

I didn't start writing songs until my late 30s, although I'd been working on reportage, fiction, and creative essays since my teen years. These lyrics, crafted over a prolific 5-year period, turned out to be a mix of little fictions and cheeky punditry. There's a pessimism and paranoia that emerges unforced from me, and I try not to disavow those dark attitudes. For each song, I have a sense of its origin, or the resonant line or spark of story that started it...but I'm still amazed they turned out to be as cohesive, narrative, and visual as they did.

Selections below are from INNOCENT MONSTER (to be produced) and MEMOIR (2007).

“Monster”

I build a monster in my basement, and tried to teach him how to talk.
But he could never manage more than an unintelligible squawk.
I sent him up to the state college to earn his history degree.
But what he learned there was so gruesome, back to the basement did he flee.

He say “Words, they fail me, they fail me, they fail me,” he say
“Words, they fail me, they fail me, they fail me...ev'ry time.”

I put a parrot in my parlor, and waited long for her to speak.
But she preferred to perch in silence, quietly burnish her mystique.
I wondered if she were a goddess, reincarnated here and now.
Does Polly really want a cracker, or does she want me to kowtow?
She say, “Words, they fail me, they fail me, they fail me,” she say
“Words, they fail me, they fail me, they fail me...ev'ry time.”

I hid a painting in my closet, a kind of emblem of my soul.
And while I lived a life unblemished, the hidden portrait did get old.
And when the time came to be honest about the sins that I'd disowned,
I took a glance at that dark portrait, and my poor tongue did turn to stone,
I say, “Words, they fail me, they fail me, they fail me,” I say
“Words, they fail me, they fail me, they fail me...ev'ry time.”

“Innocent”

I don't want to know it, don't want to talk about it,
Even hear it all debated on the television show.
Can't abide discussion, tolerate dissension, analyze progression
Or come up with alternate scenarios.
I want to live my life like an innocent,
unburdened of the need to know.
Done with contemplation, sick of rumination,
Tired of trying to figure out what makes
This topsy-turvy world go.

Gertrude Stein is in the city of nets tonight.
She and Alice B. have prepared a beautiful spread.
Bring yourselves but leave your damaged goods behind.
That childish nonsense is bound to cloud your head.

Tired of being hounded, tragedies compounded, totally
Astounded by the terror and the bloody vengeance queue.
Can't afford ambition, filled with inanition,
Passively conditioned to believe there's nothing else that I can do.
I want to sleep as deep as an innocent,
Swaddled in pick or blue.
Won't accept revision of my indecision.
This is how it was and how it will be,
So I leave it all for you (to fix).

Gertrude Stein is in the city of nets tonight.
She and Alice B. have prepared a beautiful spread.
Bring yourselves but leave your damaged goods behind.
That childish nonsense is bound to cloud your head.

“Petting Zoo”

All those open mouths at the petting zoo,
All that naked yearning reminds me of you.
Days of desert dry, no sign of morning dew.
Years of empty gestures, of motions gone through.

How can I feed you?
How can I feed you?
How can I feed you?
I'm starving, too.

Hungry little creature bites the hand that feeds.
Dribs and drabs of nurture fall like precious beads.
Innocent and woolly still knows how to bleed.
When did mere survival start to look like greed?

How can I feed you?
How can I feed you?
How can I feed you?
I'm starving, too.

Picture just a dropper filled with what we dream.
Memory of abundance, honey golden cream.
Something to sustain us, or we'll lose our steam.
What is now a trickle was once a rushing stream.

How can I feed you?
How can I feed you?
How can I feed you?
I'm starving, too.

“Memoir” *(A paeon to truthiness in our time. I wrote this in 2006, in response to James Frey having fabricated large parts of his alleged autobiography, A MILLION LITTLE PIECES. This was well before the election of our current liar-in-chief. I suppose the yearning for dramatic falsehoods has been with us, always.)*

“Utter lies,” she demanded.
Tell me what I want to hear.
Let the others be reprimanded.
Here you have nothing to fear.
I don’t want something as simple,
As to know what’s really real.
Just the beautiful story
That won’t complicate how I feel.

“It’s no use,” she explained,
“yearning for the thing that’s true.
We all see what we want to see,
And do what we want to do.
I once tried to discover
What there lies behind the veil.
But compared to the fiction,
the facts are awfully pale.
Compared to the fiction,
the facts are awfully pale.”

“Mark Me” (if “Petting Zoo” was the end of a grand passion, “Mark Me” was its beginning)

Skin on skin on skin.
Where do I end and you begin?
Our mothers would have called this ‘living in sin.’
We just call it living.

Hand inside my hand.
Lead you all across this land.
Fingertips like a burning brand,
Taking what you’re giving.

Mark me as yours, mark me as yours.
Close all the windows and the doors,
Chain my hear to the floor,
Mark me as yours.
Mark me as yours, mark me as yours.
I’m not wandering anymore, so baby,
Mark me as yours.

Morning comes too soon.
Sun replaces blessed moon.
Soak our hides in the heat of noon.
That should keep us spinning.

Breath inhales a breath.
Air enough to outrun death.
Restless vines grow over the path,
And butterflies yearn for pinning.

Mark me as yours, mark me as yours.
Close all the windows and the doors,
Chain my hear to the floor,
Mark me as yours.
Mark me as yours, mark me as yours.
I’m not wandering anymore, so baby,
Mark me as yours.

Pacing 'round the crate.
Bar the door before too late.
The opposite of love is not called hate.
Something more like...slipping.
Skin on skin on skin.
Can't believe the state we're in.
Don't say a word or the room will spin,
And we'll be torn apart.

Mark me as yours, mark me as yours.
Close all the windows and the doors,
Chain my hear to the floor,
Mark me as yours.
Mark me as yours, mark me as yours.
I'm not wandering anymore, so baby,
Mark me as yours.

“Rigged Game”

Life is deadly, you say,
And then you act immortal anyway.
As if the law of gravity doesn't apply here.
We came in from the fray
And we found you just like yesterday,
As if the clocks had all decided to stand still.

And it's a rigged game you play,
Living only for today,
Dancing on your feet of clay,
As if there won't be hell to play.
Yes it's a rigged game you play,
Living only for today,
Dancing on your feet of clay,
As if there won't be hell to play.

You put on your fancy shoes,
Dine out on unpaid dues,
And wait for someone else to point in a direction.
You have all heard the news but you risk it
Daily just to lose.
As if you'll never have to total up the bill.

And it's a rigged game you play,
Living only for today,
Dancing on your feet of clay,
As if there won't be hell to play.
Yes it's a rigged game you play,
Living only for today,
Dancing on your feet of clay,
As if there won't be hell to play.

We put on our fancy shoes,
We dine out on unpaid dues,
And wait for someone else to point in a direction.
We have all heard the news but we risk it

Daily just to lose.
As if we'll never have to total up the bill.

And it's a rigged game we play,
Living only for today,
Dancing on our feet of clay,
As if there won't be hell to pay.
It's a rigged game we play,
Living only for today,
Dancing on our feet of clay,
As if there won't be hell to pay.

“What Have You”

You've got the house that looks like a magazine spread,
And the job that pays like crime.
You've got the grand ideas busting out of your head,
And the manner so sublime,
But you don't have me.
You don't have me.
You don't have me.

You've got detailed plans to conquer the world,
And the will to make them real.
Much too impatient to watch grit turn to pearl,
So you'll take what you can steal.
But you can't take me,
You can't take me,
You don't have me.

Just for a moment you were tender and real,
And through your eyes, the light was true.
But you preferred to mock the way that you feel,
And concentrate on well-to-do.
It hardly matters now—it was so long ago—
You were young and anxious—what did you know.
And no one told you things just go how they go.
You tried to run your life like some dog and phony show.
But you couldn't run me,
You can't run me,
You don't have me.

“Friday Night With the Elephant Man”

Friday night with the elephant man:
Freak just wants to have fun.
Says, “I don’t know when the pain will end,
But I guess I’m not the only one.”

Friday night with the desperate man:
Can’t turn his face up to the sun.
Says, “I don’t know what the end will bring,
But I’ll lie back now and let it be done.”

“Your Silence”

You answered my question, with silence,
Silence that fills the room we share.
It's like a kind of soundless violence, your silence.
It poisons the air.
Cross the floor, out the door,
I'll come back here no more.
For I cannot abide your silence,
The bitter truth it hides from me.

Turn away, not a word to say.
I can't see any other way.
For although you sit inside your silence,
The bitter truth screams out to me.

“Home With You” *(Possibly the one true, pure love song I’ll ever write.)*

Let forces of misrule
Sweep away the day.
Let chaos and calamity
Go outside to play.
Let drama kings and drama queens
Court doubt and disarray.
I’ll stay at home with you.

Let the world outside
Do its screwed-up thing.
Let others seek comfort
In shopping sprees and lunch-hour flings.
I don’t need anything
But what the quiet hours bring
When I’m at home with you.

If there comes a time
When I think to fly
Just remind me of the
Long days gone by
The silent moments
The murmured sighs
When I’m at home with you.

“Sleep”

I'm wide awake.
Thoughts billow like flame.
Night bleeds into day,
All hours the same.

Teach me to sleep.
Teach me to sleep.
Cradle me down
Into my deep.

The world spins out.
Dark echoes appear.
My skin won't cool.
My mind won't clear.
What keeps me pinned,
just lying here?

Teach me to sleep.
Teach me to sleep.
Cradle me down
Into my deep.