



DON GORDON

Collected Poems

A CRITICAL READING EDITION

EXTREMES AND MODERATIONS:
EARLY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA POETRY

Collected Poems

DON GORDON

1902–1989

CRITICAL READING EDITION

Edited by Brian Kim Stefans

Extremes and Moderations

EXTREMES AND MODERATIONS: EARLY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA POETRY

EDITORIAL AND RIGHTS NOTE

This critical reading edition resets all 243 poems in Don Gordon's six books. It is not a facsimile. The 2004 University of Illinois Press recovery edition is the primary textual witness and has been checked against its page images, an independent OCR pass, and the separate periodical and book scans preserved in the project archive. Book order, poem order, stanza divisions, intentional indents, epigraphs, and dated matter are retained; narrow-page carry lines are restored to their underlying verse lines.

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ARCHIVAL IMAGES

A short documentary record



Don Gordon. Photograph by Richard Nickson; frontispiece to the 2004 recovery edition.



Don and Henriette "Henrie" Gordon. Courtesy of Tina Gainsboro in the 2004 recovery edition.



Henrie and Don Gordon with Alice and Thomas McGrath, 1984. Photograph by John Crawford.

Mr. TAVENNER. Mr. Donald Gordon.

Mr. WALTER. Mr. Gordon.

Will you raise your right hand, please. Do you swear the testimony you are about to give will be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Mr. GORDON. I do.

Mr. WALTER. Sit down, please, Mr. Gordon.

TESTIMONY OF DONALD GORDON

Mr. TAVENNER. You are Donald Gordon?

Mr. GORDON. Yes.

Mr. TAVENNER. When and where were you born, Mr. Gordon?

Mr. GORDON. May I say just a word on the question of counsel?

Mr. TAVENNER. Oh, I beg your pardon. Do you have counsel?

Mr. WALTER. Are you represented by counsel?

Mr. GORDON. I wanted to say this, if I may. I was present in this room last Friday morning. I heard what seemed to me an improper and shocking attack upon another witness' attorney. At that point I felt that the right to have counsel was being invaded and I made up my mind that I could not subject any human being to another such attack, so though I do not waive any rights to counsel, I am here without counsel for that reason.

Mr. WALTER. Principally for the reason that you wanted to make the speech you just made; isn't that the reason?

Mr. GORDON. No; the thought had not occurred to me until the incident had occurred, because I had intended to have counsel.

Mr. WALTER. Well, I want to say this to you, sir, that it is becoming annoying—and that is a gross understatement of fact—to members

*Opening of Donald Gordon's testimony before the House Committee on Un-American Activities,
September 24, 1951.*

INTRODUCTION

The private nervous system of history

Don Gordon wrote as though the lyric poem were a pressure gauge: a small instrument held against the machinery of history, registering what public events did to a private nervous system. The machinery changed—Depression hunger, fascism, world war, the blacklist, psychiatric wards, nuclear weapons, old age—but the instrument stayed alert. His sentences are muscular and compressed, his images often mineral or anatomical, and his politics enter as lived pressure rather than slogan. Even at his most declarative, he was interested in the vulnerable body inside the declaration.

He arrived at poetry by way of Los Angeles rather than a university literary career. After growing up there and studying at Pomona, he read stories and scripts for the movie studios. He organized with other workers, joined the Communist Party during the Depression, and gathered writers, architects, actors, and organizers in the Pacific View Drive house he shared with Henriette “Henrie” Gordon. R. M. Schindler and Gregory Ain both left marks on that house. Thomas McGrath, Edwin Rolfe, Naomi Replansky, Gene Frumkin, Sanora Babb, Meridel Le Sueur, and others passed through the same political and literary world.

The first three books establish the scale of his project. *Statement* sets modernist compression against hunger marches, strikes, fascist leaders, and the Spanish war. *Civilian Poems* examines the home front and the civilian body during global war. *Displaced Persons* turns the Cold War inward: deportees, dissenters, investigations, exiles, and people unable to inhabit the official story. Gordon had learned that history did not remain outside the house. In September 1951 he appeared before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. He refused to name others, invoked the Fifth Amendment, returned to MGM, and found his desk cleared. The blacklist ended his studio career.

For years afterward he wrote little. Jobs in day care, a halfway house, and a night clinic brought him close to psychiatric patients and to institutional habits

of diagnosis and control. When the poems returned, *On the Ward* made that experience part of a larger inquiry into damage, survival, and moral attention. *Excavations* and *The Sea of Tranquility* widen the field again: archaeology, evolutionary time, Holocaust memory, disappearance, weapons, neighborhoods, friendship, and the indignities and discoveries of aging. The late poems are plainer than the early ones without becoming simple. They keep testing whether a human scale can be recovered from ruins.

Gordon published steadily but kept himself outside the reading-and-teaching circuit that increasingly organized American poetry. The result was a substantial body of work that remained scattered in six slim books. Fred Whitehead's 2004 recovery edition made the whole arc visible and supplies the principal witness for this reset text. The present edition retains the six-book order, Gordon's stanza divisions and indents, and the dated or numbered structures inside the poems. Narrow-page carry lines have been restored to their underlying verse lines, and unmistakable recognition debris has been corrected against the page images and an independent OCR pass. A short archival opening keeps the documentary record close: Gordon at work and among friends, followed by the first page of the testimony that cost him his livelihood.

BIOGRAPHY

Don Gordon, 1902–1989

Family, disability, and Los Angeles

Donald Gordon was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut, on November 21, 1902. Fred Whitehead reports that date from Gordon's birth certificate and passport; Gordon gave November 21, 1903, when questioned under oath by HUAC, a one-year discrepancy that later reference files have sometimes compounded. His mother, Sarah or Sadie, was born in New Milford, Connecticut. His father, Morris Gordon, had emigrated from Vilnius, sold dry goods from a wagon, and became an attorney. Gordon was born with club feet. At about eighteen months he underwent what the family called "bloodless surgery" in Europe and later spent long periods standing on a corrective platform, reading. Whitehead connects that enforced stillness with the life in books that followed.

The family moved to Los Angeles in 1912, after the birth of Gordon's sister Mildred. Morris was admitted to the California bar. Sadie and Mildred found occasional film work; Sadie appeared in Charlie Chaplin's *The Floorwalker* in 1916. Gordon graduated from Los Angeles High School in 1919, attended the southern branch of the University of California for two years, and completed a degree at Pomona College in 1923, where he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. A short trial of law school at USC convinced him not to follow his father's profession.

Film work, marriage, and the radical thirties

A Palmer School of Writing course led Gordon toward commercial story work. By the late 1920s he was reading fiction and screen material for studios. His November 1927 passport called him a writer; on a voyage to New York by way of the Panama Canal he wrote “Sea,” later printed by the *New York Herald Tribune*. Around 1931 he met Henriette Lerfield. They married that December, and Gordon became stepfather to her daughter, Tina Gainsboro. About 1933 the family moved to a modest house on Pacific View Drive. The architects R. M. Schindler and Gregory Ain remodeled it at different times; Henrie developed a career in interior decoration.

Gordon worked at Paramount and later MGM, eventually in story departments, while supporting organization among studio workers. He joined the Communist Party around 1932 and participated in the League of American Writers. The Pacific View house became a meeting place for writers, artists, architects, actors, and organizers. His friendships included Thomas and Alice McGrath, Edwin Rolfe, Gene Frumkin, Naomi Replansky, Meridel Le Sueur, Sanora Babb, Guy Endore, Cedric Belfrage, Claude Williams, and others whose work joined literature to the antifascist and labor movements. During the Second World War, too old for the draft, he served in the California State Guard and worked against anti-Semitism and attacks on Japanese Americans.

The first books

Gordon’s poems appeared in *Poetry*, *The New Republic*, *The Nation*, *Harper’s*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Southern Review*, *New Masses*, *The Saturday Review of Literature*, and many other magazines. *Statement* (1943) joined modernist experiment to Depression and antifascist subjects. *Civilian Poems* (1946), issued in a shared volume with Aaron Kramer, considered war from the civilian side. *Displaced Persons* (1958) gathered poems of investigation, exile, conformity, and Cold War fear. Reviewers recognized both the density of the language and the unusual continuity between political commitment and psychological observation.

HUAC and the blacklist

Screenwriter Martin Berkeley named Gordon before the House Committee on Un-American Activities in September 1951. Gordon appeared on September 24 without counsel. He later remembered his father's instruction: "We don't want a stool pigeon in our family." The transcript identifies him as Donald Gordon, a Los Angeles resident since 1912, writing as Don Gordon, then employed as an assistant in MGM's story department after earlier heading the reading department at Paramount. He invoked the Fifth Amendment and refused questions designed to identify associates. He was not cited for contempt, but when he returned to MGM his desk had been cleared and his final paycheck prepared. The studio blacklist ended the career on which his household depended.

The blacklist years joined Gordon to a loose Los Angeles circle sometimes called the Marsh Street Irregulars: McGrath, Rolfe, Replansky, and others connected with *California Quarterly*. Gordon's practical editorial intelligence mattered to them. McGrath credited Gordon's advice—"Begin and see what happens"—with releasing the long work that became *Letter to an Imaginary Friend*. Gordon himself traveled to Mexico, did manual work connected with a mail-order house, and stopped writing poetry for roughly a decade.

Clinical work and the late poems

After the studios, Gordon worked at the Beverly-Compton Day Care Center, where he drove patients, helped administer shock treatments, and became an informal counselor. He later worked at a halfway house near Edgemont Hospital and at the Benjamin Rush Center night clinic. Encounters with patients, staff, and institutional language became the ground of *On the Ward* (1977), but the book refuses case-history detachment: the ward is one version of the damaged social world outside it. Gordon retired at sixty-two in 1964 and resumed sustained writing.

Excavations (1979) and *The Sea of Tranquility* (1989) extended the work into archaeological time, Holocaust memory, nuclear terror, disappearance in Latin America, domestic violence, friendship, and aging. Eleven poems appeared in the Russian anthology *We Believe in Humanity* (1986). Gordon rarely read publicly and did not enter the creative-writing teaching circuit. He continued to publish in little magazines and correspond with younger poets

while living in the spare, modern Pacific View house. His study, as Whitehead describes it, held little more than plywood walls, a desk, chair, typewriter, and woodcut.

The finished copies of *The Sea of Tranquility* reached Gordon in spring 1989. He died of congestive heart failure on June 10, 1989, in Los Angeles, in his eighty-seventh year. In accordance with his instructions, his body was donated to the UCLA Medical School. Henrie, Tina Gainsboro, friends, and editors preserved the manuscripts and record from which the later recovery of his work became possible.

Recovery and continuing record

Larry Ceplair interviewed Gordon in 1988 for UCLA's Hollywood Blacklist Oral History Project. Fred Whitehead drew on that transcript, interviews with Don and Henrie Gordon, Tina Gainsboro's recollections, certificates, passports, correspondence, and the books themselves for his long biographical essay in *Don Gordon: Collected Poems* (University of Illinois Press, 2004). That volume restored all six books and more than two hundred poems to print. It also corrected an obscurity that continues to produce mistaken records: the poet Don Gordon was not Frederick Don Gordon of Kokomo, Indiana, whose Social Security and newspaper records have sometimes been attached to him.

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STATEMENT

Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943

Part I

*... other times have sung the rose,
we celebrate the thorn.
—Don Gordon*

Sea

Sea is wild marble waiting a stonecutter's hand, chaos crying for symmetry,
For recurrent shapes: the sea is less than mountains and birds
Whose heights and migrations follow laws, return precisely on wings.

Ships etch wild marble, hard prows cutting clear:
Thin veins are open, now deeper than foam; the pattern
Seems forever made. Then in salt curves... the blue annulment.

All other tracings pass, all faint designs depart
Wind edge, the sun's point; moon fingers on the tide.
Life is averse to these still early waters: the sea
And the world of man are the last voids... pendulous, unborn.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, p. 3.

The Wailing Wall

Harvests pass and turbans pass and scimitars go by.
Jerusalem is cunning, it basks at the wailing wall,
It smiles above white buildings, it knows how cities died.

This stone, this native breast, is saved for the hands
Of men untried in action: still the generations
Thump their grief, sun and stone absorb
The punctual cry, the women lean upon the dusk.

Desolation under roofs is agony that leads to action;
Sorrow closed in houses breaks the doors like flame.
Sharp grasses use the dust of Babylon but Jerusalem has wine:
Cities, remark its cunning, establish tears!

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, p. 3.

Nocturne

In the night and the related city the horses of darkness are moving:
Furiously on the ramparts of the mind they circle,
They vanish, they close, the beasts scream and retreat and draw near.

Nocturnes were tender, there were songs of girls.
Earth turned too often: the brain fails the worn orbit,
The eye discerns void and atom, at dusk the light dies forever.

The night is a mirror of basalt, the city a forest
Of monoliths sharpened by stars. I am pressed
Between the night and the city, a grain in the mirror of stone.

The insect coils in amber, years of water wailing over, the airless river
Bearing down. I have been here a thousand years of water,
The bones glittering in the black amber of the night,
The heart a rattle of purged sinew on the spine.

The dream of amber dies, the skull is clothed, the brain spins the night's web.
To be alone, to know not time, to be deafened to motion and blind to space,
To perceive only the images and deaths wrought within... but this is the very
godhead.

I have risen from the ramparts, From basalt and the pointed forest.
I have given form to silence, I have wrung kinship
With godhead, out of loneliness understood gods.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, p. 4.

The Gardens of the Sea

No star descends, nor the closest moon, nor slightly the sun.
The casual great sea flowers open their languid mouths;
The silent silver ones slip by the fern, the crystal fan.

The centuries corrupt the alabaster rock; the tawny sea-base
Crawls in emerald and in mauve. Brief are the slower golden lives:
The fed are the meat when armored shapes glide in on their blind eyes.

These deaths suffice; and in the dark lanes, the accustomed war.
Planets may cool, systems flicker out, new races inhabit the land:
No other plane excites the seascape, the unlit world.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 4–5.

Legend of Amber

Desolation falls in the Chinese rain, sorrow is the sound of the wind.
Rich are the roots that feed on buried nations; their spirals
Bloom in branches, the leaves descend like pity.

Remembering birth, the departures of men, the child
Fallen in the village, the columns endure at the river's edge:
The solid cry rolls under waters... amber is the agony of trees.

The grace of amber, surpassing light, awaits the compassionate,
The pure: the memories of trees shall circle her throat; curled
On the shadow in gold, the signature of time.

Now one are beauty and the curious still beauty of death.
The legions gone have said in amber: no arrogance
Can mar the living, the sorrow of man is borne on her breast.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, p. 5.

Image of Gold

I said: the heart shall be less. It has been at flood,
Now the escarpment will hold the bound river.
I respect the natural tides: the heart shall be charged with blood.

A dream decays, that is all, there is a death to music.
I am sickened by the waves; after them the childish foam.
Silence is enough, the mind is released from the galleys.

I had earth, the impartial wind, the birth and the expiration of suns.
Only the brain lived: the bees of thought were mighty in the hive;
Honey was on the flashing feet; there was time for the amber taste.

This, I said, is good: the tracing of stars, the awareness of atoms;
Salt of the wind in the nostrils, soundless day and the night;
The heart not sleeping, not waking, as music and the dead.

Not by the flags in drama, nor the hoofs of the youthful horses
The silence was taken: only the indolent month,
Only in April her unbound hair, the image of gold in the rain.

Still are there births and expirations of the sun;
Still the salt and the wind, the honey cool in the hive;
But final is laughter, final the beauty of gold.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 5–6.

Nor Any Word Is Said

The sounds of man are to persuade the darkness: the articulate
Have fearful deities; words are burnt offerings on their cairns.
The great realities are quiet: stealthy the planet, the lucid star, the appearance of
light.

Time is unwitnessed; its sandals pass, nor rustle once, nor turn.

The cities, the moving metals, cry in the hundred tongues;
The towers, as of Babel, are stricken with voices, the sky is lost to the builders.
None hears the orbit, the nimble atom, the asteroid in droves;
Nor any wind is loud in space, nor any word is said and all is said.)
So the heart speaks with silence, the heart answers: the quieter than light.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, p. 6.

Atomic Theory

We run between cloudy poles: birth and death
Receding forever before the eye; we know
The lung's need, only the blind motion.

Sharply In the side of the runner the dread of oblivion
Rattles like fire: the lovers are locked in passion and fear;
The child is a gesture, flung in the path of the night.

(Give me valor and I have no need of gestures:
Valor is running alone between two oblivions.)

I absorb light, I know temperature in its extremes;
I drink at the wellsprings of all seasons;
Through the five senses, the pliable funnels,
I pour the outer world and circle it with my name.

Uniquely upon this circle, the atoms lodged in this brain,
I impress myself as intaglio incised in stone: they may be uneasy
In separate space, cluster like bees at the abandoned hive.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 6–7.

Skyward the Mote

Skyward the mote, the sea and the stream: they return from the quiet cloud.
Deathward the sun as light appears in tree and wing and tread.
The fruit of the tree is the wing's power, sinew in the name of man.
The heart and the moveless wings are loam, and there is grass.
(Nor is there less nor more.)

The blood seems lasting and deep, yet poured in the later vein
Is equal to life. Fear is not privately born at every birth,
Nor hate, nor love; at any death they do not die.
Thought is in transit; and pliable as cloud, the dream.
(Nor is there less nor more.)

The islands are fat on the deaths of polyps unseen;
Yet lacking, had been formless sea. We seem to walk alone
But the years are the footfall: there is an echo not heard,
A wave finer than the eye. We would think unrestrained,
Yet the brain has the imprint of others, it is wrought in their image.

The sun nears the core: yet the last ray is reckoned.
The man is apt in his hour, the grass in its time.
The word issues from sound into meaning, and is remembered.
(Nor is there more nor less.)

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, p. 7.

Kronos

The brain marches without drum, it leaves no footprint in the dust
Of buried worlds. All deities are stricken in their age, the star
Is calmly weighed. Space puckers like fruit, and light is another motion
Crawling the mighty rind. Ghost after ghost, the old realities depart.

Now the wise men come to the end of Time: the universe is tossed
In its sleep; all bodies, clouds, moons and motions move; in space
A point passes like a river, earth is in action on the tide,
The constellations roar on their blind errands. Time is relative:
They topple from the pantheon the great Kronos, the last Greek.

Still the dial measures in bronze, still the garden is flower and bee.
Moves over the roots and the Roman hours something in silence:
And the leaf is blown, the autumn bee is crisp, the rust invades the bronze.

We have eaten: hunger is not in us. We have fought:
The weapons repose. We have loved: love is a word, a wind.
Something goes quietly, goes footless in the world.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, p. 8.

Content of the Wind

Let the friend die and the lover die: death is another birth
For nitrogen and carbon, the elements are content of the wind.
Body alone is shaken by pulse, only the brain
Is stress; simplicity was first and is restored.

Law is a rack for the mind and the bone but elements
Rest on the law as the foam on the sea. The electron purrs
On its orbit, the atom is serene. What had the involute heart?

They remember space, the atoms strain for the lawful star-work,
The massive rings. Sinew turns: they turn with the convolutions. The voice
Is heard; it is not they who cry. Let these go that were not friend
Nor lover, the hand taken, nor the mouth you knew.

Planets make no outcry in their grooves nor the concourse of stars.
Space is bloodless, dreamless; the universe has no laughter, no tears.
Die; let the friend die and the lover die; chemistry
Is not kind nor unkind, atoms have no quick to bare.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 8–9.

Year of Grace

Incessantly the root and the leaf unwind, the flower expels the pollen
The earth bares an exhausted breast. Man is cunning in the year
His land is fallow: it will breathe light, in grace drain the long rain.

Sound breaks the quiet house; iron rises in towers; nations are born;
Shouts and weapons rock the plazas. Sky is severed by prow; planets hum
On their voyage; the globe, like a tired horse, turns in its traces.

Speak to men or to God or to gods: as land pleads, as the seeds rattle
And fail, so the brain is stunned, the heart withers.
Give us our year of grace: from the nagging forms of motion... from time
In its space... from sound and the terror of lights.

We shall see if the hand remember, the ear be delicate,
The vision abandon the eye. We shall know if the brain
Be more than a labyrinth, the heart than a chamber of blood.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, p. 9.

Part 2

*I saw the core of fire in dust of conflict,
core of light in dust of mobile feet.*

Statement

We are the builders by destruction; upon us the later towers.
We are the edged and separate atoms; beyond us the element.
We are the fragments, the star-broken; after us the useful suns.

This, you said, was world: ghosts and credos on their knees;
Life in its marble lines; on his column, God. We saw
Blood on the marble; we heard over the column the bleating of winds.

You had roots, you believed: yours the animal pleasure of weeping.
For us not even nostalgia, nor the beautiful companion, dream.
What is to be wept for; when shall we yearn, who are busy with ash?

We relieve the dying with death; it is called relentless.
Mercy is relentless: deliver your malediction to the universe.
This our inheritance: a burden of destruction upon us.
Your cities are at the sea... we are the first wave.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 9–10.

Glacier

Glacier was pitiless in the locked world: the leaf
closed forever, the naked branch expired; valleys
were shorn of rock, the wing was overtaken.

Sealed are the bridgeheads of the nations, the North
lane sealed; circled by steel the granaries, circled
as the North capes. Men form the image of the serpent,
the segments writhe for bread; upon the wind of hunger
ice descends. Northward, and Southward, heedless in
separate caverns, the bear retains his shaggy sleep.

The walls are involute, weapons multiply, the wintry
clans increase; sunlight trembles upon the threshold of the heart preoccupied
with frost.

North of the mind, the ice plains test their crystal
flanks: slowly, immensely, the seas surrender. South,
the wakeful spirit shudders, antennae sense the blast.

Already wind is blue... the bitter shining particles
are borne. Gather all suns and light, the least star will be warm.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 10–11.

The Village

All fangs and thunders slashed the
biped from the sea ascendant,
tender from the house
of waters.

The village was born: for destruction
of the saurian, the mammoth,
chiefly edged.

The strangers of the separate trees
in caverns multiplied: man
was terrible in droves.

Brain would bay horizons: the cavern
ghost withholds. Heart would
amplify: upon the valves
the village weighs
like stone.

Lands are chosen: village by village
the flags declare the biped
huddles in borders.

The nations champ at the bridgeheads:
the sentinels, the iron hounds,
challenge the aurochs.

The biped is lordly upon the waters:
what word by sea in armor,
what cargo coldly
borne?

The figureheads—the metal mouths—
precede the floating village:
the freight is desolation,
the word is slay.

They are below the waters: nourished
in the hard cocoons what larvae
descend the sea gardens?

Not the saurian, the subsea village
stalks: but biped above. On
the mauve flowers the
iron is laid.

Nor less the skies receive—master
of clouds and light, what
message from the sun?
Not mammoth roars on earth. Yet over
the cities, village in flight
measures its contribution:
death.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 11–12.

Pécs

(Pécs, Hungary. October, 1934. Twelve hundred miners remained underground five days, in a mass suicide strike against a weekly wage of \$2.)

In the crypt, for a night and a day, the voices passed,
lamps burning from mouth to mouth. Men could not stand nor lie; clearly
their backs sustained the globe.

Yesterday a point on a map, now Pécs was graven upon
the continents... they taught history to a generation; the document was plain as
death.

Night, identical day, the hours ratwise in the groin;
pressure of rock upon air, the lungs rasping, barely a cry in the throat.

The world pondered how men chose to die... millions
knew in Tokyo Shanghai Bombay New York London Paris
Warsaw Berlin Rome: they saw themselves endure.

The moment dropped, and was counted, day and a night,
grain by grain. Belts gnawed... the taste of leather
on tongues shrunk to the larynx. Enormous the single groan, fallen without
whisper at the stone turn.

On the fourth night, the last tenant tunneled the
rocks: no detonation, the minds blasted smokeless
from the skull. The crevice alive: lights... white bread... Magyar ghosts on the
plain.

Concession from above: a truce with the ghostridden;
men stumbled, grave to pithead, their women waiting.

Five days: the traffic resumed: yet nothing ever again
the same. Pécs splintered the decade, fires from below illumined the dead
regions... the ruin.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 12–13.

Unemployed

The man breathes (a reflex, a solemn irony). The tool was trimmed
To one edge and use: tool without task is for the moment dead.
The man is in himself, the seed rattles in the house unbroken.

This was a column revolving on the axis of a task.
The halt was in midturn, the catastrophe struck at noon:
This is a man stunned and moveless at the source.

He absorbs air, flesh, plant, he walks at intervals; but the window
Is closed, nor (for the moment) men exist nor light is flowing.
The heart spins on its own weight, a knot in the iron web.

Life was in the first seas, continued airward, slid the earlier rock.
Afterward: wings, the flying, unwound lengths, the stolid feet.
Later the cities, the men and their sustenance, a planet taken.

This was a point in the line of motion, a man continuous.
The continuity is cut, the point in motion is unbound:
Time howls in the ear of the figure, as space thwarts the polyp alone.
This is man trimmed to one edge and use, this the consummation of the seas.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 13–14.

Hunger March

The streets are aware
of the absence
of drums;

Not the heralds
precede
nor declare;

Not the stallions
the black manes,
the gold.

The long men stride
between the hapless city
and the sun.

Mammoth is born
of the hardest womb,
walks with a single thud.

(The triangles:
solid: of stone: kneel
on the desert kings.

Ashur

the winged bull
is bas-relief.

The Greeks
die
in their marble.)

These are not slain
in fragments nor worked
in stone.

This is
the last
procession,

The pace

not measured
unwinds the world.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 14–15.

They Have Come for Their Answers

The arts curl in the navel, the seven Brahmins burden their haunches in
self-respect.

The people, the drumbeats of hunger, invest the tower inviolate, whence issue:
The preoccupations; the odor of garlands; the hundred years' decay.

Forsake the sea in its frame, the angels, pastorals, recurrences and genuflexions;
The faun is inert in the thicket, prone the centaur between the four hoofs.
Abandon the statue of the statesman, the lovers, the nymph unequal to the
bronze.

Quiet the minuet, silence myth; the great waves and the cymbals perish.
The hour deserves the dance in parallel, the Greek will not awaken.
Nor phrase the private darkness nor tend the flower of death.

The empires of the dying summon the sleepers! Cancel all dreams,
Conquests, balances: they have come for their answers.
Nor evade nor charm in the immemorial delicate fashion;
Nor deny... in the presence of hunger... beauty is the second wound.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, p. 15.

Instant of Light

That day the city turned on the bone axis: motion, and no laughter.
The city was in myself, in rage privately muffled.
No anger of multitudes in the stone heart beat about me.

Later the street, the sun lost and buried in all buildings,
The night stumbling toward fury, perhaps toward sleep.
Then the instant of light, the gold motes
 falling, the blue area open...

 in the sky (or behind the
 sultry eyelids) stood the
 peasant, the man tawny in
 some land... also weary
 of the day, his night heavy
 upon him;

 speech was in that presence
 over the city; by his smile
 he knew me; we were together.

He answered separateness, briefly affirmed the round world,
Then was gone in space, or behind the iris knelt and faded.
The solitary rage with millions henceforth merged: I saw
The core of fire in dust of conflict, core of light in dust of mobile feet.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, p. 16.

Sargasso

The weed chambers wait, the tireless infinite subsea: the corsair must drop in
his armor, a golden hull succumb.

The knuckles of the sea bind like death: once opens the shell of the lower water,
closes once the soundless rim.

Some shall breathe in Sargasso, some shall rise after the ponderous the unerring
spiral fall.

Who denied the weed will discover no airward pass; never the masters, bland in
the gale and richly weighed.

Nor the lifelong passive arms undo these waters, nor the sea gazer untangle the
lane.

Men in the nocturnal hold endure not labyrinth nor tomb: there is no terror in
the unlit wells, they are home in the airless room; weed fingers casual, to
throats that knew the iron; live steam buckled the heart, welcome are the
relieving waters.

Stripped to skeleton, to leanest flesh, they will cleave the blue mouth upward,
sunder the massive planes, emerge

like shouting sea gods, suckled
at maelstrom, sired by Sargasso
father of depths.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 16–17.

Underground, 1935

Now imminent on earth the enemy in tunics: hussars have taken the
mainlands.

It is the lost season west of the red star but our years
Rumble on caissons-subterranean, the single muscle, the manifold heart.

Berlin applauds at the opera. The war below gives passwords
Through quiet doors—the press turns urgently in oil.
Nights are alive ten paces under Brandenburg Gate: mornings rise
Between bayonets—but the walls speak. They will break the bronze horses.

Herr Strauss relieves the capital: wine is taken in Vienna
Boldly by light, the howitzers drawn in the lair. Yet they remember
The Karl Marx—the detonations still in ghostly Floridsdorf:
They build now, from their black base upward, on sturdier rock.

Hussars on Caesar's road but there are seven hills in Rome,
The guardsmen dream at intervals. They spread fire in the dark,
Knowing the jagged forum dead, seeing no god great in the empire.
They ferment in catacombs—some will bear witness at the graves of giants.

Cleverly again the castanets, Seville nods on its balconies.
Music after burial in Asturias, but they listen in the mines
For messenger from Madrid. Spain basks, muzzle to Africa:
City and land drum their own anthem heavily under night.

The generals lift two-handled swords. The guns too may utter both ways.
No lantern is under Tokyo, no cherry blossom falls upon thinkers
Of dangerous thoughts: but they breathe equally in dark orchards;
Some stars yield light below—tomorrow they stand on the terraces.

Heads stare from the gate posts of the river cities yet they salute.
In the basements of Tientsin, sub-Canton will issue steel.
They die by the hundred cuts, but nocturnal papers pass in the marketplace.
They know death who sleep at the Yellow River: the dragon will disturb his
ash.

Now imminent on earth the enemy in tunics: hussars have taken the
mainlands.

It is the lost season west of the red star but our years
Rumble on caissons-subterrain, the single muscle, the manifold heart.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 17–18.

Example of the Sun

The light is delivered in turn over hemispheres to the land and the sea.
The flowers and the life in waters use the sun, the flower and the life on earth
In common: no tree complains, nor grasses hoard beyond the root.
Men bend alike in the one wind, receive the light in portion. Before birth is the
first

Collective: in the brute hollow curled and blind. The second is after the time of
awareness:

Death drops irreversible proof among the bodies of our loves and hates.

The time of awareness, touched by the hand, informed by the eye,
Is indisputable, ours, in the period of mutual breath.

The domain is lighted, warmed, incised in the whole design: this we minister.

Sharply against the swinging light, the armed silhouette against the air:

children in gas masks delicately to school... the grammar, the bayonet, the uses
of the sky;

gauze and iodine stored for three days' waiting, the civilian refuge is rehearsed
at noon;

the wheat in the field on private maps, the ore in the earth, the oil lakes under
the gold;

the militia is burnished at fall maneuvers, the riot guns delivered;

the warm atoll, the ice lane, the impassive sea are assessed;

the fleet under full steam the depth charge lowered the plane carriers
theoretically demolished twenty-four hours before the declaration.

We minister the time of awareness with our especial stress:

The armed silhouette replies with vomit gas and iron

To air in common, birth and death, the massive example of the sun.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 18–19.

Testament

We slough decades, we the people of words stand unbound in the skull.
We the people of images, being finally of sound mind, forsake ourselves.
In the brief pause of war, hear us creep down the immaculate stairs.

We are breaking the superstructure, the old men fall from our shoulders;
We cleave to the core of our own time, we will yet find the people
Where yesterday and tomorrow open their smoky passes.

Bodiless dissociate
we have spoken to ourselves a thousand years:
Ego, the pointed worm, consumed in the marrow its own length
A hundredfold, left our bones translucent for every wind to peer.

Eaten within, hollow as skeleton with grubs, how shall we stand among you?
Enough of man was left, perhaps, to recreate himself from memory.
More probably a blood transfusion: the fluid flows in masses.

Justly on the black road each light is dubious:
The burden of proof upon us, we accept with the word and the act.
Measure both in hard scales, some will be wanting;
The others have taken themselves... the first redoubt.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 19–20.

Law of Flight

The time divides; over the slit earth the last enemies deploy.
The power burns down on the plain: it will be taken,
It will be charged with light, or the wolf regains the cities.

Already the people of passage are on the moth-flight
From the bitter to the easier sun, to the hills
Higher than wing, the island alone in the sea.

They hurry on the earth, their backs to the war-lit houses.
None pursues: the law is its guardian, weighted like the albatross.
They will not die simply, with rifles voiding the dawn.

It is possible on the moth-flight to exclude noise and the rude visions.
The eyes will be fed on the spare mountains, the ears on the droning of the sea.
There will be the breath coming, the breath going: no wars: no stress.
It is possible to live, and to be dead... the viscera
Continue the previous man; and briefly the hair grows.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, p. 20.

We Speak of Action

Your brain on its spiral still in the socket; measured by space or change
Not an inch forward. There must be an end in action, else adore the bronze:
Mr. Rodin's Thinker sits in the museum portico, immobile, monstrous,
Stripped of all power and raiment, naked in a cerebral heaven.

We speak of action, not glory: few flags, many defeats.
Later, the nations taken by the people, the exiles welcomed.
No conquest: the structure regained, also the bones of comrades.

You fear melodrama: shouts by night; crowds thrust point to point;
At dawn, the body of your friend... History, however, does not apologize:
There are only thirty plots, many revisions by time and fortune.
Reject this performance: the same dawn will find you
Cast in yesterday's Denmark, still mouthing over ruined Elsinore.

The enemy is simple with weapons, and his war-cry neolithic.
Plainly he is a true believer in blood: he is here
With his headsman, the ax lightning to your distant thoughts.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, p. 21.

The Transient

Walk in wariness among the wires, the land is forbidden.
The highway is yours, and the stone fruits thereof: the teeth of wanderers
Break upon stone, or sharpen between stone and the words of war.

Measure all that is owned: the land's core, the burnished field, the western trees
Bending with gold. In this landscape, actual beasts nuzzle the fruit.
The quieter animal (at the moment) saves his strength for the road.

The paths converge upon the streets of hostile cities.
The autumnal faces peer from the windows in a later Rome.
Onward! these are the dead from the bones out, the windy marrow.

Scan earth and sky, standing lost upon the four borders:
Southward the languors, the peoples buried in sunlight;
Northward the waste tundra locked under the polar cap.

Will the eye bear you eastward enough, or westward
To the steppe in birth? Lonely and stern, the giant
Rises under his star; he guards his roads that none may walk unshod.

Coil and uncoil to the last inch over the cities
And the plain; the towers are private and the regions of grass.
Exact is the worm's view: how far to man's stature?

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 21–22.

To the Pickets

Power slept like a cry in the throats of the people;
In the lush pastures they seemed to lie down together,
The many and the few. Now the teeth of the great herd
Nibble the dust, the many-throated utter in the hemispheres.

The gold and the iron music summon the coverts of the cities.
Upon disputed streets, between the towers and the simple houses,
The artisan history hews the solitary line: who is not with us is against us!

Strike! one by one the holidays of desperation are declared.
The inarticulate speak now in their fashion, they are eloquent before the gates:
Not one shall enter, nor of the faithless one shall leave!

Gas is blown in the streets, first and the last tears are coldly drawn.
They oppose you with steel and the mercenaries, some will be slain.
(. What manner of serf the dead, how able skeleton with tools?)
Iron is familiar, taken at the breast, driven year by year.
Can the spine be shaken, whose vertebrae were locked in war?
They will goad you above and below, until the gates are flung and the glass
shivers,
Then cry vandal and enlist new enemies in the rear. Better the flanks visible,
The armies in their camps: the gates must be thrown before there is tomorrow.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, p. 22.

The Strike-Breaker

The body will accept the bread of betrayal nor veins distinguish the salt,
Only the heart refuses. Cry the first law, say it before meals; it is briefly
All your gospels. The law may be invoked: a moment is given to any Faust.

Walk in multitudes alone, by the campfires stealthily;
Envy the deaths of sentinels, the privilege of war.
Ask pity and the hand of man; pity you have, the fainter part of scorn.
Withheld the larger grace: compassion is for the noble and the blind.

You are attended: side by side the faithless, each of his time
A stricken envoy. Judas never dies: in every generation he endures
His thoughts a lesser or a longer while... then coldly the matrix closes.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, p. 23.

The Zones

Stop the wandering feet, unbind the dismal brain
This place, and this long season, are entangled;
Yet chaos is divisible, only three zones traverse the enormous web.

Bask in the islands burning, follow the blind maps,
Withdraw the senses, seal the apertures, shrug, or deny:
Yet each by his stress and stature, we trace this time.

First is surrender: manage an especial valor, volunteer the dust.
One gesture, once cut the nourishing cord, and all confusion is undone.

Or gather your bales in houses, comfort with objects;
Kneel to the arts in world beyond world, nuzzle the seven breasts;
Repose on the cold giantess, the state; embrace God,

The sound and odor of eternity, the love and terror, the delight;
Or yearn for the other wombs... again the dark child.

Or dedicate the brain and warn the flesh, there is increasing tide:
The honey-makers gasp in the honeycombs of stone,
The people crouch at their cottages. Summon the drowsy blood!

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, p. 23.

Love Song, 1938

Herr Krupp is slyly intimate within our lives.
The shells spin westward from Osaka, cradled in trains
That jar the delicate print from the wall.

Skoda was an outland name: it smokes in our sleep.
Vickers blackens the schoolbook yew; Schneider-Creusot
Is closer than Jesus, duPont more immanent than God.

Two cannot walk in the old way: they are counted; they are known.
This man will be mobilized when the accident of time
Has rolled upon him. She will be used in a hospital ward.

Narrow the night, Osaka rises on the Tokyo exchange;
Hasten the morning, they double duPont shifts;
Hasten the light, my love, Herr Krupp has numbered the suns!

Who did not care for flowers, cares at the plain end of bloom.
Who once forsook the people, in each face observes
One now unknown at some blown outpost die with him.

Between the wars we share not life but armistice.
The moment crossed with bayonets must hold embrace
And breath, and briefly hate and all our love.

We wait no fixed appointment with the dust:
Mainly from the last dead, we learned the instant's golden core
And to advance before the firing-pin, before the breaking shell.

Publication. *Statement.* Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, p. 24.

We Will Be Martial

1. The Kinsmen

The gods are absent,
 nor even the noble dust
 remarks a pantheon dispersed.

Zeus, Astarte,
 the thunderers, Venus,
 the lambs broken upon the marble:
Who answers the roll
 call of the heavens
 from Karnak to the pole?

Only the slayer Mars
 shouts vainglory
 among the slain;
His trumpets announce
 in the minds
 of the young men.

The hoofs gilded,
 on the oiled shoulders
 the garlands and the last suns:
Which of the young bulls
 will you dedicate next?

We are the kinsmen,
 the bright herd anointed:
Stronger than blood
 is death not pronounced,
 forever about to be uttered.
Sons of the western sea
 edge, the cold eastern rock,
 the strangers of the middle desert:
We live between the breaths
 of the old men!

2. We Need to Know

We stay upon
 the plain earth, nor traffic

in the Roman sign.
We thought the man in armor
died; we saw in his breastplate
the mole's nocturnal work.

They chose the coast
emplacement, inch by inch
appointed guns:
For the empty tide, fourteen;
on the great seas, sixteen;
the turrets sweep the sun.

They climb with iron
droppings; they hold maneuvers
in the fields of summer,
They practice death
with the sons
of the people.

We are not martial. We are
the quiet ones. Clothe us,
tawny as earth, for the kill.

March us away
with flowers
in the rifle mouths.

Tangle the wire,
take us to cover
on the bleak plain.

We will be martial:
grunt with the bayonet:
write love letters in gas masks.

You, hidden in the house
of the people: instruct us
in war! We need to know.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 24–26.

The Departure

*"When the class struggle nears the decisive hour...
a portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat."*

We have been among you at the last suppers: your hand sustained
By caress no more among us, nor these faces for the sake
Of the beautiful round eye. Something has expired in the talking rooms,
On the overstuffed chairs, in mouths nightly open and shut.

We break from you bodily: for the headline you overlooked, the hunger march
From the office window, the miner's face in the rotogravure;
For the refugees on the roads, for withered Spain, and for your friend
On horseback. The departure is under his leaden shade.

Stripped, alive, unpossessing, we are quiet after the celebrants.
The blood no further bond, nor habit; never again the senses.
The community rolls earthwide from the mind: a new dimension.

Who is with us is of us, we of them and these only:
The man with leaflets on a Berlin roof; thin figure
Down the Roman alley; the Osaka nucleus; from Archangel to the East;
This man, this woman, who will not gently die on the American farm.

First is the passion, the directed full flood in the artery;
The act and the war from this stem. The concept is unshaken in the blast;
The collective is beyond grain in common, beyond the house with two families.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, p. 27.

Dialectic

We are too close to our wounds; we lick them
And swallow ourselves. Meanwhile the battle stamps out
The last world; in the speckled corpse the grass arrives.

These hungers, and abrasions, nail each to his own moment:
Pain is a private estate, the mind's boundary at the edge;
But all pangs are derivative, we are history.

The blind snake writhes and changes his skin; the insect,
Intent on his crumb, is bruised by a single undulation.
Our span is longer, the convulsion slow; at the sloughing point
A loss of blood; then opposite and equal peace.

We are closed in the mourning circle, we pity ourselves;
We show our sores, as the leper in frightened streets;
We are intent on the withered limb, on beauty slightly ravaged.

These pits and swellings are in the body of time. The healthy epoch
Has open sores: symptoms divulge in men, the structure suppurates.
It is not privilege nor burden we express disease: it is a fact.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 27–28.

It Begins in the Man

It begins in the man: act by act in five lanes the world taken.
Day furrows the brain, night plants to people and the attitudes.
Time, and the inner seasons, mature the soldier without borders.

The man passes in the cities: bones of children enter his eye.
He is a witness to people in fields, to shape of the spine in work.
He sees the walkers upon roads, the feet toward the late star.
The world in extremis rattles like a pod;
Even this the man hears, and in the windy house the cry.

First war is within: against ghosts, mortmain, self.
The man sloughs a dream of applause, he denies his father.
He honors the men without names, he decides to be born.

The man has seen: images are in his thoughtful night.
He rejects the cadaver, walls a dark avenue
First barricade blocks in the brain a yesterday that dies.

Then people are remembered, a shape of bones is recalled;
The cities and the fields will not leave him, nor the children leave the man.
Remembering, the hand curves to the gunstock, the eye glides in the gunsight;
The soldier without borders marches only for the sake of morning.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, p. 28.

Exchange of Heroes

Comrades they gave us gods, then heroes,
and the statues in public places. Their
holidays remembered giants.

Maces and long swords commanded the plazas;
bronze epaulet the courthouse lawn; wreath and robe of state the porticoes.

The mounted myths rode forever in the sun.
We were to measure ourselves by pedestals;
by grace, breathe in the enormous shadows.

We made history in the lands, our hungers
and migrations unbound the seas: lords in
the later words. Generations were humbled
before them.

They deafened us by proclamation, they
blinded our eyes with great lights. We
obeyed; we crept in valleys. We had no
stature beside the mountains.

The globe's diameter draws in, the population
by the last trench is sundered. There will be salvos. All statues will be melted
down.

It is the time of definition; the pantheon is
unroofed. We spew the corsair, and the orator, chiefly their metal horsemen.

The land is in dispute, the power hung on the
wire to be taken. We exchange their monuments,
we drum their giants from the camps. It is an end of heroes and the beginning.

We appraise stature by awareness—if we have
heroes they will be stern among us... in us...
We are together by hatred and by love, we are delivered from them.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 29–30.

Death Masks

In the Hall of State

None decreed a mask of brain, of hand or foot, of breast where the heart was charged.

The foot bore him, the hand beckoned, the brain cried its command,
The heart said yes, no; and these are gone, nor any cast recalls.
They have let the blood ebb, tissue dry, the bones sprawl and the dust go over;
They have kept this that concealed the man, that held the door of change and holds it now.

The enemy looks upon the mask, lost as the friend, crying here at last his power webbed, here dread

Reduced to a simple formula that gives no sign to the hand raised for the clasp
or the knuckles in anger.

He turned two faces and one was of friendship, one enmity; even in death he is pliable.

They have made a mask for women: she who bore him is upon the floors of stone,

Then she who loved him. One is to remember pain, the later dream, the faith unmolested

By the mask. The other is to find her kisses on these lips, her face
Still in the eyes beneath the lids, here the delight and the hours and the words spoken.

The people, the comrade, the foe, she who bore him and she who loved him come singly here.

Do they see clay, or more or less than clay: of this man's thousand faces does any face remain?

Is all he held and lost and loved, caught here in contour of bone and brow,

The ridges of the lips, the broken mounds? Do they bring the face
They knew, lift up the lids sunken, in the nostrils set the nourishing breath?

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 30–31.

Marx

He chipped
the gilt cornice,
in the long dustbin
of the midcentury
whisked the curly myth.
Facades in rococo
split and crumpled,
brocades and candelabra
tumbled the stuffed houses.
He heard the medieval hound
snarling for ghostly bones;
on the rush mat the equal serf.
The new gentlemen
raged at the cold intruder:
he smelled moats in their towns;
He pointed
to peasants
in the dank streets;
He said the spinners
were weaving skeletons, there
would be an end to meekness.
He charted the rude
indices of birth;
in time's bare stone
slit early epitaphs.
The living could see
their distant graves;
the people besieged the heavens.
Death, too,
was dialectic:
he had sired the spectre.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, p. 31.

Lenin

He rose in history's
 opaque waters like a delta:
The lands of evening
 washed from the sinking hills;
He saw the disk
 of morning, the later world.

Europe's dying lamp
 was lit by the spark in exile;
The moaning colonies
 straightened their spines.

Cool as the Baltic,
 he appeared at the April feast:
large over the celebrants
 the grim shade upon the wall;
He spilt the premature wine.
 He said: Peace: Bread: Land.

The words ran down
 the Cossack horses;
 they heard in Baku,
 Vladivostok, Batum, Kiev;
On the Black Sea
 they heard,
 on the Dnieper,
 on the steppes.

He caught the first rumble
 in the throat of time.
 He said: act.
The spectre had bone,
 cover, of the living
 the steady eyes.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, p. 32.

Hitler

The endless voice,
 the aftermath of war,
 screamed over the German cities:
Discords... the blind men...
 the time of fratricide...
 the people bound in weeping.
In the hired tunic
 shouted from the doorway
 the guardsman of the house of gold.

The bitter drum
 summoned from the Black Forest
 the swart, uneasy forms:
In the Brown House...
 flares... fires... dead Wotan
 seated and blown upon...
 sated with whips and groans.

(The masks of great men,
 placed in love,
 are to remember
the abandoned house;
 the clay is scaled
 to each vast and quiet room.)

The shadow
 of this life
 is thin across the impatient ground;
This clay, quarried
 in the hard pit of time,
 tightens with each strangled cry;
This death mask
 creeps upon the living like a scar...
 not to remember... to obliterate.

The skull is outlined
 against the dosing sky;

drops from the rootless tree
the untimely flyblown fruit.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 33–34.

Mussolini

The taurine head
 tossed its own youth,
 in the sour dust gored the debris.
Remained: the angry horns,
 the puffed and sounding nostrils,
 only the squat image in the eye.

Quietly the boneless forum
 lay on its side; in the arena
 birds pecked the ghosts of the slain Gauls.
Six days, for time to reverse
 and Caesar re-cast the die, he roared
 at the stones; on the seventh he rested
In the empire
 held by the sullen sentry-boxes,
 the leaning walls of Rome.

The bound ax,
 terrible in the brass parades,
 is split at the helve
Against the weight
 of hunger, the edge slips
 on the Tuscan farms;
The blade flashes sun
 in the dense squares
 to blind the African graves.

He did not hear
 the monotone of women
 asking news from Spain.

He cannot sleep in flags,
 nor talk at night
 above Lipari's moan.

He cannot summon friends:
 their bodies slid down Tiber
 to the sea.

He cannot dream,
 for Matteotti comes

between the eyelid and the dream.
Upon the draining head
 constricts from throat to brow
 the certain, slow, inviolate mask.
He will be remembered
 if they unearth
 the small face of death.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 34–35.

Hirohito

They die at Shanghai,
 on the Yangtze winding,
 on the inland roads;

They die with his name
 blooming like a light
 on their lips.

The emperor walks in his garden.
 A blossom crinkles on the gilded bridge.
 He writes of wistaria, of its brief time.

Three days' salt
 burns in the eyes
 of the fishermen.

The women bend
 in the wet fields, the rice grains
 are counted at the evening meal.

Men, the western metals,
 are molten in the forges
 at the seaport cities.

The emperor,
 on his beautiful white horse,
 reviews the troops;

The hoofbeats fall and fade
 in the area
 between two worlds.

The emperor has seen the bayonets:
 the bronze door is closed;
 he is alone in the third world.

The men have made a God:
 rising in his lacquered house,
 he issues light to the people.

Blasted by the moving sun,
 they do not know
 God is fed at mealtime;
Bowed over his field guns,

they do not see him clothed
by the imperial tailor;
They have not found God
in spectacles,
a little man with weak eyes.

The life mask of the emperor:
the walk in the garden
the ride between the bayonets
the closing of the bronze door.
The death mask of the emperor:
the end of the walk
the closing of the closed eyes,

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 35–36.

The Diplomat

The figure is apt in corridors
 between the sentinels and statues
 saved in iron.

Through sleeping capitals
 the golden clocks
 record his flights;

The chimes, the chosen words,
 drop on the falling chancelleries
 their thirty silver sounds.

The train unwinds the map;
 the actual peasants
 blink in the boiling dust.

The traveling eye is inward:
 the faces at the window
 barely merge with trees.

Or in the nocturnal plane,
 between the moon and the people,
 hastens the image in the air.

The common roofs conceal
 the drowsy lives; on the night's motion
 passes the last dream.

The tongue in the halls of state
 ripples the valued rivers,
 the exchange of ports,
 the somber names of ships.

The farmer planted his nation
 in the customary spring:
 the grain grows in alien land.

Home with his borders,
 the pliable image
 nods in his marble room:

Squads close the bridgeheads,
 the deathly navies
 break the sea.

The mask

is a silhouette
in the halls of state;
The marble room
is finally folding,
the borders cry against him.
He was variant
in the capitals: the golden clocks
prepare the authentic face.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 37–38.

The Headsman in Evening Clothes

Their fitful history
 uncoils, they count skulls
 in the headhunter's night;
They give to murder
 their own guise,
 their ceremonial dress;
Baroque, blind by choice,
 exactly the man upon the scaffold
 states his epoch.

They fling
 the bodies of the brave
 against time's sightless guards.

The multitude is not darkened
 by a single eclipse, the shadow
 of the fearful men is short;

The iron people
 bear in their eyes
 all later suns.

Blood is on the moment
 the idea meets the ax:

They use death
 and even death is in their image.

The mask is established
 in the globe's round cry:

This terror is the faulty heart
 of those who need it.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 38–39.

The Informer

No ship mars
 the world's even edge; this life
 is an island in the barest sea,
Cut by the fatal current
 from all mainlands, all deltas
 rich in their people.
He stares at his knees,
 a minor uncarved stone
 abandoned to the gulls.

The enemy used him:
 the shell was forgotten
 in the next salvo.
The reserves took
 the lost outpost; his comrades died.
 Remember him the sleepless new patrols!
This cold circle is
 an absolute: no window opens
 upon another time.

The mercenaries,
 the saddest troops in battle,
 are maimed in the peace and broken.
The old women shiver
 as they pass, their rifles flowerless
 at the hands of the young girls,
The children stricken
 by the alien faces; they are shunned
 in the streets of defiant cities.

Merciful the mask
 as suture to the wound
 that cannot bleed nor close.
The wintry island watch
 is done: there is death his comrade,
 the birds waiting and their cry.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 39–40.

The Poet in the Stone House

The man is tall in his room,
his space chosen in the world
between the ceiling and the floor.

The solitary pharaoh
cries doom
from his pyramid.

The people are expected
to prove his words
with their lost lives.

This is a man
by the sea's witless beauty
wholly bound,
His speech locked
in the early worship, his eye
burned in the dead light of stars.

The worn shell
repeats the tides: but briefly
at the ear of the people.

The war is a bee
in a distant hive; yet peace
yearned for is beyond this room.

He longs for the warmth
of waters; but no certain mother
is among the moving weeds.

He turns to the last solid,
the immobile rock: the child
adores its permanent night.

Familiar to him
the weight upon the eyes,
and welcome:

This is the mask
assumed at birth, the child's wish,
the whole man's desire.

In these few decades

the helpless singers passed
from ivory to stone.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 40–41.

The Unknown Worker

The soldier is quiet in the monument,
his bones spoken over
for his work with weapons.
His comrade is restless,
his worms unlit
by the state's ordered flame.

He is unburied:
scarcely warmed at his furnace,
or coldly prone under slag;
He is unturned in his furrow;
or the tall building
has grown through his spine;
Or somewhere with copper
lately wound; or the gold miles
upon his eyes.

He is unburied:
who worked with tools
in their houses;
Who bore them
in safe hulls
through the night wind.
But he is the man in the monument:
cited for his work with guns
and too quiet for laughter.

He was also the land and its use:
the mask is of structures,
of his huge cities.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 41–42.

The Exile

They knocked in the cold hour;
 the order was flung like an animal
 across the mouth.
He stood with the squad
 at the station, in the gray sun
 the faces bleak as cartridges.
He sat under the train's
 lonely whistle. The great native city
 receded without him into the full light.

He met the armed men,
 weary at the bridgeheads
 of the continent.
He found the homeless men,
 the road upon the mountain, the rivers
 between the nations where they lived.
Peasants gave him wine
 in flagons. He saw submission
 gravely ended in their eyes.
The boatmen carried him
 in varied craft between the cities.
 He heard an era passing in their words.
Age was upon his back,
 he could not stay: but he knew
 the world of simple men was waiting.

He could endure
 no other bayonets;
 he stopped on the windy plain.
He had died at the first border:
 his bones and memories had spun on.
 These fell like feathers upon the earth.

The face unknown,
 itself still lost in death,
This is the mask of the victim,
 to be raised in the later halls;
Marking the final weariness
 of soldiers and of peasants

And the word of boatmen
kept on the lasting rivers.

Decades

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, pp. 42–43.

Decade 5

Spain

Then we could not praise them: they were prone
On the burning hills with their guns, and thermite
Drenched their houses. The battle was the pulse of beaten lands.

The year has flattened the unmarked graves, the bones
Are white under the invisible flowers in the thoughts
Of distant strangers, nourished by workers in their bleak gardens.

They did not die for flowers, nor memories to be pressed
In the archives of another war. They wanted to end indignity,
They fought for life and its continuance. We are that life.

We do not praise the valor of these fathers. We respect
That time and place: there was light in men, their women were beautiful.
Respect is not enough: we are the sons they could not have,
The daughters they did not see. We inherit graves and guns.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, p. 43.

The Enemy

The enemy is rich in houses but his spirit lives in the slums of history.
His pride is arsenals, he expresses himself with bayonets in the hands of others.
He conquers by telephone to the outposts, he dines in the spoiled lands.

Publication. *Statement*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1943, p. 43.

CIVILIAN POEMS

New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946

The Sealed Train

The wheels begin with the guns: blast by blast
the sealed train winds around the throats
of cities, the least farm is shaken by the moving bell.

(One April a tangible train was unsealed... taller than a hundred divisions, the
exile among the dark people.)

The wounded, the unwounded, the heroes and the victims
Are hurried by the great engine; the exiles may prove more durable than tanks.

These curves are unbanked, this improbable torsion only the fit will survive;
The green lamps are blown, in apparent darkness we are dispatched to the
unvisited lands.

Yet the headlight will rise like a planet, the fatal seal will be broken,
The train will arrive exactly as the station clock strikes time.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, p. 47.

Communiqué

The guns are the instruments for the first phase.
Some have the honor of keeping the record, the dispatch to the future
More legible than bones and the howitzers tilted like snouts.
Tell them we lived, in what estate the bravest and the innocent died.

How we were stunned by the advancing noise, shaken by the loss of the
landmarks:

The public building walked in separate stones the night of the raid,
There was a gap in the block where the man had lived with his family,
The decontamination squad worked in the street where we were born.

How we bore the guns and their deep baying:

We breathed in the shelters and thought of our men without them in the
desert:

We saw the women at the station as the troop train slid away and the hospital
train came in.

We prepared for gas attack, they taught us the deceptive world:

Tell them of the fragrance of apple blossoms: of blue smoke, the maker of tears:
Of phosgene: the breath of new-mown hay: nine times more toxic than
chlorine:

Of Lewisite: the odor of geraniums: destroys tissue: fond of lungs and eyes.

How the enemy had ruined the fields:

We suspected the flowers and the flowering trees:

It was the doubtful petals that broke our backs:

How we straightened, how we grew new spines.

It was too enormous for hate: but the blossoms gave us lasting anger.

Tell them we endured tragedy and farce: how the actors in both were killed:
how we spoke grave lines for our friends and buried our enemies and gave
light flowers honestly to the fields.

Tell them to run off the sound track in their public squares and to listen to us if
we are dead.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, pp. 47–48.

Bomber's Moon

When there is fog the harvest will be cut by old men with sickles;
The lovers are scattered stiffly as birds in the cold season;
Only pilots use the remains of the round light.

If our planes are waiting, it will be a good moon:
The black cities will lie on their backs under the bombardier's eye.
A later night the bright snarling motors will cross the stars,
The moon lean terribly toward us, the whole evil sky explode in our faces.

Load the racks! Warm up the planes! Wave to the young men!
Know they will die.
Know they will restore the late gold light to the harvest and the lovers,
Know they offer it to the moonless child in the shelter.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, p. 48.

The Islands

They were innocent years:
the suns of the islands
rose and set in our golden minds;
We hid there from ourselves,
tumbling the tense buildings
like blocks to open the other sky;
Between the night and the furnished room
we saw the blue lagoon like an eye
in the ceiling.

The cold cities
whimpered for men
and their warmth.

We merely endured
our people: reality was lost
on the white shore,

Drowned
among the girls
imagined in those waters.

The ferns are burning
in the bomb craters; the palms
once profiles in our sleep
Are torn like fingers;
the lagoon is scarred with ships,
the iron ones drone in that sky.

The young men have bled
on the colored shells; in the jungle
with the wild pigs are the black-haired girls.

The enemy instructs in the meaning
of the minor key, the heartbreak
in the songs of separate peoples.

The drowsy golden mind
dies like a child
with the death of islands.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, p. 49.

The Black Pilot

The plane is a starlike motion; he is quiet and exact in its heart.
The serf is released for the wars: the flags they denied him are broken out
For his departure. He takes in one flight the freedom of anonymous birds.

Deftly upon its errand he sets the labyrinth of gears and guns;
The dials flick their delicate fingers, the private road is blown to the sun;
In the stratosphere they tolerate the ambassador of desperate nations.

The intricate man at the controls, the great wing span, the thousand pressures,
The interior explosions, lead to the instant of action:... impact!
Dials, guns, bones, sickening at the close of the instant, drip from the sun's face.

War's end for the black pilot; war's beginning for the next of kin.
Welcome them: if not in the name of the living, in the special name of their
dead;
Or hear forever his extraordinary cry, the anonymous one risen beyond
forgiveness.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, p. 50.

Desert Camp

The tents are a statement in geometry, white as pyramids in the moonlight of
the year. -X

The mountains squat in their black silence, the tumbleweed sleeps on the great
circle of sand;

The metallic herd settles in the tank park; only the sentries like slow pendulums
sever the shadow and the light.

The war is a quiet and terrible nightpiece.

The dawn is quicker than a lizard, the wilderness is broken by wheels and
voices.

Deeply the engines rage; from the four borders men converge in the vast
business of death.

Battalions crawl on the desert's lonely skin; girls are waiting in mirage, the cool
known rivers always flowing home.

Idly at noon the young soldier discovers the shell; it was lost by the sea in its
flight to the distant mother.

He is stunned by the sudden appearance of space and time; centuries by
thousands lie in his palm.

He inherits the purpose of the moving sea, the change continuous from water
to land.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, pp. 50–51.

Love Song

Still with arms and legs, and eyes unblinded, we walk in the night on the
California hills.

Remember the remarkable peace of those evenings in the year of the great
appeasement:

We heard the unopened war like a gaunt horse thumping drearily westward.

Clearly the planets are unmoved, not a night older the obvious moon;
Yet this quiet moment, held like a captive, is quickly unbound
By the motor in the sky, the voice of the man who vanished over Europe.

The dim city is far from the guns, a hush upon its visible heart;
The divisional convoy crosses the pass like a file of armored bees;
P-38s on late patrol are heading for the murderous Pacific.

There were two companions; now under these stars exists the knowledge
Of the pilot, the infantrymen, the men at sea. We, and the hills,
And love, do not matter to them: they must matter to us.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, p. 51.

Laocoön

The first shot was fired to Wagnerian music; drums bore it skyward...
seaward...

Under the water and the blown weed. Violence in the last house on the last
street!

The Neanderthal man at the window, the Cro-Magnon at the separate door!

Violence has no meaning: it is noise or motion; it is pure stress.

The duty of the civilian: not to be deafened by detonations;

To plant a forest of silence, to preserve trees of thought for the soldier's
return...

(Violence like a python swallows the mind in combat.

"What do you think of?" asked the foreign correspondent.

"I think of killing Germans," said the girl sniper.)

... to welcome the casualties with wisdom, to define the enemy;

To hear grass growing under caissons, to see exiles crossing the bright frontiers;

To light in the mind the violent statue, to unwind the Laocoon.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, pp. 51–52.

The Conqueror

The gray marchers came like a fog in the season of death.
The fog and the people do not live together.
No one is here but the gray marchers.

They walk the wet streets, they witness the echo.
They visit monuments, their Baedeker knows everything but life.
They finger the shops: wool, silk, paintings, food, the figures of glass.
No one speaks... this conquest is wrapped like a bale.

The war plan was flawless, the general staff received the compliments of the leader.
But how to swallow a nation? The door they broke down is oddly closed,
The shade drawn on the dusty window, the house grave as a winter's sleep.
No one is home.

The family is in the hills with the fighting men.
The great migration rolled out as the fog came over;
No one was on the roads, the spirit went shoeless to another place.

A land may be taken, but how to possess a people?
How to follow a military compass in the lonely substance of a dream;
How to occupy a cloud, the lightning in the mountains of the sky.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, p. 52.

The Guerrilla

The trees in this region are tall as friends; barely told from the landscape,
He lies at their brown feet. The quavering earth, the armies on the move,
The solid guns in line, are caught and active in his central points of light.

He observes the enemy, beyond them the forests of the world
Rustling with identical men. His thoughts hidden, the atom is quiet
In the globe's firing-chamber; if he lives he will speak and it will be known.

He is a name and a person to those who read the dangerous map
Of this sector. To the conquered, the people in all kneeling lands,
He has no past, no habits, no face; he is their nameless outpost in time.

His fathers stood against the great slaving animals, the scales, the slanting
spines.

The spiral returns at a higher point, the saurian pack is closing in:
Once more the knuckles tighten, the centuries are clenched like fists.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, p. 53.

The Cities

War was on the sea, they said, mainly cannonade in the alien mountains.
The school term is over, the examination passed, the romantic salvo
On the last page of the burned book. War is upon the summer resort,
The neighbor, the porch in the evening of the dry leaves.

History will be simple: the names of battles and the cities
Merge in total smoke. They will be cited for standing in the metal rain,
For women in helmets, for old men with weapons, for children in debris.

Warsaw's fallen masonry was blown up in Madrid.
London is a torn poem of defiance: in her empty squares,
Peasants from Chungking are sowing tomorrow's grain.

North of Manila the foxholes come to light in Moscow and Smolensk.
The Thames welcomes the airmen returning; the Volga
Curves like a mother at Stalingrad, the plain that became a mountain.

The colors on the maps have run together in the metal rain,
The borders are drawn from the veins of fragmentary men;
They cannot tell where Guernica ends and Coventry begins.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, pp. 53–54.

Death of the Dictator

The dictator will sprawl on the stairway of the neo-classic palace;
The eyes that reviewed the armored divisions will glaze
On the marble step, the voice expire in the rattle the world waits.

The celebration will be a stillborn feast: nothing will end
But the crudest shot in the dark, the figure with cape.
The death of the dictator is the beginning of war against him.

He was noise on a street corner; by indifference we fed him, by every cruelty
Clothed him for war. The abandoned village was his, the vacant man in the
city;
He was the child of colonies, of the treeless border under arms.

The dictator is in us, his filaments explore the stony brain;
He is suckled by the fear of man, the fear of change that locks the will.
His statue is by default in the public park: he lives while we breathe on his
violent mouth.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, p. 54.

Hospital Room

We need not rudely waken
Nor lie in loneliness
Through the deep and secret night.

Memory is divided with someone at
Birth, later confused by swans and
Fountains in baroque. Who would be
Found sleepless in Italian scenery,
Fondling an iron deer?

Fear is only the brain swelling
Like a frog to emulate the bull
Of darkness. The cat has fear in
The house, the fly on the wall,

Perhaps at its level the flower
Turns pale. These fables cannot
Seriously impair the immense,
Unringing, peopleless night.

Pain is too profoundly shared to
Disengage you from the sleeping
World. The marauder on every roof
Howls the separate, the night-haunted,
Into the common fold: we learn to
Huddle against the drawn lips.

Only those impaled by some special
Terror or compassion need toss on
The horns of the late and lonely
Night. The wound is collective:
It bleeds at the jagged edge.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, pp. 54–55.

The Civilian

The object of gunfire is to destroy the enemy; the vein sings
In the engagement like a charged wire, then the soldier sleeps.
The fighting man is equipped, an element and flawless.

The civilian is a target for his own thoughts, still quiet enough
To be dismayed by terror and waste, the dive bomber slipping down the
newsreel,
The houses opened like fruit, the shrapnel whirling in the eye.

The mind of the civilian is sharpened even by distant battle:
It worms through the deadly music, the fashionable round words,
The flags draped on reality as a corpse is lowered at sea.

The civilian is useful who accepts the creative guns; who sees in destruction
The building not yet risen on the ruins; who walks humbly over the rib-cages
Of the heroes to the white city; who knows he may have to take it by assault.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, pp. 55–56.

The Second Battle of Warsaw

In the fifth winter some were troubled by the spring of the year that was
passing;
Some remembered the foreign city, the black quarter where men were
unburied;
Some imagined the remaining trees were seeking to bloom when the rubble
blew up.

It is not the spare facts that haunt us: they are nearly lost in the wild labyrinth
Of the year. It is not even a story. It is an act, an outline of a grave:

April 19 thirty-five thousand Jews
opened fire on the Germans from the
tenements of the Warsaw ghetto

the destructive power of the Third
Reich closed on the circle of stone
the water mains were cut the Jews
fought to the end

May 25 silence was shed as from
a lamp in the smoking street the
wounds of Europe were open

Surrounded in the wrecked city, invoiced as freight from the occupied lands,
A secret weapon was assembled among them. Afterward it was not found
In the ruin; nor was a casual flame lit at the tomb of the unknown civilian.

The second battle of Warsaw cannot terminate as a work of art;
It would be presumption to build a monument over that extreme spirit.
The brain alone will not find the point of their insistent death;
The heart must come from exile to give us peace.

The dead of Warsaw, with us or without us, enter the legends of the people,
The sleepless colonies, the men resistant on all racial islands,
The solid continents emergent from the age of broken stone.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, p. 56.

The Undefended

The bird and the snake are established in the attitude of approaching death:
One with wings unhinged; the pulse ticking wildly, the eyes compelled by the
black tongue
While the cold one, in full authority coiled on himself, examines the
undefended breast.

Drop the raised light of pity, break the classic figure into actual parts:
The victim only dies. The tiny bones lead to the insanity of the jungle:
The victor, drowsy and corrupt, is tossed on the superior horns.

The rope, coiled in the world's shadow, compels the eyes of minor races;
The cold nations unhinge the wings of the colonies before they spring;
The heart of the people constricts, the unreturnable blood is drained from
those lands.

The snake swallows the song he does not understand; men can hear the faintest
music,
The passion to destroy the undefended will not be quieted by open veins:
Shatter the classic figure or go mad in the jungle, the skin will blow under the
rocks.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, p. 57.

The House

When they fired guns in those countries the door
of the peaceful house admitted us daily like a
dubious eye; we irritated the wooden lid.

Perhaps the house was the mote in our own disordered
eyes; we or the structure were blown through the
looking glass and came out on the changed side.

The air in cubic feet remained constant, still
the eastern windows involved the sun; the building
was simply for love to live in, a tall tree cut
squarely against the weather.

There was a third tenant, an enigma before men were
armed in a season of weapons: was the house to keep
something in or to keep something out?

The weather could be excluded, not the mountains
where the assault squads were fed by parachute;

Seen through the cracks in the dry rooms, the river
crossings were black with automatic riflemen;

The peasants spoke in their languages at the threshold,
and the people of the burned capitals.

The house toppled on the crowded shore.

It was the end of the age of the separate crustacean:

We went inland with the vertebrates, the unarmored,
from the shellbound sea.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, pp. 57–58.

The Beachhead

Study for the duration the amphibious attack in the late hour of the night;
Listen in your beds for the sea artillery; note at breakfast
The neolithic foxholes advance like footprints on the deadly bush.

Afterward the soldiers will merge indivisibly with us; it will be quieter
In the world but the gritty shores of the mind will remain to be taken:

On that interior beach we meet the final enemy whose face is like our own.

The sand is thick as the past in the wasted brain;
The brilliant coral, sharp in the old waters, can impale
Even combined operations upon the mauve beauty of polyps in decay.

This coast has been seen before, some have stood on the edge of the crumbling
land:

The jungle is uncut by the bravest. The dead hand of the vines

Can strangle an era; the trees crack like thought in the dry earth,
The habit of obedience coils dreamily under the leaves of the wild poppy.

Prepare other weapons for the attack on the last beachhead! Grind the word to
a point,

Set the will like a gunbarrel in a handy stock; comradeship is a favoring wind
On the flags of the landing party, the armies of occupation can only advance
together.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, pp. 58–59.

The German

Fearless on a day of wind
the child of the free peasant
sings in the winter forest.

Suddenly bare of snow
the German soldier leans
on the tree as though alive:

the museum of natural history
saved the insignia, the boots
on their eastward stride, the
tunic as winding-sheet.

(He came in the white year.
He talked under the dangerous trees.
He took the next to the last step.

The Russians passed him
in the western direction.)

Of the complex metals
Of the tables of organization
Of the dream-like maps
the unmelted gunman remains
in the year of the child.

The grandfather will tell him what
is in the forest...

of the glacier: of the pits
in the terrain of the heart:

of the fathers who endured the
ice age: of their colder will:

of the numbness upon the enemy,
the flight to the polar cap.

He saw in the forest the edge

of the tide, a mauled particle
thrown up by that weather.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, pp. 59–60.

Biography

The mother and the father in procession
led the child to the first sea:

fear stumbled through the new Sunday
world; teeth followed him, and voices
with a vile purpose;

the dangerous scenery fell in his eyes
with the foam, the sea was after him.

The young man walked in doubt
on the mainland's tawny crust,

or on the island shore between
the coral and the leaves of the sea-grape;

he made love in the sad light
of the beach towns, in the shelter

of sea-blasted cliffs;
he met himself on the gray coast;
he had nothing to say among the
torn paper; miles under his feet
crackled the blue-dark shells.

The beat of a central heart, undiscovered,
was more even than his own.

He heard noise without sense, he saw
motion without direction.

He found in the seascapes, half-drowned
by sympathetic tides, a permanent
and last disorder.

The man and the woman moved on the western
edge in a year of war.

The litter on the beach defined their age:
over the glass and the halves of fruit
floated ironically the life preservers;

in the sand, driftwood, or the polished bones

of their friends.

The sea had no anger, no uncertainties;
its wild hours were law.

The child brought to it his bundle of
fear, the youth his disorder, the man
imposed his war.

The three figures cast an equal shade:
the tides of destruction ran without
moons, within them.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, pp. 60–61.

The Casualties

Guardians of the archives: add the notable faces
of the men who stay at home in the course of war.

Discarded by the calendar or the shape of the bony
structure or the eye not bright enough to be shot,

Nonetheless there are casualties never fired upon,
concussions that do not cave in the brain for years.
The day a great action is fought by others, weigh
in atomic scales the value a man sets on his life;

Measure on the micrometer his height and security
when the hospital ship is moored to the side
of the metropolis;

Fortunate, it is said, to be safe on the exploding
earth, endangered only by something smokeless
that blows up in the heart.

A sickness falls upon the half-world in time of war,
subnormal temperatures drown the will in their cold lakes.

The useful warmth only resumes its flow in casualties
who state the facts:

We are responsible for the battles we do not fight,
for the ashes of the alien towns we have not seen,
for the eyeless and the graves we do not share.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, p. 62.

The Beads

Something can doubtless live in the dead place behind the wind;
The like hollow in the rear of war is occupied by immaculate tissue.
We are in houses at dry and unshelled points, fixed like hens by a chalk line
from our noses to the front.

A time has one reality: ours is war.
Theorem: three levels of existence make
one epoch...

to know reality and to order it
to be blind to it
to see it in a mirror, crammed
in the area where the wind was.

There is no exit until the mortars are tipped over and the wind blows in the
direction of home.
Meanwhile talk is a flight of birds arrested by the smell of cordite
And thought is the hero of a serial, waiting on the cliff for the guns to save him.
We can put in its actual frame of reference the way we lived under the black
weather of war:
in light reflected from the sides of darkened ships in ease delivered on the
backs of the great fallen planes in a state of grace, telling the sharp beads of
guilt.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, pp. 62–63.

Occupied Country

Quietly the men maimed and the men dead
are entering the unbroken American houses;
the last march is across the threshold of

these rooms into the abode of the civilian
mind. The tears given briefly upon their
return will not restore them: henceforth

they dwell with us, we are a somber country
occupied by heroes. Arms, legs, eyes and
the contours are obliterated; in unvisited

wards, torsos will exist for years. Who is brave
enough to bring them flowers or words? They lie
in battalions, honored along the plainly receding

shore; we assume the fallen weight and pleasure
of their lives. The hearing they abandoned is
acutely ours, the least sound may be perceived

as music; the eyes they closed we open on a
wider world than helicopters or the plastic
cars. Take for them in the nostrils the odor

of the rain, walk firmly for them among the most
desolate people: love is not to be separate from
them, love is our total statement in their name.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, pp. 63–64.

The Antennae

Midway in war ascending like a rocket, something
is dying and descending, something is being born.
The antennae of the nervous system now respond in
their thinnest fronds.

Later they will inform the brain, the last organ
to believe in change. Radar cannot detect it nor
alone the gross eye... like the final instant of
night, already alive with light.

The five senses blaze under stress: the dream
is of epochs. The fronds tingle with hope, the
remote, undimensional, infinitely patient bell.

The sabre teeth locked the mouth of the tiger; the
horns broke the neck of the dangerous elk; the vast
stomachs were in the tar pits, and the small heads.

The great animals went slowly as the rock strata.
Men were afraid to move their piled stones. Stiff
the nerves tingled in the thinnest fronds...

It was the final instant of night, already alive with light.
The flying serpent was broken on the cliff, the air contained feathers and songs.
Men built their houses in the open, on the beautiful edges of the takes.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, pp. 64–65.

The Romantic

A village was shining in my thoughts like a ship in a bottle,
The roofs steep as the visible mountains, the doorstep
A lake without a feudal swan. Remember the color of grain
In the valley under the starched clouds, the color
Of the young girls' hair under the regional headdress!

(... perhaps a postcard the child saw
or words in a book of princes;
something the grandfather said
or a memory brought on a ship
in a year of migration...)

Eroded with the dust of western cities, some unendurable day
The ox-route would lead me into the traditions of another people.

It would be harvest time or marriage time or time of birth
I would hear folk music if it were summer; or in winter
Observe the maypole, without hope of leaves, stand for its belief in spring.

Whether the village was in the mind
whether it was in the real mountains
whether an idea stated in continuous houses

was settled by
the Luftwaffe.

It took fifty thousand planes to tear up the postcard world.
We are in actual time and deep in many countries: the romantic
Was only a tourist at heart, he would have been lost in a landscape of infinite
dimensions.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, pp. 65–66.

The Warhead

Direction is plain as a compass needle in the English sky;
Perceive the hole in the cloud, the future caught on the Norden crosshairs;
the rocket travels without visa;
the rocket is beyond the weather;
in the stratosphere there is no
morality, there are only facts.

The weapon and the man are opposite in texture and purpose;
The explosives move starward, the heart goes underground;
At this depth we aim the gun at a continent and hit a child.

V-1

V-2

V to the nth power:

death is the international language; at this height
it can be read even by the unborn.

It was thought the brotherhood would come gently out of time
By the public teacher, by good men, by gifts of flowers, and by love.
Peace was dreamed of as a bird: after its erratic flight
It would settle on the white roof and sing to us.
Direction is plain as a compass needle in the English sky:
Kinship will be thrust upon us; necessity like peace is jet-propelled,
The rocket may teach us to adore the infant in the warhead.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, pp. 66–67.

The Prisoners

The quality of nightmare is incomplete: on the roads
of exploded continents, real bones are moving
the prisoners like a tropism in the homeward direction.

The family is instructed to receive them calmly in suburban houses;
The public cry is raised at the sight of dislocations;
The protruding ribs, displayed for nine days, are buried in the archives.

The blue welts are the map of the region from which they came.
The kommandants touched off the final mines under the human relationship.
Dachau Belsen Maidanek Cabanatuan hide in the wounded lights.

The enemy began as men; they receded to the time of the little horses;
They vanished with the lizards on the bare shore; the last glimpse
Was like the single cell, the uncolored jelly pulsing in the sea.

The image of disintegration clings to the eyelids of the victims;
They know the unsteady mouth of the sea is waiting for everyone;
They know men can be truly lost.

They are henceforth the free ones.
They see us with the doubtful rope around our neck:
what is hiding in our black violence?

We are the prisoners of their broken eyes.

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, p. 67.

The Threshold

The mind blacks out at a certain point, only the images of death are lit
In its gallery; the murals we see at night are all of soft surrealist bones;

Publication. *Civilian Poems*. New York: Beechhurst Press / Bernard Ackerman, 1946, p. 67.

DISPLACED PERSONS

Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958

Displaced Persons

Barbed wire is the exposed nerve between the war and the peace;
The mice hear them tapping on it the dry monotone of the cage.
The brain in its double grave emits the obscene word: tomorrow.

Wired in the half-world, a house in a known land equals their Father's
mansion.

Distant artists paint them, ice-hard underfoot the blue plain,
Or in the bare summer with metal thorns on their foreheads.

The tetrarchs keep lions to prove their valor,
Enact in the black catharsis their lost selves: who search everywhere for their
mothers; who want love and find it in mirrors; who are empty and need to
be conquerors, gendarmes, mercenaries, hunters of pain.

The structure is long in dying; story by story like a building
Under artillery fire it comes down from the tower. The inhabitants
Use symbols as their last food: after the lions, men must be eaten.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, p. 71.

UXB

We perform ignoble chores in time of peace: after the guns, before they begin,
someone must shovel the metallic dung of the artillery,
the unexploded bombs, the excrement of modern angels.

UXB in the depths under your house! The state objects to mayhem after war:
the gracious cordon of police surrounds you like a prayer.

The child on the shore sleeps in the shade of the live torpedo:
sweep the holy basins where the successful sleek ships go in, go out;
bring up the mines and the unrecognizable seamen.

Plow the ground in Normandy;
plow the identification disk, the love letter, delicately the warhead;
examine the apple tree in the Spring for the airborne skeleton,
the garland of grenades on the pelvic arch.

Centuries of unexploded bombs rust in the pale cortex of the mind:
the dream of conquest rolls death ward on the interior plain;
the tree of fear rises forever with its armed skeleton;
the dictator simply appears, disguised as yourself.

All torpid iron giants decapitated,
all houses certified, all lands, shores, and seas: forget forget

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, pp. 71–72.

The Kimono

Celebrate the season of the death of the city.
Celebrate the woman in the newsreel, the print of her kimono
Burned in her back. Celebrate the bamboo leaves, the folded fans.

Exhibit A, formerly a person, was born as the white plant bloomed;
She is the night dream of the spectator, incised on the lidless eye;
Woman without face or name that is known lives in my house.

Weigh her, measure her, peer for children
in her clouded history; check with Geiger counters
the click of the doomed leaves and fans.

Lost in events the beauty and the grace of women;
Ended the age of natural love as the bomb bay opened
On the burned shoulders: she is now the memorable one.

From the nightmare to the eye
from the eye to the house
from the house to the heart
enter the dimension of love:

woman of Hiroshima
be merciful to the merciless!

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, p. 72.

The Lady on the Chartreuse Couch

The lady on the chartreuse couch is looking for herself;
Reality is a drawn shade between the dreamer and the analyst.
The child materializes in the sacred twilight reserved for the unhealthy:

the house appears in its decade, the rubber plant in the hall,
the shadow of dust in the attic, someone she hated, someone she loved,
the guilt, the web in the corner, the fear of the hairy insect;
there was a time of security beyond the mind, a sense
of warmth and water; afterward, light, noise, terror, and space.

The womb of the real world was incandescent, nothing retreats from solid to
fire;
The earth like a round wind is sustained by continuous motion;
The satellites are only secure together, the sun holds the burning family.
Men and constellations are in hazardous motion, one star is not quietly spared.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, p. 73.

Nobody Hears You

New Orleans spoke in public with the drums.
said about the river and the marketplace;

Memphis picked up the talk and the bass,
said Beale Street, night, and sinful town;

Northbound rhythm to Chicago, big and brown,
said railroad, steel, cattle, mines;

New York coming on the continental lines
said Harlem out loud, the girls, and the sea.

piano said cane-brake, drum said tree,
horn said cotton, cymbal said free

Jukebox opens its purple eyes:
neon face: chromium mouth.

Drop your nickel, get the South:
a kind of music, lightly tossed.

Nobody knows the sound of the lost,
nobody hears them trying to speak.

piano said cell-block, drum said rope,
horn said hunger, cymbal said hope

Nightfolk hear the brass, whitefolk hear
the lighted street, the dancing feet, the psalms.

Beat out the rhythm, beat your palms,
black music, beat, but never choose
those

nobody
hears
you
blues.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, pp. 73–74.

Sunday Afternoon

Slow blue tepid
time floats in the living room
as innocent as soft as smoke.
The afternoon bears a litter of musical moments:
Promptly on the hour come in the dogged comedians:
Brass knuckles fix the face of laughter as the murder opens.

The eye rolls like a marble through the colored forest,
The jungle boy whistles for his lion; the ray gun,
The crackle of the comics, recall the heroes lost in space.

luckily the hired killers strangle the afternoon:
The man might otherwise look at the woman or the woman at the man;
Someone might notice the mushroom of cigarette smoke, the scientific elf at
the window.

The man and the woman lock themselves in the room in the afternoon of an
era.

Everyone else escapes.

All figures are caught in the act of living; everything is normal in Herculaneum
The instant before the ash.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, pp. 74–75.

Crystallization

Expires on the windowpane
one petal
of the hard flower of frost;

This particle of the universe
contains events, temperatures,
shining lines as leaves, as stars.

While a man breathes in,
breathes out,
its history begins and dies.

It is brief: it is enough:
the nature of a crystal
is a quiet cold explosion.

The wingless bees are broken
to the metal hive, the state:
they crawl with honey
for the armored queen;
they may not hum or fly.

The closed the dominant mind
expires
in a final cold internal glitter.

The instant of frost
lovely on glass or tree
is apt only in its world.

The state is viable and warm
when young:
in the age of crystal
even the brute stones
are wrung by the glacier.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, pp. 75–76.

The Investigation

Somewhere in his mind,
Like a lost toy in the attic of his childhood,
There must be an absolute, the secret that will rescue them.

The man and the girl were seen in the doorway:
He must have said something to her and she to him.
If they knew what it meant, they would all be saved.

Someone besides the police must have been at the scene of the crime.
He was on another continent at the time: in uniform, a gun in his hand.
What were his intentions?

When the special and sacred explosive was dropped,
The cabinet explained: it was to save the city.
They have saved it, he said, but the people are dead.

On a morning of sun and birds he whistled in his house.
A whistle can be dangerous: it could lead to singing.
The budget unbalanced the deficit mounting what if they danced in the streets?

Yesterday he talked of the sail he could see after the hull vanished;
Or of the sun like a flower, the earth as circling insect;
Or later in the stone room the men hooded, sandals on their feet,
The book opened at the fatal page; or in the village on a rockbound coast
When a child was sick or the corn failed there were evil eyes.

The bailiff in his gray corner,
the gendarme at the door like a public statue,
cowed or bare, the committee is always in session: tell tell the secret tell us
before we go

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, pp. 76–77.

The Silent

The tree is a cone of quiet.
The sounds it seems to make
Arise from the neighbors:
The wind talking in its travels,
The rain chattering on the way down.
The tree itself is silent, its sign
Of life the root in the earth
From which its wisdom comes.

Silent the birdless miles;
Taller than the water mountains
The sea answers the moon with motion,
All its particles self-contained
Until the land disrupts with rock
The huge, untalkative, and perfect tide.

Words are unimagined in the fields of space.
The stars undisturbed by shores or neighbors
Conduct their orbits in silence. Whole systems,
Lit by interior suns, proceed without expression.

Now in the empire's lighted arenas
The Romans uncage the man they fear,
Begin the sport of ailing caesars.

The questions bind him like the net.
The questions bleed him like the trident.
The questions stalk him like the lion.

The man is silent,
His sign of life
The root in the people
Of unworldly wisdom,
His tide sustained unbroken
On Rome's jagged rocks,
His interior sun proceeding
As usual on its path.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, pp. 77–78.

The Dissenter

People will turn the middens we bequeath:
the hunters
or the hunted
express the age.

The facts go with the cities into the rock strata: someone is not to be spoken to
someone is not to occupy the house in the sacred wood dangerous thoughts
are exported on the outgoing tide it is verboten to play with the dissenter's
child.

The tributaries feed into the sea of violence.
The iron cells multiply like the amoeba; the nucleus
In each is a man who does not agree with the warden.

They nail in the hands and feet the bill of attainder,
They display in the German silence the broken mirror,
The image of forbidden people.
They need an enemy to tear apart in the mad season.
When the air is burning and the cloud signals unbearable change,
The dissenter is born alive on the edges of the weather.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, p. 78.

The Deportee

I see my friend in a rain of confetti, the comedy
Of the celebrants, bound with serpentine to the fearful shore,
Casting no shadow on their hampers of fruit and wine.

The deep horn, the sea bird, the lighted rooms move into night and water.
The metropolis closes its concrete eyes, the barometer falls, the continent
Is moored to the sightless glacier bearing down from the north.

Dry leaves
expose
the autumn

as little fears
the last season
of an era.

Adios, amigo!

if you pass
the ghost
of the Santa Maria,
of the explorer
who sailed too soon,

tell him
in the country
of the blind
the one-eyed man
is always murdered.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, p. 79.

The Hunted

The one who walks in the river is the constant man.
He hides his footprint from the dogs:
engraved like a leaf in the black stone,
the fossil is to amaze another time.

Shapeless, duly malignant, blind as a fog,
the epoch is a wild thing intent on the kill
before he gives it form: direction: heart.

The second constant Is the border police;
they have business in the mountains.
Someone is always cutting the wire, the shadow.
of thought is always at the edge of the forest.

He considered the meek, or said the earth was round;
he taught the young men in the cypress grove, or listed
the ape's ascending bone; he entered the dream
and saw the indelicate mother, or imagined continents,
or found laws in the lungs of the English weavers.

someone is always being hunted
someone is always walking in the river

The bleak pursuit does not begin or end.
Guilt, the great hound, scratches the doorsill of the brain;
fearful of air, fearful of light, the demented hunter cannot forgive the hunted:
the man who walks in the river is himself.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, pp. 79–80.

In the Gaunt Hour

Everything in the gaunt hour is exposed: the eye penetrates the cellars
Where the civilians defend themselves with charts of incoming planes
Or on the hills outlined in miraculous light the spotters wait
For one hostile pilot to rouse the wild radar over the demi-world.

The children's hour falls like a plague:
The fatal voice cries Drop! Curled as the larva, the reflex
Is conditioned early in life: when doom is rehearsed
On the knees, it is too far to vertebrate status and too late.

The desert surrounds the concrete caves with a ring of pale lizards,
The chosen island lies tenderly on its back. At the gaunt hour they are blown
In modern designs like mushrooms or smoky flowers and dispersed in your
house.

As we try to sleep
torpedoes hiss through the planetary tides;

as we try to dream
the rocket goes twice around the globe,
the warhead ticks in the bedroom;

as we try to wake
everything is exposed like a death in the family.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, pp. 80–81.

On the Border

Here in the dusk on the border between the sunlit and the moonlit systems,
Even his speechless shadow gone to earth, the man wonders
How to live from the long burial to the birth of epochs.

The slave waiting the fall of the Roman city, the serf
Landbound under demented knights, the weaver in the diseased town:
How did they manage while the old chieftain was dying?

History is the record of the arrogant.
The man on the border has neither hieroglyph nor forebear:
The dispossessed in their multitude leave no sign on the wild dusk.

He is not alone: the contemporaries appear slowly in the bare landscape;
The roots cut, the hands torn, bewildered, inorganic, and blind,
They grope in the appalling darkness along the path of the human voice.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, p. 81.

Decade 6

When the pass to the sun-drenched valley is blocked by land mines,
When the snipers sit like deities on the commanding hills,
Survival itself becomes the weapon with the longest range.

Surrounded we learn the art of breathing under water:
The sense of direction is hard, intact, and larval,
the enemy a failure as long as we exist.

Whole peoples have waited on the doorsteps of nations.
The Navajo thorn grows deep in the jagged heart of the victor.
Is the city besieged or the army of the plain besieged by the city?

The great bird of the future bristles on the metallic nest:
Feathered in our silence, words and acts tap on the shell,
energy is patient as a grenade.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, pp. 81–82.

The Silent Generation

The old ones are listening like birds
For the sound of the morning sun
Or the young trees growing or the leaves
Or the language of roots sturdily spoken
Along the veins of the national earth.

The young men are growing, quiet
As the morning sun, quieter than trees
Or leaves, quietest at the roots
Extended like fingers for food
Or a buried fund of light.

The stones of the words unused,
The stones of the foreign graves,
Lie on the minds of the old:
They are planning for someone
Who does not seem to be there.

Jet-flown into the future
Before they had a past,
The young men know everything
But words; and the fathers forget
How curt the hour from milk to blood.

A country of silent youth
Is an old man whose sons
Have not come back from war,
An old man dry as an insect
At the end of the napalm summer.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, pp. 82–83.

The Neurotics

We gave one third of the time as a hostage to sleep,
Partly to repair the tissue, chiefly a search
For some gold continent we never found.

We met them all in the country we made in bed:
The mothers and fathers of course disguised
As animals, the friends taller than ourselves
In masks, the enemy dropping us from great heights,
The sister or the brother extruded
Like a thorn in the otherwise immaculate garden
Of unreal flowers, of special moths.

Sometimes everyone in the dream was the dreamer.
Still we could not acknowledge or assemble him;
Still looking beyond logic for the sacred ego,
We ran headlong into the night's remarkable glass.

It was too hard to be strictly alive:
From the night dream to the daydream we rode
On a rocking horse in the attic
Of an odd street we could not name.

While we gave one third of the years
to a kind of sleep,
Sailing intently for the blue coast
that does not exist,
The burly ones, under our white eyelids,
absconded with a world.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, p. 83.

The Lizard

Training the ivy on a western hill in the depth of the dry blue summer,
Thinking of the English poets, of the leaves they sang,
Of all their normal birds, of the dun cattle swallowing flowers
In the innocence of time, I saw the lizard whip out of his flat jungle
Like an enemy, the black sign and motion of the evil in the heart.

He broke into the daydream of the English poets.
He was loose in the world I live in, somewhere in the veins
Or the mind the beast under the dark leaves waits for me.

I went like a patrol into the familiar house, I studied the most loved:
In that long candor had he flickered momentarily, as hatred?
If the black lizard has appeared in the rooms where love is,
The world without it could be delivered to him, he could command the armies.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, p. 84.

The Pensioner

Methodical as the beetle, appearing always in the same corner
Of the cell, the man in the world-wide stone arrives with the sun:
Perhaps there is comfort in the steady line of trees
Or in the exact view of the lake, mud-colored, broken by the baroque swans.

Strangers rush from his eye in the direction he already knows.
He turns from the children with their myths and painful laughter,
Fearless in the non-existent shell, tender as their white boats.

The ceiling barely sustains the burden of blackened skies;
Night excludes in the furnished room the city of wheels and music;
The man disconnects his mind, pursues himself over the wasted fields of sleep.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, p. 84.

Guadalajara

I remember the sun falling out of Mexico into western water,
In the onyx light the old man on a rooftop in Guadalajara
Under a rain of bell notes from the pink cathedral putting his plants to sleep.
I saw three civilizations in one instant bound by a simple act,
In a fourth my father in another land at the same hour
Bending over his leaves and everywhere in the dying sun
The old ones of the world attendant upon their secret thorns.

Perhaps the last times must be passed in relation to the earth;
Or the exiles find the only occupation open in the ruined province,
The border of our important lives where they are sent.

It may be a blind connection with the thought of seed,
An instinct to enact in winter the psychodrama of spring;
Or merely to replace in the mind the knowledge of their murderous sons.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, pp. 84–85.

El Toro

The instant he sped from the dark passage I knew who he was:
Defined by the flags, by the high judge, by the smell of people,
He was received like a child in a world I was beginning again
at four o'clock in Mexico.

I charged the first insult, the deliberate cape: all exits closed:
Bearing something evil appeared the blind horse:
My spine was eaten, my shoulder sown with streaming thorns.

Nothing was there but a voice.
Twenty minutes to find him: was it the wall, the high judge,
The bloodshot eyes, the animal inciting with a point of light?

I remembered the fields of grass, the sun, the rain on the birds.
Nothing prepared me for the great plaza
Or to separate the enemy from his cape, or the friend.

Defined by the wet sand, by cigarette butts, by the plumed mules,
He was taken like a child from a world I was beginning again
at four-twenty o'clock in Mexico.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, p. 85.

Death of the Architect

To R. M. S.

The fruit fallen in the spring
Is a shock to the intricate motors
Of the tree, a loss unresolved
By the sweetness of summer and its suns.
The fruit falls ample as birth
In the natural autumn, an arc expected
Of a circle of rain and light.

Equal to the rock and the wild mustard,
Organic in another order than the laurel,
The house, if listened to, beats
With composure like a heart.

The cave was open to the eyes of birds,
The wall continued in gardens of light.
Counterpoint to the terrible city:
Star presence, the entrance of moons.

He engaged the dark puritan, shattering
The square rooms, the aspects of graves,
Admitting plants and children like pagans
To prove his laughter could defeat, endure.

Blinded by centuries of oppressive space,
The world like a creature of the lower sea
Swam _into the beautiful clear lines and levels.
Meant for the great era that never began,
Blameless the structure if dwarfs moved in.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, p. 86.

The Destroyers

They blew up the island like a fish in a hole in the killer Pacific:
That was the day the world embraced itself,
That was the day for lovers under the sign of the active cloud.

When the windows are lit by night in the famous buildings,
A cold wave crosses the frontier of a generation in its sleep,
The coyote howls, the vulture comes down from the sky.
It is the hour of fever, the hour to study the nature of love.

Everything is lost to the dead, they are not continuous,
The generals are not continuous nor the diplomats. Fired on
Or flattened or strangled by vines, the cities are restored
By love in the living, the continuity of healing and remorse.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, pp. 86–87.

The Blow Lands

Dead objects seem to live in the arms of the southwest wind:
Thorns, feathers, skin of the lizard, dung of the bleached bull,
Dreams of tired men leaving under clouds of their blown ranches.

The heaviest bones remain, and the heaviest thoughts;
The great rocks stay, and history in the mountains;
Stay the hard-eyed buzzard, the absolute sun.

A hundred miles perhaps to Alamogordo,
A bird's flight to the proving ground at White Sands,
A thousand years to the pyramid of Los Alamos
Waiting for the speckled wing to dive, the dry wind to blow.

The simplest act of man is to plant trees,
To bring snow water from the cold passes.
The Indian was a father to the desert,
Even the armed Spaniard thought of gardens.

The complicated mind is seedless:
The simple acts are kept for children in the glass museum.
All pyramids rise in the worship of annihilation:
Dead objects only seem to live in the arms of the southwest wind.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, p. 87.

Legend

That country fed its priests well:
The meaning of birds was given
And the omen of the rain table.

Everything was foretold but the fact:
They abandoned their cities,
The jaguar coughed in the long street.

The people of the calendar
Gave up to the insects;
The mathematicians were replaced
By the simplicity of trees;
The vine took the land of the Maya,
Who understood stars..

Pyramids could remain, the record
Of believed gods stay in the rock.
A civilization could drop like a meteor,
A nation leave home in a night.

It is not told if a runner warned
Of strangers, of weapons unpredicted
In the droppings of birds,
A plumed serpent like a plant turning
In the sky of the dangerous world.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, p. 88.

Someone Always Says

it was a merciful release,
may I go like that when my time comes.
Having said it they are washed of guilt in the oral waters.

The round crackling wreath of sound, placed at the disposal
Of the folded arms, implies the dead is fortunate,
In keeping with my mission I await a special doom;
Meanwhile I deny my own mortality by affirming his.

The roses and the lights are whisked like props in a Chinese play.
The gongs confuse the issue, the words conceal the fact: each thinks of himself.
Deliver us from ritual! the great bronze bell of the ego in distress.

It Is not release or confinement: it is lawful process.
It is not merciful or cruel: it is an end. The human seasons
May not be imposed upon the actual winter of the world.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, pp. 88–89.

The Middle Passage

I think of the young, of their disbelief in dying:
Someone who is not there is at once a stranger;
It happens to another generation—always, fortunately.
Willing to slide off the ant-ridden globe.

My mother and father went too often to funerals;
Their lives seemed bleak to be so fond of ceremony.
Later I knew they simply went to say goodbye:
When they were old I saw they had no friends.

The landmarks, at the middle passage, began to go:
First the physician, my friend back from war
With the unexploded mine in his breast;
Next the architect, his spine temporal,
Malignant, his houses lighted and enduring;
Then the poet, his sun blackened in Spain,
Who lived among us by reflection for a time;
Now the great artery closed by questions,
The refugee stays as long as we remember.

Loss is unendurable until it becomes a fact.
There is an insight to be sought at noon
At the intersection of the busiest streets
Where only commonplace objects converge.

Here in the inescapable sunlight, discover
You are not the axle on which the world turns.
Abstract yourself like a number from the scene,
The landscape with its motions will not quiver:
The cars will roll on, the people buy and sell,
The officer will stand like a statesman,
The signals will stop and go, stop and go, stop and go.

Intolerable the pain until you surround it:
Neither happy nor unhappy, return,
Relieved of the weight of the axle
And armed for once with a fact.

There are no new words or ways to live with death.
The old ones keep their secret like a cabal.

The ego comes lonely, a recruit to his first battle;
It is not cowardice, it is ignorance about to be shot.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, pp. 89–90.

The Exiles

Every man is enclosed as in a cage
Of vertical and the lateral bones,
Bound speechless in the soundproof tissue,
Wound with a white mile of nerves.

Nonetheless he taps on the wall,
Is answered on the great occasions:
Someone goes free, or the warden dies,
Or an execution in the yard.

He lives in his exile by the clock
Of communiqués from the others:
The flash of intelligence
Breaking the silence of the bars,

The common word of alarm
Crossing the semantic border,
The music of the human voice
Penetrating the ego's even scream.



The total exile walks the streets
Of nonexistence: he is the man
Unable to swim downstream;
He wants a church without a spire

Or a spire without a church;
He sees us die of sleep
In all conforming tides
Endorsed by the joyful police.

The cage ironic within a cage
We keep for one who still dissents
In the strangling water hands
As we begin to drown.



We may never emerge
From the bone, or hear
Through the tissue clearly,

Or unwind the mile of nerves:
Yet the first shadow of peace
May be cast on the ground,
Or reconciliation, or remorse,
When the last exile has come home.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, pp. 90–91.

The Children

Omit a single prince from the story, or a scream,
the fox child in the thicket of sleep
howls with the fear of change.

The arrangement of objects they follow,
exactly as the night before,
like blocks that make a world, or disorder.

A formula has the property of magic,
hiding the rude memory of birth,
a bruise, perhaps the neurotic caretakers.

The children at play have desperate need of a victim.
The savage heart of a circle is someone outside
and tearful: the new neighbor, already alien,
unerringly the stranger at school.

They do not mean him much harm,
the game requires him, simply, like a ball.
When another stumbles, a bone breaks,
the ego feels sure-footed.

Violence is the third star in their sky:
they prefer guns, fire, and rope
for the melodic rites of childhood.

The blue-eyed heroine tied to the track,
the gangster riddled with admiration in the alley,
their friends burned at the stake

observe the art of living we bequeath,
dispose like Greeks of the mothers and fathers
they also wish they could love.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, pp. 91–92.

In the Forest

The odd child was disturbed at night by thoughts of the forest:
If a tree falls, a thousand miles from the human ear or the ear
Of the fur-bearing animal or the bird in flight—is there a sound in that world?

Six million persons were dissolved in the calm of a sea of leaves.
The youth listened for the report of a single cry from the furnace
Or even a bubble heard in the lung in the chamber of colorless gas.
They went without a word in a country of people.

The man entered the older world of wounds:
No one seemed to hear the wars go by or the peace strangled as a child;
The injured lay in the street for years, the lonely perished in their rooms;
Everyone fell a thousand miles from anyone.

It was late before he understood: they hear what they wish.
He found toward the end the motif lost in the beginning:
There is always a sound as the tree falls, the cry itself is the human condition.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, pp. 92–93.

When the Time Comes

The lady with the mildewed face
Strikes like an ormolu clock,
Complains of poems like guns
Shot at the dove-colored world.

Meanwhile something like a man is sleeping
Under the beautiful arch of the bridge:
The trees seem to have left the city:
The cold public globes are the only fruit
In the garden of portland cement: if a bird
Is on the wire he is quiet about it.

Someone we do not know
Is a mile deep, and prone,
Looking perhaps for fossils,
Or something to eat,
Or in the black artery, death.

An invoice of young men
Arrives in government crates,
A land mine from War One disperses
A horse in a gold meadow, in all ports
They are still hoisting foreigners
Out of the sea like stunned tuna.

Meanwhile in the desert, by the poisoned rivers,
Someone is counting nuclei to induce dreams
Of crackling cities: the air is bleeding:
In the strategic brain the great illuminated map
Glow in the seven colors of annihilation.

Forgive us
the daily bread
of our concern;

We will, Madam,
when the time comes
consider the lark.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, pp. 93–94.

The State

The house when weather-proof for man
Was still exposed to fear:
He envied the mollusc, sea-crazed,
Concealed in its tocked shell.

He set the carnivorous plant,
Calm as an angel, in the hall:
It would eat insects gladly,
Devour small animals for nitrogen,
Or strangle thieves, or neighbors.

Tenderly it moved along the wa It.
Casual leaves across the windows
Kept him safe from foreign eyes.
All it wanted first was water,
Then from time to time blood-meal.

The house was free of flies and mice.
The roots walked later through the floor.
No one came in, no one came out,
Except the enemies in dreams.

It went slowly into other rooms,
A mouth was hunting in the thicket:
It ate the light, it ate the air,
Grew fond of sons and then of daughters.

Who envied the mollusc in its shell,
Cornered now, reduced, and tongueless,
Prays in the attic for his father's ax.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, pp. 94–95.

Sometime in a Park

The Sargasso Sea, where the lost causes daily rise and drown,
Tosses the weed-wound blackened hills of old minds as they remember and
forget
The running of the guns, the sunlit words, the moon-cold plazas of those cities.

It is hard in winter to recall the reasons of the spring;
Harder to bring from the wide sea the face of the water-borne friend;
It comes in the end to counting the debauched and the dead.

They carry the flag through the smoke of taverns where the nightmare parrots
scream;
Or prowl the fog-crazed waterfront after the ships gone down in the brain;
Or sit on the porches of country hotels in the sad towns of the interior.

Sometime in a park where the newspapers fly in the trees of fall,
The chieftains of a triumphant cause, cowering at the onslaught of the young,
May expose to the last mourner the nature of victory and defeat.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, p. 95.

At the Station

Which way do the trains run?
Traveler, lost under the station lamp,
I'm a stranger here myself.

Nothing is familiar except the damp memory of childhood:
The inhabitants are woven in their cocoons; each recalls,
Long since dismantled by the wrecking crew, his house and his beliefs.

Publication. *Displaced Persons*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958, p. 95.

ON THE WARD

Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977

On the Ward, One

The quiet time is Saturday night:
the world outside jumps off bridges;
strangles its mates;
or cleans a .22
by emptying it into mother.

We have borders to protect,
voices with exact instruction,
vast electronic systems
wired to the bedsprings.
We have order enough
for a season of chaos.

The mines erupted in dusty fountains,
the toxic leaves abandoned the dying trees,
the B-52 splattered that sky with the young rice,
their children went off like Roman candles.

We are dancing here
in our equal but separate worlds;
we are turning clay into figures
of a select mythology.

They are blowing holes out there
in the jagged universe.
We prescribe for ourselves:
intensive care for the duration.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, p. 99.

On the Ward, Two

In the lull in the mortar fire,
rockets fall asleep,

Soldiers are trading cold rations
with the enemy,

Diplomats search and destroy
in the oval room.

The truce is the time to repair
the tank treads;

In the armistice they bring up
the flame-throwers;

The treaty itself is on a short fuse.

We have been invited to leave:
no one stirs.

Once out of the portals they will cry
“Incoming!”

We would only have to commit ourselves
again, again.

They have to take care of us:

In all religions the mad are sacred;

We bear the sign from the godhead
like the entrails of birds.

We are not about to tell them
the truth:

The only bomb shelter is psychosis.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 99–100.

The Child

Deep as a mole
In the night world I lie,
Buried to the eyeball
In thoughts of violence.

This is the truth
Of the solitary man:
Each is a Berlin wall,
While in the flyblown street
Aggression, loose as a lion,
Mangles the one we love.

A scene from the history
Of fear rises like a star
In the mind of the night world:
The school is ringed by guns;
Through snake sound and spittle,
Through the cottonmouth women
I see the black child go.

Child of love,
Child of an act of faith!
To this light
Even the blind mole may come.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 100–101.

The Man on the Ledge

- ... stands in lieu of the country below,
uncertain, a fragment of the whole.
To live or to die, to half-live or half-die: the decision trembles on the edge of
disaster.
- ... is the catalyst of a continent:
to think of annihilation
stirs up the house of the living
from cellar to rooftop,
breaks the windows by implosion.
- ... seems unaware
belief in life is frail
in demonic days;
one gust of violence
may blow it among the constellations.
- ... by saying no:
repudiates, denies, dissolves in doubt
all hopes, all fears,
all loves and hates,
all ceremony except farewell.
- ... has power over multitudes
until he acts;
leaps or does not leap,
leaves us to stare at his space
for three days.
-

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 101–102.

Dead on Arrival

(In a New York street on an April morning,
1964, a woman was stabbed repeatedly. There
were 38 witnesses. None came to her aid.)

She was among the first to go
in the unburied decade
now recalled in the midnight
of another year.

Consider the possible assailant:
hero to cool girls in courtrooms;
resident of mind-blown cabanas;
or great murderous all-american infant.

Stark as a Greek theater
the white of the street lamp,
the noble lines reduced to terminal cries.
The victim was a disaster once;
in the rooms of the watchers
it repeats forever from window to window.

Time was older than Greece
in the depth of the lower city:

the tribe stared at the creature
going down in the tar pit.

For the woman of New York,
dead on arrival
at this X in space—

the decade remains in its nightmare,
walks on its neon ramparts,
waits for burial at the crossroads.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 102–103.

12:01 A.M.

Now anyone can sit on the porch
And watch the empires drown
In waves of carbon monoxide;
Lit by the burning forum,
The last crimes are applauded
By the deaf and the blind.

The Saturday night special
Is wiping out a generation of wives;
Children are thrown like mice from the roof,
The twenty-nine floors of the condominium

Erupt like a magnetic mine;
The walking psychosis in his burnoose
Drops the hemispheric jet in the barranca
With three hundred persons
And bon voyage cards in seven languages.

They are lying awake at night in rows
As on the wards of a thousand hospitals,
Waiting for the nightmare hypodermic
Or the knock of the sociopath
On the sliding glass of the patio door.

Hope is abandoned in the dark lands,
In others a non-word:
They know only guttural sounds
For meat, bread, fibrous or leafy vegetables,
And death in their absence by strangling
In the lethal exhaust of empires.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 103–104.

After the Gothic

The cathedral arises first in the anxiety
of the believer;

The great vault puts him lower than cherubim in their rosy paint;

The buttress permits the spire to enter heaven with its fearful plea.

Gothic is an act of faith, the architecture of the prostrate heart.

Through centuries of belief, under mountains of carved stone,

The multitude lived and died in the brutal huts and were buried

In the shade of vast structures lasting forever like pyramids

After faith went down with the western sun and the fallen empires.

We learned to breathe without the pantheon of statues.

We found the continuum in the structure
of the pulsing heart

When the blind survived in their black places, the deaf contrived a world

Of silent love, the partisan threw himself on the wild grenade.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 104–105.

The Freeway

Something I found in the city
When I went to the house
Of my childhood: the freeway
Ran through the living-room.

I remember the lizard I had
That escaped in the cicada night.
I wonder if the bulldozer
Turned up his skeleton
Like a white fern.

The jaguars and the cougars
Have eaten the footsteps
Of my mother and father;
The sixteen wheels of Detroit
Are pounding the years
And the fears
Of the child.

Everybody tears through the rooms
Where the dreams of the future
Are ground in the gears of the iron present
And a kind of children
Have never heard of the past.

It is not the infant
I want to return.
It is only to find a house
Where it was,
To know I was there.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, p. 105.

Defoliation

The bones of the defoliated trees
From some deep marrow
Are growing leaves again
In that country.
The water buffalo will not graze
Under the sick branch,
Or the young men move like panthers,
Or ever the lovely psychotic women
Smile upon them.

Nature repairs her wounds
With angry scar tissue.
She does not replace arms or eyes
Or belief in men, or innocence,
Or immanence of deities
From east or west
Or in the star dusters.

She has done penance
For the acts of the felons
By the leafless and the bloodless dying
 of the trees.
Now she tries to live with her grief:
Reduced; ashen; scant; fruitless
 for a generation.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, p. 106.

The General

The nature of a man is haunting the avenues of sleep.
I see the inscrutable face of the general,
I hear ricochet his farewell address to the troops: "Good shooting!"
The generals do not appoint themselves;
I chose him by some act I dare not recall.
Somewhere the lines of our lives intersected, he became
my protector and emissary to distant fields.
If I am responsible for his medal of honor, then also
for his idea of honor and his words.
The nature of a man is haunting the avenues of sleep.
I see the insurmountable face of the killer among the great trees;
I crouch with him on the bamboo platform bound with vines;
Below, in the deadfall, we await the lion and the white ants.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 106–107.

Killing

If you see the victim
Or even hear the sob,
The holy tides of guilt
Begin to rise and drown.

A kill at carbine range,
As in the jungle clearing,
Needs the sanction of the state—
Can a state commit a crime?

At thirty thousand feet
There are no dimensions:
The Himalayan dust you make
Obscures the marionettes
Sliding in the river.

Progress in killing
Is in the delusion of distance:
The farther you get,
The closer to innocence.

The final solution:
The country soldier
Blowing up a planet
He cannot imagine,
Pure as the great bull
Astride the land of flowers.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 107–108.

History

When the war begins
It seems to have reasons;
An hour, a day, a week later,
No one can recall them.

The field of violence remains;
The demolition of children;
The life of the backwards.

Strategy arises in the ego of the king,
Tactic in the anxiety of the general.
Someone is always giving orders
Out of his secret depths.

The commander-in-chief, at the mercy
Of his childhood, prolongs the battle
To conquer his father and/or mother.

The officer with the recurrent dream
Takes his ship into the sea of mines
To relieve the guilt-ridden.

The squadron leader, who never made it
Among equals, wipes them out
With the huts of colored strangers.

When the war begins
It seems to have reasons,
When the war goes on
We know the reasons:

All bloody actions derive
From the labyrinthine men
Who cannot get out.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 108–109.

Migrations

They have an urge to migrate
To that bare and dangerous desert
Where the ghost of Abraham
Blows like sand among the legends
Of the Mediterranean.

The caribou in the arctic crossing
Turn and wheel in their thousands
When an alien creature
Looms on the white horizon.

A mile of birds,
Intent on the south,
Will sense a solitary hawk
And veer toward another moon.

The bison roamed for millennia
Side by side with the Sioux:
The apparition of the pale marauder
Sent them over the escarpment.

They know what the caribou know,
The birds in their season,
The lemmings down from the mountain
In the month of their destruction:
An endangered species
Has to leave home.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 109–110.

Blowing Away

The plains are going away again,
Tormented by drought,
Fractured and thrown
By the wind and the old despair.

The cattle fall in the white noon;
The Osage and the Apache
Choke in the dust
Of their rain-seeking feet.

When the land is blowing,
The people follow its tracks:
The young are going away
For their reasons,
Gasping like animals
In the dust
Of the appalling decade.

They walk on the continents
To the holy land in the fantasy
Where the scimitars of the emir
Mean them no harm.

The emir is a realist:
He will not respect
The age or innocence
Of the children
Of another blasted apocalypse.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, p. 110.

Flower Child at 30

Why should an old man weep
On a birth date as young
As the month of April?

He has a memory a decade long
Of an afternoon in the park,
Of the sun and the sound
Of a hundred guitars,
Of the thousand and one voices
Of a whole generation
Handing flowers and smooth pebbles
To the people of that planet.

Where are the armies now
Of the non-violent children?
On every street corner is posted
The closed and silent tank,
The sniper slips his thirty caliber
Into the firing chamber
On the rooftops of the world.

There was that great singing afternoon
without strangers.
He weeps for the child and for himself:
Who will ever again give the old man
A flower with such blue eyes?

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, p. iii.

Kamikaze

The young Japanese are circling still,
They cannot rest or land
Until we understand
The kamikaze chose to fall
Straight down the clouds
On the divine wind of annihilation.

The young monks in saffron robes
Burned in the cruel light,
Toppled like belief in the cinders
On the public square.

The faith in degrees of immolation
Creeps blindly around the globe;
The young of the hemisphere
Dived through clouds of gas,
Fell onto bayonets,
Rehearsed with detonators
In the rumpus rooms of suburban houses.

The emperor denied his pilots by survival,
The Buddha sat like stoneware in the glow.
We fail the young until we find the flaw in the world,
The hole in the fields of glory through which they go.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 111–112.

We Are Living

We are living twenty-four hours
At a time
In the aura of the unknown soldier
At the telephone
Under the midwest wheat.
The missile in the iron cradle
Sleeps away its infancy;
The hawks of the cadaver
Tighten their blue circle.

The mothers pray for the health
Of the stranger
Over the pulsating heads of their newborn;
Never in history a psyche
So commended to the nurses of heaven.

We are locked in the devices
That protect us from the protectors;
Again in the symbiosis of life: death:
We are locked in the embrace
Of the warrior child.

In the twilight where we survive
The fantasies
He is our next of kin.

If his metabolism is normal
We last another day.
O brother, father, victim, of the era
Of fatal decisions!

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 112–113.

The Reichstag Fires

never end with one burning:
They begin with it.
Fire leads to fire,
Then to holocaust,
The charred bones of a people
With nails in their feet.

The border incident
Never makes a war.
The will to war
Is the only incident:
War follows like a foaming dog.

They are always watching
For an open window,
For a night man sleeping.
The victims, in the sea of smoke,
Walk to the cruciform trees.
It begins in a blaze of hysteria:
Ends in dark and death.

Always one defense:
Whatever is at hand,
Beginning with the stones
Of the long street.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 113–114.

The Temporary Man

We think we are here, or there,
Or essential to the landscape;
After all, we have a house,
 a neighbor.

We know where the neighbor will be
When the horn is blown
Over the baying of the swamp dogs.
We are really historians,
In the caravansary for a sleep.

The figures of that long scroll
Are always the same:
In the costumes of countries
Or centuries,
Ice-locked in the brotherhood
Of destruction,
The winter Cossack and his Jew.

Tomorrow the world
Said the German
And the Roman
And the Egyptian
And the Amalekite
And the captains of the triremes
On the outer and the inland seas.

My father crouched in the attic
While the terror swept by
In the Lithuanian night.
I learned from him:
Home is the halfway house to exile,
We are only on leave from Auschwitz.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 114–115.

Nonperson

If dead
they need only transport his worms
or change the name of a street.

Alive he is a dilemma
undone by declaring him extinct,
as the pterodactyl
sank on leather wings.

If memory persists,
if you consort in the head
with a nonperson,
you can be wrapped in wet sheets
in a hospital room until you recover.

The face you see
in the family album
they tell you is illusion:
it can be made to disappear
with a snap of imperious fingers.

He walks in the avenues of night;
the dog and the passerby
know he has a shadow.

The state that abolished him
exists only in the mind:
when he finds the others
they will announce the nonstate,
the first commune.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, p. 115.

Tableau Vivant

The Ave thousand years
Of the torture light of history
Expose a fact:
The guard is a prisoner,
The man in the cell
Embraces him forever in his iron care.

The tableau was once exact:
The headsman and the head,
The Castor and Pollux
Of the earthbound
Of the dark ages.

They fall in the black tunnel
Or serve hard time
And leave with a new suit; the warden
Is embalmed in the watchtower
Of his own idea.

The key to the manacles
Turns in the rusty heart;
Someone in charge of the noose
Stands beside the hooded
On the high gallows.
Drops his mind through the trap door.

The nature of chains
Requires a minimum
Of four wrists;
The captor is endlessly captured,
Running like mad in his sleep.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, p. 116.

Samizdat

They are closing in;
We can hear the snuffle of the dogs
in the night.
For every knock on the door one dies
of a burst ventricle.

What do we want you to know?
Only that we exist.
Perhaps you will tell your children
for their sake.

Meanwhile, words are the litanies
of the hunted,
Placed on the forbidden altars
In all the caves from Altamira
To the calcified cities of the sun.

They cannot bear to think
we are alive
And putting unlikely notions
On the kind of papyrus
That will survive the empire:
again.

... is this Byzantium
or did we move to Rome
or was it Madrid
or Munich
and once in Yenan
and twice at Wounded Knee...

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, p. 117.

Refugees

Civilization is a river of refugees:
In the memory of the simple life
Of a man
The only river
That never goes dry.

The tides come down
From the falling mountains of war,
From the arroyos of anguish,
From the terror rising underground,
Above ground, in the airbound columns
Of fire and rain.

The face is always the same:
The face of the Miura bull
When the sword cracks the heart,
The knees give way,
The tongue hangs in the sick arena.

The white horse of the centuries
Drags the same caravan
Into the black distance;
They divide the splinters of the god,
The maize or rice or unleavened bread;
On the two-wheeled cart
The mother of the long march
Bends like a mound of wool
Toward the collapsing horizon,
Toward a thousand miles of dying Cherokee,
Toward the river that never rests in the sea.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, p. 118.

Extradition

O platoons of secret men,
fan out in the direction
Of the poles and horizons!—
he has to be somewhere,
preferably the province of despair.

Or on the beach in the swarthy light
with the foreign woman
and the wine of the country.
He makes contacts in the gloom:
he is told or he tells them.

Or asleep in a forbidden land
where everyone is a pariah
even his dreams imperil us
with slips in the Freudian code—
nightmares! nightmares!

This is no time to be lost.
Or found on a pleasure boat
in a doubtful river
with the longnailed dancers.

The guilt is in the evidence,
the evidence in the round fact
the secret men are after him.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, p. 119.

The Underground Railroad

Grandchildren of slaves
can you remember the legend
for the use of the living
in the stone swamps of the cities:

what did your father say
of the night road northward,

what did his father tell him
of those lost stations?

He went down
at the edge
of the cane-brake,

slept with animals

came up in the latitude
of dissenters.

The landmarks of those journeys are needed again_

Who will uncover the grass-grown stations,

What is the address of the descendants
of the friendly people?

The underground railroad is a dream that never wakens:

of passage for the pursued
through the houses of strangers,

of passage for ideas
through the open rooms of the mind,

of one Dred Scott or always another in time fallen in the direction of his
true north.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 119–120.

Memorial Day

My God they're still marching
Down Main Street,
Still playing John Philip Sousa
In the key of the year of the child.

They have the annual heart
To put flowers on the skeletons,
To remember the legless, the eyeless,
The reasons for the last six or seven wars,
The uncounted surreptitious landings

On malarial coasts.

They don't know Pompeii is flat,
Herculaneum is finished,
The Maya have left their cities.
They don't know the whole thing
Blew down the Yalu that December.

They don't even see the fine ash
Falling on their houses
And their praying mantis heads.
They just go marching down Main Street
Like, man, two hundred years ago.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 120–121.

We Are Not Ready

for the collective:
It requires a state of grace
Light years from these war cries
On the violent desert.

The people of the mind
Live in its cerebral caves:
When the door opens
On the real world
They hear the nightriding mares.

The shellhole, neurosis, we seek
Between the dream and the fact.
In the debris,
In the smoke signals,
In chaos,
We sleep and imagine the landscape

Of the commune in its glory
Rising with each century
And dying with it.

It demands more than a belief
In our sleep
To enter the peaceable kingdom.
Or like the young Keats
We may pursue ourselves,
A fantasy in glazed ware,
Around and around an urn: and ash.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 121–122.

They Could Not Lift Their Heads

Paradise is lost each day,
Newfound in figures of the night,
Once more dispersed
Among the white bones of morning.

The war that underlies them all
Is waged in the serious heart.
We land over and over again
On the beaches of hope and desire,
Only to awaken on that dead sea
Where the fish turn up their bellies
And the horizon goes down
Like the ship of the imagined world.

Whole lives are said to perish
In the exhausting civil war
Between fact and fantasy.
Nations fall into grief and despair
As the armies of the lemmings
Hurry on fur-covered feet
To drown in northern waters.

Dream is the horn of the Irish elk:
They could not lift their heads, and died,
Their young unborn through eternity.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 122–123.

What Shall I Do?

He was a man engaged in a world,
A spatial object lighted and warmed
By the sun of his own fantasy;
When she had a child she was intact,
An arrangement in squares of anxiety,
And lines of love and stress.

The foxes are still running
In the canyons on the edges
Of the city and the fawn
Steps into the garden at night,
The ruins of Stonehenge and Monte Alban
Measure and transcribe the heavens,
The submicroscopic armies swarm
In the unexplored marshes of the earth,
Islands arise in the coral water
And are sunk by the weapons.

The man and the woman
Have closed the windows.
We hear over the roofs,
Behind the bolted doors
And the minds of the old:
What shall! do today,
Tonight, tomorrow, the day after?

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, p. 123.

The Family

Now at the age of the death
Of the mother and father
They often return to me
As characters in a miracle play
Observed in the glass
Of the seventh decade.

The child felt he was watched by strangers
Who thwarted his natural impulse
To die early by water, poison, fire, falling from cliffs.

The youth walked in the fields of fantasy
Until they summoned him
To the real world they believed in:
The province of the informer,
The city of the confidence men,
The house of their failures.

When they were old
The man had to visit them
In the orphanage
Where they remembered so well
What never happened.

Now in the clearest decade I see
They were the continuity from dark to dark,
The keepers of the seals of the genes,
The stones in front of the lair
Where the young are hidden from the hawk.
Now deep in the irreversible dusk,
Late, late,
We are a family.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, p. 124.

Obits

Mother's day began with coffee
And a list of the dead;
She had to see who was gone
Or perhaps who was left
In a census of both worlds.

Sometimes she smiled in panic,
Or was lost in a dream of years;
Or impassive, one whose flock
Is blown apart by thunder,
Who will gather them, or most,
In the quiet of the light.

Now I am old enough
To join her grave registration,
To find some comfort, still being around,
Some distress as one by one they go,
Some wonder at the endurance
Of a species that can live,
Watching its generation
Vanish down a hole in Eden.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, p. 125.

The Nature of the City

is spare and sparse
And hard to find
And hard to keep alive
In corners and waterless crannies
And gray mouse holes in the cellar.

A mile without a tree
Is not a habitation but an error
In the course of time.
A bird would be electrocuted
Singing to the leafless pole.

How can we tell about the world
We see and hear
As If through window and water
In the aquarium,
Two alien elements between us
And the wonder and the grace
Of orchid fins.

In the nature of the city
We are dismembered:
Now I understand
Our enduring envy of Indians
And their destruction.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 125–126.

The House

The house we live in
Is a shelter from the furies;
We walk the floors by day,
We try to sleep in its dark arms.

It is taken over by night:
The roof talks to itself,
The black windows look in,
The knots crackle and cry
As though with arthritis
Or memories of the violent world
It has survived.

When you live together for decades,
Objects and people are related:
They seem to be sentient,
We learn to be still.

Nothing will ever scurry or warn
In the city, no premonitions
In the great successful pyramids
Of the sun and the moon of tomorrow.

They will not even know
When it comes. We will:
The house always trembles
Just before a disaster.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 126–127.

Plants

The woman who talks to plants
Sometimes talks to me; clearly,
I have not their wisdom
Or their grace.

Does she address the leaf, or the stem,
The whole creature in its life,
Or the root, does her voice
Go to the root and nourish it
Like a mouth in the moist darkness?

Now we enter separate worlds:
Her belief in the subterranean,
My belief in hers against my will,
Against the hard geometry of fact.

Where logic and dream depart,
The earth-bound, the star-bent,
Rush for light years
To divergent heavens.

She talks to plants and waits,
Content with silence and new leaves
Or sometimes flowers
In the splendor of that kind of speech.

If I could, I, too,
Would put them forth for her
if only for a season.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, p. 127.

The Neighbor

He seemed the sole survivor
Of a dead planet,
Owning nothing but himself.
He passed through the treasure
In the thickets of the city,
Armored in his indifference,
Led by the extreme light of compassion.

No one could endure him.
He said nothing, but they heard:
 amnesty, amnesty.
They were glad when he moved:
They could resume the games.

His life casts no shadow
Upon them now,
Yet something is immortal
In the minds of the neighbors—
An open question like a wound.

They have a compulsion
To talk about him.
They think he had problems
And buried them in public.
They have to decide he was sick
 very sick

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, p. 128.

The First Law

The first law of the dynamics of life
Is to know how to die.
We have to choose, as we open our eyes,
The stones and rituals,
Under what cloths and leaves we'll lie.

The old ones found their ways and means:
Death in the Slavic drama
Stands in the corner, a member of the family,
While the sons and daughters curse;
The small child in Cuernavaca
Chews his candy skeleton and laughs
On el día de los muertos.

They wear white in Asia
And eat at funerals:
Nature needs no mourning.
Elsewhere, the arthritic
Slip into the cold seas;
Half a world to the south
The burning ghats and the widows
Line that dark and bloodbound river.

The first law
Is to know how to die
Or they will never imagine
What to do with us.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 128–129.

The Message

The lines of communication will be down
In a storm of blown nerves
If a cerebrovascular accident occurs.
We will know the genesis of love:
In body, mind, perception,
All of them, or the legendary heart.

I can tell you now
If I cannot hear, or see, or speak,
Or tap in some primal code,
I intend to be aware of you,
To hold you intact inside the sockets
Like the imprint of the fossil fern.

If I leave as a sentient being,
Remember this message in advance
From that immobile world
That does not exist and may not.
If it comes, we who have been in touch,
Will be again, in some singular way.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 129–130.

Passing Away

He passed away she said
Perhaps like smoke
That might drift back some day,
Certainly not like death
That won't.

She passed away he said
As though she came
To the servant's entrance
For an eight-hour shift,
Then ambled on.

The child passed away they said,
Too pure, unearthly—
Not that a bacterium
Looking for warmth, or moisture,
Wandered in.

They will not utter it,
They think it is the word that kills,
Not the denial of the rocky mortal,
. Not belief in angels, curly pink,
And father and mother somewhere,
Of course not grounded,
Still telling them what to say
When company comes.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, p. 130.

The Contract

I have given my body to science:
Now over and over again,
The star of the Medical Center,
I lie on veins of marble.

Under a bank of fluorescent suns
The people with knives
Are carrying out their contract,
They are going to look for me.

If they discover me
They will do better than I did.
They will see the landscape of scars,
The benchmarks on the bone,
The convolutions of the brain
Pointing to some obscure trouble.

I keep wanting to tell them
But I never know what it is.
This is the hour when the wisdom
Should be imparted to the young,
The consummation of all the decades
Of breathing in and out,
The eons of grappling for light
Among the tangled ropes of darkness.

actually
i won't even be there

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, p. 131.

Neolithic

I am turning to stone:
I feel the calcium
Adhere to the spine,
The stalagmites rising
From my feet,

The stalactites growing down
From my brain;
When they meet in my chest
Like the teeth of rodents
I will know it is time.

Meanwhile there is much to be done
And I lurch in circles
Like a wounded bull
Who will never do anything.
I will say something instead,
I will leave a heritage
Of imperishable thought
As soon as I can get it together.

A tangle of days ahead,
Nights when the calcium
Advances on the bone,
Perhaps whole seasons to be spent
In wondering how to behave
In the midst of the new stone age.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 131–132.

Nights

Then at some uncertain age
We barely wait for dawn
To tell our dream to someone
Anxious to tell us theirs.

A third of the time we sleep,
In age the active third.
What happens there beyond belief
We rush to find once more at night
Perhaps because we are the heroes
Emergent after peril but alive
To stare into the morning light.

Or in the dream we manage
To restore our dead
To tell us they survive
To die again when we awaken.

We hurry into sleep,
The land of beasts and children,
The avenue to bloodshot seas,
The wilder part of what is left.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 132–133.

In Memoriam

Memory is a desert water-hole;
It dries up as the aging traveler
Approaches and requires it
To survive in his own person.
He burrows in the temperature of sand
Toward the bones of the pallid lizard
That was himself when agile.

The landscapes are irrecoverable
And the girls of light among the trees
And on mountains and running in the foam
Of the cobalt sea,
And nightmares and dreams of that coast,
And friends and fathers
And all that anger and that love.

When memories do not answer
The summons of the years
We know they are lying somewhere
In that desert, parched and shrinking,
The holy part of our existence,
Secured we thought for the night.

Out of the bloody chrysalis
Into the breathing world;
A moment later begins the stage

Of the second larva;
Forbidding us even our recollections,
Falls the dark gauze.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 133–134.

Exiles

The row of chairs
On the endless porch
Of the house of the old
Is occupied like a country
By shaky filaments
In the shape of men.

They wander as far from the nurse
As they can go
In the imaginary forest.
They are looking in the earth tunnels
For the child they left
On the other side of the stream.

The region they inhabit now
Hasan unguarded frontier;
To astound the merciless
They cross it without permission.

The exiles of the province
Of the interior
Are stateless, stateless—
Forever in need of a passport
To visit the land and the living.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, p. 134.

70

Seven decades have gone unburied,
Each practice death only a year long,
Another always rising
In the manner of untiring suns.

Or one could think of an iceberg
Borne on that current
To the grace of southern water,
Merely a spare footing left
To keep its balance
While it moves with what dignity
To what end.

Everything else seems to be
Where it was—
The children are small and pale,
The mothers fret like goats
In the pastures of the city,
The fathers are trading cowrie shells.

Seventy is not where I thought
Or where it ought to be,
It is where I am: a white berg
Dissolving in the bony sea.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 134–135.

Snakes

Now I see the lethal snake
Regards the world with kindness
After he swallows the brown gopher
And lies in the light
Listening to the murmur of digestive juices
Like man's beginning and possible end.

Ideas of a universe
Creep around the edges of the shade,
Fold and perish of enervation.
Nourishment, a mild climate,
Are ample for snakes or old men
Curled in their skins and serapes.

War, hunger, fear of the hawk,
Are last month's crises;
Today is round and full,
With heat and food enough piped in
To be pre-natal, a life
We never really knew
But sought in all our burrows.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 135–136.

You Are Born Again

When you are old
You are born again
Each morning: in this parturition
You are your own father and mother,
You fear you are your own child.

You encounter the new sun
With alarm in the company of pain,
With the wonder of the re-discovery
Of a submerged continent.

Through the night
You looked for someone
You will not find in the light.
Through the day
You long for the search
That begins with dark and dream.

It is impossible to enter the day:
The population of the night
Is not with you; strangers are swarming;
You are a hive of dry wings.

When you are old
You never know
Whether you live
In the day or the night,
Of half, or both, or neither.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, p. 136.

A Talk with Death

I know you are not a person
I can talk to.
It is to the idea in my head
I address myself
At the age of wonder.

The child is ignorant of it:
He is not allowed to go to funerals;
People in his world simply disappear
like gophers.

Though elder brother tells him,
It's still just a rumor
Like history, and all those generals,
and their swords.

When does it become a fact?
I find seventy a good time
For it to loom upon my horizon
With the morning sun.

One can accept it as an equation
For a while: oblivion
May be swallowed like any name
For an experience we cannot have.

Death as an idea begins to displace
The contents of a life;
As a companion begins to bore;
As a solution leaves nothing to be desired.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, p. 137.

Wilderness

A generation spends forty years
In the wilderness,
Then arrives at the river too late,
And too old, to cross.

The tracks end in a dry wadi,
The idea of a generation
Is doomed like a mirage.
While we stagger in the desert
We have no reserves
To give the young.

We only gasp:
There is a land of wide leaves and peace,
There is a promise,
There is water.

They will not listen now
But we have to tell them:
Do not follow in our footprints,
They lead nowhere.

Only remember for us
There is a land of wide leaves and peace,
There is water;
The promise is to yourself.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, p. 138.

Time Is Going Somewhere

Time is going somewhere
without me
As I observe the ant by day,
the mice by night—
How they attend to everything,
How even their hard breathing
never bothers;
When they are done, they go,
Another takes their place
in the ceremony.
I learned from them
To plan on being quiet
At the close of that winter.
Who dares to praise life
as it goes;
Upon whom to turn the blade
of anger?
Rage makes a brave poem,
a neurotic end
adios amigos

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, pp. 138–139.

The Last Poem

Someone has to do it in time
Or only a cone of lava
Will tell we were here
If they come to study the canals.

What can be said in that stanza?
So many farewells we have,
So trite the distraught lovers
Keening in the centuries.

Publication. *On the Ward*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977, p. 139.

EXCAVATIONS

Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979

Excavations

I am haunted by the sound of digging
In the buried cities of the world,
By the intent face of the science
Of bones, stones, and feathers.

Vainly the heart of a people
Is sought in the kitchen midden.
It vanishes whether the end comes
As smallpox, or lava flow, or drought,
Or the barbarian riding his stallion
Up the mosaic stairs.

Discover in what artifacts
The boy's love or fear of his father,
The girl diminished by the mother,
The man and the woman in the solitude
Of the stars of the historic night;

Or the exercise of the power
Of the paramount chief,
Or the relation between the entrails
And the beginning of wars
And the drowning of virgins.

It existed for a fragment of time
In an ambience of its own desire.
Who digs in the curious plateau
Releases it forever like myrrh
Escaping with a sigh
The gold coffin of the king.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, p. 143.

The Archaeologist

He has to go away from her
To another time
And a distant place
Where columns have crashed
Like granite trees.

It is simpler to read
A language he does not know
Than to translate her
Into his natural tongue.

He relates to whole dynasties
Through tombs and cooking pots,
Even senses their women
From footprints in the middens.

He needs a Rosetta stone
To enter her remote Egypt.
She keeps disappearing
Like the people of Palenque
Into some night of her own.

It is easier to reconstruct
The dust of strangers
Than to live
With someone you love.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, p. 144.

The Cave

They explore the labyrinth of art:
The wise, the arrogant,
The terrible closed minds,
The wide open, the wind-scattered.

The secret in the sinuous passage
Stands like a cenotaph
With its stone writing
Between them and the light.

Someone understood in his bones
In the gloom of the cave
On the edge of the ice age:
Brother of trees and cliffs,
Father of creatures,
He drew the Paleolithic horse;
The bison running; the ibex; his fears.

On the walls and ceiling
In brown and red ochre,
In black oxide of manganese,
The experience of his world
Survives the glacier,
The fortunes of history,
The idea of art.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 144–145.

4 A.M.

I try to escape the brutal hour,
I think of those who could be thanked
by the whole species:
Finders of continents, of newts
in remote waters;

The man in the wintry marsh
Learning the language
Of the night birds;
Another observing on the mountain,
In the company of frigid stars,
The tidal seasons of the world;

An eye at the end of the lens
Measuring for a generation
The pulse of an undulant cell;
One who lived for three years
With the screams of the baboons
in the Transvaal;
Also the bones of the historian
Barely left among the middens of the old city.

At 4 A. M.
I never think of generals,
Or even admirals,
Or especially of neutrons.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 145–146.

Autobiography

They are calling their childhood
To our attention like a pride of goats,
Offering the contrail of dreams
Instead of the actual nightmare
Of the young.

They believe in the years
With the imaginary mother,
In the iron heroes in the park,
In all their fathers as Paul Bunyan.

Truth is the halfway house of age:
The world did not rise at once,
A marvelous sun in our heads,
Rather it came piece by piece
Like the ceremony of Aztec priests.
Each night was a bony grave,
And dawn came to the mortuary
Like a burglar.

They impress upon us the wonders
Of their childhood
As if they had lived in Eden
With the first forebears,
As if we did not know
Who the serpent was.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 146–147.

Dynamics

The little deaths come by stealth
To make the huge one easy,
The way spring hurls its thistle
Into summer, summer into fall.
Winter is only another season,
the sunless.

We let the child go forever,
The youth in his turn
For the seven wonders of the world;
Yet we age in a day like bees
Instructed by fear of the queen.

It is the same dynamic
From beginning to end
Though we walk in blindness
Among all we see
And hear the notes
But not the music.

We trust the brilliant
Or the complicated of the earth,
Instead of the one we love;
We believe in a hundred heavens
And their multiple thrones
Instead of the burial
In the exquisite calm and final waters.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, p. 147.

Mortal

They say the length of my life
Is in the nature of the veins
Of my ancestors,
Enclosed like a worm in the genes
By people I never knew.

How can I tell the age of their hearts
Who perished in a far-off village
Under a mountain of collapsing lava,
Or lay in the streets of the peninsula
In the year of the plague;
Or how long he would have lasted,
The young forebear, his brain trepanned
By a sword in the foreign war.

O great obscure manifold branches
Of the tree of the family of man,
Where does the artery begin or end
That determines the time?

Mothers, fathers, fallen in seasons
Like leaves and blown over the cold plain
Of that country, did you ever exceed
The grandfathers in their winters?

The answer is not forthcoming from them;
It is on its way with the progress
Of the multiple independently targeted re-entry vehicle
Or its next of kin.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, p. 148.

Voyages

The sculptor is the fortunate one:
He sees life in the mineral state,
The fallen bird implied in the onyx,
The wet fur of the sea-otter
In the driftwood,
The character of a woman
Forthcoming
From the marble mountain.

The poet cannot use like clay
The white substance
Under his helmet of bone,
Or see in his body, or another,
The skeleton of the great project
Of the dream of words.

He begins with fog and blindness,
Journeys alone on tides that end
On the edges of the known world,
Despairs and mutinies and starves for light,
Sometimes arrives by error and magic in the sail
On the shore of the lost flowers of the Indies.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 148–149.

In the Continents of the Dark

In the continents of the dark
The true believers
Are grappling with the cosmos
They were bound to inherit
When their people died
And were buried.

The neophytes are throwing off their vestments,
The partisans of violent creeds are seeking satori,
The monks are burning slowly down like wax.
The smiling and savage gods of east and west
Meet at the meridian where the minds are failing.

After the winter of the death camps,
After the cooling of the furnaces,
After the defoliation of the summer,
Belief in man is waiting to be born,

Replacing bells in their glory
Or segments of bone in the crypts.

The last altar a man abandons
is where his son lies
Undefended from the state.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 149–150.

Listen, Children

Listen, children, to the poetry man:
He never tells you tales
That hang on cliffs by day
Or scream at night like mares.

He sings of the heart and head,
Of the lost Maya, of newfound land,
Of stars and the colored rings of planets,
Of the meaning of the light.

He talks in his sleep,
He walks like a child
Beside the headwaters
Of the river of truth.

He will not pipe you
With his malice
To some enchanted rabbit hole
Down the road from Hamelin.

He will tell you exactly:
The end is curled as a foetus
In the beginning
The arterial clock stops in time.
Listen, children, to the poetry man.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, p. 150.

Ancestors

I planned to live without ancestors,
To escape the shadow of the dead hand;
In the mottled herd I would be the white unicorn.

They are always there, the old and the great,
Thundering into the future,
Leaving no room for the young
Whose horizon they obscure
With their forest of horns.

Now I invent the forsaken, the ancestors
Lost in the long odyssey of an ego;
I search in the blood for relics of ages,
In the head for the thoughts of the fathers,
In the tribal heart where the songs
Of despair and delight are born.
Cold, I return to the fires
Of the night of the gens.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, p. 151.

Birds

She believes in birds
And their happiness;
She is a witness to their singing,
She understands chirps.
She is sorry forme.

Their hands are feet,
They have to make a living
With their mouths;
Seeds are always blowing away,
Insects hiding in knot holes,
The worms diving for cover.

The night is devoted to doubt;
Hoping the hawk is asleep,
Hoping not to be caught,
Counting the tiny beat of the heart.

Does she know the birds sing
To conceal themselves
From the birth of thought?
They are eons old
And they can only say:
Look out! look out! the black tiger!

They do not understand themselves,
The others are forever strangers.
Men and birds
Trust in muscles and wings
To take them away from,
Seldom toward.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 151–152.

Transit

I am not drowning, I think,
Even in the emerald riptide of years.
If I were, my whole life
Would be flashing before my eyes.

The fact is: I hardly remember
Any of it, only bizarre scenes
And segments brought to the optic nerve
By a casual word or something déjà vu
Or music of another decade being born,
Fading, expiring, in some lost hour.

I am prepared to examine it
Like an inchworm
As it unwinds in my sleep
Over, say, a thousand and one nights;

Not all at once
Like the last evening of an opera,
Myself the hero
Amid the falling scenery.

Perhaps it is merely a jigsaw puzzle
Whose squirming edges cannot be joined
By living, by hallucination, or by death.
Nonetheless the transit requires us
To see it in that instant,
Laid out like a row of Egyptians.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 152–153.

Flight

The nights conceal themselves
At daybreak
As if they might be overtaken
And exposed with their crimes
And fantasies.

So the stars scatter
In four directions;
The congregations of light
Are running from this globe
Into some other heaven.

They are trying to escape us:
At 186,000 miles a second
They are moving out of the neighborhood,
Abandoning the premises
Where the neutron warhead is charged.

We are gradually left here
In this meager constellation
Like the Indians on the edge
Of the Strait of Magellan:
Of all their tribes
Twenty-seven persons survive
To fish with bone hooks
In the dead waters of their history.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 153–154.

The Ox

The ox moves the stone wheel
On its axis, like a world,
Crushing the grain of that season,
Believing with every step
He is about to go somewhere.

The earth opens to the weather
In the life span of the village,
Seeds fall into place, the rain works,
Food in its hour rises toward the light.

The people share the circular dream
Of the blind ox:
A birth, a death, a copulation;
Wild rice and honey one day,
Or the ribs of a great animal;
A short war, and the faces
Of a few strange women, some spears.

There is neither more nor less:
Ideas of change
Have never flown over the dry plain
Like a plague of man-eating birds.

why do we keep thinking of this
in the shaken night of the city

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, p. 154.

Statues

Who occupied whole continents
Now sit on iron benches
In the plazas of a hundred lands.
The parts not missing in action
Want to explain themselves
To the young—

Who do not believe in the great valor
Of a year they have not seen:
Old wrecks are always speaking
Of enormous tides
To attract and skewer another generation.

The veins quiver in their temples,
They try to remember
The reason for the war;
Or if victory was confused with defeat;
Or defeat with the music of triumph
In the smoke
Of the splintering forest of guns.

The youth run on their narrow trails
To their own mountains;
The old soldier talks to his shadow
Under the statue of the cavalry.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, p. 155.

Of Excellence

The only pure adoration is of excellence.
There all earthly matins begin
And evensong of the actual world
Concludes in a burst of glory.

The sculptor receives a premonition
Of the dream of art in the stone,
The woodcarver from the tree itself.
They are seen as creatures
Able in particular to induce birth.

The music unheard by the inner
Or the outer ear
Sounds in the depth of a remote cell
In a man responsive to terror and beauty
In the passage of the great planets.

The intimations of the poem
Are moving in and out
Of the cerebral cortex;
Their images stand like the pillars
Of Stonehenge, a statement of faith.

All earthly praise begins in a man
And ends in a museum;
Meanwhile, the human desert
Is filled with light and grace.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 155–156.

Something Flies Out of the Cells

Something flies out of the cells
Where the doomed poets lie;
Something tells it like it is
In the bowels
of the vast nervous amphibious powers.

The nails of broken fingers
Incise graffiti on the walls:
The legend of decades
Of the lions of silence.
When the poets are strangled
At puberty,

Generations live in the undersea
Of the blind.
Even the secret police
Cannot change a fact:
The giant never falls at once
But he always falls,
Wondering why.

The poem has a half-life
Of a thousand years,
The prison returns to sand and lime
While the word flies out of the cells
As a dove
From an ark of the drowned.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 156–157.

The Fair Country

Born on the edges of the Mediterranean,
The dream of a fair country
Moved in the direction of the sun,
Then northward in a cold arc.

The faithful came across seven waters
Until they found the bones of the poets
Buried alive
In blocks of frozen tundra.

Now it hovers in the year
Of the animal
Like a cloud in the mind
Over the cones of blue mountains.

The idea of the landscape never dies.
It goes when the killing begins,
Returns to fill the emptiness of sleep;
Otherwise we rattle,
Dry gourds in the fields of night.

The dream
Is created in one generation
And lost in another;
But the son remembers the father
In time
And with him the boundless land.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 157–158.

Plateaus

We have come on the only path
To the plateau of age
Like the sky city of Acoma,
in the distance the great buttes
Of red stone rising as cenotaphs,
Below us the abandoned circle
Of the desert of the world.

All plateaus are the same:
They end in a falling space;
Memories die on the dunes
Of night; the footprints
Of the ancestors are lost
Like the code in the bird tracks.

We are companions of the height
As we were on the long traverse
of the tribes, in the years
When the obsidian arrows
Flew close to our heads.

Here on the plateau of age
Like the sky city of Acoma
We rest
And wait
In the eye of the hawk.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, p. 158.

Missing Person

Thumb curving in the direction
Of the future,
Somebody in blue jeans
Stands at the crossroads
Of an alien world,
Waiting for a progression of strangers
Under the moon of the cool girl.

After a decade of silence
A generation like a catapult
Hurled itself at the walls
Of the empire, the centurions charged,
The young carried away
The broken and their dead
To the burial place of the elephants
Of all the rebellions.

The figure on the highway to somewhere
Does not know who she is:
The child of two generations of war,
The widow of the third.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, p. 159.

Bicentennial

How a country can be saddened
As it ages:
It looks into the mirror
Of the two seas endlessly
For itself, and for the footprints
Of its early image on the plains
Of snow; among the clouds
It circles like a condor
Who will never in its life
See the mountain again.

There have been others broken
In the chronicle of conquest,
Also the simple dying of nations
Like the towers of Uxmal;
Sadness too in the faces
Of nomad peoples
Who could not imagine water
In a desert of centuries.

The morning is always astonishing:
The night ends with its oblivion,
The nightmare begins with the light
As the ruins are seen on the skyline
When the turbines of power fall silent.

Hope exists in the time of plenty,
Falters when the mice
Have eaten the grain,
Expires when they stare at us
With the appraising eyes
Of the great carnivora.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 159–160.

The Fourth World

exists like the equator,
An imaginary line
In the minds of generations
Bleeding in the first three.

The geography of hope
We learned in childhood
Remains like a firmament
In the bitter skies of age.

The ancestors, each in his time,
Fought under the known flag
Of the birthright of a new world:
Pure, compassionate, the reconciliation
Of all the opposites in armor.

The painted lamb
Grazing beside the lion
In The Peaceable Kingdom
Is nearer than we are, caught
In the iron dens of the destroyers.

The inhabitants of the fourth world
Know one another by signs
And intimations, travel in parallel
On the homicidal globe,
Meet on the borders of the years
As in a future dream.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 160–161.

Gulls

The small dark birds driven inland
By white gulls in the pride
Of the curved talons of possession,
Are kept far from the rich source
Of the kingdom of the shore.

Too busy with patrols, the gulls
Die of exhaustion on the edge
Of the protein-laden depths
In full sight of the next of kin.

They never observe the facets of the sea,
Or the light on the night waters,
The grace of roiling clouds,
The duplicate grace in gray
Of the rising and the falling wave.

The gull exists for the moment:
The pursuit of the enemy bird.

Caught in the metallic net of war,
He is prisoner of the territory,
Lord of all he can frighten.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 161–162.

12:00 Noon

Midday in the city: the congestion
In its chest is fatal;
The legs of the long centipede
Move like a tropism
To the shelter of the daylight bars;
All bodies and metal gears
Are rising to a climax,
A sirocco of fire and ash.

I see a mirage in the noon sky:
Changeless in the Kalahari Desert
Under the suns of fifty thousand years,
Quiet people are gathering locusts.

They are kind as antelopes;
They respect the plants;
They have no wars in a life
As round as the great phase of the moon.

Now in the eye of the meridian
There is a choice of mirages:
The city raging in the time
Of its strangulation;
Or the nomads of the desert,
Content in the dusk of the stone ax.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, p. 162.

The Assassin

He confuses the drowsy world
That dares not exclude him

From the testimony
On the walls of the mind
Of an era.

The contents of the brain
Are observed at the clinic
As the debris of childhood;
The loneliness of the night walker
On a deserted street;
Or the agony of a need to be seen
By someone, to be a discovery
Huge as a submerged continent.

Dreaming in his dark Rome
He severs the head
Of the populace
Like the father of psychosis.

The chosen angel of deliverance,
Believing in his own rituals,
Always knows what to do
While the multitudes mill in doubt
In the great plazas.

The assassin haunts the colonnades
Where the state is dying
In the gloom:
He is not a cause
But an effect.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 162–163.

The Music

The music is always sad
In the mauve cities of the west.
The young never cry in public:
Exalted by the minor key
 of lamentation

They drift with opaque eyes
Into the streets of night.

The close of childhood
—an instant of glory—
Then the world exposes the end
Coiled in the beginning
As in the first garden.

Someone is implored by the words
They seem to know at birth:
Possession and loss are one,
And life and the coup de grace.

The music is always grieving
As if there is little spring
And less of summer,
Only the cold of autumn
Blowing among the death of leaves.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 163–164.

The Holiday

It is the day the lonely frogs
Disturb the marsh,
The neuroses bubble to the surface
In alluvial rings.

While the insect is eating
His brother,
The father of the hawk
Dives for his heart,
The wife of the water moccasin
Drowns his mother.

Matriarchs of all species
Lie down in the afternoon
Of despair.
The young seem to escape

Into the myth of the fiesta
But the angel is frowning
At the top of the tree.

It is the age of expectations:
Year by year
The child is said to be coming
With forgiveness.
Meanwhile for the habitants
It is another day of conquest
And defeat,
A long ingestion, family by family.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 164–165.

The Hull

To be born is the original disaster
In that cold dry white place
With some bastard pounding your back,
The first enemy.

The child survives by accident
The weight of the great mother,
The eye of the father
Coming on like Cyclops.

The youth sails among the girls
On the shores of the antic isles,
Confused when the wind takes him
Across the equator at midnight.

The middle passage opens
Through the gray continent,
A river of storms and visions,
And he is old and on the sea
That has no littoral.
Then he remembers in reverse:
One gave him his first breath;
Two others nourished his second;
A tenderness remains of the lost tropic,
Even of tumult in the river.

Now a hull on a wide Sargasso
he accepts
the beginning
the middle
the end.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 165–166.

The Shtetl

Born in a shtetl
In the hour of the wolves,
The child lived in a house
Engraved like a time capsule:
Do not open for two thousand years.

He fled across continents,
Still listening for the hoofbeats
Of Cossack horses.
In the cities of the west
The people of the shtetls
Lie awake in the night.

He became my father;
I heard the horses
He gave me in sleep.

The shtetl always exists:
A scene in a glass ball,
The snow falling, falling fast;

Or where something quivers
Like a spent hare
In the minds of generations;

Or there is a sickness
In the pit of the stomach
Of a man
Ten thousand mites away,
A hundred years later,
Today.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 166–167.

The Seventh Sense

The man who thinks he is a bird
Is in trouble in the world:
The sense of freedom
Is a form of flying;
Someone always tries
To sever wings.

In the country of birds
The hawk is forever hung
On the blue branches of the sky,
Waiting to descend
Upon the happiness of swallows.

The smallest bird
Lives in a habitat of flowers:
—The jay cannot bear such joy—
He has to shred the nest
Before the eggs of spring.

The five senses reach out,
Even the possible sixth,
Weak as tendrils
In a garden of air;

The seventh, the instinct
To be free,
Brings them to life,
The tetrarch to his grave.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, p. 167.

An Old Radical

hears in the winter of neglect
The horses of another summer
Edging his world
Toward an imaginary equinox.

Echoing in the deserted age
of a garden and of sleep,
Recurrent dreams foretell
The saga of the future
Incised in the stony past.

Ascent of theoretical mountains,
Descent into real canyons
Where the jackals waited—
Now quiet of enormous size
In the uninhabited house.

Triumph or disaster or the death
of brotherhoods
On the field—all are beyond joy
or regret:
Once in the iron fingers of history
Nothing can ever be taken back.

They are walking to the cemetery
Where they think he lives;
The young, in need of laurels
Or true relics,
Do not see him charging up the slope.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, p. 168.

Survival

He came out of the deep concrete
Like a groundhog
Looking for a warm season.

He had always taken good care
of himself:
As a child he had consumed
his mother.

He walked in the silent city
called debris
On streets of molten glass
And miles of charcoal people.

Everything was his.

The eye of the sun,
Closed by fountains
of dust,
Was the sole witness
To his day of triumph.

alone rat
limped across the lobby
of the grand hotel

He wanted to tell his heirs
His great scheme
For living through the age
Of the missiles.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 168–169.

In the Real World

Who is always telling us
To live in the real world
Perhaps
Knows where it is.

O firm and permanent as the earth
The one you love in a global moment
With its own space and universe
Until it fades in the galactic distance.
Flowers of forgiveness, a fantasy,
Grew in the earth-filled helmets
After the war;
Nourished by the real world
Of the dead,
They are the bloom on the next war
Just over the burned-out horizon.

Some encounter the creatures
Of their desperate lives
Crawling after them
On the sea-floor of sleep.
The scream is real enough,
The unreal dissolves in light_

Someone is always telling us
To live in that landscape
With its thorny trees
As if we could find it
With five senses.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 169–170.

In the Hospital

Falling in the October fear
The old ones
Do not go lightly as leaves,
Yet in the same natural order
To the same end.

There could be a time the earth
Draws us to itself:
A change in gravity, the weight
Of too many years for one aorta
So far from its native ground.

The bone is broken
Or the Isles of Langerhans
Are shaken loose;

Or sometimes we rise again,
Defying a thousand horses.

Everything returns to the horizontal:
The tree in the age of the termite,
The stone women holding up the temple,
The light as it balances
On the knife-edge of evening;
All that is old and almost ready,
All that cannot withstand
The day and the night of the great sirocco.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 170–171.

Days

There are days when the earth
Seems unable to move.
The furniture of the universe
Is exactly where it was.
The whole idea of motion
Is jettisoned for twenty-four hours
From the ship of the silent world.

It is like waiting for a coronation,
An interregnum of doubt and terror:
If the heir is an autistic child
They might choose a regent
Fond of fools and scaffolds.

Faith in the sense of direction
Falters and leans in those days
Like the death of trees in the north.
Everything is the same in mauve,
Motionless for imagined eons.
We have to look twice
In the mirror
To see if we are there.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, p. 171.

Childhood

The children are playing with skulls
In the streets of Beirut;
The laughter in the bones
Can be heard as far south
As the Cape of Good Hope
And the outskirts of Soweto.

After a year of automatic gunfire
The empty sockets
Are a diversion,
The teeth are certainly smiling;
After the season of rockets
Anything round or smooth
Can be a part of the game,
Even the head of a possible father.

The black-eyed children are playing with skulls
In the streets of Beirut.
The children on the banks
Of a thousand rivers
Can still, for a while,
Make sailboats of the morning news.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, p. 172.

Graffiti

The walls of the middle ages
Surround the barrio
Like the stones of a dry moat.

The defiance is stated
In two languages,
In the colors of earth and fire:

Jaguars in the darkening air
Crouch as in a frieze at Tula;

Forlorn the face of the cacique
In the final light;

Later, the blue-eyed homicidal
 horsemen;
Deaths of cities; heads rolling
Like cultures in the arroyos.

Then the alienation appears,
The madness of incomplete lives,
The wild broken abstract clouds:
An undetermined world
inhabited by the nightmares
Of exiled peoples.

In the hour of the sun,
In the hour of the moon,
In the human drought
Can be heard from the walls
El grito de los ángeles perdidos.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 172–173.

Return of the Exile

It resembles a woodcut of trees
In a country we have not seen:
A woman is walking on the road
Under a black shawl
The color of the death of the men
Thrust into battle by her words
Like an argument of guns in the mountains.

Marching toward the lost capital
Is a generation of ghosts
She cannot forget or remember
Except that they were young
In the year of the visigoths.

In a pause beside the grave,
Doubt rises like a second stone:
Could history have waited
For the terminal act;
Was it just, to send them
Into a future dream?

A child comes out of a house
With a gift of flowers.
The woman begins to plan:
Perhaps they left sons...
Or daughters.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 173–174.

The Mugging

The old woman was already mugged by life,
Her pension reduced by gentlemen of the committee,
Her bones barely articulate until noon.

The blue check, not to be mutilated, arrived on the third;
But she misunderstood the tempo of the sun,
Walked homeward in the twilight of terror.

The stud was cruising the backwaters of an empty street.
Nothing in the scene in the lamplight recalled his mother,
Or his childhood in the gloom of the unconscious:
It was simply fun and games.

Less an encounter with the grandeur of meteors colliding
Than a tableau in a mortal barrio
In one of Spengler's autumnal cities,
It was even later at the crossroads
Of the winter of a civilization.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, p. 174.

Kristallnacht

I was six thousand miles away
When I heard them shatter
The windows of the homes of Jews,
The doors of the prayer houses,
The teeth in their mouths.

Countless as flax in the fields of Dachau,
They could not enter the mind:
It was like trying to swallow
A sea, a desert, a disaster
In another constellation.

I could understand fragments:
A door, a window, the spectacles
Of an old man on his knees
In the filth of the street of heroes.

When the glass was broken
I heard the language of centuries
Telling me what a Jew is
And is not.

Now someone drops a glass:
A knot forms of terror and pity—
It is November 9, 1938,
Kristallnacht—the birth
Of the age of the headsman.

2000

She will be coming of age
In the year two thousand:
A number without content,
A row of zeros indicating space
Or something vast and sunlit.

Where will she live—
In a structure like air,
Like a cloud;
Or in the salt caves
Where the waste is stored

For its half-life.

Who will be there—
One with saurian feet;
Or the prince who always saves
The red-gold child
in the dark forest.

What will she do—
With grace notes,
Or sea-color, or antelope motion;
Or on her knees
In the Buchenwald of that season.

I tell myself: two thousand
Is no more to be feared
Than one.
I tell her:
I would have loved you
if I had lived.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 175–176.

Deadfalls

I have opened the middens
Of the decades I thought of as mine
So that one child at least might know
The same deadfalls await each generation.

A civilization is not an immaculate conception:
It cannot survive like the agave
In a desert where nothing else has ever existed.
The flowers of Alexandria and Firenze were nourished
In continuity from the Bay of Bengal to the Mediterranean.
Child born under the aegis of a new century,
The horn of time is already sounding
The onset of another thousand years
Of doubt and dream-work.

The counsel is not of despair but of hope:
For those who listen to the insects
Drilling the body in the deadfall;
Who remember the painful excavation of the king;
Who see the warnings rising like fire in water
From the spires of submerged cathedrals.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 176–177.

Rootless

I must have had ancestors
in the history of strangers,
Their names forever unknown_
It is all empty and very quiet,
Lost in antique deserts.

Give me stars and a horizon,
I will devise my own fathers.
Give me the sun and the rain and the river,
I will find a regiment of mothers if I need them.

There are plants continuous in air for years;
Only trees demand deep roots
For their ambitions.
Men can move on the earth
With the animals:
They do not follow in the tracks of forebears.

The triumph is to live in time and place,
To examine the universe
As if it were the first Eden or the last.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, p. 177.

Gardens

The garden in the turmoil
Of the mind of a man
Exerts a total and enormous calm
When it comes to the surface
Like a breathing plant from water to light.

The garden is also composed
At Ryoan-ji near Kyoto:
Of sand in furrows like a sea
And five clusters of rocks,
Noble as sunlit mountains
Placed with care like creation.

A few rocks make a universe
If the mind accepts them:
The faultless arrangement in gray
Compels like a faith.

Ryoan-ji is that great order
We have bled for
Since we crept from the marine world
Toward wings and varicolored eyes
And the mighty chaos of thought.

It is the full statement of peace,
The oasis of stone and sand
Where the tormented animals of compulsion
May come to drink and repose
After the heat of the intense day.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, p. 178.

The Midden

The excavation that will tell us
Takes place in the gray midden
Where the mind was in residence from birth.
The explorer of a buried site
Has to approach it stealthily,
The whorls of the fingers
Sanded like a safecracker.

The man who should be the expert in his own head
Is the last to know what he is looking for
When he accepts the contract.

The historian is armed with a theory of nations,
The paleontologist is at home in the rock strata;
The plain man wanders in a labyrinth of tissue
Where thought begins and ends.

Someone is seeking in this tomb:
He will find it in the ivory boat
Carved for him
On the black river he is waiting for.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 178–179.

The Refuge

They go on and on
Like the meaning of forever:
The skinless things in the mind
That never end except by dying.

Alt day, all day, the brain
Turns on itself. The images
Go round like a water wheel
Run by the river of indecision.

All night, alt night, they whirl
In the bare silence of bats.
No relief is found in dream:
It is larger and ferocious there
In the manner of those dogs
That never leave us in the dark.

No refuge except in dying;
Even then some friend may linger
In the old house, haunted...
By what we did or did not do...

As the drowning man held up his hands
For help in the overwhelming sea
While we played some other game
On some other shore.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 179–180.

Free Fall

I do not have faith in those
Who know who they are:
They have already done
What is never possible.
Like a ship in a doomed port
They are low in the water and lifeless.

I take to those who are mistaken each day,
Whose nightmares occur in the light.
They have few facts but they fly
In the slipstream of undiscovered planets.

I prefer those who go in and out of the psyche.
They enlarge horizons, there are
Two blue lines in their distance.
The chosen are to speak for us all
In re: man's birthright and despair.

May we be delivered
From a nation of burghers
Who know where they are.
Meanwhile I stand with
The free-falling ones
Who believe the parachutes
Will open some day.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, p. 180.

The Visitor

The bird is out of its mind:
It wants to come in;
It hurls itself at the window
Until it drops on the silt.

You would not have liked it here.
It is not what it seems.
Remember the birth of your children,
The nest that withstood the weight of the wind.

The house of man is moving
Into the bowels of termites;
People are working on a shorter route to annihilation.
Last to go will be what you think is within:
The appearance of overwhelming power.

Lift up your feathers of confusion,
Listen to the hard voices of the inmates,
The Saturday night mayhem,
The Sunday of stupor and sleep,
The Monday of open wounds.

Pity

the creature that wants to leave the sky,
the man who cannot ask it in.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, p. 181.

Ruins

The ruins of a future
Not yet born,
Have to be excavated now
Or abandoned to the white ants.

To prevent the last conversation
On the red telephone,
All archaeologists are subject to the draft;
All historians have to be told
They cannot chronicle the great launch,
They have to see that it self-destructs
Before it happens.

There will be no way for a board of inquiry
To sift the debris of a globe
With the half-life of a thousand years
Before it can be touched
By people who will not exist.

A supreme act of imagination is required
To foresee the civilizations
Not yet founded in time;
To hear their columns crumble
In the angular cities;
To strangle a non-future
Now lurking in the barrancas of the night.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 181–182.

The Artifact

One day the child asked me
If there were middens
Under the waves
As in a mirage or a miracle
In the waters of Egypt.

Perhaps: since there are middens
On the huge shoulders of Peru;
On plateaus like Monte Alban;
Minoan huts sit like swallows
On the cliffs above that inland sea
Where everything great lies drowned.

The archaeologist believes for years
In a city under his feet:
It is there if only in shards.
Someone is always diving in lost depths
As if faith could create one amphora.

So the salt-laden columns
Of every Atlantis
Arise first in the mind.
All submerged continents,
All Utopias,
May yet be found
If hope is the hidden artifact
we seek.

Publication. *Excavations*. Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979, pp. 182–183.

THE SEA OF TRANQUILITY

Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989

Lions

The lion in the small shade of summer
Lies with a dry moat between him
And the open mouths of a generation
To whom he is only a mute lord of the fallen.

They do not know he is dreaming of the singing grass,
Of a lean cat fast as the gazelle when hungry,
Resting with blood on his mane
While the young females glide sinuously by.

The children laugh on the other side of the years.
Growing among the crushed beer cans of their fathers,
They cannot imagine the world inside him,
The suns of that continent, the moon of the night of cries.

He sees her tawny eyes upon him in his youth.
He sees again a tumbling pride of sons and daughters.
His mate goes to and fro, to and fro, a living metronome.
She is old but full of grace as on the lost savannah.

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, p. 187.

Citizen Band

Come in, citizens, non-citizens,
People of the sleeping houses,
Drivers of wrong-way roads.

The wheels are falling off the wagons,
The horses are racing a clock that has stopped,
All interstates end in nightmare cliffs.

Talk now on this frequency before they jam it.
Find out: why everything crawls into dark culverts,
There are no lights on the plain.

The disembodied cargo shifts and bubbles
In the back of the sixteen-wheeler. What is it?

The manifest is like the prints of birds,
The shipper is lost in the fog,
The consignee is said to be waiting
On a black corner of the universe.

Come in,
Communicants of the band,
Come in, world—
help!

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, pp. 187–188.

The Scientist

He was a refugee from a continent strewn with limbs.
He was at home with infinity and with numbers,
A true believer in peace.

When the great equation flashed like a missile
Across his brain, he stood as on a nova,
Holding the future of all creatures in fee simple.

Did he in that instant see the terror in mankind,
Or know he was Genghis Khan incarnate
Who could not turn back, or would not,
From that slaughter on the plain?

He was a good man,
Not the first
Or last
To let angels die.

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, p. 188.

Light

I am sitting on a hill in my dotage,
Unwilling to go
Until I see the light of a star
That has not yet begun to travel
In the future of space.

Born in the galaxy of despair,
It will come without a name
Unless it is the star of compassion,
Or tenderness,
One beast to another.

It has to fall a timeless distance:
We need eons to prepare for it
After this savage childhood.
The hostile eye, unable to bear
That incandescence,
Will close in the dark and the dying
Of the angry mind.

It will be in us and around us
Like air and water,
Like a great calm,
Like the embrace
Of the father and mother of the sun.

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, pp. 188–189.

No One

This street in its trance is a village
In which no one knows anyone else.
The dogs with all their teeth
Are better acquainted than the habitants.

No one gets involved in a scream at 3 A. M.
The armed helicopters roar across the black sky;
No one looks up except the refugees from Asia.

The city is a web of fragile streets like this,
In which no one is actually said to be living.
It is possible to live without knowing the neighbors.

Then why are the cats crying in the night?
Why are the doves mourning in the pepper trees?
Why are the coyotes coming down from the hills?

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, p. 189.

In the Cell

The nameless in a whitewashed cell
Does not really believe he is here.
If he were, he would make friends with the rat—
He dislikes the rat, so he cannot be here.

He also disdains the myth
Of prisoner and guard
In their fearful symbiosis.
His own is sullen as stone.
They hate each other.

He expects to awaken in another place where he really is.
He sees it on the imaginary wall
Like a fine painting of his life by a surrealist.

There is a fifth world of non-persons in airless cells,
Each wondering if the others are there.
They are slowly gaining in numbers on the generals,
And coming out of the paintings into the graven minds of men.

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, p. 190.

The City

A mind cannot contain a city:
I do not have room for it,
Unlike a star—
Simply a light in a heaven.

A city can almost be endured as a honeycomb,
Cells no larger than a block
Lined with familiar gas lamps.

I have two kinds of neighbors:
Some inhabitants prowl their turf like gophers,
The strangers across the street
Enter and leave their own worlds.

To live and breathe I conjure a remembered plaza,
Its maypole waiting leafless for spring,
Customs observed like a law, costumes
In the childhood of the years.

I multiply by thousands:
Then it is a city
I think
Or a mirage
Or schizophrenia.

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, pp. 190–191.

Minnows

The child is welling up in me,
A terrible fountain of bones;
He forgets as I grow old
The sadness of his infancy.

He seeks once more,
In the body of a person,
A refuge from the perils
Of the light.

He has to be fought
To the last barricade
Or he will take my place
In a dubious world.

Why does he plague me now
Who was lost for decades?
I tried at length to be a man,
I do not need the child
In the hour called wisdom.

We long to die in an order
As stately as ships,
Not nibbled by minnows
Rising to the surface
From their wet grottoes.

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, p. 191.

In the Vanguard

He is murdered who rages in the vanguard,
Who brings down the onyx columns,
Who numbers the sick hours of the kingdom.

He read the first graffiti on the wall,
Lashed the gold changers from the house of prayer,
Insisted the earth moved around the sun,
Announced the ascent of animals from the salt waters,
Opened the collective to the future of light.

History is the obscure tomb
Of beliefs and bodies destroyed in the vanguard,
Of faith that becomes local fact
In the next generation.

It is the habit of the multitude:
The new and the noble
Must be buried in the middens.
It is the habit of the martyr:
He must live to the very end in his own Masada.

Later: the adoration of his bones.

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, p. 192.

Words and Music

When the words and the music were blown away,
The young of the world
Cried for three days
At the throat of the cave.

The old were entirely lost in their webs;
The mothers and fathers stared at the graven images
In the mirrors of the abandoned mansions.

Now was seen as an abyss
The black hole in the music,
The crack in the ground
Between us all.

The silence was like an oak dying in winter,
Its mouth nonetheless groping for enzymes—
As even in the brutish season
The air can be alive once more with imaginary birds.

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, pp. 192–193.

To the Survivors

We who have never fought
Cannot feel the battle fatigue.
We think incessantly of Auschwitz,
Who have never heard the sounds in the German night.

We are transfixed at the point
Where civilization disappeared
Between the morning and the evening prayers.

O survivors!
Turn from us: we do not understand your neurosis.
We have our own—the inability to enter it.
Who will relieve you of the aftermath,
Or absolve us of our lasting fault?

Forgive us the human failure,
Forgive the incomplete mind,
Sightless in its fragile nest.

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, p. 193.

The Mole

When we have used the last word and the last thought,
What do we do then for companions of the night?
Contemplation is left, it is true, O mahatma.

Thinking of lost causes alone
Hurls us into another capsule
When they were all alive:
The friends, the compadres, the ones we loved.

We can re-enact the wonders of childhood,
The terrors we cannot forget.
We can witness that distant self, stalking his minotaur
Among the rising trees of his youth.

When we have used all the words
We can at least keep out of the way.
No one will know we are still at work,
Looking for something we never had,
An aging mole in the tunnels of the cerebral cortex.

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, pp. 193–194.

Someone Has Heard

Suddenly I saw the secret in the landscape
From which a generation of compadres had just departed,
Taking with them, I thought, the blueprint of the holy city.
Each who survives sees utopia vanish
With the members of his gens.

Someone has heard who did not seem to be listening.
Someone will open the archives on a far-off day of rain,
Enacting the first law: the conservation of dreams.

They will search the bony landscape
Until they find the testament we thought was lost.
Hope is the lever that raised the stones of Easter Island,
That yet may tell them something they did not know.
Why else do they churn the middens of Galilee?

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, p. 194.

Waiting

Everyone is waiting for lefty
Or godot
Or the orient express
Or the death of the old man
With the gold pesetas.

The general is waiting in the pass
For geronimo,
The carrier for john paul jones
To walk on the water.

Everyone is waiting for ulysses,
The homing pigeon of eternity;
For alice to come out
Of the rabbit hole;
For davy crockett to save the alamo.

Two or three kings are waiting
In this desert
For a child to be born
In the magical year 2000.

Everyone is waiting
For the messiah,
Or the millennium,
Or the missiles.

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, p. 195.

On the Border

I remember the hour of dusk in El Paso
When the birds in their thousands
Settled in the trees of the plaza,
Winding their small clocks into sleep.

In the morning they flew over the Rio Grande,
Hoping to find seeds in Mexico,
Or their cousins, or friends of animals.

They had no problem at the border.
They were unarmed and singing
As they soared into the warmth of the wide-open day.

They scatter seeds for others in all countries.

The language of birds, uncoded, is between themselves
Though anyone can listen, even hawks.

Now in the failing northern city
I think of the birds of evening in El Paso,
Their calm arrivals and departures,
Their easy crossing like brothers.

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, pp. 195–196.

The Missiles

Now the general requires us to plan the end.
The brain, after millennia, has at last reached godhead:
The power to create or to destroy it all.

If we cannot believe in our own exit,
How to accept the burial alive
Of the creatures we know,
The loss of the landscape and of birds, of the great constrictor,
The tread of pachyderms in the continents of fire,
The non-being of generations never to be born.

Now we are on the final plateau
With a view in all directions.
We think we can choose any point of the compass
Until we discover we are in Masada, besieged by ourselves.

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, p. 196.

Communiqué

The music that comes in the night
From the house of the stranger
Is a communiqué from a man or a woman
Who is telling something to the world.
She cannot bring herself to say it.
The music is for one who is listening.

Will he respond?
Will I?
Or hide in the crevice of steep?
These are the questions the city asks in the night.

Each answers or does not answer in his own way.
Each discovers the secret for himself:
Whatever comes from an unknown house is also a heartbeat.

One is in a room full of grace notes,
One is in a room where they fall.
Each waits for the other,
Drowning alone in a sea of music.

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, p. 197.

The Distance to the Planets

toward which they are rushing
Is the same as the distance
To the interior of the nucleus with its tiny stars.

They are wandering in a labyrinth of ambition.
The recombinant forms are nightmares in their heads,
Pawing the graves of their dreams of glory.

Others are lying in the streets of expiring cities,
Proving the first law of life is death
And the last law to be observed is compassion.

The missiles sleep in their silos.
The missiles move in the waters.
The missiles fly eternally among birds.

Who will save us from those with their hands in the cloud cover,
From those with their forceps in the heart of the atom,
While the earth is blown from its orbit in the mind of man.

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, pp. 197–198.

On the Mesa

He is plainly a cliff dweller in his age.
He comes resistant to the edge of the last mesa.
He cannot fly, he does not want to fall.

He sees the ant and the lizard at work.
He does not belong to their clans, he thinks.
What on earth are they doing:
Their footprints go in circles as he did.

The clearest view is from the mesa:
It tells the size of the ant hill,
Of the hole where the lizard dives—
These, like us, are the poor relations of the stars,
On their tiny and pointless errands.

He inquires of the night
Of all the gods,
Is given the same answer
As once the dark watchers of Chaldea.

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, p. 198.

Childhood

I wake in a tremor at four in the morning
For the child I do not imagine.
She does not dream of dolls.
She dreams of Hiroshimas.
Her blue eyes cannot focus on the world.
She does not often laugh.
She stares into a distance
Where the city always burns.

Her future perished in the year
She heard the fatal words
And saw the charcoal mounds
And caught the sickness that is fear.

Who will adopt the stepchild of the missiles,
Who will hold her when she shivers,
Who will assure her in the night of the wild horse?

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, pp. 198–199.

80

Now eighty is creeping over the horizon,
Lighting the long plain through which we have come
As though it were a day and a night, or a breath.

The young barbarians cannot wait to take the city.
They are already an army of occupation.
They lend their children to us like hostages
To see that we do not misplace the family jewels.

They do not know we have been ready for years.
The house has become a graveyard of dried bees,
The ants are working from the roof down.

We will leave it to the creatures who demand nothing.
They drink from the flowers without hurting them,
Their tiny eggs simply open in the wood and they are home.

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, p. 199.

Black Hole

Each day is consumed in the black hole of night.
We need not scan the earth fault
For the meaning of catastrophe:
It is enough to witness the burial of twenty-four hours.

Everything as beautiful as light
Has its own time of departure
For the starless place
Where there are no beginnings, only ends.

The black hole is an organic part of a continuum:
Pain at this point leaves the body we so cherish;
Even love is known to dissolve in its thin air.
The mind that thinks of it all
Descends until its oxygen fails
In the only heaven we may ever know.

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, p. 200.

There Were No People

There were no people in my dreams one night.
I knew then my generation had fled.
I was alone on the ice floe.

The more the city grows in numbers,
The lonelier it becomes for those
Who cannot find a face they know
In all that turbulence of bees.

Who once shared whole continents
Cannot bear the narrow township
Where they wait at the crossroads
For the signal that will not change.

Mothers, fathers, friends, lovers,
Have taken up residence in another street that has no name.
Loneliest of all the sorrowful islands, survival is not enough.

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, pp. 200–201.

Neighborhood Watch

They are waiting for the night visitor
Who comes unseen through the iron grid.
They are praying for the family jewels
Or the sacred white jaguar
Locked in its cave in the dark.

Meanwhile the dehydrated old man
Is dying of loneliness in his house,
The widow next door strangles a cat for the same reason,
The husband and wife in the doomed bungalow
Are on the crumbling edge of mayhem.

A country in love with itself
Cannot regurgitate its worldly goods in time.
It awaits the millennium in the museum
Where the stuffed eagle stares with glassy eyes
Into the lean and ghostly past.

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, p. 201.

Worlds

I live in two worlds at a time:
One in my head where the memories
Jostle one another like gravestones.
The other is the disease of kingdoms,
The nervous breakdown of the earth,
The birth of tiny wars in the eye of the nucleus.

At the same moment I see her delight
As the waxen joya comes in the window
And the whole besieged city
Enters the brain with its howitzers.

There is joy in the stature of trees, in the simplicity of light,
And in the red-gold child
And the pure golden child
And in sleep until the dreams come.

Two worlds in the same place
Can only strangle the peace.
One can wake or sleep. One cannot do both at the same time.

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, pp. 201–202.

The Theory

Let us think our way into the theory of annihilation.
It began in the prize-winning minds of the western world,
It grew up in a day in the gardens of Hiroshima.

Now we have to imagine a planet skinned alive,
All houses spent, all trees dissolved,
The lions scattered among the winds
As the cat on the window-sill,
The body of the gray dove picked clean
Like the flowers of the sun,
The bones of the great mammal
Crumbled in the wilderness of the sea.

Who will know where my love is
And the children of her children into infinity,
Their birthright blown to heaven in that cloud.

black sand
black sand
for this final blessing of the damned
no one can ever reproach us

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, p. 202.

Los Desaparecidos

The women of that city are marching
In the streets of indifference,
Holding under the white cloths of mourning
The pictures of the company of the lost,
Crying at the gates of the palacio
Like a field of falling birds:
Dónde están los desaparecidos?

Fathers, brothers, sons, compañeros,
Even the dark-eyed daughters of their lives,
Psychotic habitants of the half-world,
Have drowned in the waters of oblivion.

The faces of the women of that city,
Like the death masks of history,
Are carved in the stone of the homicidal era,
Whispering through their own eternity:
Dónde están los desaparecidos?

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, p. 203.

The Tears

It is easy to cry in childhood, easier in age.
Between the two we bite our lips
And try to walk the continent
Of beauty and of terror
That begins nowhere we know
And nowhere ends that we can see.

The business of those years precludes all tears.
We are in the streets and houses
Where the traffic stops and goes but does not move,
Where the ego wants to be at home but fails.

Everyone is grateful to exist,
No one wishes to be dust.
The tears begin to dry in one exhausted night
That leads to the presence of the sun.

If they excise all pain with their procedure,
If they blow up the morning and the evening, too,
The ghosts alone will weep in that silence.

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, pp.
203–204.

Chosen People

They have been killing us inch by inch
For five thousand seven hundred and forty-seven years
That we know of.

Heels dug in the black terrain of time,
A psychosis not yet found in materia medica,
What is to be said of a people that insists upon living,

Conceived on the remote edge of the Mediterranean,
Moving unseen like an equator around the globe,
There is only one holocaust from there to here.

It is not far to the terminus so long desired.
The generals and the Nobel winners are working on Sunday.
If they succeed there will be nothing to it,
The final solution is in the hands of the last gentiles.

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, p. 204.

The Widows

The widows of the greater and the lesser wars,
Winding on their paths
Among the fallen trees,
Do not often cry again
After the rivers of salt run dry.

They move as tense as panthers and as grave.
Some nights they dream it was a sin
To give their love to mortals and to live.

They invade with fear the future of the very young
Who hear their tales of death and years
In gardens they have lost but never knew.

The widows are walking in the woods among the fallen trees,
Wondering if it were a crime
To bind their lives with thongs to mortals who are gone.

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, pp. 204–205.

The Sea of Tranquility

is on the moon where no one needs it,
A boundless meadow of dust
Made by a meteor in some dark age of heaven.
Meanwhile, the very words quiet us like sleep.

The name of that sea is required on earth
To untangle the nerves in the streets of the city,
To reduce the cries in the beds of the closed ward,
To open a vast blue placid eye upon the fields of blood.

We have to invent a sea of tranquility in the heartland,
A calm world in a curve of trees, spacious, silent,
Cooling the fevers with a landscape of hope and repose.

Forever in the depths of the black hole of time
Is an idea that seeks to emerge in the light.
We await the second coming: the birth of the great sea.

Publication. *The Sea of Tranquility*. Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1989, p. 205.

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TEXTUAL NOTE

Witnesses, lineation, and corrections

The primary witness is *Don Gordon: Collected Poems*, edited by Fred Whitehead (University of Illinois Press, 2004), which reproduces the six books in chronological order. The project's separate scans of "The Middle Passage," "The Neurotics," "The General," *Statement*, *Civilian Poems*, *Displaced Persons*, *On the Ward*, *Excavations*, and *The Sea of Tranquility* were used as available checks and finding aids.

The embedded text layer of the recovery scan introduced both false spaces inside words and missing spaces between words. Every poetry page received a second, independently generated OCR reading. That reading was used to verify word boundaries only; wording and punctuation were retained from the page witness unless the image made an error unmistakable. The production folder preserves both readings and the audit report.

Every poem begins on a new page. Intentional source indents are scaled to the Green text block. A line too wide for six by nine inches wraps with a twelve-point hanging continuation, making the accommodation visible without turning it into a new authorial line. Stanza spaces remain open. Roman-numeral internal divisions and authorial dates receive distinct but quiet formatting.

Statement retains Part 1, Part 2, Death Masks, and Decade 5. The book epigraphs and the documentary note before "Pécs" are set as epigraphs rather than verse. Book titles are italicized in section displays, contents, publication apparatus, biography, and bibliography. The publication note after every poem identifies its first book witness and source pages in the recovery edition.

Clear recognition failures in names, ordinary words, spacing, and stray scan marks have been silently corrected. Unusual compounds and politically or historically specific names were retained when supported by the page. No poem has been reconstructed from a prior generated reading PDF.

COLOPHON

Production record

Designed and edited in Los Angeles in 2026 for Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry. Six by nine inches; mirrored 66/48-point margins; EB Garamond; cream page field; live-text Green cover system.

The cover uses the project's recovered 2024 surreal photomontage and recenters it in the standard Green image panel. The archival section is limited to four images: a portrait, two photographs of Gordon with family and friends, and the opening of his 1951 testimony.

Source scans, independent OCR, proofed corpus data, downloaded research pages, archive crops, cover art, fonts, build code, source manifest, change log, and page-by-page QA renders are preserved in the production folder. No new research asset has been discarded.