

# preacher boy

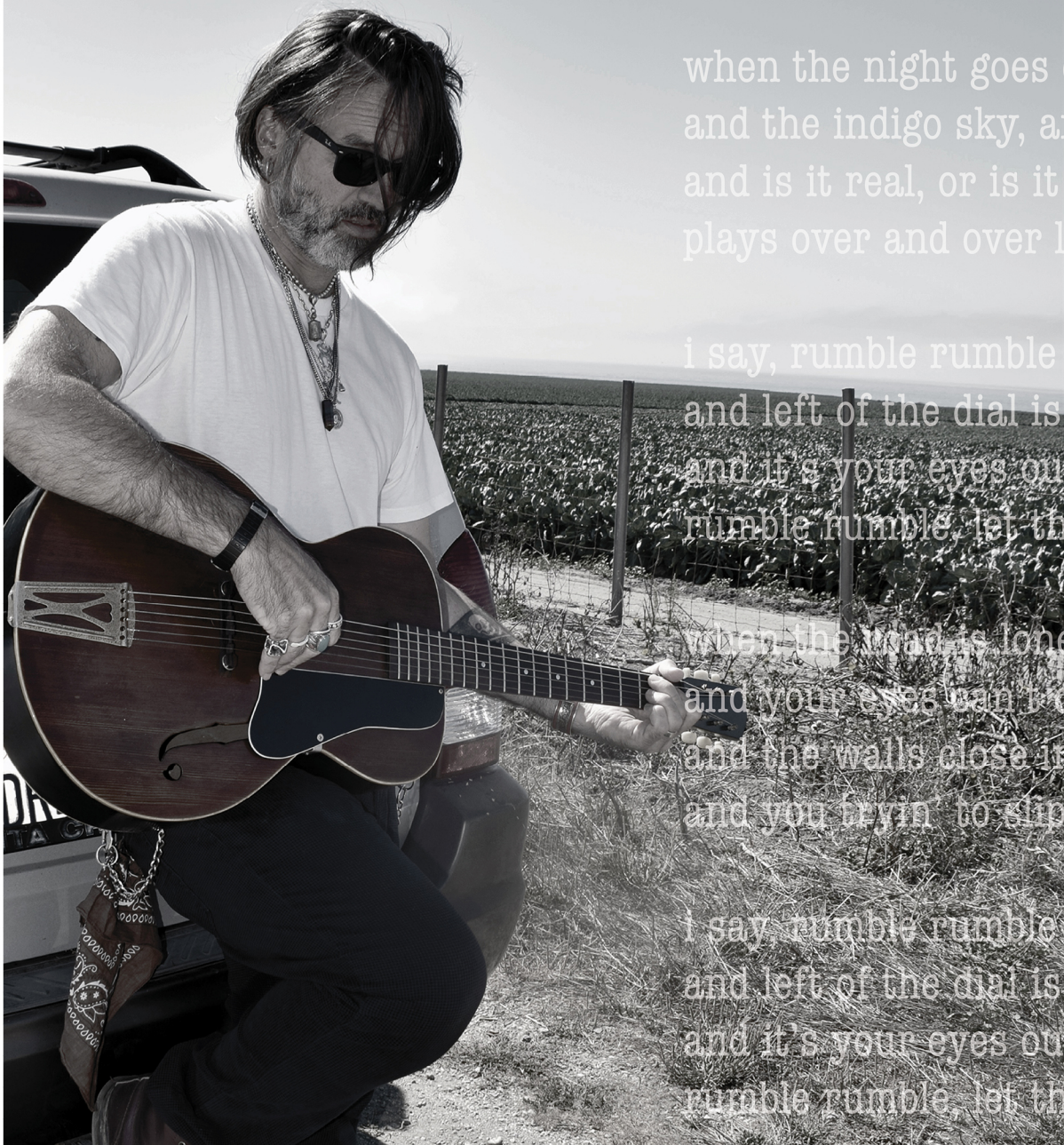
The Rumble Strip: Lyrics  
and  
I-80 Blues: 96 Choruses

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plays over and over l

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when the road is lone  
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**The Rumble Strip: Lyrics**  
and  
**I-80 Blues: 96 Choruses**

by Christopher Watkins

# The Rumble Strip

## Lyrics

Preacher Boy - The Rumble Strip  
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all songs written by Christopher "Preacher Boy" Watkins  
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# **The Rumble Strip: Lyrics**

## the sliding window (hail mary)

if you're tryin' to get to pure but your conscience says no  
you can set yourself down behind the slidin' window  
and drop your sins, like a coin, into a priest, like a slot  
and wait, like for a ticket, for the penance that you got

say, one, two, three (lord's prayer)  
four, five six, (rosary)  
seven, eight, nine (hail mary)

what did you touch, and was it pure? did you sell out love for hate?  
did you take the name in vain, and put a button in the plate?  
well, there's a voice without a body, in a room without a light  
where you can go in all wrong, and come out all right

say, one, two, three (lord's prayer)  
four, five six, (rosary)  
seven, eight, nine (hail mary)

but what do you do if you kill somebody?  
just rub a string of beads, and apologize for bein' naughty?  
then walk into the sunshine, like it's just another day?  
lord, i can't imagine, that mary wants to be hailed that way

say, one, two, three (lord's prayer)  
four, five six, (rosary)  
seven, eight, nine (hail mary)

if you're tryin' to get to pure but your conscience says no  
you can set yourself down behind the slidin' window  
and drop your sins, like a coin, into a priest, like a slot  
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say, one, two, three (lord's prayer)  
four, five six, (rosary)  
seven, eight, nine (hail mary)

## bullet

born in louisiana 'cross the river from new orleans  
to a mother with a husband doin' six in dungarees  
he was runnin' soon as he could walk, mostly from the cops  
he was dealin' x in gay bars when he finally got popped  
judge laid out the choices, one through three, when he said  
that it's the army, or it's jail, or it's windin' up dead  
so he traded in his mullet, earrings, jackknife and bandana  
and the army made a little room for private louisiana

god's gotta lotta love for this boy, by rights he should be dead  
he's lived more lives than a junkyard tom, he got a bullet trapped in his head

he landed back in louisiana but he didn't stay for long  
he found a laundry list of enemies, but all his friends were gone  
so he hopped a ride to california with someone else's lady  
all the while suckin' on a crack pipe like a baby  
he hit the streets with his hood up over hair once more grown long  
metallica on the walkman and his leather jacket on  
someone offered him a couch for the night, cuz' he had a cough  
it was six or seven months before he finally got off

god's gotta lotta love for this boy, by rights he should be dead  
he's lived more lives than a junkyard tom, he got a bullet trapped in his head

he got himself a job as a groom down at the track  
all the while stealin' bits of tackle for crack  
and things kept gettin' tighter, and he was gettin' rattled  
and the shit finally hit the fan when he tried to steal a saddle  
so he grabbed a train to fresno, swearin' that he'd get clean  
he spent five months on a horse farm then he was back in new orleans

god's gotta lotta love for this boy by rights he should be dead  
he's lived more lives than a junkyard tom he got a bullet trapped in his head

he found himself a cookin' job and he saved a little money

and kept himself off that pipe and moved in with a honey  
but she had a crazy ex, and a son from when they were together  
well, one day he showed up, he said hello, and cocked his hammer  
eight months later our boy woke up, we never thought it would happen  
he was in the very same hospital where his poor mother had him

he felt around his head for some bandages to unwind  
his mother said, "honey, there ain't none, i'm sorry son, you're blind"

god's gotta lotta love for this boy, by rights he should be dead  
he's lived more lives than a junkyard tom, he got a bullet trapped in his head

it's been nearly nine years now and he's back across the river  
he's married, with a son, and they're talkin' 'bout a daughter  
he still likes his pipe, but now he only smokes it green  
and he lives in louisiana 'cross the river from new orleans

god's gotta lotta love for this boy, by rights he should be dead  
he's lived more lives than a junkyard tom, he got a bullet trapped in his head

## the rumble strip

when your way gets dark, and you're all alone  
and you need a little guidance to make it home  
and death waits outside the lighted edge  
and it's gone too quiet inside of your head

when the night goes dark and the ground goes cold  
and the indigo sky, and a moon of gold  
and is it real, or is it not  
plays over and over like an LP pop

i say, rumble rumble like ten pins blown  
and left of the dial is the gospel moan  
and it's your eyes out there in the headlight cone  
rumble rumble, let the moss get grown

when the road is lonesome and your throat can't sing  
and your eyes can't close on a single thing  
and the walls close in like sable drapes  
and you tryin' to slip through those raven gates

i say, rumble rumble like ten pins blown  
and left of the dial is the gospel moan  
and it's your eyes out there in the headlight cone  
rumble rumble, let the moss get grown

when the oil towers and the cauldrons crow  
and you hear the spell bein' woven slow  
the broken line of white through the pass  
dances like a translucent asp  
and neither god, nor time, nor night will take your bribe  
the rumble strip will keep you alive

when your body is weary and your spirit weak  
and your needs have outgrown the prayers you speak  
and your white hands out there like houseless ghosts



and you lookin' over there for signs of hope

i say, rumble rumble like ten pins blown  
and left of the dial is the gospel moan  
and it's your eyes out there in the headlight cone  
rumble rumble, let the moss get grown

## **down with the fellas**

sure, i know those fellas down on 6th street  
hangin' outside the pawns, and talkin' smack  
in their members only jackets, sheen stains on the shoulders  
drinkin' 45 outta brown paper sacks

and sure, i know those fellas over on 14th  
huddlin' in the doorway, next to netti's after dark  
back and forth between a pitcher at the bar  
and a little bit of shoppin' in the park

sure, i'm down with the fellas, busy beggin' to receive  
but there's a difference 'tween me and them, and that's that i can leave  
so although i know the fellas, that don't mean that i belong  
it's just a season on the street for me, for the sake of a song ...

sure, i know those fellas in the drunk tank  
shufflin' 'round, lookin' for a place to sleep  
tryin' to keep from havin' to use the toilet  
and treadin' mighty careful in their stockin' feet

sure, i'm down with the fellas, busy beggin' to receive  
but there's a difference 'tween me and them, and that's that i can leave  
so although i know the fellas, that don't mean that i belong  
it's just a season on the street for me, for the sake of a song ...

sure, i know those fellas at the library  
with their shopping carts, pickin' up broken smokes  
readin' large prints in the mystery section  
laughin' at what they think are dirty jokes

sure, i'm down with the fellas, busy beggin' to receive  
but there's a difference 'tween me and them, and that's that i can leave  
so although i know the fellas, that don't mean that i belong  
it's just a season on the street for me, for the sake of a song ...

## **bandy-legged and broke**

walkin' is left to the tired, and the race doesn't go to the swift  
and the meek will only inherit throwaways from the rich  
and a penny earned is only poor wages, and nothin' gets saved  
and a cradle costs some kind of money, but all of the world is a grave

bandy-legged and broke, on broken heels  
runnin' short on hope, like a prayer feels  
like a straight man, in a fool's joke  
rust upon my keys, bandy-legged and broke

i know about pannin' for gold, i know about changin' a gear  
but i don't have any idea how to get outta here  
i know about speakin' in tongues, i know about healin' the sick  
i know about findin' new water with a divination stick

bandy-legged and broke, on broken heels  
runnin' short on hope, like a prayer feels  
like a straight man, in a fool's joke  
rust upon my keys, bandy-legged and broke

my beard has lengthened my chin , my drinkin' has reddened my nose  
my age has receded my hair, my boots have callused my toes  
my worry has torn up my stomach, my deaf ears have fallen on pleas  
my burden has bent my back, and made strangers outta my knees

bandy-legged and broke, on broken heels  
runnin' short on hope, like a prayer feels  
like a straight man, in a fool's joke  
rust upon my keys, bandy-legged and broke

## **saint peter**

i borrowed my fate at too high a rate  
i was the blind one, behind the blind  
i'm on my way to my judgement day  
and i pray that saint peter will be kind

i've lived at a loss, i've bought time at cost  
i've rewritten 'trouble in mind'  
i'm on my way to my judgement day  
and i pray that saint peter will be kind

i can hear the angels and i know it's time to find out where i'm bound  
i can see saint peter at the gates of heaven lookin' down

a line here or there, a melody in the air  
the one song that i couldn't find  
i'm on my way to my judgement day  
and i pray that saint peter will be kind

i can hear the angels and i know it's time to find out where i'm bound  
i can see saint peter at the gates of heaven lookin' down

## the belly of down

rain is turning into snow  
the frost sticks to the window  
all the halos i replace  
with the mist blown out my face

i'm diggin my cold hands into  
into all the room in my pockets you  
you don't fill up with change when i  
when i ask for some and you pass me by

for every break this world gives you got to pay a price  
but when you got no luck like i don't, then you got to pay it twice  
so it's one step forward, two steps back, day by dismal day  
til you ain't got nothin' earned but debts no mortal man could pay

i been lookin' up at the belly of down  
instead of seein' the sky  
i just want to go to sleep forever  
without really having to die

the ice is turning black with oil  
like butter burnt on tin foil  
the wage of sin is death, i'm told  
the wage of grief is growin' old

for every break this world gives you got to pay a price  
but when you got no luck like i don't, then you got to pay it twice  
so it's one step forward, two steps back, day by dismal day  
til you ain't got nothin' earned but debts no mortal man could pay

i been lookin' up at the belly of down  
instead of seein' the sky  
i just want to go to sleep forever  
without really having to die

## **crazy dirty james**

i've known richer people, who weren't worth half the price  
he wasn't nice for pretty, but he was nice for nice  
a penitent with the patience to accept a belated christ  
he wasn't nice for pretty, but he was nice for nice

we nodded quiet every time we met, because he didn't care for names  
poor, poor, scraggle-haired, crazy dirty james

london fog trench torn in two, duct tape down the splice  
it wasn't nice for pretty, but it was nice for nice  
he held on to his little transistor radio like a vice  
it didn't sound nice for pretty, but it was nice for nice

we nodded quiet every time we met, because he didn't care for names  
poor, poor, scraggle-haired, crazy dirty james

the only shelter food he'd eat was split pea soup and rice  
it didn't taste nice for pretty, but it was nice for nice  
he slept in his sister's basement when the winters brought the ice  
it wasn't nice for pretty, but it was nice for nice

we nodded quiet every time we met, because he didn't care for names  
poor, poor, scraggle-haired, crazy dirty james

he's buried now in the family plot, beneath a simple stone  
it isn't nice for pretty, but at least he's with the family

we nodded quiet every time we met, because he didn't care for names  
poor, poor, scraggle-haired, crazy dirty james

## can't sleep here tonight

it ain't so much the echo of the truth  
and it ain't so much the shadow of a noose  
it's more like a fossil that i dug up  
in a desert from a holier time  
i can see all over your pillow  
there's the imprint of another man's mind

it's ain't so much the sense of regret  
and it ain't so much the sour smell of sweat  
it's more like the sweet white threads  
on the inside of a bitter lemon rind  
i can see all over your pillow  
there's the imprint of another man's mind

i wanna try, but it ain't right  
i cannot lie, and i can't sleep here tonight

it's ain't so much the haunted and the strange  
and it' ain't so much the contours and the change  
it's more like a penny that i flattened  
on the rail of a ghost train line  
i can see all over your pillow  
there's the imprint of another man's mind

it ain't so much like blood from a cut  
and it ain't so much like bruises in my gut  
it's more like the scars on my wrist  
from the nights that i spent bound in twine  
i can see all over your pillow  
there's the imprint of another man's mind

i wanna try, but it ain't right  
i cannot lie, and i can't sleep here tonight

## showers of rain

i am weary of being a teller of tales  
spending my nights on a carpet of nails  
walking for miles to learn my name  
waiting for jewels to come down ...

i am weary of being a singer of songs  
knocking on doors where i don't belong  
wandering through lands that i can't explain  
waiting for jewels to come down like showers of rain

i am weary of being a writer of words  
trying to shape the crowing of birds  
watching the ocean, listening for trains  
waiting for jewels to come down ...

i am weary of being a player of tunes  
a sinful dealer in counterfeit moons  
walking a mile in another man's chains  
waiting for jewels to come down like showers of rain

i am weary of being a surgeon of dreams  
a panner for gold in old barren streams  
spinning crooked in the wind like a bent weather-vane  
waiting for jewels to come down like showers of rain

i am weary of holding a mirror in place  
scratching initials in skin i'll replace  
waving a thumb sunburned by shame  
waiting for jewels to come down like showers of rain

mama, did you know, just how it would go?  
and poppa, was it like this for you?  
i'm a son, and a man, and all i understand  
is all i cannot do  
with the sun in my hand,, i try to catch all i can



but it's strange  
waiting for jewels to come down  
like showers of rain



# **I-80 Blues:**

Ninety-Six Choruses

# **I-80 Blues: 96 Choruses**

by Christopher Watkins

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*New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming, Utah, Nevada ... 3001 miles, door to door; New York to California, alone, a pregnant fiancée waiting. Boy Scouts dead by tornado and bridge-swallowing floods; roadkills and billboards, dead crows and live ones; late-night preachers and rusted radio towers; auto boneyards and soldier's graveyards; museums for the fur trade, museums for the Danish, museums for the mountains; all on the road to The West.*

## First Chorus

It is nine o'clock in the evening,  
and the date is June 10th,  
and I am leaving New York.

There is exactly twenty-two feet worth  
of what-was-once-our-home  
Tetris'd in wood & metal behind me,  
underneath me.

The diesel engine underneath me  
grumbles loudly as I pull into the rain.

I immediately make my first mistake,  
forgetting I am in a truck now,  
and can no longer travel the Nesconset;  
*Cars Only.*

~

I am pleased with myself  
for having planned to drive at night.  
I hope to make Pennsylvania,  
or at least the west side of New Jersey,  
before I sleep.

I want to rise up and GO.  
Straight, the 80 West, to California.

*The Promised Land.*

No more crampy, filthy traffic,  
no more East Coast cacophony,  
no more useless chaos:  
the grotesque, compressed hyperbole  
of inter-constricted streets, avenues, numbers, names.  
No more.

~

This is the breaking of the bubble, of the monkey,  
of the junkie that is junkiedom New York.  
This is the weatherman's  
delirium tremens; the truck

shaking in the throes of withdrawal as  
the storm bursts upon me.  
I ride towards the lightning,  
the dry lightning;  
no storm yet, just electricity,  
but then it comes,  
and when it comes – oh –  
it comes HARD.  
Down, upon me,  
sideways, left to right, water bursting over the bridges,  
slammed, jostled, thrust, heaved, upheaved ...  
and the streets, my God, the roads of New Jersey!  
In the roiling monster shadows;  
ghosts of fat, cigarette-smoking, plumber-assed  
flag-wavers laughing as we bounce  
our breaking necks,  
something breaking in the back;  
breaking, then dislodged, then careening through  
the giant box-on-wheels which houses  
what-was-once-our-home;  
a meager home,  
a meager home-to-be,  
if I can make it.

~

Eventually, the storm  
starts to relent, a little bit,  
but it's so dark, so black, one  
still feels scared, I still feel scared;  
but I make it, I make it ...

... I make it OUT of New York,  
I make it OUT of New Jersey,  
I spend the first night of my new life  
in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania.

Nothing  
ever seemed so magical  
as Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania.

## **Second Chorus**

At Exit 306  
there was a sign:  
"Old Exit 49."

*So they flipped the state around, I thought  
and now I'm countin' down.*



## **Third Chorus**

Tannersville, next right.  
Alright.

## Fourth Chorus

There's a thirteen-week old baby  
in the belly of my missus  
at the other end of this.

Already, it's trying to suck its  
still-see-through thumb.

According to the female nurse,  
and the male doctor who took the latest photos  
and identified the baby's new location,

it only wakes to the sound of a male voice,  
which should make my missus happy,

since she'll never have to  
wake it from a nap  
without my help.

## **Fifth Chorus**

As a military grave bereaves the nameless,  
here is a drive-in movie theater  
on a Wednesday afternoon  
in Ohio —

white poles crooked in bare daylight,  
ground footprintless,  
giant white screen hovering  
like a weather-beaten eagle

— proclaiming another type of freedom  
to another type of victim.

And just two miles down the road  
children cannonballing into a pool,  
as they have done, year in and out,  
ever since the invention of the cannon.

## Sixth Chorus

New York to California,  
and by Vermillion, Ohio  
the radio has begun to repeat itself,

like a dementia'd uncle who can't keep his nieces straight,  
perpetually repeating the same story to the same young girl;  
the only one who will listen.

I listen like the niece would,  
because I like the song:  
*The Sultans of Swing.*

## **Seventh Chorus**

If ever you see  
miniature buffalo  
highway-side in Ohio,  
please call me if you can,  
so I might go back to this moment.

## **Eighth Chorus**

Westward on a drab Ohio tri-lane,  
under clouds plumped up in bunches 'cross the sky;  
blue baked potatoes in a line.

And pointing at their abdomens,  
radio towers;  
some with buildings in their bowels, some without.

Closest to the road; a long, low, row-house,  
painted like a pink bowling shirt,  
Neapolitan'd with light- and dark-brown diamonds.

On the side it says K-something or another,  
I can't read the fading letters from the road,  
but I can see a single bulb on at the door.

## **Ninth Chorus**

There is roadwork  
behind me, and more still to come.

They're tarring,

and I thank the powers that be  
that I'm not out there

laying that awful black spread  
of hot, lung-puncturing despair.

## **Tenth Chorus**

A sort of goat's heart beats  
in the brains of these Ohioans

—that drive to be UP, UP, ATOP—

and all across this vast flatness  
rise up towers, and silos,  
and strangely tapered fiberglass  
ice-cream-cone creations,

from the back lots of farms,  
with the salt, and the goats,  
and the brains, and the hearts.



## Eleventh Chorus

Wow.

I actually just saw a sign  
for a street named  
*Fangboner* ...

## **Twelfth Chorus**

One of the unspoken tragedies of the  
current gas crisis  
is that attendance has  
dramatically fallen  
at the RV Motor Home Museum  
in Elkhart Indiana,  
known affectionately to  
former regulars  
as the RVMH.

## Thirteenth Chorus

One hundred miles east of Chicago,  
and already I am desperate  
to go PAST,  
to *be* PAST;

Oh, to be even one mile  
to the west of it.

I bless the best of it —Chicago—  
for holding us together when it did,

for teaching my missus  
yet again more  
of who she is,  
and who she is to me.

Still, the scene of my music ruination,  
is both renaissance and disaster.

Oh, I'll PASS Chicago.

## **Fourteenth Chorus**

The Tuesday sun suspended  
over the Mishawaka water-tower,  
and the thrill is gone.

## Fifteenth Chorus

I won't call and tell him now,  
my phone battery is too precious,

but I'm thinking on my friend Brian;  
his feeling for *The Fightin' Irish*,  
and the many times he brought romantic hopefuls here  
for some sort of strange emotional/moral test.

Did he bring his wife here?  
I can't remember.  
If not, or if;  
there's probably something to be gleaned either way.

It's Juday Creek I'm over now,  
and then comes exit 77:  
Notre Dame.

Bless you Brian.  
Bless you new brides.  
Bless you marriages.

## **Sixteenth Chorus**

Heading east,  
the other way,  
towards New York,  
a car on a trailer  
behind a rental truck—  
and I just say,  
"Good luck."

## Seventeenth Chorus

Dead dog  
on the side of a  
very  
empty stretch of  
highway.

German Shepherd,  
*with a collar on.*

That can NOT  
be a good story.

## **Eighteenth Chorus**

What a confluence of names!

*Peru, Illinois' Tiki Inn, featuring The Pine Cone Restaurant.*

Wow!



## **Nineteenth Chorus**

I wasn't on the road but five minutes when the engine light went off;  
dashboard beeping, coolant level sign flashing,  
then all of a sudden the engine just cut out.

I pulled over, jumped out,  
semis rushing by me, wind blasting my head,  
the radiator  
stealing my California dreams away  
in its foul green mist.

~

I've got 50/50 now if it happens again;  
hopefully, I'll make it through the day without that happening.

If it does, I'll have to wait for the truck to cool down  
before reloading,  
which means hours on the side of the road, just waiting.

C'mon Mr. Penske!

## Twentieth Chorus

... and I see a sign up ahead  
for "Moline/Rock Island,"  
and I get Johnny Cash's "Rock Island Line" in my head,

and My God, it's the sign  
for Highway 61!

Highway 61!

~

...and I see a man in a cowboy hat  
fixing a fence.

And I'm taking a bridge  
over a railroad track.

And somewhere out there  
is the America  
that gave birth to my grandfather,  
my parents,  
me.

~

... and somewhere in the dust of these farmhouses  
there's a fingerprint  
that forensics cannot trace;

a heartprint, not a fingerprint,  
only traceable by God!

## Twenty-First Chorus

From the speakers,  
it's Neil Diamond,  
and he's *hitchin'*  
*on a twilight train* ...

And in turnarounds,  
white Sheriffs watch  
for speeders,  
and immigrants.

## Twenty-Second Chorus

I pull into a truck stop,  
and I feel the no-respect  
from the journeymen lifers  
who think I'm a phony.

And I might *be* a phony.

But then again,  
I have a great many miles  
notched into my belt.

And the bathroom stinks.  
And I did it.

## **Twenty-Third Chorus**

Ahead, the low tones in the sky  
have taken on a different feel,  
like a key change  
after the second chorus.

## Twenty-Fourth Chorus

It's a cruel fate,  
having to haunt the uninhabited,  
in this land where,  
when a final generation dies,  
the house is left behind  
to rot  
atop a berm  
that overlooks  
a ragged stretch of  
Illinois highway:  
a four-lane separated by a  
waving bale of  
grass and weed and flower,  
pitted  
with the rotting bodies of  
roadkill at  
regular spacing.

I see it in the window  
looking out  
—the ghost—  
imagining a turn-off,  
imagining that someone will die  
right in front,  
wishing the new ghost  
would then come inside.

For then there would be two;  
all it takes for happiness  
in this world,  
and the next one,  
and the next one after that.

## **Twenty-Fifth Chorus**

Another miraculous confluence;  
a sign:  
*Nuclear Plant Workers.*

And this,  
in *Prophetstown.*

## Twenty-Sixth Chorus

How hard the trees are bent!

And the radioman reminds me  
that I'm driving straight towards  
where it happened;  
*last night, the night before?*

A tornado wiped out a Boy Scout Camp;  
four dead.

What was God doing  
killing Boy Scouts  
with the instrument of weather?



## **Twenty-Seventh Chorus**

Weird kind of country, this;  
a rolling sort of flatland,  
where the gods can foment,  
and then roll out,  
their level plans.

And I ain't superstitious, but  
thrice, a redwing blackbird  
crossed my path.

## **Twenty-Eighth Chorus**

A less intoxicated kind  
of west determination;

a grimmer and more brow-sewn  
kind of focused  
kind of grimace.

Not a focus,  
but a grimace  
in the mirror.

## Twenty-Ninth Chorus

Heading straight into a sullen brooding  
blue of blueing sky;

the shape of the air has changed,  
it has different hands now,  
it touches me  
with different expression.

A threat of wetness;  
the cool, oppressive, amniotic,  
salinized encasement  
of a Midwestern storm.

Brooding, hatching, fomenting, waiting,  
waiting for me to drive  
into its gut ...

~

I'm on a bridge over the Mississippi River,  
heading into Iowa  
and MY GOD, how high the river is!

Oh , these rains, these poor people,  
my God, my God,  
will you look at that river!  
Will you look at that BIG BROWN WATER BEAST!

## **Thirtieth Chorus**

I now pass into  
my birth state.

My missus,  
I love you.

and Iowa.

Here I am in Iowa.

Iowa.

## Thirty-First Chorus

From here,  
it would appear  
that every single  
carpal-jointed  
slender white  
tendrill-fingered flash  
of lightning coming down  
is touching the freeway  
right on where  
the broken stripe  
is going.

Yet suddenly  
the freeway makes a turn  
as if it knew.

And so we weave  
to the right,  
and I thank God  
for poking fingers  
into someone else's chest.

## **Thirty-Second Chorus**

Just wiped clean less than an hour ago,  
yet already my windshield is a scientist's slide;  
frozen star-bursts  
of exploded bugs revealed.

## **Thirty-Third Chorus**

Shredded,  
violently dispatched retreads  
from raptured bastions rolling  
under thick shag darkness of storm  
roiling over Belle Plaine,

dollop the highway-side,

and in the wind,  
they rear up  
in an Armageddon of snail  
loosed upon  
the unholy.

## Thirty-Fourth Chorus

The Des Moines River.  
The Great Flood.

Entire businesses submerged.

Quarries, their great rock mountains now  
just tiny little turtle-shell tips showing  
above the water.

Unbelievable, how far  
this river  
has spread  
past  
its banks:

new rivers,  
new lakes,  
a new land.

This is not a river!  
It *is*  
the land!



## **Thirty-Fifth Chorus**

One can learn a lot  
about the character of a region  
by its museums.

One sees a lot  
of aviation museums  
in the Midwest.

A lot of places to land, I suppose.  
But I've only seen one museum  
for silos, and smokestacks.

## **Thirty-Sixth Chorus**

I flip the station  
just in time to hear  
Bob Seger say  
he headed west  
because he thought a change  
would do him good.

Damn right, Mr. Seger.

## Thirty-Seventh Chorus

And then I see a sign up on a hillside,  
in generic commissary font;  
flat white, with black block letters,  
and it says, SPACE AVAILABLE,  
with a phone number,  
and for just half a second,  
I read the area code as 408.

The West.

And I want to make that call,  
I want to call it, I want to call it  
and I want to say, Do you *still* have space available?

Because I want it, I want it SO BAD,  
and I will pay ANYTHING for it,  
anything I have.  
But I have so little.  
But please, I would appreciate it  
so much.  
I will pay in appreciation  
and you'll be rich!

Space available, and I wonder,  
should I call it? Should I call that number?  
Who would answer? Who's in charge?  
Who's the boss of California?  
And can I go before them?  
And should I wear a suit?

What will they think of me?

I better send  
my missus instead.

Everybody loves her.

## Thirty-Eighth Chorus

I wonder what brought the Danes here;  
*The Danish*  
*Immigrant Museum.*  
Pottawattamie is certainly not Danish.

Some peculiar clash  
that must have been;  
Native Americans and Danes.  
Farming, I suppose.  
It must have seemed some  
heavenly wild gift:  
huge, huge landscapes,  
undulant hills in every shade of green,  
fresh water rivuleting through,  
veining the landscape with a future.

Did they bring their own crops,  
plant their own foods,  
or learn from the local Pottawattamie?

And to what extent is this crop now  
a derivation of those crops then?

Is there a Danish diaspora?

Or has it all been reduced  
to a windmill  
selling maps?

## **Thirty-Ninth Chorus**

The Union Pacific Railroad Museum,  
Council Bluffs, Iowa.

Finally.

All day today:  
*Council Bluffs, Council Bluffs*  
why the hell  
do I know Council Bluffs?

And all along,  
it was the railroad.

## **Fortieth Chorus**

Maybe raccoons are like rabbits.

Maybe they too breed in such ferocious capacity  
that they do not need much brains.

Raccoons by the hundreds  
dead by the side of the road.

Country raccoons.

Like this one, over here,  
who never in his life  
ever saw a trashcan  
to tip over, or a dumpster  
to climb inside.

## **Forty-First Chorus**

An eruption of white fuzz motes,  
like decapitated dandelion tops,  
erupts from the bed of a truck up ahead;

it's like the white lines  
when the Millennium Falcon  
goes into hyperspace.

Except I'm trapped at 70,  
speed constraints put upon me  
by my Penske.

## Forty-Second Chorus

I am able to realize that I am  
American.  
But I am not American  
amongst my fellow Americans,  
only American in the world.

And just now,  
for a moment,  
I saw America  
through other eyes;

just a few cracks in a bad road,  
and suddenly, My God, this country  
is falling apart,  
these roads:  
terrible!

Cars shuddering and shattering everywhere,  
rotting buildings crumbling onto the countryside,  
all this collapse juxtaposed against the generic, the banal;  
all this idiot, slap-up, suburbanite shit,  
capitalist garbage, it's SO ugly!

This is a terrible country!  
This is *regality* at its end!

Gluttony; sick,  
bed-sored, flabby, flatulent, vomiting, degraded, ill-at-heart ruination!  
Oh!  
Oh America!

Oh America.  
Stop, get away from the table.  
Go find a mountain, a river.  
Fast.  
Drink pure water.  
Eat berries. Slim down.  
Clarify.  
Empty out your ears of sound.  
Commit regicide  
against yourself.



## **Forty-Third Chorus**

Playing Pooh Sticks  
with anything bigger than a pencil  
would be a bust  
cuz' there ain't no headroom  
between the water  
and the belly  
of the bridge.

## Forty-Fourth Chorus

Heading west,  
I find it weird  
that every state  
has its mile signs  
counting down.

Why,  
and what gives?

Is it mandated  
by the Federal Government,  
that everybody has to  
go in this direction?

Is this a refutation  
of The East,  
that the source be in The West?

Is this a violation of State's Rights?

Have The Federalists imposed this?

What does this mean for Our Democracy?

Counting down to BlastOff,  
is that the emulation?  
Arrive at The Pacific  
and be launched into space?

Is this some sort of Conservative judgment  
on the sixties,  
on The Castro,  
on San Francisco?

I wonder.

~

Well, the one thing that it gives us  
is the sense of going DOWN.

So in the end, and as always,  
**it's the Protestants.**

## **Forty-Fifth Chorus**

You just gotta love genuine  
road coffee.

The kind where, when you  
take the lid off and look down,

you can see for a depth  
of a full three inches.

## Forty-Sixth Chorus

I drive by these farms,  
and I see kids out there  
with their hoes or rakes or buckets,  
going around the house,  
doing chores,

and I write this now  
to remind myself,  
when I am a father,  
to try and raise a child where  
*Chores*  
means something.

Not something bad or good,  
just something.

Something that is part of life.

How do you teach  
that chores are part of life?

You do them yourself, is what you do.

## **Forty-Seventh Chorus**

Hastings, Nebraska!

And is Hastings,  
in fact,

the site of Interstate 80's  
last  
planetarium?

## **Forty-Eighth Chorus**

I know, from my last fuel stop,  
that I have an enormous dead dragonfly  
embedded in the grille of my truck.

And I am driving parallel  
to a set of train tracks on my right,  
and almost keeping pace with the train.

And to my left, a tremendous cloud form  
that looks exactly like the head of a giant turtle  
trying to bite a cloud.

And I am passing Buffalo Bill's Ranch.  
And the Rolling Stones are singing "Miss You."  
And Amy, I miss you.

## Forty-Ninth Chorus

Strange to be here,  
and be reminded  
of one's own song  
written about one's own different self,  
some twelve years ago.

I was in the back of a 1969 Dodge Pace Arrow  
nicknamed "Solomon Grundy,"  
and I wrote a song called "Coal Black Dirt Sky" ...

*Nebraska is tall as heaven, and it's twice as wide  
And it's bound to take a lifetime to reach the other side  
And you don't even know what it looks like, because you never saw its day  
So Nebraska lies behind you, and just fades away*

It's daylight today in Nebraska,  
and it's summertime,  
and I'm heading west;  
this time towards Wyoming,  
not away.

~

*You leave behind the creaking night  
The whip-slap winds a-moaning  
Never again to see the wilds  
Of Nebraska and Wyoming.*

And yet,  
here  
is Nebraska.

## **Fiftieth Chorus**

I believe I have officially entered  
*The West.*

Between North Platte and Ogallala,  
I crossed into Mountain Time Zone.

So I am no longer in the east,  
I am no longer in the middle.

I am in  
*The Mountain Zone.*



## **Fifty-First Chorus**

Fur Trade Museum?

## Fifty-Second Chorus

A horse-track is a world like this;  
a secondary culture co-existing  
alongside the primary world—  
a secondary world,  
with its own rules, mores, hierarchies;  
they get up at different times, go to bed at different times.  
Self-enclosed, self-reliant, self-sufficient,  
self-generating, self-destroying.  
It's their world, and their void,  
alongside THIS world, and THIS void.  
Many of them don't speak English, many aren't legal—  
most are talented, hard-working;  
they get up in the middle of the night  
and go to sleep in the afternoon.  
They eat from taco trucks, and take drugs;  
*different* drugs, LOTS of drugs.  
It's an entirely separate economy,  
in mirror of the primary.

That's what it's like,  
this trucker world,  
and this is a whole other species of human.  
Their America is completely different  
from the America anybody else knows or sees.  
They eat in different places, eat different food,  
sleep in different beds,  
shower in different showers;  
What they know about America,  
nobody else knows.  
They SEE what doesn't show.  
There are no pictures  
of Trucker America.  
They keep it to themselves, and there's no way to find it.  
It's right in the middle of the world,  
but it's invisible, you can't see it,  
it's like the way squirrels and rabbits co-exist in a field  
with no idea the other is there.

It's very strange, Trucker America.  
It's not really *meant* to be exclusive.  
Consider the Hasidim in Brooklyn,  
who make a point of separating themselves out  
but who are highly visible

in their exclusivity.  
That is not the way  
of Trucker America.  
Truck America is separate of necessity;  
the requirements of commerce,  
the judgments of the city,  
the strict before and after  
so the current can succeed.

Trucker America  
is like Train America;  
a train takes you to and through a different city  
than the city people know.  
The industrial world, the warehouse world,  
the junkyard world.  
That's the city side that you see from a train.  
It's the city that you're not supposed to see,  
the secret that you're not meant to discover;  
like discovering a caesarean scar on your lover.

Truck America. Horse Track America. Train America.  
Invisible America in the middle of America.

## **Fifty-Third Chorus**

I've come thousands of miles  
just to touch your stomach;  
my wife, my child;  
I'm so tired.

## **Fifty-Fourth Chorus**

The graveyard in Dix, Nebraska  
has forty-plus headstones,  
by my eye.

## **Fifty-Fifth Chorus**

Wind-white wind turbines on the horizon;  
the pale, the blue backdrop.  
Off to the right, where the clouds  
gather,  
hovering over  
the point  
where the highway lines converge ...

~

White wind turbines  
slowly pinwheel  
on the horizon,  
before a backdrop of pale ...

~

White wind turbines slowly pinwheel on the horizon  
before a backdrop of pale nightshade blue  
to the north of where the clouds gather  
and hover over the highway lines' convergence ...

~

White  
wind  
turbines  
slowly  
pinwheel  
on the horizon  
before  
a backdrop  
of pale, bedsheet blue.  
To the north, the clouds gather and hover  
over the point  
where the highway lines seem to converge;  
the westward winds forever turning turbines ...

~

... forever churning the turbines.

~

White wind turbines  
slowly pinwheel in the breeze  
before a backdrop of pale, bedsheet blue,  
north of where the clouds gather and hover  
and the highway lines converge.

## **Fifty-Sixth Chorus**

A truck boneyard rusts  
on a slope; rugged grasses  
flipping off the wind.

Bug bodies pock the  
back of my side-mirror like  
currants on a scone.



## **Fifty-Seventh Chorus**

Coyote roadkill, the first confirmed.  
Beautiful auburns and grays in the fur,  
torso stretched out west to east,  
the tail pointing north.

By the state of its ruptured body, it would seem  
that a tire tore 'cross its belly,  
but it's turned the wrong direction for that.  
Something's been eating its guts.

The head is surprisingly intact;  
mouth open, tongue out, nostrils gaping.  
Only the lower jaw is starting to decompose,  
and the eyes are black, and present.

The tail, spiky and dry,  
is almost porcupine-quill-stiff;  
at that angle it looks almost  
like a handle.

## **Fifty-Eighth Chorus**

In the dark-green velvet valleys in between the bluffs,  
cloud shadows move like stingrays,  
like mood rings,  
changing moods  
from line to life.

## **Fifty-Ninth Chorus**

Geographically, my past is now behind me;  
I am finally west of Denver!

I am driving, driving west;  
west, straight into the wide, The Great Divide.

Rockies to the north,  
and to the south.

## **Sixtieth Chorus**

I am somewhere near Buford:  
Wyoming's smallest town,  
Population 1,  
established 1888.

Here's  
where  
the story  
ends.

## **Sixty-First Chorus**

Mungo Jerry  
on the radio singing  
*In The Summertime.*

So much better than  
The Sundays.

## Sixty-Second Chorus

The American East Coast:  
competitive, nasty, back-stabbing, eviscerating,  
scaling, climbing, trampling, hypochondriacal,  
hung-up, uptight, blue-lawed, Freudian insanity,

versus the wild, visceral, raw,  
brutal, challenging scope and expanse  
of The West!

Give me The West!  
Elevation 8,649,  
give me this West!

For when you paddle through  
the snow, rain, thunderstorm, lightning, earthquake, rockslide,  
days-on-end between towns,  
enormous heights,  
dizzy depths,  
mountain winds and ways,  
you come eventually  
to the guiding  
seer, spirit angel  
of The West,  
the Pacific Ocean!

Pacific = peaceful;  
the great, kindly, magic  
of the Pacific,  
of The West.

And in The East?

Just wound-up, un-sprung  
spring competitive exclusivity  
permeated riddled ought-nastiness;  
all in, The East, and for what?  
To be shattered  
by the freezing brutality of the Atlantic?  
The ocean that will pound you, and pound you,  
for having thought that you were better  
than the person whose head you stand upon,  
beating your chest?

Give me The West!

Give me these mesas,  
these buttes, these bluffs, these canyons, these hollows,  
these creeks, these brooks, these rivers, these mountains, these hills,  
give me pines, redwoods,  
give me rich, red rocks,  
give me adobe, give me brown-skin people.

Give me stage-fright. Give me vertigo.  
Give me the bends. Give me The West!

Give me *this* God,  
give me *this* gold,  
give me *these* gloves,  
give me *this* homosexual sex!

At least here,  
feeling is acupuncture,  
and rock-climbing.  
Not a couch,  
in an office,  
with a Freudian.

Out, over, down, and through,  
to The West,  
where right now  
(and I know this, because I spoke to her on the phone  
less than half-an-hour ago)  
my missus is skipping a rock  
in my honor—

the Pacific,  
stretching out its broad back  
for my missus to play a child's game  
upon it  
**for me.**

## **Sixty-Third Chorus**

To be like a crea-  
ture who lives in Wyoming,  
and eats grass in peace.



## **Sixty-Fourth Chorus**

"Museum Of The Mountain,"  
Pinedale, Wyoming.

And Utah is up ahead,  
just the other side  
of the Continental Divide,

where the waters turn west,  
and run with me.

## **Sixty-Fifth Chorus**

A crow balances on a ranch fence  
in 40-mile-an-hour Wyoming winds;  
he looks like he's flying, with a fence in his claws,  
through a sky of greying green.

~

The Rocky Mountains;  
glazed, frosted,  
with a rich, salt-lick cream  
across the crests.

~

A tattered black plastic bag  
caught in a ranch fence,  
as if a crow had just been shredded  
from its perch.

## **Sixty-Sixth Chorus**

Jazz is not the sound of the country,  
but it's damn sure the sound  
of black and pretty.

## **Sixty-Seventh Chorus**

The *Mile 243* signpost,  
in Wyoming.

The two-thousand-mile sign  
in my head.

Next is Rawlins,  
point of entry,

to the Great Divide Basin;  
the break in The Rockies.

A thousand miles  
to go

until the break in the basin  
of my head.

## **Sixty-Eighth Chorus**

7000 miles above the sea,  
hurtling west alongside  
a seemingly endless Mount Rushmore  
of God frowns;  
countenances I can't look upon  
nor recognize  
for their true faces.

I am fixed into the right lane at 70 miles an hour,  
in a long convoy of trucks  
whose secrets remain secrets by their drivers;  
Truck America.

The sun, straight overhead,  
keeps lamping down;  
no clouds to lend our shadows  
to the landscape.  
To the right, a white cross,  
bright red & white flowers  
at its base.

To feel the first face;  
to feel someone dead here  
is to know  
the heart of old Wyoming's  
eerie quiet.

## Sixty-Ninth Chorus

How do you explain Wyoming  
to someone who hasn't been here before?  
How big it is, how wide it is, how high it is,  
how tremendous the sky is.  
How bushed, shrubbed, and tree'd it is?  
How bouldered, mesa'd, butted, cragged it is?  
How brown, and dirt, and grass, and earth it is?

How do you explain  
the low wind-humped spread of it?  
The geometry of it?  
How the land surges up  
as if once it was a cauldron; something liquid,  
as if it was bubbling up,  
and then suddenly froze,  
leaving a flat expanse covered with huge bubbles  
that were then sheared flat across the top?

How do you explain Wyoming  
to someone who has never seen it before?  
How do you explain the feeling of looking over your left shoulder  
and seeing miles and miles and miles away;  
a tightly compacted serpentine row of deep black chocolate cupcakes  
capped with snow-white frosting, all in a line, as far as you can see;  
how do you explain that's what The Rocky Mountains look like,  
and that they're miles and miles away from you?

How do you explain  
how clouds come down and touch snow,  
and how those are two different kinds of white;  
how one has a blue in it, and the other,  
a slate?

How do you explain the intricate,  
interwoven, effort-expanding cat's cradle of telephone wires  
that completely cover Wyoming?  
How do you explain what it's like to see parallel train tracks  
with trains running opposite directions, passing one another,  
making you hear Muddy Waters in your head ?  
*I've got two, two trains runnin', oh, but neither one goin' my way*  
How do you explain traveling through this kind of land with Muddy Waters in your head  
to someone who has not seen Wyoming, or heard Muddy Waters?

How do you explain  
the weird signposts marking your progress,  
those Little America hotel signs  
that are so strange,  
with their frozen children  
licking ice cream  
and their plasticene parents hovering around  
frozen swimming pools?  
And the signs with the promises that say, "We're Always Open,"  
"Kids Stay For Free," "Spoil Yourself";  
the signs that count down the miles,  
starting a hundred miles before,  
until you're within five miles  
of finally finding out  
what Little America might be,  
like Burma Shave.

How do you explain the peculiar shade of gray-purple  
that is somehow a part of the miasma of green  
that lines the interstate with bushy, pale, grey, dusty, craggy, low-lying  
shrubby purple, interspersed amongst the wind-tuppened greens?

How do you explain this to someone  
who has not been to Wyoming before,  
and driven through all this?

The oil pumps, the strangely alive, strangely  
biological shape and movement of the oil drills;  
how do you explain that?

How do you explain  
the strange spread of squashed bugs  
on a windshield,  
how it makes you rub your eyes because you think you have a lash,  
or some encrusted piece of sleep  
queering up our vision?  
One, two, three, four, fifty, seven hundred, a thousand bugs  
slapping against your windshield like bullets!

And then suddenly, you're there:  
Exit 68,  
one mile  
to Little America.

And it's funny, because you really, by this time,

want to know.

But it's just a hotel.

A Little America Hotel.

Little America, in Big Wyoming.

Wyoming.

The 9<sup>th</sup> largest state  
in the United States,  
and the least populated  
of them all.



## **Seventieth Chorus**

Yesterday, I mostly kept the radio off,  
kept the headphones off,  
just listened to the sound of the road.

The subtle changes in the engine's burly revolutions,  
the erratic slaps of the wind,  
the arrival and disappearance of the fan.

Other engines, other cars,  
the sound of a train racing me, parallel, towards the west.

Just the air.

## **Seventy-First Chorus**

Today, instead of racing trains, I'm going to race the sun,  
to see who can make California first;

it's well behind me now.  
We'll see ...

## Seventy-Second Chorus

I'll confess  
that if one were  
to found a new religion,  
if one were to believe  
that one was called  
to be  
a new messiah,  
this landscape  
is the one to inspire this.  
It's hard  
to be in this,  
and not believe  
in God.  
This is just,  
you are not just;  
God—  
a hierarchical God,  
a hierarchical God  
that sits in a throne  
atop a pyramid of royalty  
where you refer to this God  
with terms like, *Majesty*.  
*Majesty*, this landscape;  
it truly can make you believe there is a holy king  
presiding  
over a dominion  
of followers,  
participants  
in the grand theater  
of human life.

Of all life.

This stage, this backdrop, this living participant,  
upon which we sleep, walk, travel,  
breathe, breed—  
this *is*  
a kingdom,  
there *is*  
a majesty.  
I believe.

## **Seventy-Third Chorus**

Trains cut across spreads  
of Great Salt Lake; from above,  
the gray-scale rock gut.

## **Seventy-Fourth Chorus**

...and then you turn a corner  
and see the dark underbelly  
of the holy kingdom.

NINE billboards in a row  
advertising West Wendover's Jacuzzis,  
races, sport boats,  
steakhouses, slots.

NINE billboards in a row,  
in the middle of  
all this holy dreamscape.

Advertising gambling,  
meat,  
and water sports.

## **Seventy-Fifth Chorus**

And there it is; Morton Salt!  
The gal with the blue bucket umbrella!

And these amazing cones  
of bright white salt behind her.

## **Seventy-Sixth Chorus**

Don't forget *knolls*.  
Buttes, bluffs, mesas,  
and *knolls*.

## Seventy-Seventh Chorus

Heroic acts of self-remembrance  
fill the Great Salt Lake up—

Along the highway-side,  
people have gathered rocks and spelled out words,  
or made heart shapes and put their initials inside;  
in a great many places, people have gathered together  
11, 12, 15, sometimes 30 or 40 by the looks of it,  
glass bottles —beer, liquor— and buried them  
neck-deep in the salt, butts upended;  
like ducks in a lake,  
feathered backsides pointing towards the sky.

Food is not all  
that salt preserves.



## Seventy-Eighth Chorus

Oh,  
so *that's* the sculpture  
my parents wanted me to see!  
That giant,  
artificial tree.

## **Seventy-Ninth Chorus**

A white desert,  
where the trains grow short.

## **Eightieth Chorus**

Not actually a white desert, of course;  
a multiplicity of shades: tan, hints of ochre,  
yellow, gray, corduroy,  
even brougham!

## **Eighty-First Chorus**

Pacific Standard Time!!!

## **Eighty-Second Chorus**

Crosses just  
suddenly appear  
from the bowels of these  
riddled  
rocks, just suddenly  
put forth  
with no  
warning; some  
utterly  
bare, white as  
bone, and equally  
sparse,  
knotted together  
at the joint,  
rough on the edges, others  
so ornate, almost  
Byzantine.  
A few with  
writing;  
"God Bless," or  
"RIP Robert."  
The more ornate, it seems, the less  
language; as if the message  
is in the beauty  
of the marker itself—  
No need to speak  
of what lies beneath.

## Eighty-Third Chorus

The artificial valley in between the interstate's two directions ...

~

In the artificial valley  
in between the interstate's two directions,  
shrubs grow like mushrooms,  
tough as cauliflower,  
in all their shades of ...

~

In the artificial valley in between the interstate's two directions, shrubs grow like mushrooms, tough as cauliflower, all the colors of the rainbow...

~

In the artificial valley between the interstate's two directions,  
shrubs grow like mushrooms, tough as cauliflower,  
all the colors of a rainbow coated in dust:

dusty periwinkle, muted fuschia,  
pale lavender, swamp green,  
lemon'd avocado, scarecrow-hair yellow,  
corduroy brown, aging ochre,  
fading wintergreen, grubby cheesecloth,  
worn-out burlap, well-worn eraser.

## **Eighty-Fourth Chorus**

You see it on a map, and you think,  
"Oh,  
Battle Mountain."

And of course  
you see mountains all the time, and you think, "Yes,  
mountains."

And you get closer, and you look ahead,  
and you see the letters  
BM  
painted in white on the low slope;  
huge letters.

And it takes you a couple minutes,  
but then you realize, "Oh,  
Battle Mountain."

And then you think, "Wow,  
it's right in front of me,"

and then, "Wow!  
It's fucking enormous."

And even then,

but then,  
ahah!

You put two and two together,  
and you realize, "Fuck,  
I have to go over that."

A battle indeed.  
Very clever.

## **Eighty-Fifth Chorus**

And I'm looking at a big billboard  
for a Mexican Restaurant,  
and my first reaction is, "Yeah, right."

But then I think, "Well,  
I don't know,  
there *are* rivers ..."

And then I think, "Well,  
if it's caught in a river,  
is it still seafood?"



## **Eighty-Sixth Chorus**

And then, while  
contemplating  
this one,

and accordingly,  
all the *other* auto graveyards in America too,

I slowly begin to realize  
that the road is veering right,  
and I'm not going over  
Battle Mountain after all.

And so I silently praise  
the early pioneers  
for their staunch revision  
of heights.

And then I pass a sign that says "Battle Mountain ..."

*Wait, what the fuck did that say?*

"Battle Mountain, Gateway to Nevada's Outback?"

## **Eighty-Seventh Chorus**

Amendment:

All the colors of a rainbow,  
basted in dust.

## **Eighty-Eighth Chorus**

Passed a wreck on the Interstate just now;  
a pretty fierce one:

two vehicles,  
both mangled.

It looked like the police  
had just got there.

Couldn't tell  
if there were bodies or not,

but I hope, when next I drive through,  
there is no cross there.

## **Eighty-Ninth Chorus**

Stopping for a coffee  
in Puckerbrush, Nevada.

And then ...

IMLAY!

## Ninetieth Chorus

In all seriousness,  
I think I am starting to hallucinate;  
though only slightly.

Not so much because of the altitude,  
it's just, with the heat,  
and the eyestrain,  
and the roads being so long,  
and the landscape and horizon being so wide,  
it's just that it gets progressively more difficult to  
really focus properly. Accordingly,  
at just the right angle,  
road signs slide up in such a way that I'd swear it was  
people walking by the side of the road,  
and I have seen prison signs, hitchhiking prohibited,  
that sort of thing,  
so it's not out of the realm of possible, that that would enter one's imagination.  
And again, there's those crosses.

To think of a ghost, cursed to this.  
A ghost of the Nevada Outback.

~

Poor Mr. Penske's fan has been on overdrive for hours;  
fortunately, the coolant leak seems to have vanished.  
I'm not entirely sure how that's possible,  
but it has.

~

I saw rabbit roadkill for the first time.  
A sort of stringy, desert rabbit.  
And lots of other roadkill, too.  
Though I also saw a tiny little chipmunk  
make it safe.

~

Not much has changed  
since the last time I spoke  
with my missus.

~

Off to the right,  
north of the Interstate,  
is the Rye Patch Reservoir,  
and this stretch of mountains  
is the Trinity Range.

I should be less  
than a hundred and forty miles  
east of Reno now;

Ah, there we go, Exit 129, Rye Patch Dam, 1 mile,  
so that places me.

## **Ninety-First Chorus**

*...when these men heard the law of God,  
they allowed the law of God to do its work!  
You know what that was?*

~

*...They didn't get the Catechisms!  
They didn't get your bible verses!  
They didn't get the ABCs of The Gospel!  
They didn't worship in the temple!  
Man, they found a real line,  
straight to Christ!*

~

*...Isaiah 55:3. This here is a wonderful lesson  
for you and I, and it will get better next week!  
If you get half of what God gave me,  
it's gonna be good for you!  
Isaiah Chapter 55, listen to what it says!  
I'm gonna read verses one through three, and tell me,  
is this not your experience?  
Oh, everyone that, what?  
Do you see it? Oh, everyone,  
I tell you, this Gideonite's thirsty!*

## **Ninety-Second Chorus**

Note to self: Look up the name of the correctional facility in Lovelock, Nevada.



## Ninety-Third Chorus

Seeing these  
no hitchhiking signs:

### *Hitchhiking Prohibited*

on the side of the interstate, reminds me of a night,  
many, many, many years ago,  
back when I was living in  
Richmond, California — Point Richmond —  
down by the trainyard.

Late one night, I was driving home,  
from Oakland, or Berkeley, or San Francisco, or somewhere,  
and I saw a hitchhiker,  
and I almost stopped,  
I almost stopped to pick him up,  
but I didn't ...  
I went past, I was  
too cautious about it, then sick to my stomach about it.

I told myself, I said, "This is an extremely important moment  
in your life."  
And I felt myself to be in a critical stage.  
I felt that the rebel, outsider artist  
persona that I'd been living  
was just that, a persona; I was not that person,  
I was lying to myself.  
And I guess the way I thought about it  
exposed that as true;  
I wasn't a natural.

I talked to myself, back and forth, terrified;  
one side of me said, "Well, what if I get myself fucking killed?"  
And the other side of me said, "What a fucking suburban bigot you are."  
And I was helpless  
because I wasn't a natural,  
I was in my head, not in my body.  
So I went back and forth, vacillating,  
and I made myself sicker and sicker, until finally I decided,  
"This is SO important,  
I have to, I have to do this."

So I got off the freeway, and I circled all the way back;

by this point I was miles past, but I went back  
and tried to guess the exit that would be  
the one before where he had been.  
Thinking, all the while, that knowing me and all my thinking ,  
he would not even be there.

"Whatever happens," I told myself.  
And in my head, I think I really made peace with that.  
And I also hid my money in my sock,  
and found a wrench under the seat.

And anyway, I circled back, and I got back up on the freeway,  
and I started heading his direction,  
and he was still there.

And I just pulled over,  
and I picked him up.  
And I asked him where he was going,  
and he was going across the Golden Gate,  
into Marin, and that was not where I was going,  
but I took him anyway, I went  
10, 20, some 30 miles out of my way,  
just took this guy where he wanted to go.  
And in the end, you know,  
not much happened.  
We talked a little bit, not much.  
And I dropped him off,  
and I drove home.

But I swear, a decade-and-a-half later,  
with all that sort of youthful foolish adventuring idealism  
long since leaked from me,  
I can still, without any sense of melodrama,  
say that was one of the most important nights of my life.  
Because I think I really did learn who I was  
and who I wanted to be.

I did learn that I was going to be different.

And I did decide I was going to be part  
of a different America.

And I *did* learn, that I would do it  
*my way*.

And so I began to very carefully lose myself  
**into a less-than-careful world.**

## Ninety-Fourth Chorus

Continued from the previous:  
*I was going to lose myself  
into a less than careful world.*

About a month ago, I gave a lecture  
at a private school  
—as a published poet, and songwriter—  
on the subject of  
spontaneity and craft,  
and how it's at their  
intersection  
that the deepest, most profound,  
most influential art  
occurs.

And as I think about it now,  
that's what I learned that night,  
that was the first time in my life,  
I truly experienced  
what it meant  
to exist  
at the crossroads.

I would have never picked that hitchhiker up  
as a purely spontaneous gesture;  
I'm not like that,  
I'm not a natural,  
I don't live in my body,  
I live in my head.  
Instead,  
I committed the truth  
of a spontaneous act,  
by careful, studied, planning.

Spontaneity and craft.  
Picking up a hitchhiker,  
in Richmond, California,  
late at night,  
when I was fairly  
younger.

## **Ninety-Fifth Chorus**

*I'll be drinkin' red wine out a flat-bottom glass...*

*I'll be drinkin' red wine out a flat-bottom glass...*

*I'll be drinkin' red wine out a flat-bottom glass...*

*I'll be drinkin' red wine out a flat-bottom glass...*

*I'll be drinkin' red wine out a flat-bottom glass...*

*I'll be drinkin' red wine out a flat-bottom glass...*

## **Ninety-Sixth Chorus**

Ok, ok ...

here we go ...

5 ...

4 ...

3 ...

2 ...

1 ...

5, 4, 3, 2, 1 ...

California.

The End.



## Postscript

My missus was pregnant, and we'd come to California for a wedding. She stayed, and I flew back to New York to pack up our life and drive it back. I rented a 26-foot yellow Penske truck, and I loaded it alone, and I drove for 4-and-a-half days straight, 3001 miles, to join her again in California. I had a hand-held digital dictaphone with me, and I spontaneously composed spoken-word poems as I drove, and I recorded as I drove, and I made it finally, and the dictaphone went into a box somewhere, and I forgot all about it, until years later I found it. And one night, I set up my laptop in the little second bathroom, because that was my office, and I transcribed everything that was on that dictaphone. I took Kerouac's *Mexico City Blues* as my inspiration, but instead of little notebook pages, I had these dictaphone entries, and every time I started a recording was the beginning of a poem, and every time I stopped recording was the end of a poem, and like Kerouac had done, I called them 'choruses', and when all was said and done, there were 96 of them, and what you have here are those choruses—a long, strange, 3001-mile solo.

*For Amy and Clara Bay*

*Teg yw edrych tuag adref - It is good to look homewards*