

Praise for *Far From Sudden*

“Goodman’s poems are marvelously realized into crisp and compressed lyrics not easily forgotten. I hated to leave a world where a heart resides in a blue aquarium, and black holes and other mysteries of the universe “sip from themselves.” *Far From Sudden* frequently surprises, even as we are seduced by sights and sounds of the ordinary animated with astonishing and eloquent force.”

– Aimee Nezhukumatathil

“These poems are heart-haunted. Cardiac telemetry is the central metaphor for his poetic quest that captures the dance between desire and death, and the eroticism (“I like it / when our wildest parts are glistening”) is made more urgent because of the awareness of mortality (“Hears headlights always on”). Between gravity and trajectory, Goodman’s poems are crushingly immediate—as compelling as cave drawings, as awe-inspiring and elegant as star maps.”

– Patrick Lawler

“Memory and mortality are disquieting muses in Brent Goodman’s *Far From Sudden*. The first assaults the mind with the knowledge “every life / must move one sullen photograph at a time;” the other dispirits the body with the existential truth: “I am this quiet / passenger in my own vehicle.” But from the poetry of pain and solitude come recovery, gratitude and the blissful state of surrender. Goodman weaves light into darkness gloriously, like prayer into marrow.”

– Rigoberto González

Also by Brent Goodman and Black Lawrence Press

The Brother Swimming Beneath Me (2009)

FAR FROM SUDDEN

poems

Brent Goodman



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Executive Editor: Diane Goettel
Front cover design: Rebecca Maslen
Book design: Pam Golafshar
Author photo: Kelvin Fujikawa

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For Kelvin

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<i>Adirondack Review</i>	“Then”
<i>Buddhist Poetry Review</i>	“Orange”
<i>Cimarron Review</i>	“All This Fun Nothing” “Some God’s Finger” “Sunroom”
<i>Diagram</i>	“Poem for Four Hands”
<i>Diode</i>	“Days Within Days” “Easter” “Hearses Are The New Black” “Jonathon Edwards Channeling Albert Einstein To The Wrong Family During An Unaired Taping of Crossing Over” “Satellites” “Shmuel’s Calculations Are 11 Minutes Off” “This Morning I Woke with A New Twin” “What Happens Next” “What To Do With My Body”
<i>DMQ Review</i>	“A Focus”
<i>Express Milwaukee</i>	“I Used To Think I Was Only One Person”
<i>La Fovea</i>	“A Dream You Don’t Remember Remembers You”

<i>Flyway</i>	“Gravity”
<i>Gulf Coast</i>	“Madison, New Year’s 1999” (as “Precision”)
<i>Perihelion</i>	“Glass Painting with Sun” “Security Mirrors”
<i>Slant</i>	“Don’t Remind Me”
<i>Softblow</i>	“The Sky Behind Us”
<i>Qarrtsiluni</i>	“I Should Mention Love” “One Nation Under Me” “The Ground Left Me”
<i>Verse Wisconsin</i>	“Enso”
<i>Weave Magazine</i>	“Rhineland” “There Is A Lot of Loneliness in Dutch Poetry”
<i>Zone 3</i>	“Skywalk”

“Everyone Wonders” was first published in the anthology *Collective Brightness: LGBTIQ Poets on Faith, Religion & Spirituality* (2011 Sibling Rivalry Press). “One Nation Under Me” also appeared in the anthology *Love Rise Up* (2012 Benu Press). Earlier versions of some poems in the first section originally appeared in two out-of-print chapbooks, *Trees Are the Slowest Rivers* (1998 Sarasota Poetry Theatre) and *Wrong Horoscope* (1999 Thorngate Road).

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Ensō

In
the
pines,
the

wind
rehearses
its
verses.

You,
there
too,
where

shadows
grow.

i :: gravity

Between living and dreaming
there is a third thing.

Guess it.

– Antonio Machado

Memory is the Distance Between Two Points

Is this impersonation of a fond memory
impressing my future nostalgia?

I spend each moment creating the man
I used to be. The person in line behind me

will just have to wait to stand where
I'm standing. Two feet, four directions.

Climb into your vehicle of choice
and grab the wheel like a clock. See

the only fixed point along the horizon which
doesn't appear to be funneling toward us?

That's exactly where we're headed.

Don't Remind Me

It's 2 a.m. and the hippie bluegrass neighbors
laugh in circles one floor down. Outside
across the lamp-lit street, a thrift store figure mumbles by
coaxing his empty carriage down the buckled sidewalk.
Another overslept morning late to work
ghostwriting awkward international apologies,
idling away my lunches in the lot next door before
the dry cleaner's typeset windows, crisp dress shirts ascending
the jerking conveyor. That was the decade I suddenly quit
over someone else's salary. That was the age
I dried up like a downed branch. Don't remind me how
everything eventually resembles something else
looking backwards later. I've lived with you longer now
than others I've loved have lived entire lives. Forever
this lost father shuffling his empty child door by door past
our old rented balcony. He keeps circling the block
as if searching for the beginning. Each time
I stand in my window looking down
he is there or he is not.

Madison, New Year's 1999

Freezing rain. Shivering past
the tagged bus stop, walking home,
my knees two broken dinner plates,
stomach a tumble of stones, tonight
each house memorizes the inner shape
of its heart. Every tree understands
the blood's difficult passage from this world
to the next. Trees are the slowest rivers.
And living on an isthmus is like living inside
the narrow throat of an hourglass,
my compass points bipolar, all directions
channeled through this narrow passage
between two bodies of water. I'm trying
to keep my lines straight. I could say
another millennia passes, or the moon settles
deeper into its blue socket. What I should say
is when I get home, there are lights on
in two upstairs windows. In one,
a figure. In the other, a shadow moves
disconnected across the wall. I'm trying
to understand this as I cross the icy street,
I'm trying not to lose my key inside the lock
though for days it hasn't turned.

Security Mirrors

Standing in line at the D.M.V. I am no longer in love
with memory. Expire, renew. Printouts of the missing
fade and curl into themselves, pinned to the walls
like maps of distant cities. What about the lost
who never come back, faces empty as unsigned letters?
There must be hours of us somewhere spiraling
heavy dark reels – drunk, resigned, furtive –
every withdrawal of our lives recorded, each
misremembered story hanging like a stranger’s cologne
in the back of a taxi. Expire, renew – every life
must move one sullen photograph at a time
until we’re ready to pour our sight into the peripheral
vision machine. Until we’re ready to reveal
the maps of rivers hidden behind our eyes.
I’ve always stepped forward when told.
Leaning in, the held breath in my chest
hangs like two intricately folded wings.

Skywalk

Sometimes there is no one, or ghost trees
reflected there like half-erased words.

Sometimes a part of you rises through glass
and air. Sometimes the path you wear

into the earth is an empty pen's blank furrow,
though tonight, a vaulted bright bridge once again

illuminates your journey. Almost home, the skywalk
grows distant in your rear view. Is this about

getting somewhere? At every idle intersection
the dashboard compass trembles inside its watery globe.

Flurries

You rise from a white
dream only to discover

all your windows gone
fiercely blank,

so many canvases
waiting for a world.

There is a quiet
which is the pause

between breaths.
You want to learn

the hundred names
for this – your hand,

warm against frosted glass,
clears a small space

a distant horse
could run through.

A Focus

A zero in the eye widens when we need
more light. Sharp edges soften, charcoal
on damp canvas. Church bells hum in our umbrella handles
as all day we wander within the mind of a cloud,
blinking. Look up – gray can't help but repeat itself.
Sidewalks recede into haze; the stone steps to your apartment
turn slippery and dark.

The semester spent in York
sparking hash pipes inside cathedral shadows
meant little, everything. Hooves across cobblestone.
Memorize the face reflected in the well bottom,
find a place for it. Find a place for the wavering
voice, lightning shocking the windows white, static
between stations. The distance sound travels
from sky to earth. From your shipwrecked bed
you listen: A wide exhale through your smallest bones.

Gravity

More and more there is a room
we never visit where a light bulb
slowly darkens with dust.

*

Suddenly a man gives up
on a park bench – watch
how he tears bread and
scatters his life
thumb by crumb to the birds.

*

By sunset he's gone.
Only this rain
adding weight to the river.

*

Such small music this might be
heaven: A hundred tiny hearts
roosting together in the bone-
white arms of the sycamore.

Glass Painting with Sun

– *after Vasily Kandinsky*

Behind this landscape
there is a clarity.

Beyond this angle of light
across the empty rose trellis,

the transparent sound of water.
Imagine the thousand echoing rooms

beneath the surface of the lake –
a single wooden boat

sways in the harbor, testing
each door with its heavy key.

This is what keeps it
from drifting. And you

who avoids the painting
which thinks itself a window:

isn't the room well lit?
Sometimes your breath catches

as if light could pass through you
and pastel the dull walls.

Outside, the old oak
waits all day for its shadow

to circle and return.

ii :: telemetry

I don't need to be chosen I was
never separate from you

- Hugh Behm-Steinberg

Rhineland

Took three weeks just to get the cork out
of that stubborn Three Blind Moose Merlot.

Tonight, I invent new tools because
the smartest monkey wins. Tomorrow

the cable guy will be our first guest
since last year's snowfall. I tried a knife.

Meanwhile, we watch a DVD.
A man falls backward in slow motion.

A forceps, some patience. I walk next
door to pay rent. One thing at a time.

There is a Lot of Loneliness in Dutch Poetry

*There is a lot of loneliness in
Dutch poetry. Drove 57*

miles to read that critique, nearest
bookstore the Wausau Barnes & Noble.

My bookshelf? The grandest selection
of lyric verse in seven counties.

The Pileated Woodpecker turns
our ear in the driveway. We spot him

in the timbered lot beside the house.
Someone cleared it for spring construction.

What Happens Next

What happens next is most important.
One of the cats dies and I'm the dad

who postponed the vet appointment. Two
doors open. I try not to believe

in both at once. What happens next is
revised. When we slid downhill on ice

I kept the wheel aimed at her hatchback
so we'd both be equally injured.

What happens next begs a question. I
wonder which of us will leave, who'll last.

Orange

In the Social Marketing meeting
I consider Jack Kerouac in

his mother's dim kitchen, *Dharma Bums*,
laughing: "This orange is an illusion!"

The Call Center Supervisor's blouse
coordinates the wall's precise green hue.

Like ol' Ray Smith I spent two summers
meditating shirtless in the woods.

I express no opinion, take notes.
That's an orange in your hand, Jack. Enjoy.

Shmuel's Calculations Are 11 Minutes Off

Devotional. We climb the staircase
after groceries, seven years here.

Who knew there's an ancient Hebrew Sun
Prayer sung just once every 28th

Equinox, the *Birkat HaChamah*.
Ritual. Every morning naked

with you in the bathroom, taking turns.
Shmuel's calculations are 11

minutes off. Every year I miss your
body less. Meaning I feel closer.

Satellites

Never learned chess. Gave up Hebrew too.
Grandma's walls were stenciled with branches.

I ask my simple mind to explain:
How many languages don't you know?

I like the smell of bacon. And you,
sharing my cologne after shower.

Satellites guide us through Steven's Point.
All day I see fractals everywhere.

Back home among the pines, I like it
when our wildest parts are glistening.

Easter

I wake up each morning filled with blood
and a hankering for strong coffee.

There's queers wandering the White House lawn
and a man held hostage by pirates.

Sweet Zombie Jesus please do something!
It's Sunday and the cats are crashed out!

It's Easter and I'm sorting laundry!
I keep my prayers within my marrow,

arrive each moment inside this mind.
Here – some sunlight moves across the floor.

Days Within Days

Everybody owns this Kandinsky.
Squares with Concentric Rings. It's music

he heard behind these pulsing colors.
A simple black frame, 12 more implied.

Seals killed the pirates. Three clean head shots.
Now Vermont: We could get married there.

I know you can't hear what I'm hearing.
I want to see this room differently.

Days within days, each ring imperfect.
I question the title's translation.

The Ground Left Me

This morning I had a heart attack,
gurneyed pale and shirtless O2 mask

past my coworkers. I was crying
when I told you *Something's very wrong*

and you squeezed both my numbing hands
before calling help. Inside MedFlight

the ground left me. Touching down Wausau
they thread the stent in twenty minutes

from groin to heart. You and my parents
hugging in my room. And I'm there too.

- *April 16, 2009*

Sunroom

Cardiac Telemetry. My heart
suddenly everyone's attention.

Remote transmitter a tugging brick
in this goofy gown's right breast pocket.

Have you seen my tuchus? Nurses work
in shifts, I can't remember, they jot

their names on the dry erase board. Dots
tear my chest hair. Cath site storm cloud bruise.

Each wincing step down the long hallway.
I'll walk to the sunroom at the end.

Some God's Finger

Months ago I doubted that dream meant
anything, so gruesomely bizarre

to look down and watch some god's finger
knuckle deep into my skin – no pain,

it withdrew, dark blood seeping borehole
exactly where last week's Angio

scar now heals over. Friends send bible
verses, I know it's my fault. I cried

waking in my own bed this morning.
I dreamt about snow. I woke to snow.

All This Fun Nothing

Not afraid of that. Continuous.

The part of me already over

there is witness but willing to wait
for the cast party. We're not quite done

with all this fun nothing. My brother
months in isolation. A few days

for me in the stapled-up chest ward.
I'm reading my life's new manual.

You drive my Jeep. I am this quiet
passenger in my own vehicle.

Then

Far from sudden. Three damn days rubbing
my arm after stairs or cigarettes.

Halo headache jaw pain post push-ups
at the office, quite impossible.

Undressed by strangers in the E.R.
So long mignon, martinis, rich life.

I told you nothing. Your dad collapsed
in the lanai before your eyes. Then.

I felt this world returning to stone.
They stuffed my clothes in a plastic bag.

I Should Mention Love

We're here to entertain each other
and find someone to share a name, right?

My body moves my mind around now
on prescribed walks. The cleared wooded lot

I thought meant construction, new neighbors:
Since learned the landowners were just bored

with city life, came up one weekend
to make some noise. I should mention love.

Together, around the corner, we've
never seen our place from this distance.

Scaffold

Blood dyed to map its ghost-white rivers.
I travel over treetops, touch down.

Wheeled into the theater awake.
You will feel a pressure. I am thread.

I am scaffold. I am my father's
ear growing hot against receiver.

Strapped down, sweating, breathless, taking off.
Empty as a checkbox history.

My heart in a blue aquarium.
A slight balloon opens inside me.

Everyone Wonders

Told Hell awaited me by 6th grade.
Best friend. More for being a Jew than

wearing my glasses in the showers.
My parents didn't suspect he was

black. So polite on the phone, Dan Rhone.
There's something I didn't believe in

and it was all my fault. There's something
he believed in and he was all wrong.

I've never wished ill upon a soul.
To be chosen: Everyone wonders.

iii :: eventually

The unity of all astounds me continually.

– Noelle Kocot

“One Nation Under Me”

– GOD

(on a highway billboard)

Whose? The Mini Cooper cutting me off asks my bumper
to “Coexist.” Stay in your own lane
my fist-horn exclaims. Once when I was cradled
my father pressed a Manischewitz-soaked cloth
to my tongue. Generations circled me, the Rabbi
slowed his hand and breath. I was sculpted to be defined
by what our ancestors ask of us. There is a wall
we love so much we kiss it. Is this why I inherit
barbed wire? Why my grandmother suffered her first stroke
shortly after my uncle’s shiksa wedding beneath a crucifix?
How easy it is to whistle across state lines
when the radio sings such indistinct songs.
At the truck stop café the TV is muted, though
dark teenagers throw stones through a cloud of teargas
and they remind you of thieves. My first sensation
was a scalpel. I’m driving to D.C. to learn
what makes my family history fathomless or
miraculous. Never forget this starkly-lit exhibit:
Chest-high piles of black shoes, pocket watches,
gold teeth. God makes choices and I refuse
to be one of them. We ask past prophets
to write laws so we won’t have to later. Every man
and his son shall cover his head before
your eyes. Grandma raised me to avert my stare
when anyone darker slunk by, which must be why
I thought only some of us could ever be seen.

God makes choices and sometimes we are not cruel.
Still I pray for safe parking. All day at the Holocaust Museum
fortunately I learn the final solution to the Jewish question
is another question, only kinder. God makes choices and so
will you, I remind the infant my father carries. Generations
circle my living room. The oldest tree in the yard
leans its shadow against the curtained window.

This Morning I Woke With a New Twin

branching forward from my center, facing
me, already awake, our body a wishbone. I like
her freckles. She complements my Fantastic Sam's.
One toe tickles the other, our elbows akimbo.
When she catches her reflection behind my eyes,
I imagine us back within the body of a bird,
any bird really, lodged again between two wings.

I Used to Think I Was Only One Person

My downstairs neighbor salts
her midnight bath. Hot water thunders
the floorboards. This silence inside
our bedroom must be her disrobing.
Within any crowd I often constrain a sky
of hand-drawn constellations. Four simple
houses blossom along this gravel branch
where dust arrives just before
the breeze. When asked for our address
we might insist we live more like trees
than tenants. We float, we
submerge. Another year city council
voted down extending sidewalks past downtown.
Doesn't my smartphone believe in satellites?
I too undress before each dream completely.
Tonight our window can't sight the moon, though
every birch searches with an extraordinary light.

A Dream You Don't Remember Remembers You

Tell him he's an onion.

– overheard while sleeping

I exchange lives with my dream self and decide to remain
asleep. I have more personality
there, tend to get better
advice, though always the obvious interloper,
mindlessly fumbling for change or asking for the john.
I meet a woman pregnant with meaning.
There's a song on the jukebox she wants to hear
but I can't read her mind so far inside mine.
The drowned boy is there towel-drying his hair.
My parents too, how young, still expecting me
to be born. A child climbs down from the ceiling
to light a match under my chin, see if I flinch
or flicker. If you want to learn to lucid dream
pretend you've died – that really helps.
Our relatives grow less relative. Is that my body
or half a passing cloud? Each time I move
one hand, the other disappears.

What To Do With My Body

Slingshot my eyes back into the sun.
Unpuzzle this heart from my ribs.
Tuck my left scapula in an owl's nest.
Fashion my feet to furrow a field.
Mulch my mind in a rooftop garden.
Pour my voice down the well.
Cock and balls, it's been real.
My skin will find its own way home.
Smolder incense inside my ears.
Teleport each vertebra to a different time zone.
All this hair – make a wish!
Transfuse my blood into my enemy.
Imagine my brain inside your television.
Give my ass back to DaVinci.
Pile my teeth beneath the holocaust quarry.
My lungs: How will you tell them?
Keep my hands in your pockets.
Take me with you.
Leave nothing behind.

Hearses Are The New Black

Hearses arriving in style windows midnight smoky moonlight
Hearses craning heads on the Marquette Interchange overpass
Hearses comparing matching casket purses
Hearses harmonica “Love Me Do” in the family funeral home car park
Hearses rear vault door swung wide open
Hearses hydraulic tracks and canvas tension tie-downs
Hearses scolding redhead father how to drive
Hearses hearing voices
Hearses red wagons and rag dolls I chauffeured around recess
Hearses first date prank
Hearses salvaged for go-cart grills and carburetor parts
Hearses combing Brill Cream through black black hair
Hearses feeling full of themselves
Hearses day trip to Madison Morgue from Milwaukee I was seven
Hearses dear Herman Munster I had a crush on Eddie
Hearses clown car all my uncles for a dollar at the drive-in movie
Hearses picking up nice Jewish girls
Hearses tending ovens where bread burns to ash
Hearses texting limos on designer chocolate cell phones
Hearses feeling so goddamn empty inside
Hearses sitting shiva with a thousand noodle casseroles
Hearses biting nails and cinching ties
Hearses mounting magnetic wee flags on their hoods
Hearses excusing themselves like diplomats through every intersection
Hearses headlights always on

Jonathon Edwards Channeling Albert Einstein to the Wrong Family During an Unaired Taping of *Crossing Over*

Consciousness begins beneath the subatomic.

An equation that repeats itself has no beginning

and no end. Only man

stands upright as a variable.

Earth is over 4 billion years old.

Black holes are well springs which sip

from themselves.

The only thing between us

and God

is us.

A hydrogen bomb is a tiny piece of the sun set down

on a dry lakebed, a turquoise-blue atoll.

Jesus is ink on a shroud

[that's all]

another iteration toward the internal.

Where energy and matter untangle,

quantum strings shimmer

between your mind and mine.

I'm not

gone:

You're still there.

Near light speed

our molecules unbind.

We're all pixels inside

this design.

Let One Man Be Born From the Mind of the Last

1.

Before days, I was a coil
unwinding. A first thought
curved out of me like a floating rib
eclipsed by Adam's heart.
He looks exactly how I imagined.
I wrap my arms around him,
so he might imagine me too.

2.

We soon realize this conversation
between zero and one is beginning
to carry memories of its own. Our voices
build a spiral staircase together.
When I watch him climb
in helix to reach me,
it reminds me of a clock.

3.

Man insists upon orbiting
like a satellite with no reason
to stop falling. How will we ever
stop missing each other?
Every simple story he elaborates
into marginal illuminations.
It's just we never completely agree,

4.

making twice the work of stillness.
When we chart a map of the universe together,
it wanders like a loosely-drawn brain.
On the fourth day I put my foot down.
A tremor unsettles the slightest skin.
And the animals? Let the trees keep time
in rings. Let one man

5.

be born from the mind
of the last. May each
layer of ocean
eventually reach
the sky. I'm afraid
we're growing apart.
Our highs and lows now

6.

worldwide weather patterns. On any given day
we shine or we are showers. Extended families
settle within the delta's lush floodplain. Constellations
collaborate inside each pulsing vessel. Living among
so many branches, the whole world reminds them
of themselves. Parents cradle their children's heads
backward into the river. They borrow their names

7.

from the dead they once loved. Let every man return
his bones to the ground, his blood to the sky.

From this vantage, each ending
resembles two beginnings

woven together. Listen –

it sounds almost

exactly like

music.

Poem For Four Hands

First Piano

Second Piano

This song	Where did I read	our bodies are completely replaced
our cells sing.	once every seven years?	Cell of stone, cell of water,
John Cage asks	cells born to carry this very thought.	That man
you to hold a radio.	I am not now. I am audience to a long-lost	
You think you are only	composition. The voices John Cage captures	
this quiet spectator, but	are a symphony breathed from the air	
your very presence (Cage	of any moment. I stand beside my	
experiments) is a symphony	former body who stands beside	
composing itself. That's where	himself and so on. We each	
the radio comes in. There's no	carry this radio in one hand,	
such thing as silence. John Cage	a microphone in the other.	
walks through the crowd recording	Cell of song, cell of sight,	
found sound. Everyone in the theater	whose static voice is this,	
is holding up a radio tuned to a different	whose subtle ear? Once	
station. There's never such a thing as silence.	every seven years we	
The air contains every note our cells might sing.	completely replace	
Someone inside your radio is talking to someone	this symphony	
else. The composer is the only audience member.	with itself.	

iv :: trajectory

How many of us are there, thought Boris.
And the one I once was, where is he now.

– Matvei Yankelevich

The Sky Behind Us

Tomorrow you suspect another bird
might strike your 2nd story window.

The cordless phone swallows
each collect call
from the Wisconsin Correctional Institute.

One cloud snaps taut across the entire sky.

This morning you wake up naked,
a sudden smudge angel
feather-pressed near the center
of the big bay window.

Every voicemail for a week
carries a message recorded
of a recorded message.

Cold rain. Between
your house and the neighbors'
the last Sugar Maple flashes over,
dripping sparks.

There is a sound in dream
which reminds you of sleeping
inside a glass drum.

Try to imagine
how your house might resemble
more sky.

You don't know anyone by that name.

You don't know anyone by that name.

You don't know anyone by that name.

Press "1" to accept these charges.

A body with two wings
wants to pierce your living room.

Your neighbors draw
their curtains.

You don't own
any curtains.

When the phone rings
you know exactly why
not to answer.

The bird's last thought
inside the glass
looks left.

Depending
where you stand
in the room
the angel appears
or disappears.

When our path reflects
the sky behind us
may we fly right
through ourselves.

You spend the rest of the evening
wondering whether you might be
related to someone named

“Sherman.”

Outside,
three doves on a power line:

one facing, one away –

Where is the third bird?

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BRENT GOODMAN's previous collections include *The Brother Swimming Beneath Me* (2009 Black Lawrence Press), *Wrong Horoscope* (1999 Thorngate Road), and *Trees Are the Slowest Rivers* (1998 Sarasota Poetry Theatre). His work has appeared in *Poetry*, *Diode*, *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Puerto Del Sol*, *Gulf Coast*, *The Cimarron Review*, *Zone 3*, and elsewhere. He lives and works in Rhinelander, WI.