



EDWIN ROLFE

*Brickyards at Beacon
and Other Poems*

EXTREMES AND MODERATIONS:
EARLY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA POETRY

A TEXT-TECH PAPERS PROJECT

Extremes and Moderations

Early Southern California Poetry

Extremes and Moderations is a Text-Tech Papers project devoted to recovering poetry written, published, and circulated in Los Angeles and Southern California. Each volume brings neglected books and poems back into view through carefully prepared texts, archival images, biographical context, and a clear record of the surviving sources.

Edited by Brian Kim Stefans

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*Brickyards at Beacon and Other
Poems*

Edwin Rolfe

A Critical Reading Edition

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Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry

Archival Images

A short selection from the source record



Edwin Rolfe, from the local biographical dossier.

Editorial Note

This edition is reset from the project's original scan of Rolfe's contribution to *We Gather Strength* and from its local transcription witness for seven poems collected in *Permit Me Refuge*. Every poem begins on a new page. Stanza divisions and meaningful indents are retained; narrow source-page wraps are rejoined, while unavoidable display wraps use a hanging indent. In "Brickyards at Beacon," the short lines ending "brickyard gates," "grooved throughout the years," "said," and "back into the earth" are intentional indented verse lines in the printed witness and remain separate here. Book and journal titles are italicized in editorial matter. A source-edge loss in the closing date of "Homage to Karl Marx" is restored in teal brackets.

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Introduction

Edwin Rolfe's life passed through the defining conflicts of his century: immigrant labor politics, the Depression, the Spanish Civil War, World War II, Hollywood, and the blacklist. Born Solomon Fishman, he became a poet and journalist on the American left, edited *Volunteer for Liberty* in Madrid, served with the Lincoln Battalion, and later wrote from Los Angeles as political repression narrowed his means of livelihood. His best poems turn public history into intimate tests of courage, loyalty, anger, and betrayal. This selected edition brings together Rolfe's complete seven-poem contribution to *We Gather Strength* and seven late poems collected in *Permit Me Refuge*; it does not claim to be his collected poems.

Biography

Edwin Rolfe was born Solomon Fishman on September 7, 1909, in Philadelphia, the first of three sons of Nathan and Bertha Fishman, Jewish immigrants from the Russian Empire. Nathan, a skilled shoe worker, socialist, labor organizer, and union officer, was eventually blacklisted within the shoe industry for his organizing. Bertha had carried socialist literature as a schoolgirl in Ekaterinoslav, later Dnepropetrovsk, and in the United States worked for women's suffrage, birth control, and labor causes, assisting during the 1913 Paterson silk strike. The family moved to Brownsville, Brooklyn, in 1915, then to Coney Island in 1918 and to the United Workers Cooperative Colony in the Bronx in 1927. Political argument, union culture, immigrant secularism, and the beach-and-city world of Coney Island formed the atmosphere of Rolfe's childhood.

At New Utrecht High School he became close to the future documentary filmmaker Leo Hurwitz and wrote poems, stories, reviews, and interviews for *The Comet*. He experimented with pseudonyms after poor mathematics grades temporarily barred him from publishing; the name Edwin Rolfe, borrowed from an editor's name, first appeared over one of his *Daily Worker* reviews in 1927 and eventually became his public and legal identity. He had already published editorial cartoons in the *Daily Worker* as Sol Fishman in 1924. He joined the Young Communist League around 1925, attended Mike Gold's Youth's Literary Workshop, and found another early mentor in Joseph Freeman.

Rolfe worked briefly at the Workers School and at jobs that included dishwashing, grocery and delicatessen work, punch-press operation, and subway excavation. The subway job fed “The Ballad of the Subway Digger,” while factory labor and industrial injury became central to “Asbestos” and other early poems. In 1929 he broke with the Communist Party and enrolled in Alexander Meiklejohn’s Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin. He read widely, wrote less directly political poetry, and became involved with the *Daily Cardinal*, but the deepening Depression drew him back to New York and organized radical work before he completed a degree.

Back in New York, Rolfe rejoined the Party, worked for the *Daily Worker*, and eventually edited its features page. His poems circulated through the expanding left-wing periodical network, and seven appeared in the collaborative anthology *We Gather Strength* in 1933. During these years he knew writers and artists including Langston Hughes, James T. Farrell, Michael Gold, Joseph Freeman, Muriel Rukeyser, and David Alfaro Siqueiros. He met Mary Wolfe at a left fund-raising gathering; they began living together in 1934 and married in 1936. His first independent poetry collection, *To My Contemporaries*, appeared from Dynamo Books that year with financial help from supporters including Archibald MacLeish.

Rolfe volunteered for the International Brigades in spring 1937 after the Spanish Republic came under fascist attack. In Spain he edited the English-language *Volunteer for Liberty* in Madrid, corresponded with Langston Hughes and other writers, and in 1938 joined the Lincoln Battalion in the field. His journalism and poetry made him an unofficial poet laureate of the American volunteers. Mary joined him in Barcelona before the International Brigades withdrew, and they returned to the United States in January 1939. *The Lincoln Battalion: The Story of the Americans Who Fought in Spain in the International Brigades* appeared later that year, joining eyewitness history to the political commitments of his poetry.

During the early 1940s Rolfe worked as a journalist, translator, and editor, including work connected with Soviet news and the volume *Russians at War*. Drafted into the United States Army in 1943, he faced suspicion from military intelligence because of his communist activity and Spanish service. Illness led to a medical discharge. Mary had accepted work in Los Angeles, and Rolfe joined her there in August 1943, beginning the final phase of his life. He drafted a collection called *Two Wars*, contrasting the compromised moral atmosphere of

World War II with the clarity he had felt in defending the Spanish Republic.

In Hollywood Rolfe worked intermittently at the margins of the film industry. He helped Lou Bunin with a puppet sequence for *The Ziegfeld Follies* in 1944 and collaborated with Lester Fuller on the crime novel *The Glass Room*, published in 1946 and optioned for film. He also wrote scripts, treatments, dubbing text, and the verse commentary for Joseph Strick and Irving Lerner's short film *Muscle Beach*. Heart disease repeatedly interrupted this work: he suffered a first heart attack in early 1944 and a second, more severe attack that September.

The postwar anticommunist campaign destroyed Rolfe's already precarious route into studio work. His association with the Hollywood Ten, the Communist Party, the Spanish veterans, and left cultural organizations was documented by the FBI and named in congressional hearings. After 1947, as studios and auxiliary clearing organizations imposed wider blacklists, he survived through poorly paid independent work, foreign-film dubbing, and uncredited or pseudonymous writing. His poems answered the inquisition directly, making betrayal, surveillance, coerced confession, friendship, and the ethics of resistance into formal subjects. The limited-subscription *First Love and Other Poems* appeared in Los Angeles in 1951.

Rolfe died of a heart attack in Los Angeles on May 24, 1954, at forty-four, still writing and revising poems. Thomas McGrath edited the posthumous *Permit Me Refuge*, issued in 1955 as the first book of *California Quarterly*. Mary Rolfe preserved his papers until the University of Illinois acquired them in 1990. Cary Nelson and Jefferson Hendricks's archival guide and biographical essay prepared the way for *Edwin Rolfe: Collected Poems* (1993) and *Trees Became Torches: Selected Poems* (1995), which restored a writer long obscured by the political repression he had opposed. Rolfe's archive now reveals an unusually complete intersection of poetry, journalism, international antifascism, Hollywood labor, and the cultural consequences of the Cold War.

Poems from We Gather Strength

Stage I | Proletarian poetry and the Depression, 1933

Rolfe's complete seven-poem contribution to the collaborative proletarian anthology.

Asbestos

Knowing (as John did) nothing of the way
men act when men are roused from lethargy,
and having nothing (as John had) to say
to those he saw were starving just as he

starved, John was like a workhorse. Day by day
he saw his sweat cement the granite tower
(the edifice his bone had built), to stay
listless as ever, older every hour.

John's deathbed is a curious affair:
the posts are made of bone, the spring of nerves,
the mattress bleeding flesh. Infinite air,
compressed from dizzy altitudes, now serves

his skullface as a pillow. Overhead
a vulture leers in solemn mockery,
knowing what John had never known: that dead
workers are dead before they cease to be.

Publication. First published in *Poems from We Gather Strength*. New York: Liberal Press, 1933, p. 30.

Brickyards at Beacon

Here, on the rivershore, the edge of music,
of water flowing, melodious, to sea,
they work: and the rainbow is obscured;
the sunshower seen through smoke-haze seems
unreal, repellent;
the west wind rolling across the Berkshires
meets inferno heat here,
and is absorbed into heat, becomes heat.
They who work here know no other things:
only heat and smoke and fumes of baking bricks.

Early in the morning, punctual as the dawn,
they leave their hovels after a meagre meal,
follow the dusty paths that lead to the
brickyard gates
(dusty paths that they themselves have
grooved throughout the years);
they are stooped and bent and vaguely deathlike,
their chests are tragic parodies of chests.

Once, watching them at dawn, a wealthy tourist
said:

“They seem completely broken, ready to fall
back into the earth.”

But he had never seen them returning at nightfall
after twelve hours, over the same dusty paths...

Once, at night, I heard them singing:
slow, beautiful and melodious as the river
when it is arced with rainbow-color.
They were sad, these songs that were outlets
for a million pains;
sad, but surging in the night, and powerful.

And many times (most meaningful of all)
I have heard them at their work,

bent under heavy burdens,
wet with rivulets of sweat,
utter two words, a beginning:
“Some day...”

Publication. First published in *Poems from We Gather Strength*. New York: Liberal Press, 1933, p. 31.

Credo

To welcome multitudes—the miracle of deeds
performed in unison—the mind
must first renounce the fiction of the self
and its vainglory. It must pierce
the dreamplate of its solitude, the fallacy
of its omnipotence, the fairytale
aprilfools recurring every day
in speeches of professors and politicians.

It must learn
the wisdom and the strength and the togetherness
of bodies phalanxed in a common cause,
of fists tight-clenched around a crimson banner
flying in the wind above a final, fierce
life-and-death fight against a common foe.

Emerging then, the withered land will grow
—purged—in a new florescence; only then,
cleansed of all chaos, a race of men may know
abundance, life, fecundity again!

Publication. First published in *Poems from We Gather Strength*. New York: Liberal Press, 1933, p.
33.

Winds of Another Sphere

Let us admit into our land the winds
blowing from the east and the voices wafted
with them, the voices attendant on the spheres
in which we too shall inevitably whirl;

for something in our land is dying: not the trees
nor mountain-craggs nor buildings jutting through clouds
but something less permanent: the way we wearily smile,
the way we half-heartedly hail a comrade in the street,
the way we dismally work in factories and mills
and railroads spanning the land.

 We know
the color of the hardening arteries,
their bulging through the skin of our uncertainty,
their weakening within the metamorphosis
in which we move, (America is big
and trees and crags and skies are permanent
but walls and fences crumble to dust and eyes
of blankness kindle with fire and comradeship.)

And when the last corrosion sears our land
(flames low in death, and fumes and smoke lifted)
winds of another sphere will cleanse our winds
and the voices wafted will be our voices.

Publication. First published in *Poems from We Gather Strength*. New York: Liberal Press, 1933, p.
34.

Portrait of a Death

Gaunt tentacles in greedy disarray
betray the slowly-sinking octopus:
old anarch who discovers that the day
for him grows dark and that day dawns for us.
The ticker-bandage on his wrist connotes
arterio-sclerosis of his veins;
no longer can the wireless cry for votes
to speed false dawn when day already wanes

but slow, the jarring night looms in his brain,—
and sure, the death of sterile wisdom comes—
disintegration finds him and in vain
he blusters louder while his life succumbs
to poisons that his own great bulk gave birth.
His the swift death! and ours again the earth!

Publication. First published in *Poems from We Gather Strength*. New York: Liberal Press, 1933, p. 35.

Kentucky—1932

They sprang up out of darkness, shouting!
—from a womb of darkness to a black world underground—
a challenge on their lips
and in the line of their backs,
suddenly erect after ages of stooping:
 remembering *Greene*—the midnight encounters
 among the hills, the wounded that their women
 nursed back to life, back to courage;
 the solitary stand against their masters
 with only the blue grass, the trees and
 the hills to aid them—
 and *Daniel Boone*: the axes clearing
 the wilderness, the long alert rifles
 levelled against the dark
 before the soft men,
the stay-at-homes, buried them
under mountains of laws and greenbacks.

Asphyxiation of years in their memory,
and a golden moment of sun remembered—
their small farms sheltered by trees and brooks,
the long grass drying in the autumn days,
crisp in the sun over the rolling hills.
And then the little soft men wrote words on paper
 and the soil was no longer theirs;
the stay-at-homes passed laws in their legislatures
 and mines ulcerated the hills;
 they built railroads spanning distant dots
 on the map
 and levelled the woods; the tall slim pines
 became a pattern of poles supporting a net-
 work of wires
and then the voices, the soft office voices
condemned them to underground imprisonment
for life
 and their children's children...

A hundred years is a long time.
Men die and their grandchildren totter on aged limbs.

But a century is long enough
for the blind to see and the sleepers to awake!

Out of darkness, out of the pits now—
foreigners only to the light of day—
claiming the mountains in the sudden glow
of battle, welded in a mass array,
shouting!

 This is our land, we planted its first seed!
 These are our mines, our hands dig the coal!
 These roads are ours, the wires across the land
 are ours! THIS IS OUR EARTH!

Under the smoke of bullets and hunger,
the gray sky reddening to dawn,
gaps appear in their ranks, but others
spring to their places! One by one
the dead awaken, the old ones quicken
with anger and life! The moving ranks
surge like the smoke of the coal they dig
in solid, unconquerable phalanx!

Assassins' bullets, bankers' laws—
these cannot stop their sure advance!
Under the blood and the lead, their feet
pound the old mountains. Under the night
of stars of a fading era, they light
the blazing signals of a world in birth.

Publication. First published in *Poems from We Gather Strength*. New York: Liberal Press, 1933, p. 36.

Homage to Karl Marx

Here in the dim of the dusk with the wings of birds and
the noise of their cries and the slim lines of the trees
against sea and horizon

we the sons the fathers

have dipped in the thunder again for a final tilt with
our foes the dying enraged the angry powerless
fathers and sons of decay made strong in despair and
the thoughts that are those of any and all who die
knowing death is certain the victors smiling above them...
Here in the whiteness of morn with the gleam of the day on
our swords long-tempered in fire and fine with the deep
exquisite molded precision of strength and huge with
the whelmed and 'accumulate power of mass

we charge

(certain as night is here now that day is impinging
its cleansing immaculate light on our mass-arrayed army)
on to the shreds of resistance still left to the old men
their strength swiftly ebbing their eyes showing clearly they die
knowing death is sure we the victors laughing! above them...

* * *

In his great rooms, the countries of the world—his
cumulative fatherland—how many candles guttered
unnoticed? the huge sweeping movement of his brain
(rooted in poverty, love as great as deep
as he was poor) unhindered? How many hands,
dripping with blood, the torment of numberless men,
crept across boundaries at night, the fingers feeling their way
into his moments of peace? (the prophet grappling with worlds,
suspended between

yet rooted in both

the old and the new)

left him at last, broken in strength, to die—

but late, too late to check him, too irrevocably decayed
to wreck his shining pyramid, too weak with history
(the weakness of those who die knowing death is certain)
to pierce the impregnable fortress of his work.

And now

the world's ablaze! Into our ears and eyes,
his words! like rivets in a tower's steel,
red with sparks showering, penetrate. We feel
the imminent thunder in the charted skies
(charted by him, for us—his inheritors!)
and wonder need not overwhelm us; fear
is foreign now, as weakness from our will
to crash the rotting structures, standing still
only by our grace!

The hour draws near...

Look on the world, my comrades! It's aflame!
fire-tongues in the sky, new sword-blades at its core,
cutting the dry dead harvest that it bore
a generation gone, in all the lands of earth.

His dialectic enervates the doomed,
inspires the mass to courage: not for long
can our foes delay our unfolding destiny!

Witness the death which he foresaw: the seed
springing to flower, flinging its color, its breath,
into the long-patient channels of our need—
silent no longer! Now, fifty years since his days
met their last midnight, we—his countless heirs—
rise dauntless in all lands, his wisdom in our brain,
the added lessons of half a century,
to impregnate the earth with newer life, to win
the final battle; and, classless, to assume
the final right to our supremacy.

March, [1933]

Publication. First published in *We Gather Strength* (New York: Liberal Press, 1933), pp. 45–46.
The terminal year in “March, 1933” is restored from a clipped source edge.

Selections from Permit Me Refuge

Stage II | Los Angeles, the blacklist, and late witness, 1955

Seven late poems collected in Rolfe's posthumous *Permit Me Refuge*.

A Dedication

Here, then, the equivocal catch of a long voyage,
part land-, part sea-won; half accident, half choice:

the colors of your fireside spectrum, but arranged,
blended in bolder pattern, sign of their slow sea-change.

And if, all my Penelopes, there's little you recognize,
blame Time, not me; nor strain your sceptic eyes.

It's the world that's altered. Look, and you shall find
my singular faith and all my old companions at my side.

The catch is curious, I grant, but the turbulent seas
of my long and wavering wanderings shaped every heresy.

Outlandish, fragile gifts; but the spirit's more robust
than had I sailed in calmer seas where the tame fish cluster.

Accept them, then, cleansed now of the salt-exiling sea,
proofs of the homeward journey through all those perilous years.

Publication. Collected in *Permit Me Refuge* (Los Angeles: *California Quarterly*, 1955).

Many an Outcast

Many an outcast calls me friend
and with that word compels
my pity to embrace his loneliness,
my meagre share of goodness to expand
till friendship and intense
compassion warm us both.

Many a weakling thinks me strong
and with his thought endows
my weakness with an unsuspected power,
unearths within my heart a fire
and in my mind an iron
that was not there before.

Many a fool has called me wise
and, doing so, has forced
the little sense I had to rise
up from its deep morass of ignorance
clear to the surface, there to solve
his problems and my own.

And loveless girls have called me love.
These do I most enshrine
because their simple longing builds
love amid lovelessness, and gilds
even the tarnished feelings till they shine—
yes, theirs and mine.

Publication. Collected in *Permit Me Refuge* (Los Angeles: *California Quarterly*, 1955).

Bequest

Be proud, young rejoicers, jesters, poets,
of the rich lore of your art, of your sure way
of seeing the heart beating when all others
describe the deceptive skin and the hypocrite eyes.

Tell of the wars but do not forget the dawn's
light on the first squad of sentries: how they see
with wonder the new day's birth and how its light
is meaningful beyond their power to explain.

Neither ignore the seasons, nor their clothes
upon our earth: men remember the grass
and sun and the snow of winters: these remain
always with them, beyond words, even in dream.

Yes, these are the things that live in men longest,
that glow in their sacred moments, that spring to the brain
as seed leaps toward the earth, to grow, to flower
in darkness, to kindle life, always to be reborn.

This is our art, O brother, comrade, friend:
speak of these things always or others will forget them.
The wisest father's best bequest to his son
is his own unwritten work, the words of the poets.

Publication. Collected in *Permit Me Refuge* (Los Angeles: *California Quarterly*, 1955).

Mystery

The corpse is in the central square, in the spring sun.
The hilts of two jewelled daggers tremble on her breasts.
The blood is cold, corked, on her black and rigid nipples.
Her face in death is beautiful. She has obviously been raped.

Around her walk the busy men, their heads filled with figures.
The women go by with their empty baskets, obsessed with menus,
with many mouths, with the ancient alchemy of mothers
transmuting lead to gold and coppers into bread.

Only the pigeons and the anarchic children hover around her,
the doves bemoaning the death and the child-eyes grave
on the casual brutal bier. All others hurry past.
The sight is familiar as dust in the city air.

Somewhere, it is assumed, an invisible detective
broods darkly in a dark room, his black shoes on the desk,
assuring and reassuring no one in particular
with slow words and fumbling words, in the ritual of despair:

“Sooner or later, mark my word, we’ll identify the woman,
and from that to finding the killer is just a small step...”
Only the children stand silent, and stare, stare
at the broken body, the lifeless face, the living opulent hair.

Publication. Collected in *Permit Me Refuge* (Los Angeles: *California Quarterly*, 1955).

Ballad of the Noble Intentions

What will you do, my brother, my friend,
when they summon you to their inquisition?
I'll fire from the heart of my fortress, my brain,
my proudest possession.

And what will you say, my brother, my friend,
when they threaten your family's food instead?
Like Christ, I'll be silent. Man does not live
only by work or by bread.

I will think of the poets who fashioned my mind;
of the singing strokes of my vivid Old Masters,
of the meaning of my own works. These outweigh
all minor disasters.

And what if your treasures are trampled by swine?
What if they foul your art and your science?
I'll answer with anger, go down, if I must,
hurling pearls of defiance.

I will answer with anger, speak up with passion,
defy them again with my famed indignation.
But what if they babble of danger, and cite
the imperilled nation?

For it's they who imperil our country, my friend,
they are the worms at the core of the matter.
How will you answer their glib accusations,
their hypocrite chatter?

I've only contempt for these cloven-tongued men,
these pack-rats that roam our land in committees
with their claques and their clatter, spreading their lies
through our sleeping cities.

I will stand like an oak in maturity, like
a craft of fine timber against the sea's fury.
But what if these little men posture and act
as both judge and jury?

I'll read them bold pages from *Areopagitica*,
quote Milton and Marvell to rout and abuse them.

The best words of men of all ages will rise
to my tongue to confuse them!

*

And what did you do, dear brother, dear friend,
when you stood at last in the pygmies' forum?
I spoke with good sense, old friend, I talked with
restraint and decorum.

I decided that boasting like Milton were vain,
or refusing, like Marvell, their guineas with anger.
I patterned my self after Waller, who lived
more richly—certainly longer.

I engaged them in skilful debate, since I felt
that mere youthful defiance was unrealistic.
I told what I knew, or I thought, to be true;
it was harmless, anachronistic.

And what did you say, dear brother, old friend?
What were the truths you hastened to utter?
Not words—just a disinterred corpse from a grave,
on a neutral platter.

And there were some living men too that I named.
What harm could it do them, after two decades?
Besides, as I've reason to know, it was all—
after all—in the records.

Just look at the transcript, dear brother, dear friend.
Is there anything in it to make a man shudder?
Is there anything there to make anyone think
that I've lost my rudder?

No, nothing at all, dear stranger, lost friend,
nothing to move me to grief or to mourning.
It's yourself you betrayed, it's yourself who lives on
as a living warning.

Your act of survival betrayed not your friends,
but yourself most of all—no need now to cavil.
Live on, as you must, but be happy with Waller,
not Milton, or Marvell.

For you've toppled the bridges you had with your youth,
 your promising present and excellent future.
No masterpiece ever can heal such a wound, nor
 a surgeon's suture.

You killed your own scope, sad stranger, lost friend.
 My affection is dead; it's too frayed now, and grieving.
And that was your crime; in the noon of your life
 you resigned from the living.

Publication. Collected in *Permit Me Refuge* (Los Angeles: *California Quarterly*, 1955).

Idiot Joe Prays in Pershing Square and Gets Hauled in for Vagrancy

Let us praise,
while time to praise remains,
the simple bullet,
the antique ambushcade
and the fanatic justice-crazed assassin—
we who have made
and used napalm
and casually—
alone among all men—
dropped on Man
the only atom bomb.

Publication. Collected in *Permit Me Refuge* (Los Angeles: *California Quarterly*, 1955).

A Poem to Delight My Friends Who Laugh at Science-Fiction

That was the year
the small birds in their frail and delicate battalions
committed suicide against the Empire State;
having, in some never-explained manner,
lost their aerial radar, or ignored it.

That was the year
men and women everywhere stopped dying natural deaths.
The aged, facing sleep, took poison;
the infant, facing life, died with the mother in childbirth;
and the whole wild remainder of the population,
despairing but deliberate, crashed in auto accidents
on roads as clear and uncluttered as ponds.

That was the year every ship on every ocean,
every lake, harbor, river, vanished without trace;
and even ships docked at quays
turned over like harpooned whales, or wounded Normandies.

Yes, and the civilian transcontinental planes
found, like the war-planes, the sky-lanes crowded
and, praising Icarus, plunged to earth in flames.

Many, mild stay-at-homes, slipped in bath tubs,
others, congenital indoors-men, descending stairs,
and some, irrepressible roisterers, playing musical chairs.
Tots fell from scooter cars and tricycles
and casual passersby were stabbed by falling icicles.

Ah, what carnage! It was reported
that even bicarb and aspirin turned fatal,
and seconal too, to those with mild headaches,
whose stomachs were slightly acid, or who found they could not sleep.
All lovers died in bed, as all seafarers on the deep.

Till finally the only people left alive
were the soldiers sullenly spread on battlefields
among the shell-pocked hills and the charred trees.
Thus, even the indispensable wars died of ennui.

But not the expendable conscripts: they remained as always.
However, since no transport was available anywhere,
and home, in any case, was dead, and bare,
the soldiers wandered eternally
in their dazed, early-Chirico landscapes,
like drunken stars in their shrinking orbits
round and round and round and round

and (since I too died in the world-wide suicide)
they may still, for all I know, be there.
Like forsaken chessmen abandoned by paralyzed players.
they may still be there,
may still be there.

Publication. Collected in *Permit Me Refuge* (Los Angeles: *California Quarterly*, 1955).

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Book and periodical titles are italicized throughout.

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Colophon

Publication and production notes

This critical reading edition was edited by Brian Kim Stefans for The Text-Tech Papers, Los Angeles, in 2026, as part of *Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry*. The poems were reset from the source pages identified in the publication notes and datasheet. The book was composed in EB Garamond on a cream field at 6 × 9 inches. The cover uses original abstract artwork prepared for this edition.