

# The Engineer

—*In Memory of James Doohan*

## I.

Between the dust clouds calving sun to night,  
behind the blazing battlements of old  
auroral habiliments, dead supernova's light,  
surrounded by these gases growing gold,  
we wander. From cloud to cloud of matter  
clutter, where holy cauldrons spin, sputter,  
where chaos reigns and, under thunder, worlds  
congeal beneath the peal of heaven plunder—

meteorites, lightning strikes—from whole herds  
of icy shards shepherded by stellar sway  
to planets, less than paradise, where crust gives way  
to crack, crater, ponds of stagnant wonder  
we trek. Energy, synergy, blind erection.  
This manic, inorganic, immaculate conception.

## II.

This. Manic, organic, immaculate,  
our conception, our long lust for cause,  
this need, perhaps greed, for eternal laws  
sends us, spores, Earth's whores, ejaculate,  
back to the abyss, the whence we commenced,  
back to tomb, womb, cosmic amniotic sac.  
Here, death's foes (little Prosperos, Poe's), dance  
the dance of red to black. Like orphans we lack,

hunger for first embrace, to retrace the race.  
In all we do, we echo the urge to crave  
some sun, what fills—from crater to pond to cave,  
from Plato to Pluto, Dido to Odo—space.  
The dark is more than only, lonely, full of fear.  
It's made us seek, as Stevens said, an Engineer.

### III.

In seeking, as Stevens said, an Engineer—  
whether Sunday morning, porch turned church,  
looking back on pagan feast, that need to lurch  
forward, past winter, past night where night's veneer  
suggests nothing more than nothing beneath,  
no prop, no crop, only the end, with teeth—  
in search of another sun to unswallow the old,  
to end anxiety, absence, an eternity of cold,

in hope the babe would come, steal back his scythe,  
provide solution through ablution, at last arrive. . . .  
In believing, deeming—Sun to Son, Sol to soul—  
that seeking fire was more than this, a Titan's toll,  
more than matter needing matter, well, we swore  
to boldly go where none had gone before.

#### IV.

So we go, boldly, back where we came before,  
go blindly, proudly, in ships of steel, sterling ore,  
go, go returning, past time itself, the core,  
cavity, gravity, what drove us to this shore.  
Matter driving matter to the heart of matter:  
loss. Even Pound, poet, mad as a hatter,  
knew the rest was dross. So we scatter  
in these ships, these grails, each endless platter

a helping of us. And we reach, we send up flares,  
catching something of the stars we seek, angels, unaware.  
We push through all that emptiness, each portal, each tear,  
knowing that we seek the end, what isn't there,  
ships becoming stars themselves, something adorning  
nothing. First star to the right and straight on 'til morning.

V.

First star to the right? Straight on until?  
What could this mean but that we're lost,  
awaiting reentry, standing on the sill?  
Peter pecking shadow, Wendy tempest tossed.  
We want for Father, shadow. Even Hook  
would do. Some captain, any Captain,  
the one Whitman cried for between  
astronomer and star, star and star's journeywork.

Walt died seeking sacred hieroglyph,  
but isn't that all we are, our substance  
spun out—spider sputum, maker myth—  
across each rhizome horizon called chance?  
Bracing nascence against darkness, we clap, we fly.  
Freud fingered this fire, our bellies, called it Y.

## VI.

Freud, fingers, fire belly. Captain, father,  
why. Chromosome or Chronos, we linger,  
hunger, die. War's the same. And lust and nuns.  
We need an answer to oppose itch, these thumbs.  
Event horizon, Kuiper belt, Apollo 11,  
Juno Beach. . . . We stand by cusp, by bier,  
looking for something to stoke our heaven,  
for someone to answer fire with fire.

Hate or love, we ask for passage, officer,  
doctor, crew, for something more than empty hull,  
for everything, anything *beyond* the pull,  
to give it reason. Klingon, Sargon, Lucifer.  
Any con will do. Any origin, passion, play.  
Not parents of stone, gas alone, recombinant DNA.

## VII.

Our parents? Cold stone. Hot gas. A little DNA.  
Where the gods, goddesses, some holy sobriquet?  
*Pater, Madre*, Engineer, Intelligent Design?  
Where Prime Directive? Beneficent, malign?  
We do not wish to see ourselves as beast-bred, aping tools,  
though no one has a problem being kin to molecules.  
So take in hand, one, chemistry, and two, a teeming brain.  
Mix in dreams of Eden in an interstellar rain.

Dilithium and nacelles we'll need. Perhaps a shuttlecraft.  
But none of this can work without a soul to man the raft.  
We've needed one, an Engineer, to make us, take us up.  
Our fear is what has brought us here, oh Captain. Breaking up.  
Yes, fears are what have brought us here, captains of the night,  
sons of suns, engineers, dust clouds calving light.