**Missing Dates**

Slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills.

It is not the effort nor the failure tires.

The waste remains, the waste remains and kills.

It is not your system or clear sight that mills

Down small to the consequence a life requires;

Slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills.

They bled an old dog dry yet the exchange rills

Of young dog blood gave but a month’s desires;

The waste remains, the waste remains and kills.

It is the Chinese tombs and the slag hills

Usurp the soil, and not the soil retires.

Slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills.

Not to have fire is to be a skin that shrills.

The complete fire is death. From partial fires

The waste remains, the waste remains and kills.

It is the poems you have lost, the ills

From missing dates, at which the heart expires.

Slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills.

The waste remains, the waste remains and kills.

- William Empson

**Veracruz**

In Veracruz, city of breezes & sailors & loud birds,

an old man, I walked the Malecón by the sea,

and I thought of my father, who when a young man

had walked the Malecón in Havana, dreaming of Brazil,

and I wished he had gone to Brazil

& learned magic,

and I wished my father had come back to San Francisco

armed with Brazilian magic, & that he had married

not my mother, but her brother, whom he truly loved.

I wish my father had, like Tiresias, changed himself into a

   woman,

& that he had been impregnated by my uncle, & given birth to

   me as a girl.

I wish that I had grown up in San Francisco as a girl,

a tall, serious girl,

& that eventually I had come to Veracruz,

& walking on the Malecón, I had met a sailor,

a Mexican sailor or a sailor from some other country—

                                 maybe a Brazilian sailor,

& that he had married me, & I had become pregnant

                                 by him,

so that I could give birth at last to my son—the boy

                                 I love.

- George Stanley

**The God Who Loves You**

It must be troubling for the god who loves you

To ponder how much happier you’d be today

Had you been able to glimpse your many futures.

It must be painful for him to watch you on Friday evenings

Driving home from the office, content with your week—

Three fine houses sold to deserving families—

Knowing as he does exactly what would have happened

Had you gone to your second choice for college,

Knowing the roommate you’d have been allotted

Whose ardent opinions on painting and music

Would have kindled in you a lifelong passion.

A life thirty points above the life you’re living

On any scale of satisfaction. And every point

A thorn in the side of the god who loves you.

You don’t want that, a large-souled man like you

Who tries to withhold from your wife the day’s disappointments

So she can save her empathy for the children.

And would you want this god to compare your wife

With the woman you were destined to meet on the other campus?

It hurts you to think of him ranking the conversation

You’d have enjoyed over there higher in insight

Than the conversation you’re used to.

And think how this loving god would feel

Knowing that the man next in line for your wife

Would have pleased her more than you ever will

Even on your best days, when you really try.

Can you sleep at night believing a god like that

Is pacing his cloudy bedroom, harassed by alternatives

You’re spared by ignorance? The difference between what is

And what could have been will remain alive for him

Even after you cease existing, after you catch a chill

Running out in the snow for the morning paper,

Losing eleven years that the god who loves you

Will feel compelled to imagine scene by scene

Unless you come to the rescue by imagining him

No wiser than you are, no god at all, only a friend

No closer than the actual friend you made at college,

The one you haven’t written in months. Sit down tonight

And write him about the life you can talk about

With a claim to authority, the life you’ve witnessed,

Which for all you know is the life you've chosen.

- Carl Dennis

**Postscript**

And some time make the time to drive out west

Into County Clare, along the Flaggy Shore,

In September or October, when the wind

And the light are working off each other

So that the ocean on one side is wild

With foam and glitter, and inland among stones

The surface of a slate-grey lake is lit

By the earthed lightning of a flock of swans,

Their feathers roughed and ruffling, white on white,

Their fully grown headstrong-looking heads

Tucked or cresting or busy underwater.

Useless to think you’ll park or capture it

More thoroughly. You are neither here nor there,

A hurry through which known and strange things pass

As big soft buffetings come at the car sideways

And catch the heart off guard and blow it open.

- Seamus Heaney