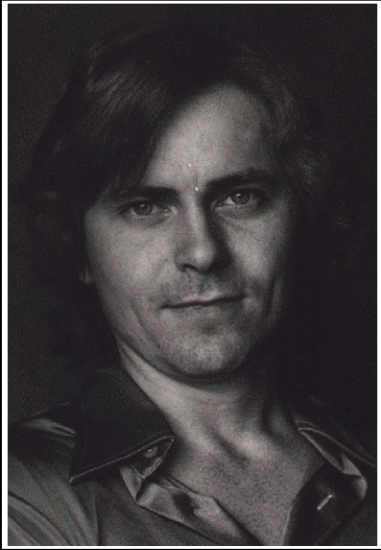


Young, Gifted, and Obnoxious



Poems 1965-1978
by Michael Finley

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On the occasion of a reading at
The Black Dog Caff.
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THE PITTSFIELD TORNADO

easter twister
scrapes through
town, a hoe

of steel
in the grip
of god

away with winter's
hangers-
on

and break
fresh ground
for planting

ONE WEEK before HIGH SCHOOLGRADUATION, I MAKE a VISITto MARBLEHEAD PENINSULA

Limestone quarry, blue pool
With white sides -- men have
Made something beautiful here
By hauling away the world.

A young man learns to suck
Time from a cigarette, feel
The life of stone expend itself
Underfoot at the center

Of an argument deep and hot
Within the earth, whose
Debates and rebuttals
Are never resolved.

Solidity implies something
Happening to all of us,
Suggests most things are
Simpler than they seem.

Water, rock, light are what
You get for answers;
Water, rock, light and envy

Perhaps for things that last,

Advance regret for things
That go wrong, and the hard
And useless knowledge that
Something deep inside agrees.

THE MAN IN THE AIR

The man in the air has been falling since Thursday.
He has an appointment on Sunday, at noon.

Time is important -- he has always been punctual.
He checks his watch for the seventh time today.
In his mind he goes over the names of the clients ahead of him,
the names of their families, the memory
of the perfect handshake.
My business is people, he says in the air.
I'm not just selling pieces of paper,
I am selling satisfaction,
I am selling myself.

He is almost sure how to do it this time.
A terrific idea will come to him soon;
until then, Pleasant day,
unlike Friday, falling all afternoon and during the best hours
of the early evening through light rain.

He holds out his hand in the rush of air.
Warmer now, almost perfect, he thinks.
Already I am having presentiments of success.

The man in the air is turning and twisting,
the cloth of his trousers is flapping around him.

He is falling head first,
he is sure he will get
where he's traveling soon, flying upward

CARTOON

en route to your party
i am handed a lit stick of dynamite
and being polite
do not refuse

blackface and smoking collar
i proceed, failing to notice
the two-ton safe
descending from a fifth story window

no matter, though wrinkled
i make my way to you despite doors
opened in my face
flattening it considerably

too many incidents to recount them all
the locomotive charging from the doorway
me poised for several moments
over the manhole before falling

the wet cement awaiting me
soon hardened but
do not despair love
i am coming

NEW FRIEND

in midmay the springtime
stops holding its breath
the trees light up like
fireworks of green
the screen doors slam like
the first time ever

winter was hard, the car
got crashed, my bike got
stolen, my dog run over,
my credit trashed

but i love my new friend Rachel
she is pretty and sweet to me
she makes me happy
like water flushed with
melting snow

everyone tells me it's true
but i believe it anyway

LOVE SONG

golder than the simple capitol of sweetness
and sweeter than the bridges of love
our directionless desires
and the one life, life
are these the orchards of your hair
and the hands i love so plenty
with hills and the happy swell
of your blue like the untroubled
window your weather

look upon these undiluted eyes
your satin beams of rain
your sight and scope
your clear suburban stare

your roads into wilderness
wetland thighs so cattailed with you
the west and east of the brushed in dance
now glistening oil

you set the table that sings
in the cottage of flesh
and i roam your countryside making wrong turns
unto hamlets and county seats and acres
and acres of love

paint me the dye of you
close to your current
drawn like and flapping this
happiest flag

THIS GUN SHOOTS BLACK HOLES

"If we can travel indefinitely outward from a given point, we also travel infinitely into that point, never reaching center."

- Rutherford

Imagine a bullet that swallows its gun
that sucks up assassins
and targets at will:
the more it absorbs,
the smaller it
gets.

Trees shoot into the bullet, streets tear free
from their beds and jump into it,
thunderheads condense and pour
into the bullet, and the bullet
shrinks down to
the dot of
an eye.

Finally the whole planet is clawing its way
into this particle of dust and the flaps
of the universe come undone and fly
into the thing that is now
so small that everything's
died and gone
into it.

It moves in trillions now. Nonillions now.

Quindecillions. Vigintillions.

And life goes on
under our red roof
with no one the wiser.
I ask for the horseradish.
You pass it my way. And we
look at one another, traveling.

TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION

thirty seconds short of a miracle
reminds the world
to keep me on my toes

forget it's a poem it's
life everlasting and what would
you give for life everlasting

i am a cracker breaking into
the crumbs of what i am, fit for a journey
through a thousand carnivorous years

remember me the way you first glimpsed me
through the wrong end of the telescope
that's me in the distance, my hand in yours

shut the door the thing out there
that was us will go away
and let us remember

a privilege it was to bless this
space that was our duty
to keep busy with being

WE ASKED FOR A SIGN

Three days he waited to fart.
Then it came, endlessly bubbling,
like a machine gun in honey.
His widow smiled thinly.

SALESMEN

Have surrounded your home,
They sleep in shifts, handcuffed
To black satchels.
They demand one of your party hostage,
But you are alone.
You send them a message, "No Deals."
Tonight your attempted escape
Was anticipated.
As they gather around the car,
You turn up the volume,
Wheels spinning tirelessly.

WATER HILLS

The water hills are
High today. Water
Hills meaning us, how
We break up the
Surface of things,
And make the lake we
Rise from more
Interesting.
Something burning and
Electric with
Insistence is in us,
Scratching, tapping
In our skulls. Some
Unnegotiable body of
Water rocks us in its
Arms, and in the
Distance collected
Like blue waves
Between us the man
Kisses deeply and
Longingly wife, and
The lightning
Sticking in our heads
Makes fire, each

Inhalation fills the
Sail, borne aloft by
A hand so strong the
Boat and sea obey.

just as the man stepped
off the chair and into
the noose the building
shook the walls caved
in an arm of water
18 feet at the crest
swept into the room

YOU CAN'T QUIT YOU'RE FIRED

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