in for critiques. However, I've never produced voluminously in those forms. In any case, even today I rarely show work in progress, in any form, to anyone — not even my editors. That's another place where Earl and I differ.

In the Bay Area I took part in an informal Friday-night poetry discussion group run by Robert Stock. I wrote a few poems while there, two of which — both sonnets, "Original Sin" and "Polaroid" — I've included in this collection. But I concentrated on fiction. My master's thesis was a set of short stories. No sooner did I turn it in, have it accepted, and put a copy on the shelves in the college library than I stopped writing poetry and fiction, for about 21 years.

Q: Why?

A: Not by plan. It just happened. A number of reasons. One was that I didn't much care for the work I produced at that point. It felt painfully young to me, strained, trying too hard, uncentered, hollow at the core. Another was that it had the stink of school all over it. Between the two, I couldn't hear a voice that felt genuinely my own, and wasn't convinced I had anything of substance to say in those forms at that juncture.

Q: What did you do instead?

A: I came back to New York and became a freelance prose essayist specializing in the arts, culture, and politics. A mix of "new journalism," op-ed writing, cultural commentary, and criticism. But that's a whole other story, most of which isn't germane to the subject at hand.

Q: Did you miss writing poetry and fiction?

A: Not in the least. Nor did I view myself as either a frustrated or a failed writer of poetry, fiction, plays, nor as a victim of "writer's block,"

which I consider a luxury of the rich. I was curious about where that impulse had gone, that's all; I used to say that the muse had stepped out for a very long beer.

But all of that experience writing in those forms unquestionably fed my work as an essayist in many ways. I've had an enormously satisfying life as a working writer of ratiocinative prose. And, until I began writing poetry and fiction again in mid-1988, I got to say pretty much whatever I wanted to say about anything and everything, in print, in the writing I did professionally.

Between '67, when I finished my thesis, and '88, I wrote and published well over a thousand essays. (By now that number has roughly doubled.) During that same period I produced perhaps ten poems, drafted one short story, jotted down ideas and scraps for a few others that never went further. Several of those poems appear here: "Turning Thirty," "Downtown Local," "For Malcolm," "Points of View," and "Family Album."

Q: What brought you back to working regularly in those forms?

A: In the summer of '88 I embarked on a love affair. The morning after the very first "night before" I wrote a poem about that experience, and the energy for that mode of writing started flowing again. It seemed as strange and unexpected to me as it probably sounds to you. Here's one of the best of those:

Lovely when I take her in her sleep

Lovely when I take her in her sleep
sighs like a child, whimpers
deep in her throat; blindly gropes

for my shoulders, pulls me down
upon her; clutches my hair as she whines
in my ear. Nails raking my back,
she groans in her flowing, then covers
my face with a little girl's kisses,
curls up against me, returns to her dream.

Q: What did you do with that new poetry?

A: Nothing at first. Just wrote when that urge struck. Let whatever came out sit and jell, looked at it after a few months to see what held up. Shared it with that lover. Some of it didn't work, but some did. The romantic relationship didn't endure for much more than a year, but the poetry kept coming, its range of subject matter steadily expanding.

Just as my early creative writing had nourished my work with the prose essay, so all that prose writing — and the teaching and lecturing that came with the territory — fed the poetry and short fiction. I'd learned how to hear authenticity and inauthenticity, or just unclarities and wrong notes, in my writing in any form, so I could tell exactly when I began to speak in my poetry in a voice with which I felt comfortable. The breakthrough poem, in that sense, was this one:

All Mine

"All yours," murmurs a stranger,
stepping through the small toilet's
door, and I step past him into the smell
of his shit, take it into
my nose, my chest, my lungs. Nothing
is all mine, everything's shared,
everything: ghosts of lovers, parents,
friends, my son, aborted offspring
occupy me, a walking hotel, their home
away from home. Just as I
am in others forever: my lust,

my love, my cowardice, my grief,
the stink of my bowels, my words,
these words, in you now, all yours.

For better or worse, that was me, unmistakably me, on the page. Once I wrote that, I knew I could do this seriously. By that I don't mean full-time creative writing, like my father. I'm still a working professional essayist who produces some poetry and fiction; he's a working poet and fictioneer who produces a few essays. Like him, I write every day, probably about six or seven hours a day, but I emphasize a different kind of wordsmithing. However, that poem showed me I could write poetry in a voice I knew as mine with a degree of gravitas I could respect. Also, on a certain level, it's a position paper.

Q: Then what?

A: In 1995, when I'd accumulated what I felt was a backlog of solid work, some sixty or so poems, I asked my dad to look it over. By then he was well into his own process of re-energizing that aspect of himself. Along with his wife Ellen, an excellent editor and equally close reader, he critiqued what I'd produced, and told me the best of it deserved publication. So he shared with me his approach to submitting to literary journals, and his list of target publications. I vetted and amended that list to fit the parameters of my own work, then began sending poems out. I haven't been as assiduous as he has with that, nor as systematic; I took a five-year hiatus from the submission process, coming back to it only in early 2005. But I've had a fair degree of success, though nothing on the remarkable scale of his.

Q: It sounds as if the two of you are very close.

A: I love and admire many things about my dad. He's a difficult father, and, partly in response to that, I'm undoubtedly a difficult son. We still have areas of stress between us. To my surprise and delight, the locus that a Freudian would likely have predicted as the arena of highest competition and conflict between us — the craft and medium to which we're both committed, writing, which is central to both our identities — has been trouble-free since the beginning. I can't remember ever feeling jealous of his ability or accomplishment when I was young and he was so far ahead of me. I've never felt the slightest envy of my achievements as a professional writer emanating from him, only pride and enjoyment and support.

Partly that's because we both know how to give and receive critiques without hidden agendas. Partly it's because I don't think I'd have become a writer if it weren't for my parents, especially my father, so I've known that debt all along and repay it gladly. I take nothing but pleasure — and a message of hope (not to mention a sterling example) for myself as a poet returning to that mode in middle age — from the success he's earned with his work since 1990 or so. That's why, when he was editing his first collection of poems, I created a section of my website, The Nearby Café (nearbycafe.com), with the same title as the book, *Stubborn Pine*, to spotlight him and make his work more widely available. Writing represents the single clearest space my father and I have ever occupied with each other, and the most enduring terrain of friendship and mutual assistance we share. Doing this book together acknowledges that bond.

Both Earl and Frances, my mother, wrote. Pop ran a writers' workshop in our apartment's living room until I was almost 14, and that group published a notable literary magazine, *Venture*, that was edited

there. Many of the people they knew wrote — poetry, fiction, political tracts, scholarly essays, non-fiction. Together my parents founded a publishing house. Our home was always full of books, galley proofs, manuscripts, typewriters. Working with words seemed as normal as eating breakfast. My parents encouraged me whenever I wrote, but never pressured me to write — a delicate balance to strike. So I owe them both a huge vote of thanks in that regard.

Q: Were you influenced by your parents' writing?

A: By my dad's own writing, certainly, especially early on. (Fran was a less frequent writer, mostly some Dorothy Parker-esque verse.) Earl has always manifested a humanistic, socially conscious, distinctly left-wing but not ideologically driven awareness, coupled with a self-scrutinizing tendency, technically underpinned by a strong lyricism and an extremely supple use of meter, internal rhyme, and other devices. I wasn't aware of much of that till later, of course; mainly I responded to his narrative content and voice at the outset.

He'd probably look back on a lot of the work of his that affected me in those formative days and see it as sentimental or romantic, less than tough-minded. No doubt I'd mostly say the same if I returned to it now. But I've re-read a poem of his called "The Matador" — about an imagined incident in Franco Spain — regularly; I've even performed it at readings of my own. It's still a terrific poem to me. I loved it from the time I first heard it — I must have been ten or eleven when he wrote it.

It mattered to me then as my first encounter with what we might call a poetry of resistance, a poetry concerned with speaking truth to power. I already knew music like that: "Strange Fruit," the leftie anthems we sang together out of *The People's Songbook*. But I don't

recall having heard poetry like that before, and of course it mattered very much that this had come from someone I knew electing to bear witness, a real person in my own life whom I could reach out and touch.

I learned a lot from that poem. I never envied his writing of it, or tried to imitate it; I just wanted to write something that strong, that defiant, something that spoke for those who couldn't.

There's another contribution he made to my development as a writer that wasn't intended as such, but that shaped me even more. When I was just shy of 14, about to go into Stuyvesant High School as a sophomore — I'd skipped two grades — we moved from our Greenwich Village apartment on West 14th Street to a brownstone they'd bought on West 70th. So I lost my neighborhood, and proximity to my social circle, in one fell swoop. And was about to go into a new school with a bunch of total strangers, all boys, most of them several years older and bigger than me. I felt completely disoriented, alienated, and scared.

Shortly after we moved into the new house, one Saturday after lunch in the late summer of 1957, with no prior discussion that I can recall, my dad took me on a mystery shopping trip. We went down to Sam Goody's in the west Forties, then the biggest record store in the city. He bought me a dozen LPs: Blind Lemon Jefferson, Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, Louis Armstrong and his Hot Five, Kid Ory, Johnny Dodds, Sidney Bechet, Benny Goodman live at Carnegie Hall 1938, Chuck Berry, Little Richard, and Elvis Presley — the first albums by each of those last three — plus a few more. And a Webcor "portable" record player that would play 16, 33-1/3, 45, and 78 rpm records. I still have all those albums.

I have no idea what instinct led him to do this. Obviously he knew and enjoyed that music, the dixieland and swing and blues at least, because he asked the salesman for all of them, named and picked them all out himself. But we didn't have any of it in the house, only a few old 78s — Josh White and Leadbelly and Paul Robeson — and some junky generic classical-music LPs. So it came from out of the blue.

That music hit me like a ton of bricks. Talk about authentic voices! Talk about bearing witness, and a poetry of resistance! I became an instant teenage jazz and country-blues fan. I gradually worked my way from dixieland into swing and thence to early bop and from there to truly contemporary jazz, so that by 1959 I was listening to Charlie Parker and Miles Davis and by 1963 to Mingus, Coltrane, Cecil Taylor, and Ornette Coleman, as well as to Muddy Waters and Lightnin' Hopkins and more contemporary electric urban blues players.

That music became the sonic backdrop of my adolescence. And what I absorbed from it osmotically — about voice, breath lines, pacing, tone, rhythm, harmony, dissonance, testifying, and the development of both sly and brash oppositional practice — formed my writing just as much as, if not more than, what I was reading. No way to put my finger on it for myself, or point it out to you, but I can hear traces of Robert Johnson's phrasing, Billie Holiday's shading, Miles Davis's pauses, Charlie Parker's melodic line, Max Roach's brushwork infused into my writing in all forms.

Q: What *were* you reading?

A: Everything. Or a reasonable cross-section thereof. By the age of 16, Kerouac, Burroughs, Genet, Beckett, Hemingway, Dos Passos,

Richard Wright, Dalton Trumbo. Chaucer, Robert Browning, Hart Crane, Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, Corso. I loved the Irish and Welsh writers more than the British: O'Casey, Behan, Synge, Dylan Thomas, a certain intoxicated wildness in their relation to English. Damon Runyon, for his ear for New York dialects and slang. P. G. Wodehouse, for his send-up of the British class system. Several sci-fi writers — especially Alfred Bester, now considered the father of cyberpunk. Terry Southern, Paul Krassner, Lenny Bruce. Mezz Mezzrow. H. P. Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard. Dashiell Hammett. And Walt Kelly, for the rich, delicious, multi-layered Joycean punning of his dialogue in the cartoon strip *Pogo*.[2]

In short, following Archibald MacLeish's advice, I dealt with influence like a boy in an apple orchard, "taking what I had an appetite for and could carry off." Of course, you couldn't actually announce many of the above-named influences as such at that time without people thinking you either frivolous or mad. It took many years — way after grad school — for me to identify and then state their importance to my work. Not because I was embarrassed to do so, but because they fell so far beneath the radar screen of what people (including myself) considered as conceivable influences on serious work.

Q: What brought them to your awareness in this new way?

A: Long before I came back to poetry and fiction, readers of my essays had commented on the ease with which my writing could be read and

[2] Six months after writing this I came across the following in Kenneth Koch's homage to his mentor, Delmore Schwartz: "Believed *Pogo* to be at the limits of our culture./*Pogo*. Walt Kelly must have read Joyce Delmore said./Why don't you ask him?" See "A Momentary Longing to Hear Sad Advice from One Long Dead," in *A Possible World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), p. 9.

understood, and a number of reviewers of my books had commented on what one of them described as my "shapely language." I came to realize that this was because, even as a critic writing closely reasoned and sometimes scholarly pieces, or when producing what some now call "cultural journalism," or as an occasional polemicist, I write for the ear as much as for the eye. Always. I hear all my writing as speech. If it doesn't sound right when spoken aloud, I revise until it does.

And, as speech, I require comprehensibility of it. I write nothing that I would not say, in those exact words, to someone else whose intelligence I respect. So the writing is ear-based, and speech-based. Which means it's necessarily concerned with voice and tone. And also that it's breath-based. Consider, for example, this poem from my first book of creative writing, *spine*, a collaboration with the Finnish photographer Nina Sederholm:

Panhandle

Sometimes it gets so large
out here that you can plainly
    see just how someone could saddle
    up at night and race on off
into the empty, shooting at the stars —
and why, when we all tracked them
    down a few days later, sprawled
    in that ravine, clearly there was nothing
for it, after much palaver, but to put
them both out of their misery:
    the horse nigh dead, all busted
    up, the man still breathing but
plumb useless in his head and not
about to mend anytime soon.

I'd propose that all those writers I just mentioned wrote for the ear, and that their lines, though very different from each other, all strike me as breath-based, whether in prose or poetry. Which brings us back to Olson, but also to Dylan, who once wrote, "My songs are exercises in tonal breath control."

One of the things that struck me forcibly about the Marcus book on Dylan is that the music that shaped Dylan — synopsized in many ways by Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music*, the eccentric Bible (or perhaps Apocrypha) of the U.S. folk-music revival of the 1950s and '60s — was the same "roots" music that shaped me: all that early blues and folk and jazz that Earl intuitively set me listening to in '57, the surviving traces of what Marcus calls "the old weird America."

Then a further surprise, from reading the Dylan autobiography. My dad became a huge fan of *The Threepenny Opera* by Brecht and Weill when its revival opened in the Village in 1954, and pulled me into his enthusiasm. We had the original-cast album, and he played it so often that we both memorized it; we could (and did) sing "Pirate Jenny" together, by heart. Turns out Dylan's girlfriend worked on set design for the Theater de Lys during its long run there, so he sat through it numerous times, and recalls that he was particularly affected in his songwriting by . . . "Pirate Jenny."

The singing voice of Lotte Lenya, who *owned* "Pirate Jenny," was one of those — most of them richly flawed, with a stark, raw quality — that helped me find my own. Dylan, Lady Day, Ray Charles, Van Morrison, Nina Simone, Tim Buckley, Lightnin' Hopkins: I learned from them that you build your own authentic voice with the materials at hand.

So a lot of things that poured into me didn't just nourish me in passing; they also molded me. You are what you ingest. But not till this

year did I actually begin to see the tributaries that flow into my work from an aerial perspective, so to speak. That helped me understand various notable elective affinities, including Dylan's deep resonance for me but also what I've valued in others, from O'Casey to Walt Kelly to Ginsberg to Thelonious Monk to Bartok to Björk.

And that creates at long last an understanding of myself and my framework, my ecosystem as a creative writer, on which I think I can build. Acknowledging that song-based, ear-based, speech-based, ultimately breath-based aspect of my work points me toward a reconsideration of my relationship to the poetry of my own day and of previous times that's constructed on the same premise. So now I have to re-read Olson, Pound, Levertov, William Carlos Williams — Whitman too, maybe even Chaucer — because I think I missed something crucial. Or, more precisely, wasn't ready for it till now.

Q: There's a political component to the work of many of the writers and composers you've mentioned — Brecht and Weil, O'Casey, Ginsberg, Wright, Dos Passos, Trumbo, Dylan. Even Walt Kelly, as a social satirist. And your father's work certainly has a political aspect. Where do you stand in relation to all that?

A: I think any communication to the polity constitutes, by definition, a political act, whether that's publishing an essay or performing a poem out loud for an audience, regardless of its content. So I think there's a politics inherent in, and visible in, all of my writing, regardless of what form it takes. That's true of my father's work as well. But not all of his writing or mine is specifically issue-oriented.

I don't feel less keenly about the social issues of our time than my father does. Because I've done the bulk of my writing in the form of

prose essays, I've woven my commentary on many issues of our day into that body of work from the beginning; you'll find it there if you spend some time reading those writings, it's threaded throughout that project. Perhaps for that reason, I write fewer issue-oriented poems than my father does; I have other forums for those ideas. But I don't avoid them if they come to me — as in "Juarez Kindling," "Cold Shower," "Language Poem," and "Holding the Fort."

On one hand, I can't imagine myself writing a poem such as Neruda's "Song to Stalingrad," which I re-read (in translation) recently and found merely tendentious — and woefully, excruciatingly, almost irredeemably naïve from a political standpoint, especially given what we know now. On the other hand, I have the deepest respect for his *Spain in Our Hearts*, and for Carolyn Forché's *The Country Between Us* and Marie Howe's *What the Living Do*, two extremely autobiographical and very different book-length works that I think of as political and, in Forché's case, issue-oriented, and that satisfy me on every level.

Q: You say your poetry takes numerous forms. What do you mean?

A: When I started writing poetry and fiction again in '88, I made a simple deal with myself: I would write any poem or story that knocked on the door. Didn't matter what style, or voice, or tone it came in. Or even what weight — frivolous, even silly. A sonnet, a haiku, a pantoum, free verse, a limerick, open or closed form . . . If it asked to get written I'd write it, and sort its significance out later.

As a result, I've written some awful poems, some mediocre ones, and (I like to think) some strong ones. Including poems in voices I'd never heard before or since that seem to come to me out of the

aether — like the murderous cowboy in "Panhandle." This surprises me for several reasons, not the least of which is that, as a fiction writer, dialogue has always been a weak point of mine. Yet there I managed to create a character who's certainly not me, yet credible in himself.

Also, I permit myself a certain amount of tomfoolery; see the "Bagatelles for Satie" section.

I don't know if this recent shift in my work I've described will terminate this diversity of voice and form by channeling me into a specific approach to writing. I can visualize that as one consequence. Still, I can't imagine saying no to an incipient poem on principle because it comes to me in rhymed couplets and I'm now an open-form guy.

Q: How do you work? What's your process as a poet?

A: When I sit down at 9 a.m. with my second cup of coffee most days, it's in front of the word processor. My dad usually generates his first drafts longhand, in a scrawl that only three or four people in the world can read. Unlike him, I grew up around typewriters, and was an early adapter of word processors. (I work on a Mac, in Mariner Write nowadays.) I'll use pen and paper if something hits me on a train or bus or in the garden — "Pushing Ink" came that way — but the computer screen is my blank page.

Normally, unless there's something gnawing on me, I'll warm up on correspondence, including email, sometimes instant messaging. If I have an essay in the works, or one that needs building, I may tackle that, get a few planks in place and see how that goes. Periodically, with some frequency now, poems ask to get written, and if I feel one's ready to enter the birth canal I will turn to it. Easy enough to do with the

word processor; if it insists on emerging on the spot I can just write it in the middle of whatever document I'm working on, then cut it out later and paste it into a new file.

Q: Does that mean you wait for inspiration?

A: Not exactly. Inspiration does happen; poems like "Panhandle" and "All Mine" have come to me all of a sudden and all of a piece. But sometimes I have only a phrase, or an image, that seems promising, and I start playing with it, and it takes root and grows.

The risk, for me, is doing that prematurely. If it's not really ready, I may squander it, expend its energy. I don't excel at radical revision, as Earl does. This doesn't mean I don't rewrite and tinker. But I rarely return successfully to an idea I've failed to actualize in large part the first time around. So I try to gauge and wait for a certain ripeness or urgency.

That's a judgment call. Sometimes I'll plow such an image or phrase back into the mulch heap, after making conscious note of it in my head: saying it to myself, saying it out loud, then letting it go. I have a scrap pile of such written fragments that goes back 40 years now, and I've decided not to enlarge it further. If it truly matters, it'll come back more fully formed and ready for my close attention. That's something I learned from doing dreamwork in Jungian analysis — a writer's version of "the return of the repressed." Write no poem before its time.

Then there's material that I've chewed on consciously for awhile. For example, take the poem "Samaritan," elsewhere in this book, written in 1996 as an apology for a wrong I did to someone several years previously, a confession of my own blindness to myself.

I knew that, for karmic balance, I needed to make public and symbolic amends for this failure. Bits and pieces of this poem — first the boat-and-swimmer image, then the title — drifted in and out of my field of awareness for several years. Finally I saw enough of its outline and details and thrust and mood that I knew I only needed to start and it would flesh itself out, as it did.

The metaphor I use for this process is that of the poetry channel on my psyche's radio. Sometimes it unexpectedly turns itself on, full-blast. Sometimes I tune deliberately to that channel; if something's playing and I can make out the words, I write it down. Sometimes its signal crosses with the signal of another channel to which I'm listening, and I'll usually try to tune to it to see what's up. If the signal stays garbled, I tune elsewhere. If I can bring it in and it's clear enough, I pay attention and perhaps set to work.

Q: You spoke just before about "performing" your poetry. Can you elaborate on that?

A: Along with writing, I've always had a public-performance aspect to my life. My father, who loved to sing, would bring me along to Greenwich Village parties as a kid to sing left-wing songs with him. I took theater classes and acted as a child, acted again in my teens. I began political speechmaking as an antiwar activist during my adolescence. In graduate school, as I mentioned, I helped form a Bay Area rock band, singing lead and playing rhythm guitar. I sang lead in another band when I came back east in the late '60s. Then, in my professional sphere as a critic and historian of photography, I started teaching, using the Socratic method, and also giving public lectures —

accepting both of those as forms of performance. I've continued that to this day.

Unless you treat lecturing and teaching like the stereotypical academic tonelessly "delivering a paper" at a conference or droning away robotically at your students, you realize soon enough that this activity is de facto a form of theater. It's not just automatically ear/speech/breath-based; it's the engaging presentation of your words and the ideas embodied in them, done in the visual as well as auditory presence of your audience as listeners/viewers. So, as a dialogue-oriented teacher, you become in that process the director and lead actor of an improvisational troupe. As a public lecturer, you become the scriptwriter, director, and sole actor in an extended monologue, a one-person show.

If you learn to do those things well, a synergy develops. The experience of performance feeds the writing and the underlying organization of thought; you learn how to write in ways that minimize your limitations and maximize your strengths as a performer. And you learn how to perform what you write for maximum effectiveness before an audience. As I intimated earlier, this also often leads to revision; awkwardness and unclarity in your writing tend to stand up and wave their hands when you read your words aloud to someone else, regardless of their response.

I'm not talking here about slam poetry, because that's not what I do, not by a long stretch. I require my poetry to work on the page, to function fully and deliver itself to the reader completely through the reading process, as well as to communicate in performance. So I strive to imbed all necessary clues to the poem's auditory potential in its written form. That manifestation on paper isn't just a faint trace of the performance, which is how most slam poetry appears to me when

published — uninteresting as autonomous writing on the page and insufficient in itself, even if it makes me want to hear the live version.

Furthermore, the rowdiness of the slam environment — where a certain declamatory style dominates, a "goes to 11" volume level prevails, and a relentless momentum gets going and carries forward — really doesn't work for those of my poems intended as very quiet or in a minor key. Others, my shorter ones, have a blink-and-you-missed-it quality that requires a very attentive audience in live presentations. Still, I write them all for the ear; I want them heard.

From the time I found my own primary, mature voice as a poet — say, from the time I wrote "All Mine" — I operated on the assumption that I would present the poems I wrote not only to readers on the page but also to listeners in public spaces. Thinking that way affects the way you write, and even affects *what* you write, because it engages you consciously and unconsciously with the idea of your reader as listener and the extremely intimate, personal act of speaking directly to someone else, without the distancing factor of the page between you. That's as close to the experience of Ong's "first-stage orality" as literate people can get.

My father has a very similar approach, I believe. His work is very ear-based, musical. He's acted, and sung. He's an excellent teacher and public speaker, though he's had much less opportunity to perform in all those contexts than I have. And fewer chances to present his creative writing in person during this phase of his work as a writer. But he's a first-rate reader — subtle, expressive. Both he and Fran read to me frequently as a child, and we all read aloud to each other at home just sitting around: passages from the *Times* and other periodicals, or juicy paragraphs from whatever book we had open. So I grew up accustomed to hearing the written word spoken.

In the late '90s I had the good fortune to come across a small cluster of poets in my own home community on Staten Island who emphasized public performance: Marguerite Maria Rivas, Wil Wynn, and J. J. Hayes. I joined up with them; in 2000 we formed a collective, The Sepoy Rebellion. (Hayes left the group in 2006; Rivas, Wynn, and I continue to perform as a trio, and in various duos. You can find us online at sepoyrebellion.com.)

Consequently, since '98 I've performed live with them dozens of times. Presenting as an ensemble has nuanced the individual work of each member of this group. I've also had numerous occasions to perform my work on my own, or alongside other writers. I've found all of that extremely valuable in my evolution as a poet.

Here's a poem I've performed often with the Sepoy group:

Royal Pain

Six months of *don't*
bother me led on to
a year of *haven't you*
got anything better
to do, after which
a long silence broken
only by *read my lips*
alternating with *what*
are you, deaf? From
there we went straight
downhill, along *mind*
your own damn business,
past *do we have a problem*
here, deep into *what part*
of that didn't you under-
stand and all the way
to *Jesus, not again*, bare-
ly skirting *get the fuck*
out of my sight. You'd think
someone who claims to love

you would sooner or later
run out of all that
why can't you just leave
me the hell alone.

I now take that vocal aspect of the work for granted. Forinstance, when Nina Sederholm and I began designing the web version of *spine* (spineonline.us), I recorded the texts and put them online; those audiofiles will also appear on a forthcoming DVD of that project. That led me to develop a live-performance multimedia version of *spine* that I've now presented several times. So the written aspects of my poetry and the spoken aspects of it have become complementary. Not exactly inseparable, but interlaced.

Q: Your father's not particularly sanguine about the state of the world. Do you share his outlook?

A: An interesting word, sanguine — meaning "flushed with blood." The century of my birth reeks of wholesale slaughter. Passchendaele. Nanking. Dachau. Dresden. Stalingrad. Hiroshima. Nagasaki. Rwanda. Cambodia. Sarajevo. Baghdad. Some things have gotten better in my lifetime. Some have gotten worse, much worse. Among the latter are forms of serious damage to our ecosystem that could prove irreversible. So I may have witnessed the unnecessary destruction of our basic support system. Forget the cyclical collapse of empire, the inevitable decline and fall of this or that civilization, even the various vast abbatoirs of the past century's worst monsters; that could prove itself the real bloodbath, the end of human life on earth, done not deliberately but out of dumbness and cupidity.

So things seem bad, in many ways. They could deteriorate further, and probably will. I'm no Pollyanna. But problems remain soluble, at least up to a certain point. And, for better as well as for worse, we remain hunters. Thomas Harris writes, in *The Silence of the Lambs*, "Problem-solving is hunting. It is savage pleasure and we are born to it." I believe we have the capacity to solve many of our problems, even those that seem most intractable.

That doesn't mean I believe that we *will* solve them. However, I remain not optimistic but hopeful, in the sense of the word as defined by Vaclav Havel: convinced that it is important to perform certain actions regardless of unfavorable conditions and even in the face of evidence that they may prove ultimately unsuccessful. For me, that's the motive for continuing to bear public witness, via the written and spoken word, to the experience of life in my time as I've lived it.

About the Author

Born in Brooklyn, New York, on December 19, 1943, a writer since his adolescence, from a family of writers, Allan Douglass Coleman did his undergraduate work in English Literature at Hunter College (Bronx, New York). He received his M.A. in 1967 from the Creative Writing Program at San Francisco State College.

Shortly after earning that degree Coleman returned to New York City and began working professionally as a freelance cultural journalist under the pen name A. D. Coleman, specializing in writing about contemporary photography and the new digital technologies. He has published eight books of his critical writings and over 2000 essays on those subjects in such publications as the *Village Voice,* the *New York Times,* the *New York Observer, Art in America,* and *Artforum*. A long-running internet newsletter about these professional activities appears at photocritic.com.

Returning to creative writing in the late 1980s, Coleman has since published poetry, short fiction, and creative nonfiction in dozens of print and web journals. In 2000 he released his first book of prose poetry and free verse, *spine* (Borgå, Finland: minipress), a collaboration with the Finnish photographer Nina Sederholm. An installation version of that project traveled widely in the Nordic countries. (For a multimedia version, go to spineonline.us.) In 2001 Coleman received a Council for the Arts and Humanities for Staten Island Performing Arts Award for the premiere on Staten Island of a live-performance version of *spine*.

Since the mid-1990s Coleman has read solo and with James Ragan, Joyce Carol Oates, Edmund Keeley, Daniel Halpern, and others, in such locales as Tucson, San Antonio, Las Vegas, Tulsa, and Prague. He is a member of The Sepoy Rebellion, a Staten Island-based collective of performing poets. Founded in 2000, the group performs regularly in the metropolitan New York area (sepoyrebellion.com).

Coleman's bookworks include *Carbon Copy* (1973), a series of self-portraits*,* and *Confirmation* (1975), an account of a 1962 pilgrimage to the grave of saxophonist and composer Charles Parker, Jr. Further examples of his creative writing, along with information about his performance activity, appear online at villaflorentine.us.

The current collection, shared with his father, Earl Maxwell Coleman, is entitled *Like Father Like Son,* and contains a mix of published and unpublished poems.

Thanks to the editors of the publications in which these poems first appeared:

"Body Language": *Poem* 94, November 2005
"Shy Bricks": *Small Pond* 35:1, Winter 1998
"School of Crafts": *Iodine Poetry Journal*, Fall/Winter 2005/2006
"Language Poem": *The Chaffin Journal*, 2005
"Stay Hungry": *Illuminations*, Spring 2006
"Cold Shower": *The Cape Rock*, Spring 2004
"Going Postal": *Erased, Sigh, Sigh* 19, July 2006
"Juarez Kindling": *Hazmat Review,* Fall 2006
"Arachnophobe": *Pudding* 31, 1996
"Taking the Field": *Pudding* 31, 1996
"Downtown Local": *Potato Eyes* 14, Winter/Spring 1997
"For Malcolm, February 1975": *Glassworks* 1:2, Winter 1976
"Turning Thirty": previously unpublished
"Deal": *The Chaffin Journal*, 2006
"Bone Voyage": *Poem* 94, November 2005
"Family Album": In somewhat different form, these poems first appeared individually in *Assembling* 7 (1977) and 8 (1978). As a group, they appeared in *Sanskrit* 28, 1997
"Concerning ice cream on Mom's side of the family": *Steam Ticket* 3, 1997
"Points of View": previously unpublished
"In the Widow's House": *The Glass Cherry* 5:2, Spring 1998
"Ukiah Afternoon": *The Higginsville Reader* 7:4, Fall 1997
"Floater": *Parting Gifts* 18:1, Summer 2005
"On First Beating My Father at Chess": previously unpublished
"Theory of Relatives": *Into the Teeth of the Wind*, Fall 2006
"Salvage Rights": *California Quarterly* 24:2, Summer 1998
"Glossolalia": *Medicinal Purposes* I:5, Winter 1997
"Fogbound": *Strong Coffee*, Spring 1998
"I can tell Lovely can't believe her luck": *Eidos* 9:1-3, Summer 1996
"Knowing Beans": *Porcupine* 9:2, Spring 2006
"Original Sin": *Cardinal Poetry Quarterly* 2:2, Fall 1966
"Aubade": *Koja*, 2, Summer 1998
"Hot Dog": *Poetry Motel*, 1998
"'I think,' he said": *Main Street Rag* 3:2, Summer 1998
"Pushing Ink": *Main Street Rag* 3:2, Summer 1998
"The Tossed Dwarf Speaks": *The Maverick Press* 10, November 1996
"Microscope": *Rosebud* 10, Spring 1997; "Dead Letter": *Lynx* 12:2, 1997.
"Dream Poem 3": *Cover* 10:1, 1996; "Dream Poem 4": *Stoneflower* 2, 1997; "Dream Poem 6": *Peaky Hide* 4/5, 1998
"Samaritan": *California Quarterly* 31:1, Spring 2005
"Chomutov Snapshot, July 1996": *Black Buzzard Review* 10, Spring 1997
"Short Leash": *Prairie Winds*, 2006
"Someone Extraordinary Speaking": *BlackWater Review*, Fall 1996
"Polaroid": *Potpourri* 10:1, Spring 1998
"Analphabetics": *JAW Magazine Quarterly*, Summer 2006
"No Way": *Poetry Harbor*, 2006
"Holding the Fort": *Parting Gifts* 18:1, Summer 2005
"Bird of the Summer Solstice": *Poesia* 4:1, January 2006
"The Gravity of Ash": *Lalitamba* 1:2, 2006
"Frieze": *Passager*, Winter 2005
"Out of Here": *Lalitamba* 1:2, 2006
"Self-interview: Allan Douglass Coleman": previously unpublished
"License": previously unpublished
"First Poem": previously unpublished; "Fragment": *Short Fuse*, forthcoming
"Lovely when I take her in her sleep": *Paramour* 3:3, Spring/Summer 1996
"All Mine": *Defined Providence* 4, 1996
"Panhandle" first appeared in the book *spine*, by Allan Douglass Coleman and Nina Sederholm (Borgä, Finland: minipress, 2000)
"Royal Pain": *Coal City Review*, Fall 2006