

University of Windsor

## Scholarship at UWindor

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Theses, Dissertations, and Major Papers

---

1994

### No Answer but Solitude: A collection of poetry. (Original writing);.

Steven Christopher. Markwick  
*University of Windsor*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd>

---

#### Recommended Citation

Markwick, Steven Christopher., "No Answer but Solitude: A collection of poetry. (Original writing);." (1994).  
*Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 2859.  
<https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd/2859>

This online database contains the full-text of PhD dissertations and Masters' theses of University of Windsor students from 1954 forward. These documents are made available for personal study and research purposes only, in accordance with the Canadian Copyright Act and the Creative Commons license—CC BY-NC-ND (Attribution, Non-Commercial, No Derivative Works). Under this license, works must always be attributed to the copyright holder (original author), cannot be used for any commercial purposes, and may not be altered. Any other use would require the permission of the copyright holder. Students may inquire about withdrawing their dissertation and/or thesis from this database. For additional inquiries, please contact the repository administrator via email ([scholarship@uwindsor.ca](mailto:scholarship@uwindsor.ca)) or by telephone at 519-253-3000ext. 3208.



National Library  
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services Branch

Direction des acquisitions et  
des services bibliographiques

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0N4

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa (Ontario)  
K1A 0N4

Your file / Votre référence

Our file / Notre référence

## NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

## AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.

Canada

NO ANSWER BUT SOLITUDE

A Collection of Poetry

by

Steven Markwick

A Creative Writing Project  
submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
through the Department of English  
in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts at the  
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

1994



National Library  
of Canada

Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services Branch

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Direction des acquisitions et  
des services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa (Ontario)  
K1A 0N4

Your file / Votre référence

Our file / Notre référence

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-315-93292-9

Canada

Name STEVEN CHRISTOPHER MARKLICK

Dissertation Abstracts International is arranged by broad, general subject categories. Please select the one subject which most nearly describes the content of your dissertation. Enter the corresponding four-digit code in the spaces provided.

LITERATURE MODERN

SUBJECT TERM

0298

U·M·I

SUBJECT CODE

**Subject Categories**

**THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS**

Architecture	0729
Art History	0377
Cinema	0900
Dance	0378
Fine Arts	0357
Information Science	0723
Journalism	0391
Library Science	0399
Mass Communications	0708
Music	0413
Speech Communication	0459
Theater	0465

**EDUCATION**

General	0515
Administration	0514
Adult and Continuing	0516
Agricultural	0517
Art	0273
Bilingual and Multicultural	0282
Business	0688
Community College	0275
Curriculum and Instruction	0727
Early Childhood	0518
Elementary	0524
Finance	0277
Guidance and Counseling	0519
Health	0680
Higher	0745
History of	0520
Home Economics	0278
Industrial	0521
Language and Literature	0279
Mathematics	0280
Music	0522
Philosophy of	0998
Physical	0523

Psychology	0525
Reading	0535
Religious	0527
Sciences	0714
Secondary	0533
Social Sciences	0534
Sociology of	0340
Special	0529
Teacher Training	0530
Technology	0710
Tests and Measurements	0288
Vocational	0747

**LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS**

**Language**

General	0679
Ancient	0289
Linguistics	0290
Modern	0291

**Literature**

General	0401
Classical	0294
Comparative	0295
Medieval	0297
Modern	0298
African	0316
American	0591
Asian	0305
Canadian (English)	0352
Canadian (French)	0355
English	0593
Germanic	0311
Latin American	0312
Middle Eastern	0315
Romance	0313
Slavic and East European	0314

**PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION AND THEOLOGY**

Philosophy	0422
Religion	
General	0318
Biblical Studies	0321
Clergy	0319
History of	0320
Philosophy of	0322
Theology	0469

**SOCIAL SCIENCES**

American Studies	0323
Anthropology	
Archaeology	0324
Cultural	0326
Physical	0327
Business Administration	
General	0310
Accounting	0272
Banking	0770
Management	0454
Marketing	0338
Canadian Studies	0385
Economics	
General	0501
Agricultural	0503
Commerce-Business	0505
Finance	0508
History	0509
Labor	0510
Theory	0511
Folklore	0358
Geography	0366
Gerontology	0351
History	
General	0578

Ancient	0579
Medieval	0581
Modern	0582
Black	0328
African	0331
Asia, Australia and Oceania	0332
Canadian	0334
European	0335
Latin American	0336
Middle Eastern	0333
United States	0337
History of Science	0585
Law	0398
Political Science	
General	0615
International Law and Relations	0616
Public Administration	0617
Recreation	0814
Social Work	0452
Sociology	
General	0626
Criminology and Penology	0627
Demography	0938
Ethnic and Racial Studies	0631
Individual and Family Studies	0628
Industrial and Labor Relations	0629
Public and Social Welfare	0630
Social Structure and Development	0700
Theory and Methods	0344
Transportation	0709
Urban and Regional Planning	0999
Women's Studies	0453

**THE SCIENCES AND ENGINEERING**

**BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES**

Agriculture	
General	0473
Agronomy	0285
Animal Culture and Nutrition	0475
Animal Pathology	0476
Food Science and Technology	0359
Forestry and Wildlife	0478
Plant Culture	0479
Plant Pathology	0480
Plant Physiology	0817
Range Management	0777
Wood Technology	0746
Biology	
General	0306
Anatomy	0287
Biostatistics	0308
Botany	0309
Cell	0379
Ecology	0329
Entomology	0353
Genetics	0369
Limnology	0793
Microbiology	0410
Molecular	0307
Neuroscience	0317
Oceanography	0416
Physiology	0433
Radiation	0821
Veterinary Science	0778
Zoology	0472
Biophysics	
General	0786
Medical	0760

**EARTH SCIENCES**

Biogeochemistry	0425
Geochemistry	0996

Geodesy	0370
Geology	0372
Geophysics	0373
Hydrology	0388
Mineralogy	0411
Paleobotany	0345
Paleoecology	0426
Paleontology	0418
Paleozoology	0985
Palynology	0427
Physical Geography	0368
Physical Oceanography	0415

**HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES**

Environmental Sciences	0768
Health Sciences	
General	0566
Audiology	0300
Chemotherapy	0992
Dentistry	0567
Education	0350
Hospital Management	0769
Human Development	0758
Immunology	0982
Medicine and Surgery	0564
Mental Health	0347
Nursing	0569
Nutrition	0570
Obstetrics and Gynecology	0380
Occupational Health and Therapy	0354
Ophthalmology	0381
Pathology	0571
Pharmacology	0419
Pharmacy	0572
Physical Therapy	0382
Public Health	0573
Radiology	0574
Recreation	0575

Speech Pathology	0460
Toxicology	0383
Home Economics	0386

**PHYSICAL SCIENCES**

**Pure Sciences**

Chemistry	
General	0485
Agricultural	0749
Analytical	0486
Biochemistry	0487
Inorganic	0488
Nuclear	0738
Organic	0490
Pharmaceutical	0491
Physical	0494
Polymer	0495
Radiation	0754
Mathematics	0405
Physics	
General	0605
Acoustics	0986
Astronomy and Astrophysics	0606
Atmospheric Science	0608
Atomic	0748
Electronics and Electricity	0607
Elementary Particles and High Energy	0798
Fluid and Plasma	0759
Molecular	0609
Nuclear	0610
Optics	0752
Radiation	0756
Solid State	0611
Statistics	0463
Applied Sciences	
Applied Mechanics	0346
Computer Science	0984

**Engineering**

General	0537
Aerospace	0538
Agricultural	0539
Automotive	0540
Biomedical	0541
Chemical	0542
Civil	0543
Electronics and Electrical	0544
Heat and Thermodynamics	0348
Hydraulic	0545
Industrial	0546
Marine	0547
Materials Science	0794
Mechanical	0548
Metallurgy	0743
Mining	0551
Nuclear	0552
Packaging	0549
Petroleum	0765
Sanitary and Municipal	0554
System Science	0790
Geotechnology	0428
Operations Research	0796
Plastics Technology	0795
Textile Technology	0994

**PSYCHOLOGY**

General	0621
Behavioral	0384
Clinical	0622
Developmental	0620
Experimental	0623
Industrial	0624
Personality	0625
Physiological	0989
Psychobiology	0349
Psychometrics	0632
Social	0451



# *NO ANSWER BUT SOLITUDE*

*A Collection of Poetry*

*By*

*Steven Markwick*

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Master's degree in English Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Windsor.

April, 1994

## **DEDICATION**

These poems are dedicated to the people who inspired them and who helped me put them together. Without you there would be many blank pages in this book, and in my life.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Section One: *Singular Visions*

Title	Page
First Weekend in April.....	1
Shadow City.....	2
Frigidaire.....	3
Early.....	4
Window Shopping.....	5
Promenade.....	6
Dead Tired.....	7
Smoke.....	8
Stillstanding.....	9
Tears.....	10
Drowsing.....	11
Rumour-Mongers.....	12
Woman on the Patio.....	13
From the Window.....	14
Cover-up.....	15
Chores.....	16
Night Out.....	17
Eclectic Cafe.....	18

### Section Two: *Solitary Pursuits*

Title	Page
Mediation.....	19
Sparks.....	20
Firefly.....	21
Traces.....	22
Silent Dancer.....	23
Wildflower.....	24
The Candy-Man.....	25



Distances.....	26
Take Care.....	27
Praise.....	28
Linda's Wedding.....	29
Steel Touch.....	30
Giant Bones.....	31
2Sight.....	32
Annie's Birthday Poem.....	33
First Degree.....	34
Familiar Ground.....	35
Season.....	36
Restless Spirit.....	37
Petrified Forest.....	38
Kerry.....	39

### Section Three: *Memory Cells*

Title	Page
Journey Back.....	40
Grandpa's Ring.....	41
Lightning Rod.....	42
Sawdust and Steel Guitar.....	43
Closing Time.....	44
Sacred Grove.....	45
No Answer but Solitude.....	46
First Times.....	47
The Bench Warmer.....	48
Leavetaking.....	49
Linda's Going-Away Present.....	50
November Morning.....	51
Blood Sample.....	52
Stealing.....	53
Engineering.....	54
Riddle-Master.....	55
3-D Technicolour Unicorns.....	56
Covert Operation.....	57

## *Singular Visions*

### **First Weekend in April**

An early Spring.  
The thinned branches  
of our apple trees,  
diseased and amputated  
to save the rest,  
lie like mammoth bones  
in the sun.

### Shadow City

Grey air streams over the Detroit river,  
past its looming, rusty ambassador  
and clings to the dull buildings  
on the south side.

Gleaming skyscraper eyes  
and brooding slums watch over  
a watery border.

Small parks in a small city  
wither under a gaze  
full of dreams of fire,  
violent redemption.

Poor sandwich town,  
homeless in its own country.  
Made up of shadows.

### **Frigidaire**

Pedestrians steam through morning  
as the ragged tails of shivering cars  
lash round their legs.

Spring promises the smell  
of softening asphalt,  
pushing through woodsmoke.

What would you think  
of my desperation  
for an uncertain future,  
cold, jobless days?

Snowflakes settle in my hair  
like false wisdom,  
melting into youthful rain.

Early  
morning  
bus spews  
grey clouds  
down the road

looking at it  
from a window  
in a row of gemini houses  
a woman balances one child  
on the unborn swell of another

### Window Shopping

In the first, frantic snowfall  
of winter, the wind  
blows a dozen names  
past my aching ears.

Each crystal caught on  
my dull brown glove  
demands acknowledgement  
of its uniqueness.

I don't know why I came out,  
it looked better from inside

twisting, white air.

### Promenade

My footsteps assault winter-still air,  
clashing against the salt-white sidewalk.

Cringing on a dead lawn,  
a stunted tree clutches withered fruit  
in its leafless fingers.

I feel close to this tree.  
Stopped in my purposeless walking  
I admire its tenacity.

Its wizened grip pleases me,  
for we are both guilty  
of keeping what we should not.

We carry the rotted past  
into a new year.



### Dead Tired

Stepping into the swift darkness  
of early Winter, it seems later than it is.  
Dinner-time blends into half-past midnight.

When I board the westbound bus  
it's absolutely silent,  
no one knows anyone else.  
The blue light turns us vampire-hued.

I cough a couple of times,  
human sounds over the engine's low rasp.  
A man with too-dark eyes looks suspicious.

At my stop a man pulls  
his daughter back urgently  
"No honey, we don't want *that* bus."  
As I step down, breathing gouts of steam.

## Smoke

Smell of tortured wood  
splinters the air.

In one of these boxy houses  
two someones warm their love  
by a fire.

Their smoke mingles  
with the damp air.  
Fog swirls around  
my idle feet.

I can't see,  
but that sharp scent  
follows me home.

### Stillstanding

Sleep-walking again,  
a dull ache in my knees,  
stretched-tight pain  
behind my forehead.

I spent the sunset indoors,  
oblivious to another sinking day.  
Night opens me up and I watch  
my shadow spread out, shrink,  
as it slides streetlamp to streetlamp.

It's been a long time  
since I wrote "La nuit je t'aime."  
Now I wander towards someone else's home  
and a thin pull-out couch  
I have all to myself.

## Tears

The rain on my face  
is almost as good,  
marching down the grey streets.

A Coke can scuttles through the gutter,  
an old snowman has melted  
into something obscene.

It's too dark for morning.

It's not hard to do,  
a life of waiting in the interim,  
the in-between of rainy days.

I zombie-shuffle up the road  
until someone else comes along  
to carry me somewhere.

It's not clearing,  
but the rain on my face  
is almost as good.

## Drowsing

End of the month  
my list of things hasn't shrunk,  
it still burns my fingers.

"You look very tired."  
No, I'm fine, I'm fine,  
I'm always fine, it's only polite.

At the front of the classroom  
words bounce off the chalkboard;  
Myths, legends, the Voice of God.

From under my heavy eyes  
I see the other side,  
where a low white blouse,  
loosely tied, sweeps pink flesh.

After drowsing I always wake  
with the taste of daydreams  
sweet in my mouth.

### **Rumour-Mongers**

Gossip breeds in the walls  
of apartment houses, college residences,  
scuttling under ancient fridges  
in the mouldy afternoons.

Everyone wants to know  
who's fucking who,  
ears perked for drunken promises  
and the squeaks which outdo the mice.

Faithfulness evaporates into  
knocking pipes and burning showers,  
other names are written  
on steamed-up mirrors.

Rumours are crawling  
through the radiators,  
gathering like dust-mites  
under every innocent bed.

**Woman on the Patio**

Though the day's end  
slid shadows across her face  
her voice gleamed like sunset,  
rich as liquid amber.

### From the Window

Halfway between the sunrise  
and the sidewalk,  
below my fourth-floor  
cloud-smeared window

a runner.

Her ponytail bounces  
in the light, throwing  
shadows across her back,  
across the dark legs

gravity and defiance.

It is possible  
to fall in love with motion,  
to run for no good reason,  
to run away.



### Cover-up

Went home,  
end of another week  
spiralling through  
the month, to find  
all the woodwork in my room  
stank of new, white paint.

It crawled across  
every nick and gouge,  
filled all the imperfections  
left by hard living.

They tell me  
it's only an undercoat,  
something to cover up,  
to be covered up.

It lies heavy in my nostrils  
when I try to sleep,  
silent, drying.

## Chores

It's almost noon  
and the dishes still lie  
soaking in the basin  
and the garbage squats  
accusingly by the door

Lying on the pull-out couch  
I read poems from an old book,  
marred on the overleaf  
with an 'I love you', a few x's and o's.

It's been breathing dust  
for four years now.  
I handle it a little less reverently,  
though it meant something, once.

Outside, the rain falls  
like Spanish doubloons,  
gleaming on the grass.

### Night Out

Patter of rain left behind  
as we enter the bar;  
Thursday night pandemonium.

I try to focus  
on swirls of light,  
thigh-boots and feral smiles.

Perfumes drape me  
in an alien place  
where tawdry hangs in the air,  
like smoke.

### **Eclectic Cafe**

Just before the witching hour  
I flow into the Eclectic Cafe,  
leaving the sharp night  
for the murky afterthoughts  
of cigarettes and coffee-flavoured steam.

Patrons sit like their own shadows,  
munching the dim sum of their knowledge  
and wiping their mouths  
with left-over Picasso napkins.

I breathe in dusty philosophy,  
push back my chair  
and drink thoughts like cinnamon tea.

*Solitary Pursuits*

### Mediation

I have peered around the corner  
into your life,  
disturbed your work  
and tried to make you laugh.

All that, for no better reason  
than to hear your voice,  
roughened by a scratchy throat  
or smooth as liquid air.

I am made up of moments,  
expressions, the arch  
of an eyebrow over  
your blue eyes

and I wonder, will you  
look into my corner,  
sit in my chair?

### Sparks

Once you were only a paper-figure,  
sparks blew across my mind.  
Now you dance, red-hued  
in my smoky eyes.

Nothing is consumed,  
no ashes smear my face  
but this fire warms my skin,  
heats my blood.

The yellow flicker  
calls to its sky-bound kin,  
they wheel and turn  
dancing.

### Firefly

For less noble reasons,  
but mostly to hear you sing  
I breathed smoke and people  
in my solitary corner.

Through streaming eyes  
I saw blurry fingers  
on the guitar,  
your reddened face.

I lost the words  
in the music,  
straining to hear  
over busy, endless  
conversations.

When it was over  
I walked home,  
let the cold air  
clear my head of smoke,  
and dreams.



## Traces

I have sketched my name  
in the constellations of freckles  
lying sun-dappled  
across your shoulders  
and that is enough for me.

To listen to your heartbeat,  
bathed in the warmth  
of your skin  
was more than I hoped.

I pull off your earrings  
and new textures, the contours  
of your naked ears  
join the weight of memories  
in my fingertips.

Only a little time  
has passed between us,  
but traces of you  
linger in my deep places.

### Silent Dancer

You're so quiet  
my sense of you  
is muffled.

But I've seen the way  
you enter music  
and you're like  
a silent dancer  
in my mind.

I must have failed  
to listen, but I have  
all these pictures

of you swimming up  
a rocky cliff, or  
tipping back a drink  
with female grace.

Last of all I see  
a rainy highway slipping by,  
when my head rested  
on your shoulder, safe.

## Wildflower

I've said "Fine"  
two hundred times today.  
Same question, same people.  
A Town Convenience store  
Sunday afternoon.

I almost say the same  
to you, but you've gone.  
I pretend not to watch  
as the blue station wagon pulls away.

With you it's never anything more  
than a brief appearance,  
a flash of colour.

You're my wildflower,  
bright-hued, stubborn  
and fine as lace.

Home at dusk I see  
the cloudy blue of your eyes  
on storm-darkened petals,

before the spring rain  
washes clean my empty spaces.

### **The Candy-Man**

Never having loved anyone  
enough to write every day,  
I scatter my fancy  
to the east and west.

If I could, I'd embrace  
sunrise and sunset,  
divide my being  
in two amorous selves.

My imagined passions  
stretch me like taffy,  
sickly-sweet,  
pulled in two directions.

## Distances

Being right isn't always a triumph,  
His name seldom came up  
but I knew he was here.

It's easy to understand.  
Five years of love,  
moment weaved into moment  
in a long joining.

I like your honesty,  
but this confession  
shrinks my hopes.

I go into hiding,  
like the time  
I broke  
my mother's crystal.

You can't untangle  
all your knotty feelings,  
so you go back,  
put on an old sweater.

I can always step away  
and wait,  
patient as a barren tree  
for spring's first green touch.

### Take Care

I seldom cross the street  
without looking several times.  
Except when, deep in thought,  
I trust my grandma's prayers.

Standing in your doorway  
I wait for an invitation,  
water drips down my neck.

This I've learned  
from blundering in, all light,  
when you need cool darkness.

As I turn away from  
a closed door into heavy traffic,  
I can see you, walking with an umbrella  
in the rain.

## Praise

I can't write about  
twilight strands,  
hanging mischievous  
over your forehead.

I can't tell you  
that your glasses  
make me think  
of trust and cleverness.

All artistry deserts me,  
turns of phrase, imagery,  
and I'm left with  
your hands.

Long, slender fingers  
like proud Elizabeth's but  
freckled, lined, pale.

In my mind I trace  
their backs, a scar  
between right thumb and forefinger  
like a story.

I wonder about all  
the other stories here,  
touches, textures, feelings  
these hands have known

and I wonder,  
would your blood pulse through  
a little faster,  
if I raised one to my lips?

### Linda's Wedding

Not long ago,  
in some sort of half-assed  
clairvoyant dream,  
I saw you get married  
in blurred beauty.

I could only watch,  
helpless, silent  
like a shadow  
made of old emotions.

We have never loved  
but you know  
almost all my secrets,

and you fit so well  
in my arms whenever  
we say goodbye.



## Steel Touch

Sometimes you seem remote,  
like a loon on a summer-still lake,  
calling the sun in.

When your eyes brighten,  
I can't keep up.  
You slip past like a blade in flight.

I see you walking  
down Kincardine's main street,  
right into uptown woods

in your thick, black  
grandmother-knit sweater  
that whispers "hug me".

With your dark hair,  
and eyes that see  
more sun than rain,

I couldn't believe it  
when your steel touch  
bruised my heart.

## Giant Bones

I have gathered rainbows  
from around the sun,  
plucked the trees like stems  
for a bouquet,

though a giant's love  
isn't big enough for you.

I've bent lakes and rivers  
to reflect your view,  
pulled the clouds apart  
to clear the sky,

still all the light I bring  
is too dim for you.

Should I rearrange the mountains,  
should I drain the sea?  
Will I leave my giant bones  
to moulder at your feet?

For all my giant efforts  
still fall short of you.

**2Sight**

It would be easier  
if I hadn't become  
sensitive to your skin,  
tuned to a song you played.

Because I've seen your future  
with my eyes shut  
and you always say  
"I'm sorry but..."  
before an electronic nudge  
pushes me back  
to a still dark morning.

### **Annie's Birthday Poem**

Whenever you unexpectedly appear,  
I forget what I'm doing  
and my thoughts scatter like birds.

Even after you've gone  
your image paints my eyes  
and leaves me unfocused.

How am I supposed to keep my sight  
in the brightness of your  
summer-morning smile?

I don't know nearly enough,  
only that your history stretches south  
and you dream a banker's dreams.

That will have to do.  
Your new year began even as  
I wrote your name across this page.

### First Degree

Late last night on T.V  
I saw an actress that used to look like you  
and I waited for something like pain,  
but it didn't come.

Disappointing,  
but her hair wasn't red anymore  
and her freckles, fading.  
She was someone else.

Now that such reminders  
don't leave me as pale  
as a low-sky moon,  
what am I supposed to do?

It's cruel of you to slip away,  
leaving me no excuse  
not to jump back into the fire.

I can't believe how little time it took  
to forget the smell of antiseptic  
on my blistered flesh.

## Familiar Ground

When I almost call someone else  
by your name, I know I'm in trouble.  
You should be a skeleton by now,  
worn smooth and white by repetition.

I have told our story many times  
to a sympathetic audience.  
I always make myself the hero.  
Claiming I was victimized  
by your refusal, by your half-hearted acceptance.

I'm the only one  
out of at least a dozen  
that you didn't sleep with,  
singular and unprivileged  
the embrace of your thin limbs.

Even now, I should know better  
than to summon up your ghost  
and watch you whirling down  
a winter's road in my memory,  
sunlight burning in your hair.

I have covered you too thinly.  
Your freckled fingers  
claw at the earth  
and draw me back,  
to familiar ground.

## Season

I've one less Christmas gift  
to buy this year, one less name  
on the list I make by heart.

Through these head-cold, mid-December days  
I see your changing face,  
I miss your name.

Your voice enters my dreams,  
talking around me, over me.  
You speak to a higher, ideal creature.

As I sleep, dreamer becomes reaver,  
your white knight sheds into demonic skin.  
Hot blood burns away his perfection.

Waking into this season  
of forgiveness and ancient hope,  
come to me, tell me regret is enough.

One last gift  
in the short days of winter  
and we can part.

### Restless Spirit

My dreams trouble me lately,  
she's there again,  
breathes and speaks.  
I don't know what to say.

It's worse when,  
striding through my familiar life,  
I see freckles or flaming hair  
and I have to forget  
what scratches at my sleeping mind.

It isn't her, it never is.  
My hands unfist,  
my burning eyes turn watery.

At night I tell myself  
it's been a long time  
"two years, two years"

But I still sleep  
on the right side of the bed,  
and whisper her name.



### **Petrified Forest**

We sculpted our moments together  
in blue ink and the silence  
of dead forests.

Green canopies  
sank into the mud,  
just so we could write  
our paper wishes.

I know many more  
axes will lie sap-stained,  
before the trees swallow you up.

**Kerry**

I've spent all this week  
trying to remember  
my first love's name,  
when I was fourteen  
and I knew what that meant.

Oh, it's easy enough  
to conjure up a flimsy picture,  
to think how my eyes darkened  
when she talked of older guys  
with cars and chests and razor-burn.

She's the whole reason  
I scribbled desperate romantic stuff  
that she smiled at, as if  
I'd passed her the potato salad.

She moved away long ago,  
married someone, grew shorter  
and just now,  
I've remembered her name.

## ***Memory Cells***

## Journey Back

Home sits like a matriarch  
among winter-rough fields,  
square, red-bricked, patient.

Around her,  
a thick screen of trees  
glistens with ice.  
Snow lies like penitence  
on evergreen branches.

High on the northern wall,  
the words "Maple Lea 1899"  
give us a name, a birth-date.

Legends grow even in a little time,  
a house built for a young bride,  
the old farmer and his jealous sister.  
Empty, passionless rooms and waiting.

Memories of a bitter spinster,  
her unwilling bachelor brother.  
Long doubts and arguments,  
shadows in the stained-glass windows.

There are no ghosts in my home  
except shades of disappointment,  
a jilted bride, her rustic lover  
rattling round the old rooms.

### Grandpa's Ring

Long enough to seem like part of me,  
an old ring circles the third finger  
of my right hand.

Half a century ago,  
it was promise fulfilled.  
Three letters in white gold,  
as close to forever as we can know.

I can't even see the break  
where it was cut from swollen fingers,  
only to dull in a forgotten drawer.

It's been fixed.  
Mended and re-sized for me.  
Only ten dollars to wear a promise,  
discount memories, thin gold.

### Lightning Rod

Uncle Joe's aluminum boat sat dry  
for a dozen years, 'til dad fixed it  
at season's end.

Though the trees had all changed  
I took it into the dark lake,  
checking for leaks.

There is no silence,  
even in still water.  
Loons called to each other,  
waves slapped against the sides.

When I looked to the far shore,  
the sky creased in thought  
over riotous, red hills.

Far away, lightning struck  
a struggling beech, close to the water,  
thunder splashed around me,  
over a frightened creaking of oars.

### Sawdust and Steel Guitar

On Sunday winter nights  
I warm up an old radio,  
and listen for the music  
Dad used to play when  
he was working.

Sawdust and steel guitars  
run together in my mind,  
one evokes the other,  
and my father in the centre.

I never knew what he was doing,  
but I followed the motion of the saw  
and moved my tiny, awkward body  
to the twangy rhythm.

If I leave the radio on,  
I can fall asleep  
with sawdust tickling my nose,  
dizzy with motion.

## Closing Time

My father and I.  
Rubber boots and  
green hip-waders,  
waterproof creatures.

Standing beside our dock,  
which lies old, exhausted  
over its water-bed.

Lifting and shoving,  
we are two thin hercules  
hauling the rotted planks in:

A blizzard of leaves  
in the wind,  
urges us.

Kind weather  
makes our task easier.

Loons guard our lake,  
aloof and sad, calling  
'Only-two, only-two'

My father and I  
at his retreat  
from a frightening world,  
our cottage, at closing time.



### Sacred Grove

In late autumn  
the road beside the lake  
lies wet with the paint  
of a thousand damp leaves.

Somewhere beyond evergreens,  
maples, birches,  
cold water numbs a dark shore

but I walk on the path  
to my sacred grove.

It happens suddenly,  
a clearing on the left  
lets the watery sun in.

Green stumps and furred boulders  
lie scattered around their shrine,  
four trees whose trunks embrace like lovers,  
struggling for the light.

### No Answer But Solitude

Midway between downtown streets  
and the dusty roads of home  
I watch you bustle around  
your parent's restaurant  
as if keeping busy were  
the answer to everything.

From my counter stool  
I watch the familiar customers,  
they ask too many questions,  
wondering who I am and if  
we're sleeping together.

I have to leave, go back home  
where my parents work in different worlds.  
Mom's a martyr to dirty dishes  
while Dad mourns his dying wallet.

I seek answers in computer screens,  
blank paper, but I can't satisfy  
the customer's desires,  
my mother's clean obsession  
or my father's green blues.

Though I stay awake until  
the wrong side of midnight,  
there's no answer but solitude  
and the dawn seems a long way off.

## First Times

Speak to me about first times,  
about a bottle of orange pop  
almost as big as you,  
that you held with both hands  
serious as a five year-old can be.

Reach back to the bullies  
who stole your toque in winter  
and taught you about shame  
and the impotence of rage.

Can you still feel the air  
parting in front of you?  
Master of the three-speed,  
newly-empowered suburban raider.

How does that compare  
to a first, sweaty embrace  
in a darkened gym,  
music, strobe lights and fear?

We are bound by these moments,  
steps on the ladder of experience,  
alphabet blocks of the spirit.

### The Bench Warmer

Every recess I watched him,  
mornings and afternoons  
at our school, built among  
Ontario's shrinking hayfields.

In the yard a monstrous,  
splintery arena lurked.  
Peeling green pain, rusty wire fence,  
cracked asphalt.

He was always there,  
sitting on the rough wooden bench  
of a forgotten penalty box.

Just enough sun came through missing boards  
to leave a mixture of light and shadow,  
by which to read the book  
he always carried.

It changed from week to week  
but there were often dragons on the cover  
obscured by small white hands,  
or reflected in enormous glasses  
until the bell made him close it up  
and go back inside.

## Leavetaking

Late spring flows past me  
in grass-green pools spread  
neatly round the city's stones.

Darkened by a swift rain,  
afternoon walks swim by like storms  
leaving the air damp and heavy,  
nodding off to sleep.

Lilacs purple the breeze  
on mornings when I wait for dawn  
to return everything to colour.

Shadows fall away when I think  
how light falling through a window  
woke the sunshine in your hair.

Unlike me, you belong to beginnings,  
to the waking-month of May  
in the turning of your year.

You've always been spring to me,  
opening my eyes to a new morning  
under the same, invisible stars.

So it comforts me to know that,  
miles apart, we still share the sky.

"Bye, for now."

### Linda's Going-Away Present

As snow clothes  
Christmas-tree bound-evergreens,  
I think of sun-red on your arms.

Even then, my thoughts reaching  
southward, I warm my hands  
with the memory of hot-chocolate  
and your steamy eyes.

So if, on a miraculous night,  
a few white flakes dust the ground  
I'll save a few in mind, heart,  
or a jar in the deep freeze.

If there's white magic on Christmas eve  
I'll think of distances, a clear hot sky  
and while I'm star-watching  
I'll keep some for you.

### November Morning

Light through  
the big front window  
shines in sleepyeyed dust.

A few friends snore  
on the floor  
of someone else's cottage.

Then, one stirs,  
sudden gold on gold,  
her hair glistens like  
a spider-web at dawn.

She's a little wobbly,  
she has water on her mind,  
but there's something  
beautiful, still.

November morning sun  
shines in the corner,  
brighter on Monica's hair.

### Blood Sample

Something in your body has failed you,  
dreams of children blur, dissolve  
among stubborn tears.

No one is supposed to know.  
Your mother mourns for an  
inverted womb, reproductive imperfection.

When you tell me, with admonitions  
of secrecy in your brave voice,  
I can't even touch you in sympathy.

I am too much your friend,  
aware of my place, my usefulness.  
I can check your essays,  
listen to your complaints  
about a jealous boyfriend.

You should be rounded as a sunrise,  
a gentle swell above your hips,  
greedy for a miracle.



### Stealing

Yesterday I said I'd kill  
for one of Stevie Smith's end-lines  
but that isn't true.

I wouldn't kill but I might maim  
just to be able to say:

I was much too far out all my life  
and not waving but drowning.

## Engineering

For days I have tinkered  
with the engine of my imagination,  
trying to rouse the dusty gears  
into mechanical life.

I ran my blood through it like oil,  
but it has dried away,  
mingling with the rust  
in a shower of brown flakes.

A little neglect  
has dimmed endless coils  
of coppery thought,  
left them green, and dying.

### Riddle-Master

I have lived like a question mark,  
curved around mysteries  
and riddled with fill-in-the-blanks.

Creeping through conundrums,  
my feet grow heavy and stick.  
A sick, green smell clings to them.

Bring me a jug  
from the river of forgetfulness  
to wash away this puzzling muck.

I never asked for curiosity,  
the sharp taste of doubt  
and the unknowable.

I would rather sneak  
under the labyrinth  
and pull the minotaur's tail on my way by.

### 3-D Technicolour Unicorns

My friend keeps a stable  
full of popular fantasies.  
He trots them out, now and then,  
for my inspection.

It's carefully impersonal,  
it's safer that way.  
Their naked feet won't scuff  
his polished wooden floor.

He's proud of his sterile herd,  
mind-inflated creatures,  
rainbows and stars  
with a cardboard aftertaste.

I don't envy his plastic magic  
even though I can't remove  
the tangles and burrs  
from my rough-coated memories.

## Covert Operation

Gather round the table, gentlebeings,  
today's operation is simple but profound.  
We are attempting, with anaesthesia,  
the circumcision of language.

Our patient is, as you can see,  
hormonally challenged.  
A man rather than a womyn.  
He doesn't understand why.

Our task is more difficult,  
since this is not a person of colour,  
we may not see the blood  
until it's too late.

Fortunately, our team of  
non-differently abled specialists  
-Gender neutral to a man-  
have practised by removing malignant novels  
from our school's diseased curriculum.

We begin, the patient unconscious,  
a sterile atmosphere all around.  
I shall make the first cut,  
you see how easy it is?

Now, I may have sliced too deeply  
but you needn't worry,  
the patient can't feel a thing.

### **About the Author**

Steven Christopher Markwick first emerged (under protest) on August 31st, 1969, just in time for dinner. He received his B.A in English and Creative Writing from York University in 1992 and is currently pursuing a Master's degree in the same field at the University of Windsor. Mr. Markwick has been published in University newspapers, yearbooks, and the 1992 student anthology *Svengali Fish*, edited by N. Kim Stitt.