I sing of welfare and a man who’s well
because of Core, who learned everything
he needed to know about whores
from Gilgamesh, and was later pleasurably hushed
at heart by the Tao Te Ching. Now when he walks,
he takes one step at a time. When he talks, he sings
the song of himself, chock full of all
those contradictions and thinks, Very well,
then, feels very well when in the light
of friendship, especially with a bottle of Bacchus’
best in hand, Aristotle at his hip.

Not all
is easy, of course—Darwin’s world can be as poor,
nasty, brutish and short as it is replete
with wonder. The heart’s hard arc of love
is harder when your love’s a deer—isn’t that right,
Petrarch? And what then, our well man, when your heart
stands a loaded gun, is up against other guns,
germs, the steel gaze of others? This man, Gargantuan
in height, calls upon his Rabelaisian humor, draws near
his brothers and sisters and says Don’t put Descartes
before the horse. By all means, don’t
lick that horse in the mouth! Remember we’ve exhausted
thousands of years of stars, and there will be
thousands more. And when this man finally finds his father
beyond the comfort of his home, asleep deep in the dark
of the unknown, cloaked in all age has to say
about youth and how we owned it, and the father’s fate
carries him closer to the colder waters
where no oar helps, where even reflection
does the son, our man, no good—Well, still it moves
him to think of Aeneas, of how he was
Burdened and sick at heart, with feigned hope
in his look, and how still he stood
before his people to say:

Friends and companions,

Have we not known hard hours before this?
My men, who have endured still greater dangers,
God will grant us an end to these as well.
You sailed by Scylla’s rage, her booming crags,
You saw the Cyclops’ boulders. Now call back
Your courage, and have done with fear and sorrow.
Some day, perhaps, remembering even this
Will be a pleasure. And so our man gathers together
mother and father, reminds them their job alone
is to try, to essai, to inspect within and without, to harbor
wonder. Maybe our man is eccentric, maybe Quixotic, but he
knows truth when he sees it, knows because of Core
that one man scorned and covered with scars
still strove with his last ounce of courage to reach
the unreachable stars, and he knows the world
was better for this, and will continue to be
or not to be. And if the possibility of the latter
leans uncomfortably close, our man will keep
long-ago-learned words closer, will not fear suffering,
for a man who fears suffering is already suffering
from what he fears.

And if he suffers? If he fails,
falls hard, encounters pandemonium, betrays his own
good work? He’ll grin and bear it. He’ll smirk
in Mephistophelean spirit. And even then he’ll call on Core
to remind us: Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav’n.