

BETWEEN NOTHING AND ALL

Poems by
Robert H. Deluty



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Renato Rotondo



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struggling to counsel
chewing out
the psychotic man

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informing her ex
spotting
lemonade stand

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the stuntman
four star restaurant
algebra test
essay exam

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the anti-Semite
a boy hoping
the priest claiming
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a plastic surgeon
a teen asking how
in her dream
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Cornell freshman
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enraged
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Between Nothing and All



*For after all what is man in nature? A nothing in relation to infinity,
all in relation to nothing, a central point between nothing and all
and infinitely far from understanding either.*

Blaise Pascal



the Newton scholar
seeking the perfect pun
with apple and pi

Grandpa hiding
jelly beans in the fold
between his chins

the bride pondering
whether to keep Lifshitz
or become Schmuckler

afraid of flying,
hoping that in heaven
he won't have wings

high school career fair . . .
inquiring how to become
a dominatrix

at the track ~ his wife
betting on horses whose names
make her smile

turning ten,
their son insists on wearing
a derby to school

inattentive Met
trotting to first base
after *ball three*

a boy inquiring
whether sports cars' radios
play faster music

anorectic teen
pleading with her parents
for liposuction

her Dad despising
any male over seven
wearing flip-flops

the drug counselor
showing to a teen client
his rock star dartboard

a Muslim student
transferring from TCU
to Notre Dame

a Sikh student
transferring from Brandeis
to Yeshiva

the one-armed vet
juggling three rolling pins
for his awed niece

a sixth grader
asking the optician
for a monocle

basketball team
of five pancake chefs
christened *IHOOP*

turning ninety,
setting a personal best
for roses received

young Gil's parents
nicknaming their wayward son
Guilty

phoning
her estranged Dad after dreaming
she killed him

the bibliophile
stacking excess romances
in the guest bedroom

the bibliophile
stacking excess cookbooks
in the guest bathroom

a child asking
are you permitted to put
Coffee-mate in tea

Great-Grandma,
needing a ride to the store,
calling 9-1-1

his new patient
noting that happiness
makes her itch

first day at Princeton . . .
spotting on a men's room wall
Smoke Weed, Hail Satan

an eighty year-old,
her great-grandchild comparing
their fears of the dark

nine second graders
standing side-by-side, holding
one Burmese python

multitasking Dad
snoring and farting
as he sleeps

airport check-in . . .
the four-month-old baby
getting a pat-down

on her deathbed
scolding a granddaughter
for saying *Ya know*

telling the shrink
why her doorknob phobia
is adaptive

the CEO
displaying twelve birthday cards
on his office door

the workaholic
taking pride in looking
overwhelmed

their fourth grader
removing five letters
from *fire truck*

the old prof praying
for no committee meetings
in the hereafter

informing her Mom
that calling their dog a *pet*
is condescending

informing her Dad
that calling termites *pests*
is disparaging

underweight woman
fretting for the calories
in mint-flavored floss

asking her colleague
why he turns thirty degrees
before speaking

a teen searching
through *Roget's Thesaurus*
for *chillaxin'*

two brothers
debating which Pep Boy
is the best looking

a boy wondering
if, at heaven's gate,
you get a score

his dying father,
a staunch unionist, whispers
Don't mourn. Organize.

left-handed vet
doing canine surgery
at Southpaws Clinic

Destined for Greatness

In response
To his grandmother's query
Whether he's been eating
His vegetables,
The six year-old notes,
Upon careful reflection,
That he downed several
Peanut *M&Ms*
A couple of hours ago,
And four of them
Were green

traffic circle . . .

watching his wife outline

a pentagon

Onna Fritz

studying how to repair

televisions

on his birthday

the Berkeley dean receiving

a whip and a chair

Mom and Pop

referring to her husband

as *the bedsore*

street-food vendor

confessing to his priest

what's in the franks

gravely ill man
screaming at his spouse
to quit wailing

staring
at the bumper sticker
No Goats, No Glory

staring hard
at the bumper sticker
Better Dead than Mauve

staring harder
at the bumper sticker
I Was The Walrus

staring hardest
at the bumper sticker
Give Pizza Chants

a teen pondering
which she fears more:
life or death

Reverend Jones
learning his grandchild's been named
Golda

Rabbi Finkelstein
learning his grandchild's been named
Beyoncé

old psychiatrist
sharing his diagnosis:
She's wired wrong

hating themselves
for feeling relief their son,
an addict, OD'ed

after hours . . .

morticians using their hearse
as a gypsy cab

an immigrant child
grappling with the distinction
between *that* and *which*

a college teacher
grappling with the distinction
between *that* and *which*

driving Dad
to the hospice located
on Omega Lane

Atheeth Hiremath
planning to register
for Calculus III

Physics professor

noting he chose the field *'cause*

it's so damn hard

Psych professor

noting he chose the field *'cause*

it's all I'm good at

after the wedding

Bebe Schmidt opts not to take

Charles Bobo's last name

their mother

noting publicly her kids

are below average

two old ladies

debating whether it is

butt or *buck* naked

wedding night . . .

insisting on attending

Wrestlemania

at commencement

the college dean and provost

trading knock-knock jokes

dating service . . .

requesting *a kind man*

who can fix stuff

learning

the owner of *Big Bob's Ribs*

is Irving Goldfarb

learning

the owner of *Sal's Pizza*

is Shin Dong Hwi

42nd Street . . .

a panhandler requesting
\$1.85

Italian mastiff
lying down, exhausted
carrying his head

pre-K scientist
placing Dad's *Alka-Seltzer*
in a glass of *Coke*

ninth grade scientist
dreaming of a rare disease
named in her honor

calling it quits
after his blind date orders
extra kale

Monster Truck Jam . . .
spotting in the cheap seats
his French professor

Grandma, in slacks,
punching out the sales clerk
who called her *Sir*

the old vet
claiming their cat is part Manx,
part nihilist

the old vet
claiming their dog is part Lab,
part mental patient

a vegan woman
dreaming of spare ribs dancing
with sausages

mid-tornado . . .
family of four praying
in their bathtub

mid-tornado . . .
the old hospital's ER
disappearing

Halloween night . . .
Grandpa wearing a fake beard
over his real beard

informing the cop
she was speeding home
to study math

informing the cop
he was speeding to church
to help the poor

a priest

irked by the car sticker

Honk if you're Jesus

chic French restaurant . . .

their child requests for dessert

cotton candy

Jewish horse breeder

naming his Thoroughbred

Norman L. Feinberg

Chinese horse breeder

naming his Thoroughbred

Ng

a sixth grade boy

hoping the Apocalypse

falls on a school day

trying to evict
the poor, old agoraphobe
from his house

the college dean
wishing he could build a moat
around his office

buying his wife
of sixty-three years
a rotary phone

Thai, Polish in-laws
struggling to pronounce
each other's names

the deaf man unveils
his beloved father's grave stone
in a blinding rain



Brevity hones thinking and forces clarity but can also mean losing subtlety and nuance. The challenge is knowing when it does more harm than good.

Deborah Tannen

Consider the things that stick with you: The Ten Commandments, the Gettysburg Address, the seven dwarfs . . . Think long. Write short.

Carl Sessions Stepp



commencement speaker
describing his own success
in vivid detail

jet black-haired elder
telling the great-grandchildren
she uses dye

Mom staring
at the tattooed scorpion
of his fiancée

Dad staring
at the bright blue ponytail
of her fiancé

the pastor's wife
buying a new outfit
for the Rapture

death-row prisoner
requesting for his last meal
escargot, frog legs

her old patient
struggling with the demotion
of Pluto

her new patient
struggling with the loss
of *Oprah*

expressing concern
her blind date is nicknamed
Meatball

Nobel laureate
yanking at the entrance door
under the sign *Push*

driving her child
to the abortion clinic . . .
tears and silence

in the victors' pile
after their World Series win,
breaking an ankle

job candidate
bringing his mother
to the interview

in Sunday School
a boy asking if dead kids
grow up in heaven

in Sunday School
a girl asking whether souls
can improve in hell

texting the preacher
who erred predicting Doomsday
In yo face!

an Irish boy
wishing he had the last name
McNugget

an untenured prof
laughing uncontrollably
after the dean burps

retired broker
reading *Das Kapital*
on a cruise ship

retired professor
reading Plato's *Republic*
in Las Vegas

their teen seeking
a tattoo that resembles
chest chair

post-honeymoon . . .
bestowing a rolling pin
to use on her son

signing the card
to his Uncle Jonathan
Nephew Paul

asking the provost
why he keeps in his desk drawer
a *Ken doll*

zoo officials
nicknaming the old penguin
Sister Catherine

a crust of bread
hanging around the neck
of the sated crow

portraying
her lawyer as expensive
but incompetent

in a Bronx bar
three bodybuilders sporting
Yankees Suck t-shirts

the prof declaring
he did not know groping
was a crime

seven minutes late . . .
convinced her teenaged driver
is drunk, maimed, or dead

post-tornado . . .

searching for survivors

under lightning

a child fighting

for space on the car's back seat

with three terriers

pondering

what percentage of Cher

is artificial

McJob applicant

asking the interviewer

about pensions

Yale coed's shorts . . .

the words *No Respect*

printed on the butt

post-divorce . . .
hoping their daughter-in-law
finds someone better

moving van driver
directing his road rage
at a bicyclist

M.A. student
dreaming that, mid-orals,
she's called a pinhead

Ph.D. student
dreaming that, post-orals,
his parents are chastised

vacation planning . . .
choosing between Lake Tahoe
and China's Great Wall

Eden

Their teenaged daughter
Demanding to move
To a large city
Without crime, ice storms, buses,
Mosquitoes, earthquakes, bigotry,
Fog, hurricanes, blight, lizards,
Rush-hour traffic, tornadoes,
Slums, floods, and cacti, but
With lots of cool,
Handsome guys

spring break . . . building
a Brooklyn Bridge replica
with ramen noodles

pre-exam . . .
a girl memorizing
the eye chart

English professor
displays his tattoo: *I read
therefore I am*

newly rich athlete
mastering saying *No*
to his in-laws

newly rich athlete
unable to respond *No*
to his oldest friends

their first date . . .
exhausted from holding
his belly in

a New York poet
writing an ode to nature
sitting in traffic

her brilliant son
writing his dissertation
on gross-out humor

his brilliant daughter
writing her dissertation
on tabloid gossip

on the cartridge
for their laser printer:
Don't eat the toner

Grandma warning
dark sheets and pillow cases
lead to nightmares

a therapist's child
wondering why Dad's patient
is mowing their lawn

relatives
of the litigious woman
fearing her visit

the Browns of Dallas
choosing to name their firstborn
Nowitzki

Memorial Day . . .
seeking the link between sales
and dead soldiers

terrifying
her Doberman pinscher
by gargling

in the store, her child
asserting he did *not* steal,
he simply took

the old waitress
estimating how often
she's been thanked

the old waiter
calculating how often
he's been stiffed

wishing
they could dust their daughter
for male fingerprints

his grandson jumping
out of the booster seat,
screaming *Ta-da!*

mortified preacher
rescheduling Doomsday for
the next century

a bank teller
wishing she could penalize
for bad penmanship

Catholic schoolgirl
inquiring which apostle
was the best looking

a boy's drawing
on the refrigerator . . .
forty years old

at *Denny's*

Great-Grandpa ordering

a quail-egg omelette

angst-ridden teen

glaring at her mother

for being gracious

angst-ridden teen

castigating his father

for showing concern

the new patient

uttering her first words:

I lie all the time

a fifth grader

wondering which weighs more:

a typed or inked 8

demented father
preferring a pinwheel
to her company

at *Carrabba's* . . .
their server working on
his ninth *I'm sorry*

four-minute address . . .
commencement speaker getting
a huge ovation

describing
his bipolar daughter
as *emotional*

describing
her schizophrenic son
as *different*

a bored ten year-old
watching unpierced franks explode
in the microwave

the young therapist
dreaming of counseling
the Freud family

an unhappy wife
practices calling herself
the Widow Jones

Harvard dean's son
pasting a Palin poster
beside his bed

seven-year-old Joy
wishing she shared her name
with a hurricane

at Wimbledon
blaming a ball boy
for his defeat

the old polyglot
wondering which language
he'll lose first

telling the parents
their fifth grader is failing
to embrace grammar

assuming
the tattoos on her stout calves
make them sexier

roadside diner . . .
a four-year-old girl crying
her burger's too big

asking his wife
if he must remain faithful
in the afterlife

incensed to learn
Mom's been putting vegetables
in the smoothies

her ten year-old
seeking alternatives
to civility

dying pool player
asks to be buried holding
an eight ball

Miami merchant
hawking stone alligators
as lawn ornaments

realizing
Mom and Dad get along best
an ocean apart

their daughter
refusing to date a man
whose Dad is balding

Jim Colby, Carl Hamm
believing they are destined
to own a deli

Sam Bikel, Blaire Lochs
believing they are destined
to be married

1:00 a.m. ~ pleading
with their suicidal teen
to stop killing them

morning jog . . .
a woman in Laredo
packing a handgun

Santa applicant
stating with pride he requires
no padding

air force captain
fighting a panic attack
at ten thousand feet

his spouse
noting her favorite word
is *luxury*

her spouse
noting his favorite word
is *solitude*

Don't be too clever for an audience. Make it obvious. Make the subtleties obvious also.

Billy Wilder

Broadly speaking, the short words are the best, and the old words best of all.

Winston Churchill

the new parents
introducing their quads
Faith, Grace, Hope, Ed

piano bar . . .
a drunk patron requesting
Beethoven's Fifth

her grandchild
requesting a pink thimble
for Christmas

a Quaker girl
winning the spelling bee
with *blitzkrieg*

post-finals . . . wishing
his daughter would decompress,
not decompensate

asking his doctor
which burns more calories;
whistling or snoring

married fifty years,
wishing her husband
were socialized

Duke graduation . . .
dance majors doing *jetés*
across the stage

Yale graduation . . .
theater majors hamming
across the stage

Tufts graduation . . .
physics majors walking
across the stage

writing to God . . .

a girl stating she's British,
asking what is He

Jewish candidate
hoping that wedding a Sikh
will be a net gain

boasting to the nurse
he's had bacon every day
for eighty-three years

young Baltimore cop
standing on a lawyer's porch,
cursing, spitting

their son-in-law
seeking a job requiring
no future learning

offering
her despairing grandson
ten dollars to smile

twelfth grader Bo Peng
applying only to Brown,
Bard, Bates, Pitt, Penn

Mary and William,
twin seniors, opting for
William & Mary

his child confessing
he finds lady truckers
utterly hot

her child confessing
she finds men who look like Dad
complete turn-offs

their sister
valuing sweetness
over truth

their brother
finding a sibling's joy
acutely painful

a three year-old
taking the butt from Gramps' lips
as he sleeps

a girl pondering
what her German shepherd makes
of television

after the murder
his Mom torturing herself
with what ifs

the old Jew
calling each of his six sons
Boychik

the old researcher
calling each of eight R.A.s
You

Chinese Olympian
feeling the collective weight
of one billion

at *Chuck E. Cheese's*
their granddaughter screaming
I hate lactose!

the chronic liar
terrified his memory
is failing

Stanford commencement . . .
their grad blowing a bubble
beside the provost

a boy assuming
suspenders will make him look
wise and rich

ninth inning homerun
causing the ailing old man
to die with a smile

resisting the urge
to spit in the barley soup
of the rude patron

renowned doctor,
as a patient, finally
showing gratitude

an obese man
getting the vanity plates
LVN LRG

recollecting
Uncle Chazz each time she sees
a pinky ring

the naked jogger,
hot and exhausted, jumping
in a public pool

asked how it's going,
the first grader responding
Copacetic

family picnic . . .
their four-month-old baby
riding a bulldog

turning nine,
practicing writing *Dr.*
before her name

turning twelve,
practicing writing *Sir*
before his name

recalling fondly
her parents, both janitors,
smelling of sweat, bleach

first date . . .
asking if he can bring home
her leftovers

a benchwarmer
making the game-winning shot
before waking up

on the boardwalk
spotting a ninety year-old
in red, high-top *Keds*

a philosopher
showing off his Kant, Hegel,
and Descartes tattoos

a psychologist
showing off her Freud, Skinner,
and Jung bobbleheads

screaming spouses
in a *Saab* with the sticker
Choose Civility

depressed man's Mom
telling him he hasn't the guts
to take his life

linguistics class . . .
asking the prof which accent
is the sexiest

instructing her teen
she **can** kiss a fellow
if he's wealthy

during his rant
a gang leader using
the *royal we*

celiac patient
beaming as she dreams
of pumpernickel

a diabetic
welling up as he dreams
of napoleons

wondering why
there's a *Scream* marathon
on TV Christmas

wondering why
there's a *Rambo* marathon
on TV Easter

the dog-walker
struggling with a Peke, a pug
and two wolfhounds

old psychologist
teaching his scared child-patient
how to juggle

young social worker
teaching his shy teen-client
ventriloquism

Senate campaigner
driving an old, beat-up *Ford*,
stashing his *Audi*

a boy praying
for facts to leap from the text
right into his brain

a girl praying
for God to choose the answers
on her True/False quiz

staff meeting . . .
the judge peppering his remarks
with the *F* word

with her last breath
Great-Grandma confessing
to three murders

at Bellevue . . . learning
the wild-eyed fast-talker
is a staff member

father of seven
insisting that his den
be photograph-free

linguistics student
researching when *bay*
became a verb

linguistics student
researching when *way*
became an adverb

linguistics student
researching when *gay*
became a put-down

his wife inquiring
if the red blouse makes her eyes
appear bloodshot

her spouse inquiring
whether his paisley necktie
makes him look shorter

instead of numbers
a young narcissist sporting
! on his jersey

the new father
noting his two-day-old son
is *tenacious*

the new mother
noting her two-week-old son
is *ferocious*

finding in drawers
of their late nana's kitchen
twelve thousand stirrers

nine-year-old Bart Welch
wishing his first and last names
had kinder rhymes

ditching her date
after he asks the waiter
for goat cheese soup

Yale psychologist,
in his cluttered office,
studying hoarders

in the ER
gang members showing their wounds
to a burn victim

noticing
her spouse stops listening
once he stops talking

the psych intern
terrified she's turning
into a voyeur

race car driver
investing his winnings
in treasury bonds

the elder's eyebrows
evoking from a toddler
fear and wonder

to avoid her ex
figuring she'll need to move
from Rhode Island

his date, over lunch,
asks which punctuation mark
he likes best

boxing promoter
stating the match was not fixed,
just *preordained*

Grandpa pushing
a *Wal-Mart* shopping cart
nine blocks to his home

their daughter-in-law
calculating her weight gain
in ounces

her husband cracking
under the strain of trying
to be gracious

the hospital shrink
doing his best therapy
over ping-pong

a novelist
asking to be cremated
with her first drafts

struggling to counsel
the offensive husband,
his defensive wife

chewing out
her daughter for wearing white
to *Pizza Hut*

the psychotic man
cracking open an acorn,
seeking the oak

at his new job
sensing that he's repeating
tenth grade

the great tenor
getting a pass to abuse
because of the voice

informing her ex
threatening to kill himself
is not a turn-on

spotting
her longtime psychiatrist
at the nude beach

lemonade stand . . .
an eight year-old offering
Pink and Normal

before the big match
donning a Star of David
and three crosses

the stuntman
begging his teenaged daughter
to drive safely

four star restaurant . . .
the young couple next to them
playing backgammon

algebra test . . .
the high school student asking
if neatness counts

essay exam . . .
the college student asking
if clarity counts

entering the church
requesting that her children
act human

the anti-Semite
blaming Northern Ireland's woes
on Jewish bankers

a boy hoping
Nerf Dart Tag is an event
in the Olympics

the priest claiming
he did not intend to write
convict for *convent*

her mother
regarding hand-me-downs
as heirlooms

the billionaire smiles
recalling his fifth year
of high school

a plastic surgeon
pondering how much past work
was needless

a teen asking how
the Founding Fathers managed
without PCs

in her dream
the obese woman battling
anorexia

their balding father
praying for black fedoras
to make a comeback

winners' locker room . . .
the team owner's *Armani*
drenched in champagne

Cornell freshman
equating criticism
with battery

Cornell professor
equating criticism
with caring

her teen responding
to *We dress for dinner*,
with *Who doesn't?*

her spouse responding
to *We dress for dinner*,
with *Thank God!*

two Nobel winners
debating which is better:
Bosco or *U-Bet*

new prisoner
hoping her uniform's stripes
are vertical

on Flag Day
a sophomore displaying
his Princeton pennant

the hungry mouse
refusing to approach
a no-salt rice cake

retirement home . . .
three grandmothers discussing
slip-and-fall lawsuits

fired ice cream salesman
claiming there's nothing joyous
about *Good Humor*

enraged
his wife is cheating on him
with a Glenn Beck fan

behind closed doors
the Supreme Court's Chief Justice
dunking *Lorna Doones*

hard-boiled detective
drinking from his pocket flask
Strawberry *Kool-Aid*

four elders roaring
as their granddaughter offers
her first joke's punch line

identical twins
requesting the same number
on their team jerseys

his teacher claiming
a haiku must not have
sixteen syllables

new convertible . . .
alarm on, windows rolled up,
doors locked, the top down

May's second Sunday . . .
watching with Mom and Grandma
Terms of Endearment

June's third Sunday . . .
watching with Dad and Grandpa
The Godfather



Index of Poems' Original Sources

Some of the poems presented in this volume have been published or are “in press” elsewhere. Listed below are the journals in which they have appeared or soon will appear:

In **The Pegasus Review**: *a New York poet; a teen searching;
retired broker*

In **Timber Creek Review**: *Cornell freshman; Cornell professor;
Eden; identical twins; lemonade stand; the Newton scholar*



Author's Note

Dr. Robert H. Deluty is the Associate Dean of the Graduate School at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. He has been a psychology professor at UMBC since 1980, and was named Presidential Teaching Professor in 2002. He and his wife, Barbara, live in Ellicott City, Maryland and have two adult children, Laura and David. Dr. Deluty's poems and essays have been published in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Baltimore Sun*, *Modern Haiku*, *Voices: The Art and Science of Psychotherapy*, *Psychiatric Times*, *the Journal of Poetry Therapy*, *Hummingbird: Magazine of the Short Poem*, *Welcome Home*, *Muse of Fire*, *Maryland Family Magazine*, *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*, and many other newspapers, journals, and anthologies. *Between Nothing and All* is his thirty-third book.

