



GENE FRUMKIN

Collected Poems

A CRITICAL READING EDITION

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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Collected Poems

Gene Frumkin

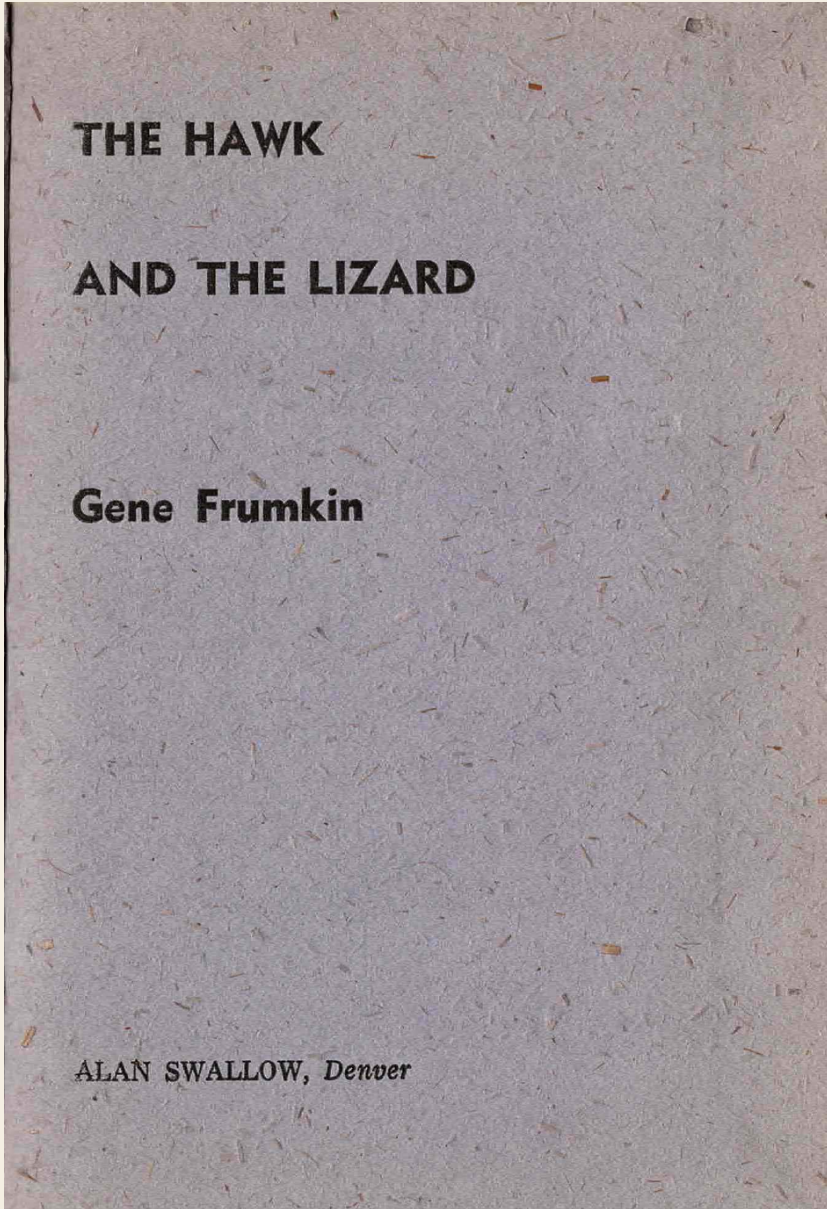
1928–2007

A Critical Reading Edition

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ARCHIVAL SECTION

Selected pages from the project archive



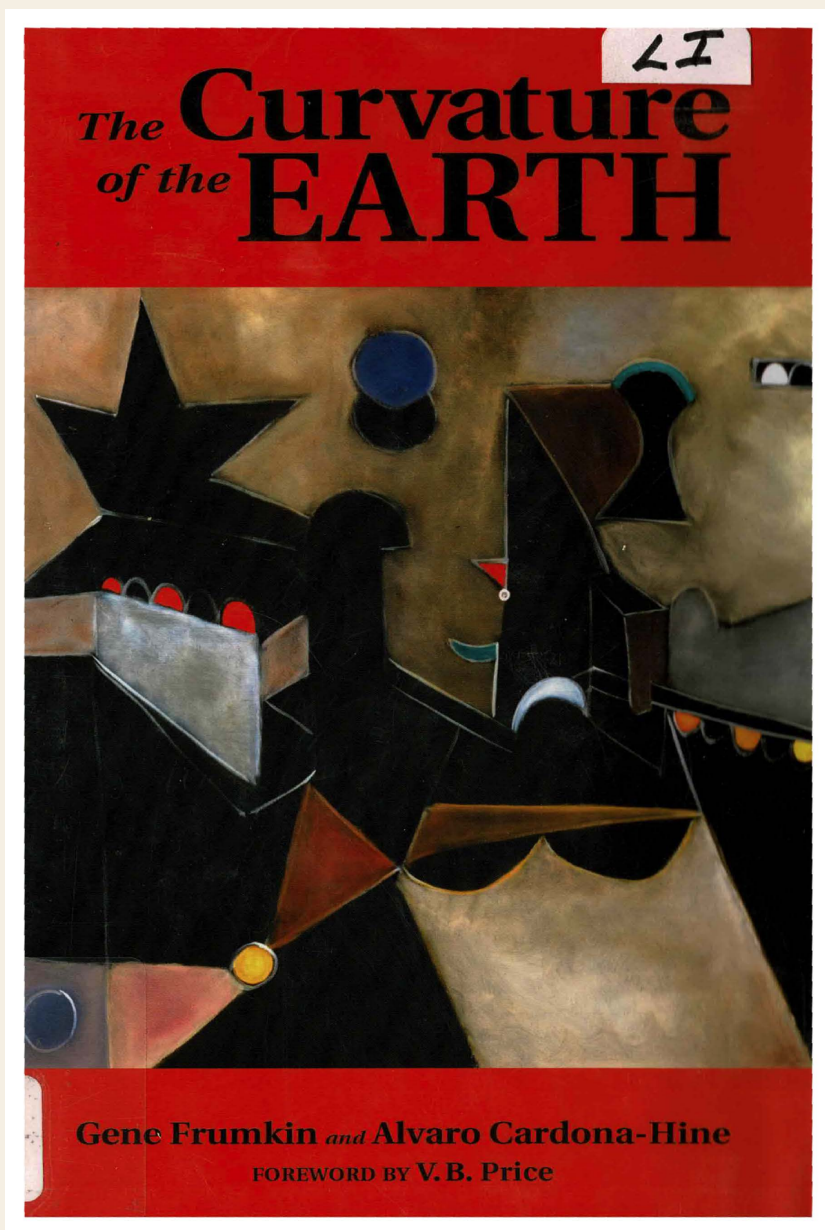
*The title page of *The Hawk and the Lizard* (1963).*

THE MYSTIC WRITING-PAD

Gene Frumkin

THE RED HILL PRESS
Los Angeles & Fairfax / 1977

*The title page of *The Mystic Writing-Pad* (1977).*



*The cover of *The Curvature of the Earth* (2007), Frumkin's final book.*

INTRODUCTION

The life, work, and present edition

Gene Frumkin

Gene Frumkin moved from a Harlem and Bronx childhood into McCarthy-era UCLA journalism, the independent Los Angeles magazine *Coastlines*, and nearly three decades of teaching in Albuquerque. Mel Weisburd remembered introducing him to modern poetry and Thomas McGrath's workshop drawing from him a decisive early poem about his father, a tailor. Frumkin carried that mixture of political alertness, surreal comedy, bodily unease, landscape, dream, and philosophical argument from *The Hawk and the Lizard* through *Freud by Other Means* and *The Curvature of the Earth*. At the University of New Mexico he helped establish the creative-writing program and *Blue Mesa Review*, teaching writers who included Gloria Frym, Joy Harjo, Simon Ortiz, and Leslie Marmon Silko. This edition resets every complete book and independently published poem presently available in the project archive. It preserves the eighty-five-part prose sequence *A Sweetness in the Air*, avoids repeating selected-book reprints, and uses only Frumkin's sections of his collaboration with Alvaro Cardona-Hine. Four unavailable books and the missing leaves of the partial *Saturn Is Mostly Weather witness* are documented rather than silently reconstructed.

Editorial note

The poems are reset from the best complete witnesses in the archive, with lineation, stanza space, visual indentation, section numerals, dedications, and epigraphs retained. Narrow-page wraps introduced by scanning or earlier resets are removed only when the source makes the authorial line unmistakable. Obvious OCR substitutions and detached scan specks are corrected against the page image. Later collections reprint substantial earlier books: those repetitions are represented once. The 1998 reprint supplies a clearer reading text for *Dostoevsky and Other Nature Poems* and has been collated against the 1972 printing. *Saturn Is Mostly Weather* survives here only in a partial scan; the two complete, otherwise uncollected poems in that witness are printed, while its absent poems are listed in the textual record. No audio-only poem has been transcribed without a print witness.

BIOGRAPHY

Harlem, Los Angeles, and Albuquerque

Gene Frumkin was born in Harlem on January 29, 1928, and spent his first decade in the Bronx. His family moved to Los Angeles late in the 1930s, seeking a climate that would ease his asthma. His father was a tailor, an occupation and family memory that entered the early poem “Elegy for a Tailor.” Frumkin attended UCLA, where he earned a B.A. in English in 1951 and worked at the *Daily Bruin*: city editor in spring 1950, editor that fall, and chair of the Publications Board in 1951. The newspaper record places him directly inside the loyalty-oath and anti-Communist conflicts of the period.

After college Frumkin worked briefly as a bank teller and then spent roughly fourteen years in journalism, including editorial work in the Los Angeles garment trade. The poet Mel Weisburd became his closest early literary companion. Weisburd later remembered introducing Frumkin to modern poetry, bringing him into Thomas McGrath’s workshop, and watching him find his subject in the poem about his father. In 1955 Frumkin and Weisburd founded *Coastlines*, a small Los Angeles magazine whose first issues drew partly on manuscripts McGrath had accumulated before his firing during the anti-Communist purge. The magazine’s free-speech, surrealist, and politically dissident commitments remained visible throughout Frumkin’s career.

Frumkin married Lydia, an artist, and they had two children, Celena Allison and Paul Frumkin. Weisburd’s oral history gives a painful account of Lydia’s severe mental illness after the family moved to Albuquerque, the couple’s separation, and Frumkin’s eventual responsibility for raising the children. That account is valuable but personal and retrospective; it is preserved and attributed rather than generalized beyond what Weisburd reports.

John Logan recommended Frumkin to replace Robert Creeley for a creative-writing course at the University of New Mexico. Frumkin arrived in

Albuquerque in 1966 on what began as a one-year appointment and remained until his retirement in 1994. He helped make creative writing a durable part of UNM, participated in the Rio Grande Writers Association, and in 1989 co-founded *Blue Mesa Review* with Rudolfo Anaya, David Johnson, Clark Smith, and Lee Bartlett. Anaya remembered Frumkin and Johnson taking turns as editors and singled Frumkin out as an excellent poetry editor. His students included Gloria Frym, Joy Harjo, Simon Ortiz, and Leslie Marmon Silko.

Frumkin's public commitments were continuous with the poems. He signed the Writers and Editors War Tax Protest during the Vietnam War and participated in Albuquerque's arguments over censorship, including the 1970 "Love-Lust Poem" protest at UNM. His books moved from the compact political fables and surreal personae of *The Hawk and the Lizard and Locust Cry* through the Southwestern landscapes of *Dostoevsky and Other Nature Poems* and *Clouds and Red Earth*, the numbered prose meditations of *A Sweetness in the Air*, and the psychoanalytic sequences of *Falling Into Meditation and Freud by Other Means*. *The Best American Poetry 2002*, edited by Robert Creeley, included his work.

Frumkin died in Albuquerque on February 18, 2007, survived by Celena and Paul. A memorial reading the following month brought together writers from several generations of the New Mexico community. His recordings now preserved by PennSound—Buffalo in 1991, *Tangents* in 1993, *Magdalena* in 2005, and a final Harwood reading in 2006—extend the print record through *Comma in the Ear*, the Freud poems, and late unpublished work. His papers are held by the University of New Mexico's Center for Southwest Research; correspondence also survives in collections connected with Mel Weisburd, Barbara Guest, Charles Bernstein, Milton Kessler, and other contemporaries.

ORIGINAL FOREWORD

V. B. Price on The Curvature of the Earth (2007)

V. B. Price's foreword to *The Curvature of the Earth* presents Gene Frumkin and Alvaro Cardona-Hine as friends of more than fifty years whose collaboration grew out of the Los Angeles poetry world of the McCarthy era. Price places them beside Thomas McGrath, Bert Meyers, Mel Weisburd, Charles Bukowski, and other writers shaped by the political pressures and small-magazine communities of Southern California in the 1950s and 1960s.

For Price, the joint book is an act of friendship as well as a sequence of travel and love poems. Its settings—Holland, Spain, Tuscany, Hawai'i, and New Mexico—become occasions for the two poets' different styles to answer one another. He emphasizes age without treating the volume as a work of decline: desire, imaginative energy, wisdom, and curiosity remain active powers throughout the collection.

The foreword also gives concise portraits of the collaborators. Frumkin is described through his long UNM teaching career, his editorial work for *Coastlines* and *California Quarterly*, and his mentorship of two generations of poets. Cardona-Hine appears as a Costa Rican-born poet, novelist, painter, and composer working in Truchas, New Mexico, whose visual art and writing share an improvisatory, metaphorical movement.

Price's account supplies an important bridge between the Los Angeles beginnings of both careers and their later New Mexico work. This summary is included instead of a complete reprint of the copyrighted 2007 foreword; the full text remains in the archived source scan.

V. B. Price
Albuquerque

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THE HAWK AND THE LIZARD

1963

This Great Burden of Loving

This great burden of loving:
a knapsack of roses
on my back, a clock of birds
on my wrist. I am not strong,
my sweet, I am not swift.

Huddler in the memory
of mother's mountainous kisses,
I hide my fat urge
in the skinny land of the Thirties.
I am afraid of passion.

But always she takes my hand,
leads me on through the dance,
the daily round that ends
with an alarm of sensual angels;
her thighs, Roman candles,

flare and await my darkness,
and again we celebrate.
I must close the spider years
when life walked in my sleep.
Sheer living breaks the web

as kings crack borders of stone.
This great burden of loving
is a wild and brilliant bird
that circled above the city
and settled on my shoulder.

We Come into the Gospel Country

(For Lydia)

We come into the gospel country:
wheatwarm mountains before us,
around us fountains of golden oil.

How many years of love
did we need to find this hemisphere
—this lime and pomegranate world?

I think we were here from the beginning
but only now believe its promises,
having broken with tenderness

love's clamoring forest,
and hewed a home from the fierce green maze.
This bargain we have made with each other:

to wait, like harlequin and columbine, for God
Who shall be the nihilistic frost, the black storm,
that divorces us at last.

La Femme

Red hair, but a temper white as milk
and a voice that lounges in a bar at midnight.
Her walk a banana peel
on which any man's eye must slip:
each step a golden oil sliding from a tube.

Duffy thought she was a sailboat on the sea
but she would never dress so simply;
no, she would wear pennants in her hair
and her earrings would spin like ferris wheels
around her laughing axis.

Deep in her darkest Africa
she is queen of a leafy bordello
whose clients are birds and monkeys.
Still medieval at heart, she wants a fireman
to climb the ladder to her burning balcony.

And though her lips are a circus of sin
and a smack at the white-collared priest who signs
her checks,
her body is thinner than a daydream
and her eyes are no more in love with me
than a field of blue forget-me-nots.

That Girl Who Follows Me

That indestructible girl, shaggily striding,
(stocky, with fat fingers, her breasts round loaves,
and thoughts a cage of squabbling doves)
finds me in whatever cave I may be hiding.

Between us was the field of my disdain,
that barren mood her loving flesh patrolled
with good humor and patience. Unkindly, my cold
eye called her cow; she squeezed her milk from
pain.

I knew, and now know better, what dreams can do:
how they dissolve the factual terrain
until the world contracts to the scope of the brain,
and what we hope, in our gypsy ball, is true.

In buxom optimism, bold she grew,
became the bull and I the frightened maid.
I leaped her fence of dreams (though she still
stayed)
and ran where her love, I thought, could not
pursue

to other arms, more delicate and downy.
I too have falsely turned my cards of love,
for she, hot in my blood, trails my each move
and hunts me down, she cowboy and I pony.

Love's Decay

Come, we've left our house to others.
Let it burn, let ashes bury
hallway steps and bedroom whispers:
we are not concerned with shrines.

Long ago, I gathered clouds
in a basket, smelled them, tasted.
They were sweet with seeds of rain
yet left shadows in my mouth,

only shadows. There is not one
single word your lips can squeeze
from that bent, dry tube, your voice,
that can change your kisses' shadows,

give them permanence, as berries
on the bush: a truth each season
will renew. The wind must take them:
kisses are the seeds of scarecrows.

Now, Love, lead me, iron-lipped,
through the arms and thighs of women;
let me find an easy door.
Love, my house I've left to others.

Lament for an Old Pressman

Where shall he put his eyes
now that his heart is dead?
At two in the inkstained morning
the press prints only lies.
Where shall he lay his head?

The death of his wife was a warning
the greyhaired charm would break.
No more will her flesh rise
at two in the thumping morning
his humpbacked heart to wake.

Where shall he put his eyes
that never will welcome hers?
In the black, printed morning
his fingers grope in the skies
to read the braille of stars.

The Trap

Truly, people are a forest
in which he is lost.
Snakes of sun wind around the treetrunks,
a baby's voice hides in the dark apertures.
There is no map for this arena.
Each way is a trap.

"Father," he calls, "hear me.
I'm your only son.
The others are impostors, with rubber hearts
and brains that peel like weatherbeaten bark.
Only I am of your loins.
Let me out."

Strangely, his plea is heard.
The woods release him
and he runs free, his head light as paper.
All fruits and grains are his; beasts bow to him.
He wears the sun in his lapel
and twirls a cane.

Henceforth, his friends report
to him in writing.
He doesn't even need a name or address.
For him the world is a polished tabletop.
When he grows old he is a picture
of Fred Astaire.

One day, a knee gives,
he falls in wrinkles.
Too late the cameras cut, too late lights dim.
His bottom eye knows this dry prune of a hole
deep in his heart. Leaves fall and fall,
his breath full of leaves.

An Inquiry into the Ultimate Loneliness

That park, full of social meaning,
and I uncertain hummingbird
 stopping and going on
never sure of my direction.
The small girls breezy on trapezes.
The baseball boys pursuing balloons.
The old man asleep with a dream on his face.
They were not my airport, these pretenders.
So hillward on a way I went
that no one knew or cared about
to the city on display below me:
a department store open for business.
And I, Zeus's Number One Boy,
 sat on a rock
 faking thunderbolts.

Time was a fly crawling on my arm.
Fascinating. I could have sat there
 watching it for hours.
But to remain a monk behind a wall,
spying on the world, was anonymous.
I had to be a window-glare
in the tall architectural shadows.
Coming down from my brief Tibet,
I met a motorcycle racing up,
riderless. O proper messenger
to a mythical place. I hurried now,
knowing I had missed the big event:
Messiah had come. The park was miles
 of deserted lawns
 and capsized picnic tables.

The Hawk and the Lizard

Attacking heaven, the hawk loses his prey,
melting into the sun,
at first a sparrow then a midge
and finally the wind.
Heaven becomes
a mountainous solitude.

In the fields the wheat is ancient with rain and sun,
beards on the stalks
shaking sadly at some holocaust,
old men believing death
is manna, life a long starvation.
Heaven is a hard landlord,
taking the rent of mind and body as
it swallowed the hawk's flight.
But what is orchard, what is farm
without belief?
Are the roots secure, believable?

The lizard has no doubts
but is the solid faith of the stone
from which he follows the sun diurnally.
Such golden navigation suffices him,
each quick swallow of his throat
recording adulation.
Held by the great hypnotic eye,
the lizard feels the sun's direction
toward him, always toward him.
And if his tail falls off, there will be another,
another endlessly, till the sun falls too.
But in the night the hawk returns
(the intellectual night
when heaven is a cold, black slab)
and there, above, still darkly strives,
his desperate wings beat at the moon,
attack again the ages' invisible prey.
Belief exceeding belief.

The Dragon

Smoke-dimmed, the sun is russet, round at noon,
a daylit red moon, paling to pink effulgence
on the sidewalks. We wear metallic roses
from a blackened, bitter garden on our skins
and go our various rounds below a strange god.

The complexion of the city has changed, yet no one
remarks the rhetoric of distant fire nor imagines
a dragon, spawned perhaps in a copper cloud,
closing around the sweep of our ancient pinions
to make bones of our city. Myths do not disturb us.
We swim in the pink light and never hear
the cries from the far, flaming hills, our dying
 brothers
already caught by the incendiary tongue
of the new dogma that comes as lightning from the
 skies.

The Alligator

For years I was tomorrow's man
who rode a white horse through a city
gay with roses. Above my head
God was a mobile, stirring to music
that accompanied me.

Such fragrance
crowded the hammock of my youth!
Such laughter!

Yet I stood in water,
thigh-deep, my hands touching bottom:
alligator, with snout stuffed full
of allergies, unable to breathe
the night through to the morning's dream.

Now I am serious in my swamp
as I gauge the difficult ascent
to dry land. I am wise to the roses
and do not want to be amused.

The Hermit in the Glass Bottle

He doesn't belong in this dormouse weather
where time is fed to the peacocks
and neon soldiers march through nights of ghostly
combat.

He is too old to believe in corporations,
in the empire of sex, in a populace
afraid of its own jokes.

Instead, he stores up his personal suffering
in a cabin whose neighbor is a mountain lion.

Below, the lights of the world are stars
millions of miles away.

Here, with his hoard of pain, he is safe
and stares down into that shattered heaven.

But those lights are eyes in which he sees himself.
How elfin he is against the long flowering of the
Earth!

And once again he offers his past to the winds.

He will be no miser:

Let the crowd enter his heart,
let them pass through the golden archway
and press toward the darkening walls,
let them be lost and cry out in panic
or plummet through the heart's black well to
the stars.

He will be open
but to find him, they must bring their own
lamps.

Meditation of a Man, Circa 1958

His feathers are spikes, his throat a bristly rug,
his claws plump marshmallows that ache from too
much hopping.

He opens his shirt to see if his chest has a purple
daub.

No, just the usual black hair. He had imagined his
lips

pecking the floor for dirty beads of bread
Well, what of it. His mind has a right to its privacy.

The wife and two kids stand unused in a corner.
He must remember to dust them tomorrow . . .
obligations.

Tonight another quiet evening with the goldfish,
playing a romantic spider web on the phonograph.

Outside, the streetlamps are Japanese lanterns,
the air is pineapple: it is another country.

His round hours roll upon a smooth surface.
To doubt is to create a friction where none need be.
One day the ball would stop and he step off to a
world

he did not recognize: cool and bony October,
the rituals of living only business forms,
his pulse ticking in a pawnshop, a ticket-lost loneliness.

He would not be braver if the thought occurred,
for in his own album he is always Ivanhoe.
If in time he fails, a curse on the muscle of the
armor
that held back his eager arms. Then, too, behind
the visor
who shall know him a fool or coward unhorsed?
In that old picture, how toylke his smile beneath
those leaves.

Later, he listens to the night through the window.
It is a plum-colored bird, the observer of seas
and lands of all weathers. It says, "Life is Venice

or Tangiers, perhaps a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

You have never been there and may never go.”

Moonlight. Stillness. One of his wings has fallen
asleep.

The Rider

Rider below the moon that melts on his horse's
 mane,
that stars its flanks; rider of thick oceans of light
whose back feels the tons of distance already
 unloaded,
 whose eye burrows into the night
 and is brilliant there...

A persimmon spills over the faraway wall of mountains,
the sage and juniper wade in summery orange

 waves
 and the plain awakes with rider and horse.
 Silence is tethered to the land.
The hoofbeats of the single horse startle a buzzard
 miles away
 the sound of whose wings brushes the ear of the
 rider
before his eye can trap the black motion in the sky.

Shadows of men on horses pass across his own
 shadow;
 no words are spoken: there is no language here.
 Perfection of loneliness: communion
—and not the grazing of the mind on munched
 grass,
 the salivation of flowers in a dead garden.
Rider, what image do you chase so swiftly now?
 It is a grandeur we have not seen before.

New World

Turning back the clock of the heart,
 he returned in sickness
 to a sick town;
 lemons hung black
 from the boughs and grapes were pebbles
on the vine; outside his window

night was racked by summer coughs
 dry as match-flames in the throat.
 He remembered
 growing up
 in that laddering town;
hill on hill his wheezing steps

took its measure, tough Cortez in
 boots, with tiger's eyes,
 conquering that
 bed-ridden town.
 Then he was the sullen
king of red and black dominions:

marched the checkers in his throne-room,
 always crowned himself
 lord of laurels
 in the mirror.

Webnets in the screening
gathered golden deaths of flies,

husks forgotten in the sunstream
 dayfall down the garden
 -weeds, O lances
 through the bloomseeds—
 how he hummingbirded,
laurel-boy, above the snails,

 bushes, trees, lost to the earth!
 Ten years brought him back
 broken-eyed,
 cracked in his luck,
 with the scattered glass
of the world beneath his feet:

rainbow glass, the weather black,
all the churches crumbled;
on their pulpits,
priests of marble.

Wisdom was too large
for so small a room as his

where he slept a crab to the falling
petals, leaves and feathers
of the sick town,
saw the bird-flights
only through the keyhole
of his shell, and heard the children

playing hide and death in the wind.
When had boyhood fallen
like an apple
from his grace?

Sometime, sometime the fabled
checkers broke, the game was lost,

sometime all the rich, ripe trees
ceased to bear the proof
of the seed,
certainty
fell behind the mountains,
skies turned palely mountainous, jagged,
not to be climbed, not to be conquered.

- The boy stood a sole dream
in the arctic
silent weather
at the still point of his way.
Sick in the sick town of four walls,

sick of games and sick of coughing birds
perched outside his window,
he arose
mad as a song,
broke his panes and mirror,
leaped to luck down hill and hill,

O he ran the wind a whistling race,

boy no more nor ever,
man against
sky and mountains:
ran on bloody glass,
man his eye to catch the green world.

The Oneness of the World

Between the Talmud and the appletree
there is the swaying bridge of the working day,
 and there I go my nimbus way
 above the earth of cockatoos,
 below the sky of bees.
At times the sun is the color of a bruise.

A quiet man between the buzz and squawk,
I do my work in blind and spider calm,
 going my bridge with hardly a qualm.
 On one side is the cider smell,
 on the other rabbis talk.
My will swings back and forth, tongue of a bell.

How perilous to be so high, alone,
to hear no apple in the synagogue,
 to hear my own long monologue
 beside the silly croak of Polly
 and the bees' furious drone.
The bridge creaks and I fear my balance is folly.

By light I climb the thought of Aristotle
whose catalogs of old intelligence
 ought to raise my mood to eloquence.
 His golden mean is safe as banks
 or cork tight on the bottle.

I trust him but, oddly, grow more fond of cranks.
Or Saint Teresa, nun of swoons and pain,
who gave her body to God the Spouse, and grew
 well.

I, to love under equal spell,
must, like Everson the poet-friar,
 unsex myself of Man,
and pray that nun to be my wife, my prior.

I laugh my fill of possibilities,
there, high above the bees, below the fish;
 at night the star is in the wish.
To be the salt within the thought
 that ebbs and flows with the seas,

that is all. Among the stars my fish is caught.

It is I, that dolphin tossing in the light,
from the meon's candles (lances on the water)
 through the broken, burning ways of laughter
 to the tear of melting wax itself.

 There is no end of night,
the day is always, I fly beyond all gulf.

I leave the bridge and pluck the simple apple.
It's red, it shines, its meat is juicily fat:

 I knew a rabbi who smiled like that.

 All saint and thinker sums are zero.

 My big bite is my chapel.

I taste the world, and am my own hero.

The Fat Pigeon

Here we are, handcuffed to our bodies.
Everything that touches us
leaves a criminal in our blood.
My friend, we exist

under an impossible esthetic:
each sentiment of incense,
of plume and honeysuckle,
conceals a policeman;

even our skins are watching us.
We are negro, friend, and the law is white.
We must love each other cruelly, as a vise,
fearing only the fat pigeon in the heart.

Variations on the Taste of Dried Apricots

Tongue and palate are darkly lit
by the afterglow of the dried apricot
in its sour sunset.

A rainbow in the mouth:
spectrum from honeydew to lemon;
and afterwards the kodachrome
in the buds, fresh as truth.

An ear
heard on the lips:
the sound
is soft and round.

The dark orange gong,
struck by the tooth,
vibrates on the tongue.

Van Gogh painted some
-brandy-scented-that the sight devours.
He called them sunflowers.

Van Gogh Dead

The light cools in the incandescent chair.
Night falls on the sunflowers. His eyes are closed,
will wake the room no more to bedlams of color.
A sudden hand has torn away the sun.

Some Days the Blood Is Warm and Certain

Some days the blood is warm and certain,
the fingers touch all objects kindly.

I step from behind my usual curtain
and smile, unnecessarily, at the desks
and cease to be that strange self
who answers the telephone warily
as if the caller might be a bomb.

Those days there is no sense of doom,
no one says anything unkindly,
and I seem to be profoundly witty.

When someone asks,

I know;

nothing is left behind
wherever I go.

What happens then around me
—a death, a birth, a breath of wind—
becomes the mind, the flesh, the bone:
that clear, intuitive self
that is all I need ever completely own.

The Face-Down Indian

So we dug up his shame:
bones of a face-down Indian
(one hundred years without a name),
condemned by tribal custom
to eat the worms from which he came.

That ritual troubles us.
Our funeral is flowers,
the mourner masking his animus,
the priest too sad and fluent:
his golden praises so by purchase.

Old shamans, chieftains, wise,
you were not trusting heaven
to turn the face of shame from the skies.
You wore the robes of judges
to say that good death is a prize.

Joan at the Stake

Flames converge from all angles
in a yellow concordat
of smoke and darting spangles
covering stake and knot.

At the girl's first blackened flesh,
the crowd murmurs in marvel
of her screaming soul in thresh
with her body's flaming devil.

Her milky robe is gone,
her marble thighs are burning,
angels and demons are one
in her agony of yearning.

for the icy cross of Styx.
The crowd applauds her emotion;
the men who gathered the twigs
are pleased the consummation

is bright and quick, proving
the faggots they found were good.
Ashes of the girl are moving,
moths of gold from the wood.

Mobile for Celena

A palette of birds, paper stuffed, swings
leisurely from its blue tin tree.
The four branches suspend four strings
of birds (red, blue, gold and green)
that fly nowhere on silent wings.

To the baby's eyes the colors merge
in fires and shades that jar the air
above her crib, circle and surge:
a flight of feathered things that flare,
darken and fall in her mind's own forge.

The room's square window frames the leaves
in clusters of wind. The stiff birds wheel
but their illusion no longer weaves:
she cries her need blindly to the wall
in a rage that no one quite believes.

But soon the droning will begin,
her sky coarsen with airplanes that scud
shadows across landscape and brain
-a new nightmare fired in the blood
to hint at some forgotten sin.

She will learn that crying, burning, maiming
hid in the clouds before birds came;
will know that the witch of screaming
laughed in wounds while she slept in the womb,
bewitched, of pure white spaces dreaming.

But if an amazon of love,
she'll bear all sins like pearls in her breast,
spit in the eye of the wind above,
raise the roof on a wood of nests
to tempt perhaps the perfect dove.

Homage to My Mother

Your knobby fingers, mother, know more
of mankind's pulse than mine
which too often tap a dry machine.
Teach your knowledge to my daughter,
born in a quick pain as the cock awoke
and grown to face the light in your image.

I hold her milky smell of infancy,
her wrinkled cries flailing the air,
when suddenly frown and smile merge
in single expression, and I see
(so slight a symbol turns me to you)

a wind of tears in your bluebird eyes.
Here, soon asleep in my arms, is the dream
you carried in shacks and tenements,
on relief, through nights when love was dark
in windows though the moons burned high:
your sickbed son raises a new health.

I bridge your blood to her across
the seasons, blood that flowered on rock.

Elegy for a Tailor

Myopic old tailor, you poked at life
as at the eye of a needle. The bird-dreams
skimmed through your mind with their falcon
screams
and vanished. Stiff eyelids blackballed your wife,

while your face hung limp in Cyclopean sleep.
The twelve lizard hours you daily pursued
in sewing circles tired you. You suffered, slued
around the master axis, but wouldn't weep.

Yuu lived beneath the humid clouds of pressing machines and walked on grass of
wool and
cotton,
and in spring breathed the sweat of walls hot in
golden fur. Lost to you, life's summer dress.

But the Talmud, father, was prophet still of pleasure
—antique made richer by teachers' voices, old
silver tucked away in deep beards, and sold
to you before you dozed in bankrupt leisure,

while the tombs of viciously mounting skulls
made marmoreal the fields. You quietly waned
to the grave: museum of Jehovah gained
until Messiah's rod startles your pulse.

O tailor, muted totem-head in state,
how mourn your sterile decades? Yet in this place
where I, you loved too little, scan your face,
you are the chalk that scrapes my mind's gray slate.

Memorial

Yet have of you no syllable to keep....

-Stanley Kunitz

My well-erased father, it's now ten years
since I've come to brood above your yellow bones
and it may be another ten
before I seek you there again among the stones.

I have nothing you wrote or read or wore,
not even your photograph. What purer death
could you have wanted? You who were so still;
so vanquished, in your cage of pious breath.

Phylacteries, books of strange backward text,
skullcap and praying-shawl—props for a play
on tribal morality. Me, I read Yeats,
an Irishman. What more need I say?

Though we were distant neighbors, we would agree
that time is yet more orthodox than you,
that in my death I shall convert,
accept the rabbi's rites, become a proper Jew.

I speak of this grave country unmystically,
not in the spirit of Dante, who took the tour
to bring back pictures for the common vision.
I speak pragmatically: of heart to endure

conflicts and losses, to suffer and create,
make flesh of piety, now, before we die.
I mourn the failure of your heart
but cannot love that green synagogue in which you
lie.

Speech to the Silent Generation

Let us admit it. We are china dolls
who stand upon our mantels quietly,
not daring to oppose what we dare not see.
Our silence is the glaze that blinds the eye,
holds mind and mouth in politic disunion
so that we would not know what to propose
if we should speak.

Suppose, if we should speak,
suppose we are not heard, our voices dust.
Suppose, in speaking, our characters break,
and no one hears our going, no one sees:
our voices then would be irreparable.

I too, who prophesy life, am afraid.
The spider, spinning in his musty corner,
reproaches me, for he accomplishes
at least his webs, those small personal webs.
While I would crawl out to spin a web of the world.
And God's heel presses me. I disappear.

I praise the pessimists: they give me hope.
Why else but to refute them do I kill
my grudge against myself and, purified,
become the blood of others? When I select,
say this is pain, that joy, man is my compass.

This age is fable whose meaning is fox,
wiser than we; it is a flower also,
one secret on a mountainside of stems.
Once I have it in my hand, the fox is mine,
and what I speak opens the eyes of dolls,
glassy as in death. May the scent be true:
my messianic eye climbs distant mauve.

The Salesman

Always the big ruby sun ascends
and the compass points to him.
The lake of his eyes is full of sitting ducks.
Tomorrow is always white as laundry on the line
and the past is dirty water.

So he takes the plane from failure to failure,
buoyant as a ballerina,
with his parachute packed for the next disaster.
He has learned the wisdom of futility: that heaven
is the rumor of his good luck.

Budapest, October 1956

Bodies in the streets.

Flags on the bodies.

Birds now scattered from the square, the lonely
grass is shot with plumes of autumn blood.

Freedom's ghostly finger pulls the trigger
in necessity's name,

and the city
claims the right to sleep in the bed it makes.
The hard brave ideas, whose bodies starve,
wield quite naturally chalked guns on
walls and fences:

the mind's rebellion thinking
through the hands.

O nothing, nothing is more
certain than this renaissance of bullets!

From the bones of Revolution muscle
forms, the son born of the bullet-state
plays with fire to raise his arms against his father.

Red October 1917
meets its progeny in this October;
son and father, armored in their banners,
battle through the streets their family parting.

Now the birds return to sing by the dead,
sprawled like sleeping children in the streets.

The Waiting Room in the County Hospital

(For Dr. Marvin Marsh)

That cankerous day, caries
of the old Hebrew, once
marcher in the torah pageant,
moaning to the sweet of his God
on the stretcher of his last belief,
wheeled through the gauntlet of eyes
to the rubble room to wait

in the pile of people. The choir
of calypso-hearted quiet;
the young mulatto taped
to the spirit of the mummy room,
hearing the names unwind
to a lonely cadence,
waiting in the masked and cryptic

light. Aztec hearts,
scalpeled out, bled
for their gods on the teocalli
altars-the senoras here,
amid a rosary of thoughts,
feel too an obsidian
presence in their temples, waiting.

No microscope sees
these poor shuttling in the culture
of the charity-raw room,
nor stethoscope hears
the cyclone of hearts in the silence,
nor fluoroscope reveals
this anatomy's hidden lung.

Then, doctor, do as you must.
Your love, not in teaspoons
at appointed hours, but always,
by the whole bottle, must tonic
all these patient, who wait
in the chemical air for the day

when a better solution prospers:

To Thomas McGrath in New York

A poem is the heart's last chance,
when a certain passion is brought to trial
by the law of its own eloquence;
and death and life contest its truth.
So, Tom, receive this labor as more
than gift or ambassador from our city
of gold-plated but sooty angels.
This is your own compatriot,
born of your own devoted style
in the lonely land of the looking-glass.
It's irreligious too, but written
as though God stood behind the nearest door.
I hope you'll recognize the pose:
one in which the tears rarely pass
the clear-eyed guard, who prefers the witty
aside at the moment of despair,
and yet a guard who may clearly doze
while grief speaks quickly as it ought.
Resigned your wife and gone your youth;
the home exploded, children lost.
This poem is too young to dare
profess the reality of angels
that they will restore what has been lost
or to assure you of honor here
for the graces you have thought and written.
My poem is caught, and before you stands
to receive, as always, justice at your hands.

Los Angeles

January 24, 1959

The Hawk and the Lizard

LOCUST CRY: POEMS 1958–1965

1973

*So soon to die
and no sign of it showing—
locust cry.
Matsuo Basho
(tr. Harold G. Henderson)*

America

Sunset in arms against daybreak
our troops waiting in the wings
Who

in this chilly garden
will bite
the apple of war

The East marks May's first morning
with red roses
strewn across the weather
lethal stings hovering there
We wear our fate like a blindfold
not daring to imagine
the other side
of evening's wall

One word we have lost
one word trapped somewhere
If only
we had it back!
The shadows of our troops
are pale

A Parable on Free Enterprise

Fellow citizens
the wings expect
 freedom
from the bird

 and every feather
 demands its own
 freeway
 through the sky

Unfortunately
the bird also
 exists
and has ambitions

What wizardry can
liberate its
 members
from the bird

Ask that early man
who hides and waits
 gripping
his long blast

The Hummingbird

After months of black wind
a hummingbird
 stops at our window
 then is off again
having given us our allotment
 of his time
 His departure
 shatters the air
Since the black winds
even the blue sky
 threatens our glass

Eyewitness

Eyewitness of penny wars
picture cards that smelled of gum

one battle

Barcelona. I think
a blue picnic day that wore

a yellow bomb in its buttonhole
People blown up

a face

coming toward us maddened
mouth coming apart

The scream was available too:
I could tune on the radio / The Shadow

would know it

or the Green Hornet

We traded battles

whole wars

some of us specializing
in Sino-Jap others in Spanish Civil

Holding the power of these cards
all my senses were charmed

Youthful causes do not lose
their martial images in time

though later headlines
pay and pay for the gay cheap game

In the Margin of the Text

Myself standing in the margin of the text
which is Cuba:
black soldiers on pages of sugar
Standing beside a sycamore
in a saucer of flowers
royal palms overlooking
the rooftops like giraffes
the morning cruising around me
on a slow bicycle
I glance at the jagged edges of heaven to the north
and know that elsewhere men move ahead
the hands of the sun

But in our city
Cuba is not a place but a checkerboard
Castro is a cartoon
and his government a ctime
I think I'm living in a secondhand world
in which too often I've surprised myself kneeling
or reaching for the sky

The poems I wanted to write
for those Batista murdered in their honest passion
for the saplings of the revolution
for Castro's beard and other prophecies
are out of sight political prisoners somewhere
Instead I watch the snails
on the walkway
listen to the children
in the house
to the conscience of the bluejay
on the limb
and feel immortal as a housefly

Merry Andrew

Andrew lives by appointment only
scholar of birds and Roman togas
Two daughters are in school

one engaged to some Greek letters
He is their Miami Beach
and sometimes Stars & Stripes

to his wife
He belongs to a good saloon
and to his college bombshelter

and walks on the golden sidewalk
giving a drop of his bank
to win or wine any man's blood

Of his former tenants in Cuba
Andrew has no memory or picture
though he once collected the rent

For Those Who Die Violently

This morning hills moved next door
a peahen

bloomed on our windowsill

The sky was a fawn on our grass

Also on the lawn

that remote town square

where DeGaulle's machinegun saluted

and 41 stopped

their chanting

‘Algerie francaise!’

the Colons cried

living and dying

Myself a Jew in the eight-year Arab army

have organized my self's

opposing forces into

a blind flag

Now an airplane leaves cotton sticks

crumbling in the sky

my daughter rides

her bicycle and a girl in shorts passes by

orange lips small, round as a nipple

Those pink and red geraniums that parallel

our walkway

make a decent bouquet

for any bloodbath

Earth ancient fertile ruin

death has dropped its eggs everywhere

Stalin the Good

I dreamt that Stalin sat at table
with three others
 two blond children
and an outline

Stalin's

small knife patted
the butter, his bread a child's
 hair, at his arm a jar
of marmalade

When Stalin

smiled I saw
I'd forgotten his mustache
 and was about to
paste it on

A warm

breeze brings me roses

I have accomplices

even during
 the hours of light and reason
My madness

flourishes

The Old Jew

(Germany, the 1930's)

He touches a match to the old Jew's beard
laughs, calling them curls of smoke
(The Jew smells like a chicken plucked and singed
his age contributes to the joke

Not Mephisto but a man in the street
a brown shirt his career
boots the hymn of his ear People surround
this ritual he set / bonfire of hair

a night of parades and Party songs
The Jew smothers his beard
screaming, in his coat / the crowd lingers in his darkness
aimless now their candle disappeared

A Booster for Gemini

A man balances
on the shadow of a wire

He is walking from life to death
and back again

Once, had observed himself
'straining for sense'
holding in his hand an orange
a fish a stone

He would peer into the cracks
of brick or stucco walls
stare at white boats
on blue water

He would look into his own eyes
for consecutive hours

Concentration
Perplexity

Finally, at 40 or 50
their colors faded / albinoed
the boat the water the walls
his eyes

They spoke words. to him words

Orange fish & stone
weighed nothing in his hand

He opened a door into space
began to walk the
white shadow of a wire

This Great Age

He lives in a field
which is day-&-night
the seasons coming & going
by sleight-of-hand

There is something
he wants to plant
to remind him of his
hands

Craft
solitary

primitive
too slow
in this Great Age

For the turning of the sun
is ourselves
and the weather in which it turns
is ourselves

Men Fail in Communion

They fail in communion a surplus of failure
stored in grief and the birdwrist
lying open to the razor Who knows what hand
passes through the wind Perhaps it's ours
a peninsula clutching at the savage emptiness

A king lies drunk on the mountain The black man
darkest leaf on the blossoming magnolia
A man starves within sight of manna
Whisper it Men fail in communion

And they arrive at the temple of ruins
Footsteps on the polished floor
of a thousandmile corridor
Far from the beginning
Each man alone each waiting for night
to dream the old salvation
But flies are dancing
to the music of dust

Men fail in communion being greater than beasts
Men possess circles and numbers and death
Men are caught

Their fictions are lions
in their stealth caged by their own treachery
Their grasshopping fingers
infest the earth
Even man's innocence deserves prison

Listen, the surf erodes men's sleep
They awake and vanish in the glare
The morning cannot hold them
The earth cannot hold them
Only the sea contains their echoes
Only a man's wrist contains the sea

N.Y.: Graveyard of the Iroquois

There is this to swear by
 a river
in places purely still
 waiting
 mirrors to substantiate
a final hope of order
 But it's upper New York
 and the Iroquois
 are dead
The trees grow out of their graves
slender memorials along the highway
which is
 accompanied also by the river

I am going to a name on the map
 Delicate trees
 ptimevally green and nascent

Among long-disembodied Iroquois
I hasten to amend
 as I can
(tall-necked bouquets
 on either side
 my private quarrels

The Ball

There he is my manic neighbor
who bounces his ball
upon the ground
against the wall
or shuffles it
 from hand to hand
in that same corner of his yard
where I can
 see him

 It's Sunday
 a day for love
The ball monotonously
kisses the wall
He's casual about it
to conceal his intense absorption
Maybe he's counting the bounces

He caresses the ball
 It's Sunday

I am in my room
watching him

The trees are
out of bloom

A night of fog
has drenched the grass

Is it for me
whoever I am
this courtship
 across a distance

Man with a Drill

His back vibrates
back to the sun
flesh of sand
polished by sweat

his hands hold tight
to the bucking stallion
riding it
into the ground
a few black hairs
on his back
and the backs of his arms

muscles hardening
as his horse opens ground

fear of this hole

where's the horse taking him

his warm skin

hands angry
pushing down
hard

At the Bus Stop

No one knows her

A woman weeping

7 a.m. bus stop
streetlamps dowsed
by oncoming morning

A woman weeping

Someone speaks to her
someone says who are you

We look about us at the morning
inhale its grass and trees
run our hands across its mountains

A few automobiles
slowly pass
a patrolcar smiles at us

Who are you

Under our feet
maroon rivulets flow through sewers
sharp green foliage
thistles and briars
converge in small islands
opposing the flow

they struggle

they are beasts

under us

A woman on a bench
weeping

buses come and go

What should we do

It is the bluest
most transparent of days

Goddess in the Neighborhood

Her fingers smell of lime
In the outdoor basin
 goldfish repeat their glidings
 interminably without sound

Birds alight fly off
Grass is available
The goddess of quiet Sundays
 escapes her clothes

 to seize her image
 in the fish-laden pool
No blemishes there
 sees no hair in her armpits
 one breast is

 round as the other
White and weightless imprint
of body on water she is
 frozen in love
 satisfied...

Behind the Fence / Smashing of a Dried Leaf

SMASHING OF A DRIED LEAF

Who is it

Someone's breathing
destroys the image

frightens the birds of her limbs
She scatters into human nakedness
 heart spurting
 through leaves and petals
 fallen limbs
pursued by incubi of sunlight
back to her house
swamp of quiet pastel mosquitoes

Fine Words

Now yesterday's fine words are uninhabited
The door is locked bats
fly in and out the broken windows

When we speak it is out
of our selves' solitary desires
and the words are not fine

Artfully we claw at each other
try to rip out the grandmother
who lives with us like an echo

Afterwards we return to walk
through the garden
and remember
the fine impermanent words

And again love is an infant
to protect at all costs though
we are angry at its parents

The Quiet Harbor

Occasionally the quiet harbor
boats roosting on the water

standing on gashed wood
looking down

or knees drawn up /enclosed by arms
ensconsed in a cup of sand and stone
that inclines toward the water

Front porch to the sea
watching gulls swoop
glide

the blood itself a sea
contained immobile
in its vastness

a way to grow old
no human desire anywhere

Of Time and Place

A blue pelican coriverses
with an Egyptian lady
on my wall A crowd outside
gathers to watch a

man's hairline recede

(My neighborhood needs a vacation)

Lately I've noticed
cigarillo stubs
in my ashtray (made in Korea)
and remember a jug
designed on an Aztec theme
Quietude is my house

a mass of old sunlight
Pursued by my neighbors'
armed rooftops / tomorrow
tomorrow's pale mountains

A Man Preserved in Stone

Habitue of shadows the man in purple robes
for whom secrecy is a palace whose only subject is himself
who wants his problems thinned his rough edges clipped
who wants to be watered like a lawn
He is climbing the mountain
by Erector Set complete with printed compass
Or you will often find him in the park
gathering the rust of sunflowers speaking to a mallard
copying the patterns of the water
Scan him closely He is a man preserved in stone
in the frieze of his fear he is a reservoir of desire
Once he bursts your warning finger will not stop him
There is no telling how much of the world
he will translate into love There is no telling
how many mornings will riot how many stars vanish
how many women bend until he is safely himself again
But then in that resurrection
he will rule as the grass rules the earth

The Old Wound

A trip across the heavens fills
the poorest man's pocket You stand
by the window / the sunweighted breeze
sends you a grass bouquet
and your breath opens its petals

Even cosmopolites have simple eyes
small enough to snare
a lizard
to follow
a cloud

The sparrow ascends:
you are so light the frailest
branch will hold you

From the blue hills next door
mandolin and flute
and the earth
stuffed with birdcalls
embraces you like a friend
What you feel is an old wound

reviving

God in His tomb
still struggling toward birth

October When the Sun

October when the sun
weighs hardly anything
the sea cool ballast
some gulls flying over us
crying like babies

Northward

the whitening hills Five
and the sands are almost snow
From my heart a red sail sets out
to alarm that sea

All the Stations Are Dark

Subwaying under poppies
I ride the crisis
through stone
In the breakneck tomb
light is splinters
and the walls
too swift

The tunnel's lens is blue
or red or yellow
as I will
There is no object beyond
(Above
the leaves arrive
and depart on schedule)

Only
from time to time
through the black roof behind
I hear the music box play
'The Beautiful Blue Danube'
And hear
or perhaps imagine
my pulse ticking the order
of a new sun

My Eyes

My eyes are insects
that live a day or two
at a time
My eyes have burned too long
in their dark cafe
When they emerge
the sunlight is
a flood

My eyes of cotton
absorb the moment's blood
like a secret
not to be opened
in the acid air
My eyes wrap their gifts
in bandages

Two eyes two cold coffees
imagine all the dead bodies
that have fallen into them

A hand whose fingers
are poinsettias
a vain hand
tempts my eyes
with red birds
in the winter
in the frozen rhythm
the waiting

Legwatchers clockrobbers
pigeons on the sexual grass

At crucial times
my eyes
have run out of film

Camellias & Daffodils

Daffodils and camellias
are on show
in the Descanso Gardens
Spring / warm sliver
in the cold hand

Daffodils and camellias in the garden

‘Accept it’ his dream says
where he stands on sun-embalmed ground
stands and listens
‘Your name is a row of trees
spring the holy land of your heart’

Behind him
bird-bitten apricots
behind him
the blackened fields

He is lonely with listening to words
trying to push through their pods
and flower into telegrams

Spring is here
formed and ready

Listen
among the trees buzzing like old men
the contrapuntal measure:
his own pulse
erupts from silence
Before him the voice
singing high above the human ear

Is it spring, then

His lips move with a dog’s deliberate humor
in stretching itself
The naming breaks through his skin:

Camellias & Daffodils

Pascal

No Pascal

the silence doesn't

frighten us

We're not listening

The Separation

Reluctant
to continue intimate
discourse with himself
weary of the long siege
fearing to plagiarize
 the work he began and finished
 yesterday
 months ago
he stops reading poetry
Sometimes a good line
 can hurt you

It's rarely now
he wants the conflict
of another presence
 someone who'll take half his self
and return him half an enemy
 This has happened
since he moved away
from the secret lodgings of his heart
after he refused
 to spy any more

He scans the city's face
with goodhumored disinterest
It's easier alone
 to walk without the need to explain
 or offer the self
 which
 it might be
is second rate

He will bless
the birds and fish
fastidious in their discipline
He will bless
rocks which are solid and hard
 and remain

For the flesh itself
 he'll keep a notebook

His apartment has a terrace
overlooking the ocean

These days he reads
novels which also concern
fictitious people

Structure & Meaning

He asks for structure
 meaning in the pattern
 of your hoofbeats
 on this tough earth

The wind has swept you
 out of your corner
you are swirling
 across the city

Each line of your face
is a painting superimposed
 on older oils
 whose clouds remain

Why does he tell you
to rely on chessboards
 It hasn't happened
that way / your life

rose years ago from
asphalt battlefields
 hardly brave enough
 to pick a flower

You want to wrap
 your wounds around
 a peacock / The carillon
of its feathers

is the faith of your church
 Your flanks are sweating
 but your wings are light
 You're on your way

Those Years We Were Together

Drops of a xylophone resound in a cave
the small suns of his name
falling into night

Those years we were together
he offered me his name eagerly
with all its ribbons and rust
its raw nobility its helium and flecks of blue
He said 'Now we're two streams meeting in one river
We'll sit in a dim light and trade visions
like old storytellers Between us
a feather will be enough'
How could I admit such equality?
I tell you my knees were too smooth
my blood too purple! My eyes looked down
and saw his gift lurching in the streets
his love in perpetual safari
his aimless love
trying to assassinate me

Now somewhere he may be drinking his name
into the sea

my friend
that enormous ship
towed by a carp

The Muse of the Times

This music is two needles knitting
it is a wasp shearing through cloth
angry eyes of a cat
darting about in the pitchblack sky
One cannot listen too long
or the sound will shrivel the skin This music
is the edge of a cliff
Should you survive the frenzied blood
that plunges through our veins
should you listen swiftly enough
and clearly enough to the waves
of this revolution you will occupy it
with cannon You must be agile and guileless
a bird poised to fly into bright red thunder
to sing though your skull is an earthquake

King of Daydreams

Dawn surmounts the farm the bull
still dozing balls a waterland of
pink fish and lotus leaves

constant motion
 absorbed in expectancy

 Beside the cow
fingers pumping there's a sweetness
without voice in her act
It can't be preserved her gentle
touch it's she
unsuspecting

 A Renoir morality
While flies goad the bull's ear
and sun grows heavy on his back
He calls 'O playmate
O red forest!'
His blind artillery
 menaces the farm
He wouldn't hesitate

Though the sun
 his balls
offers
have thoughts of their own

 It spills
The milkmaid turns rancid
Her smell too original
for love

 Darkness opens his eyes
Nothing has changed

The Party

There in the corner

two wounds

are bleeding quietly
to each other

In the center
of the room the talk

is tictactoe.

always ending
in a tie

A joke cracks open
the eggplant night
and it splatters
everybody's face

A virgin

thinks it's turd
and screams

A bombardment of owls
silenced only by the first
cymbals of moon clattering
the pool

The bodies compose
a sonata
by Karlheinz Stockhausen

Inside

the wounds
have trickled under the sofa
and will remain there
in dust and darkness

scabs for tomorrow's
cleanup lady

Elsewhere kisses melt
in glasses

Love swims in milky puddles

The clock snores

The DeKooning on the wall
tries to utter a human cry

Upstairs

a tiger prowls the rooms
and soon will cross the border

The Firefly

That night explosion of a pineapple
sweet-sour flames in which we danced
while the orchestra played chrysanthemums
I remember the luxurious faces at the tables
the glamor of their words which I did not hear
the scent of their unseen eyes
And then the piano frightened itself
and fled into the thicket of lights

stuffed with dolls

Glossy one
I held you with all the passion of a child
I remember the curl of your blonde wig
reaching out to me tenderly
But when I tried to kiss that luminous worm
it flew away toward a derelict building

What a black house I bought! A house of charcoal
standing on its hillside
like a fragment of the Circus Maximus
It hurts my fingers with its blackness
and throws the acid of dead flowers in my eyes
this monkey this whitehaired penitentiary

Burlesque Show

A ship on the exploding lake
in its hull the cargoes of our forgotten loves:
sequences of flight and remorse
The flesh laughs at us

A garden lit by the moon
in which a deer startles the flowers
and they run away:
nothing left of the middle-aged armor
Well I'm a stranger a black Pluto in a milky sky
I'm a closet stuffed with old clothes
I'm waiting for spring to come up from the cellar
with its golden deck, motor of seaweed and plankton
I want to be opened like a melon and eaten by the sun
But the flesh laughs at me

You sitting with me here in the center of the stage
we are being tested for lies self-deceits:
around us the almanac of our defeats dances
caressing us with hands of dandelion
We're newspapers caught on the wind

paralyzed

and our red headlines weep red tears
How long can we sit here under water
waiting for the miraculous ship
Fools go home if you have one
for the flesh laughs at us

Tomorrow I'll get up early and exercise
fitness of the body to receive its inspiration
which may come haphazard as a glance
turning cartwheels or relaxing on a cloud
I'm tired of aiming my flashlight at the sky
pretending I have a badge and know my way around
I'm tired of murdering the sunsets
with daydreams with laziness with fierce onanistic orgies
Tomorrow I'll exercise
though the flesh laugh at me

New York

Seen through the asphalt hide of an elephant
the haze of lights the doze on the roof of July
my childhood city is a guilt and pleasure
not quite silenced even today

Lovers parted by the lake
between them the swan with its sentinel neck
marching back and forth

Jewish faces
his a clerk hers a bookkeeper. They will never cross the lake
where the black swan is Pharaoh a dreamer
of dominion And the water through the reeds
is jade and cruel

I am the clerk
who sips the grass as if it were a woman's body

In the hot yellow sky thick as stucco
the starched wings of the birds barely move

Central Park / a legend I remember only
the humid lips of the day lips of grey wax

At night the militia of candles
bayonets in the hands of meek old Jewish men
They patrol the unlimited heaven of the past
they are the planet to which no light returns
a law whose robes have fallen off

City of tall buildings pictures in a school book
whose pages break like November leaves
Infant city held in the cardboard arms of actors
whose lovemaking was a whisper in a play
and which I hear still in the archives of my loves
whispers of women for whom the clerk is waiting in the trench
at the other side of the water

The Builder of Clouds

..in which the builder of clouds elopes with the seawind
to live among mermaids first saint of a new freedom:
aviator of words who flies into the cold astronomy
to possess it like a child its mother
builder of avatars in the desert of myths whose shoots
he plucks from the borders between stones
long walls older than Ilium
before the gospels of memory

...in which the builder of clouds is closest
to anthracite murmurs in the heart of the daily failure
to dusk and daydreams adrift on the horizon
Do you know that death is a microscope
in which we are giants
O build us clouds so that we too
may arrange a pattern for our footsteps to discover

...in which / alone / he weaves a flag for all women
who are the palace on his clouds huge domicile of his lonely
kingship:
in them he lives with the courage of a bawdy knight
in them the angels play upon walls and ceilings
and windows butler a parade of winecups merry-maypole seeds
choruses of birds dancing bouquets sunleaves ribbons of stars
...and always the fragrance of death in robes of orchid
anointed in rain awaited in the cellar of the spirit
unspoken even in clouds
and no man is safe in no woman's darkness
when the lantern of this avalanche shines on the cloudwall
and thunder slips through the brain with the guile of a seduction

Yet how flexible tomorrow is
and how the gratuity of mind and hand wed
the angel to the grave!
Earth a piano marching up and down to the fingers
of the builder who is the general of the clock
who is the filament in the secret harbor of justice
the compassionate mouth of praises wishes
stuck in the throats of even the stupidest men
Earth which is a cloud

a cloud which is a woman
a woman who is the muscle of a man
a man who hides the body of his death
his death which is the Earth
...in which the builder of clouds elopes with the seawind

The Poet on His Lunch Hour

Day to dayness Berries rotting while churchbells
shrink to peanuts Walking at noon through newspapers
through summer conspiracies of bosoms
seeing myself arriving at store windows
looking like hay My plan: to keep moving
through the tarpaulin air that smells
of yesterday's cremation 90 degrees
says Federal Savings & Loan Flick At 12:17

Parlor game: can I avoid recognition
For an hour I would like to be no one
There is the lady with the windmill spinning
in her hat there the old foot-soldier with the billboard
in his throat: 'Repent!' 'Read the Bible!'
These two are almost no one
But I whose eyes button down my collar
who am walking too near my salary
my head in a telephone am almost someone

The sky above Martindale's Books
is a sunflower They must be sick of me here
but open the dogeared pages of their smiles as usual
I come here a horse to its bag of oats
and for a while hide my head in language

Always buildings slowly slyly surrounding my hour
entombing me Coffee among Mongolians
Yet one businesslike hello and no book
may help me any more Better throw pies
at policemen or go chagalling in The Back Room
It may happen too: someone in my personal hour
pronouncing that last chaotic hello
Someday in chalklight the birds too crisp to fly
And lo, I'll be nothing but a black dot
in a perfectly white square completely myself
open and visible to all

DOSTOEVSKY AND OTHER NATURE POEMS

1972

Text from the 1998 reset, collated with the 1972 first edition.

Perfection of Summer Thundershowers

Every afternoon around 4 o'clock the leaves discover a wind
behind the wind a thunderhead emerges from its hiding-place
The rain pellets the heat's thick plate

Afterward, an hour at

most

a few puddles have grown
blue green gold and red
in a few ruddy beds
in alleys on the streets
in craters of grass

The heat surrounds the puddles
they form concentric cycles

You as a man within your shelter
watched the preparation for the rain then the rain itself
For a brief time

while it rained

you were happy

The world you live in had changed for the better

You, a critical

man

had been the rain
as you had been the heat

The rain was perfect and you had lived perfectly
since nothing could have been preferred

to the rain

As a critical man

at the height of the downpour
(though still a nameless well-concealed lodger)

a flaw

had already found a warm spot in your heart

Not that the rain would stop
but that it was perfect

Albuquerque Spleen

On warm nights in late June
at 2 a.m. on warm nights
as you lead the full Albuquerque moon

V

by a leash
the future leaks into your shoes
Your feet are wet
the streets are warm and
dry
There is the moon 'not the white moon of idylls which resembles
a frigid bride' but your own moon with its sound of a single cymbal
brash against the warm air
You have read Baudelaire and agree
that Time doesn't fly
but is a slow flea in Mistress Earth's
perfect ambush
So you flee
Your feet are drunk
tomorrow is already today
it's a wobbling saucer
You tip the moon
it barks at you
at your feet
so porous
the wine rising warming legs and thighs
You believe on those warm nights this elixir is the future
and that it doesn't exist
It's all in your feet
All you're doing is going

Waiting for Godot in Class

So I stood there and said 'As I say this the present is already the past'
Where I
later stood in the classroom corner
moved back to the lectern
stood
before
where I stand now is the present'
is now the past
Time in
motion
from space to space
But I can't stand at the lectern
forever
Beckett would never forgive me
So the
prospect
of the next step
in time
which is the future
I don't know if they who watched me
are still waiting for something to
happen
The sky has shifted several times today but at no time have I observed
that silvery blue sky above a park in Newark at which I am present again
at felicitous moments
for a few seconds
now and then
a merging of all my times from childhood to possible old age
Such a sky I said to them
is more profound to me
than a
signed contract
I still don't know what I meant
other than the meaning
which demands no promises
That same sky may favor me again
I won't watch for it

toward it

nor impossibly move

My next step was to say “The class has concluded

I have

nothing more to say until

tomorrow’

The Mask of Marcel Duchamp

The Nude has descended the staircase
where the carpeted floor
is absent
there is only a face in the wind
a device
engineered to cover the void of ground
to entice the Nude from her bedroom
There is wind
and a face grinding its teeth
where She would stand
under normal skies
The Nude flies downward
nowhere else to go no other mind
to go there
She should have stayed upstairs
have given
in her bedroom
her bodies to faceless paramours
should have screwed on all fours
It's all the same though
a game
Because of the abyss downstairs there is no guarantee of a place upstairs
there is no reason to
suppose
where a Nude could hang her clothes on
the wind is softer there than anywhere
Around the staircase
is purely air
The face below is also above
grinning at the merest mechanics of love
With its malleable its tortured smile
with precise invisible hands
it probably gave
the Nude one final shove

Hypnos Waking Knocks at the Door

Candle of the dozen woods
another year flattens its face against the glass
Reading the poems of René Char
what is there
you do not understand?
Simply the
rhetoric
of this very
question
As the small blaze of each arrival
snuffs itself out in your house
what amazement each hour invites
how short your breath
how long a distance to the next survival
And that is how you receive your guests
with a longing
not to be
trampled by the shy poems of their love

The Moth

As Your hand holds the feverish moth
 what glow of energy compels its wings to strike
 with all their strength
 out of their darkness
 a drop of sweat on Your brow
The Amazon
 oceans trickle through Your fingers as You refresh Yourself
 in the morning of every millennium
 Our planet is a blue apple
 in Your orchard
 The zephyrs roam
 through space
 gently shaking the stars
 that are all
 plums and apricots
 Your hand releases its captive
the moth flies freely toward its own enlightenment
 and its own
 good night
These words are my first to love Your absence God
and I shall never diminish You with praise again
 You Who are
 perfect
 Who have opened Your hand
 and allowed all the power there is
 to lose
 itself
 among Earth's creatures
 foolishly
we who still
 cluster about its radiance

The Procession

On a white anthill
spring's first iris

How does an iris love?

With its thin curling ears
with its purple drooping ears

The Chinese elm in the yard is dying

on warped crutches
How does
it die?

On a mound of leprosy
a fever of the skin

The sun goes down leaving a bitter aftertaste

it has fallen away
the air a dull blue aftermath

You had expected much today
from this carnal fruit superbly conditioned to endure
How will the sun manage to climb again to arrive at noon again
while you sit on a pile of frozen snow

dozing
dreaming of one more
warmth?

Tomorrow you reach out
something reluctant scrapes your fingers
it tastes like red hair

it is almost visible / a white grain of sand in a red anthill
It sticks in your eye until you see finally a crystalline female form
and go blind with love

or will drown in the socket?

You are as foolish as the sun

The Nature of My Sexual Problem

Wind, you are a
member
of my body
the breath itself
Mountains, you are my face
Rivers, my blood
Earth, my skin
Sun, you are my eyes
Without the thunder I cannot hear
Without the doorknob there is nothing to touch
The savor of rainbows is in my mouth
There is nothing outside of me that is not within me
I travel day after day across the world
to open one woman's
eyelids
When she sees me
I see myself
Then dream myself to sleep again
back in my hovel
Always the feathers of some woman's love
drifting drifting
through the sky
which is
my heart
I see myself continually reaching for one blue feather
to kiss it forever
The sky so huge, my heart so small

Still Life with Pear and Old Man

For the absence of love, a slightly rouged pear

An old man lies in wait for you

he is there in the penny arcade

cranking a vintage burlesque show

he is wild as 10 peyote buttons

his head's an opera of sex

soprano and basso profundo in one

If you offer him a bottle of whale oil

will he accept it gratefully?

You think you will retrace your

steps

Somewhere there must be that Mexican plaza where your daughter in her stroller

held a red balloon in her hand

Your wife was wheeling the stroller

You hadn't thought of bottled memory then

the old man too

was so far in the

background

you couldn't see him with a microscope

Your wife still loves you in her LA letters

Those faded mirrors: you look like the Sandia Mountains 10 minutes after

they have outgrown the big orange balloon

Such times are the settling wings of an eagle

such silence is friendly

and absence the applause of the universe

Send a bouquet to anyone

while the old geezer gets dizzy

riding his ambush

outside the moment's limits

Dawn Vision: Hot & Cool

bones A few
stones a few
Rio Grande dry again
avenue of mud through the middle of Albuquerque
sky immured
in its rented cradle
An Indian has opened his Mexican eyes
it is morning
a green
vehicle drifts
in the distance
in dilatory passage via a
frontage road
Burnt-out wind
a few bones
a few stones
The mind is an anvil the blows are heavy
Black Indian bronze Jew
no others
will do
Four years rocking to and fro across the dead duke's city
and still the deep maroon chiles
dangling in clusters by doorways
are creatures of a song
whose seeds are bitter
are strong
Slag-black earth
the orchards are few
The mind is a fragment of desert
where all detritus is baked anew
Always the Jew's Mosaic daydream in a clay or stone
the blue-skinned messenger is on his way

Friday Afternoon May 29 1970

In this late afternoon of a quiet village the sun barely resembles
Van Gogh

Hard to believe the devil dwells there

smoking

his red cigar

the smoke-rings demolishing entire theologies

He is there though

we dare not be deceived

It is his fire

devours the elm leaves

and penetrates the closed eyelids with an orange potion
so we are tempted to sleep as if deep in the belly of love

Van Gogh saw him saw Blake's angels

contorted squirming

long worms and small ones in the blazing pit

a pot of stewing entrails amazed by their own beauty
within the motion of their tortured days in heaven

on earth

Almost evening

the gnats that dance above the grass
stay in the dodging sunlight as long as they can

Dostoevsky

When the river shines
those nights of green translucent bones
the bearded man fishes for stars

He groans in this labor
which takes all his strength What is hidden beneath the waters:
a substance of moths

The stars slip away
steadfastly
no hook of light so pure
it can hold fast to the steady flow

The man's eyes / ecstatic beams
fasten onto the golden mean of transmutation
To still the slippery bones
no other weapon burns with such energy
it is the tongue he must use
green smoke tears into his eyes

Sweating he sips the river
Night after night he fishes for stars
his tongue a coal a small orange curve among
the gleaming green darts that resist in darkness

and still resist
until at last and then again he catches one

It is a secret he cannot part from
who spent his life learning it
The bones of the river are his stars
they are ashes in his brain

He is the icon the cauldron to whom we kneel in our bones
beloved God beloved original of sin
who knows how to stab himself to the heart
with his baited crosier

Of you who withheld yourself in your later years
from the imprecisions of health

who clung spiderlike to your
soundless room
at 102 Boulevard Haussmann
breathing through gauze
fighting
the war
against life as you fought it against
death
of you Marcel I write most surely

in this installment on nature

Your allergy to flowers to all
fragrances
your surreal asthma
the stony requiem of your Time Regained
lead me precisely toward the groping delusions of my dying elms
as they stand in sunlight
and my stand for years there, chalky-faced
leaves returning season after season
my elms lovely in dying

You Marcel, 50 years without a word, return to me
sickly in passion, fawning like Rilke in your letters, a liar
in all the truth you knew by heart

How pleasant never to have known you
so I can admire the music of your wheezing lungs
in the long weaving sentences you wrote
in the same breath as I observed yesterday
the golden-breasted bird who glided from branch to branch
in my elms
then swooped down to stutter in the grass
its brief, almost personal, salutation
before it flew out of sight

THE MYSTIC WRITING-PAD

1977

Vision

I looked transparency in the eye
and saw there the next transparency
succeeded by the next
and so on

I looked a black wall in the eye
and saw a black wall

Never stop and never go

Two eyes exactly alike

Code

You begin with absolute opacity
a figure of night
all-enclosing night
against which no being can budge
even the smallest fraction of time
This, a Western thought
to posit so what did not
and never could

exist
You have supposed what is not
and from this impossible origin
there appears the naked form that crawls
toward you through a pinhole

It has been warm these last weeks
an early spring the apricot blossoms have appeared
the bermuda grass half green
The cold air of the upper atmosphere
clashes with Earth's gathering clemency
and there are irregular sequences of wind
The usual process, somewhat sooner apparent
We are accustomed and accept
Soon the earth will need its rain

Relaxed, the man in his lazy labor blossoms
in the cradle of order Sun moon and stars
spray him with a fine sprinkle
of light 1

He is no more than grass

In coils, the green hose
is the snake he knows how to use
The fountain sways within the currents of air
The man possesses his natural coat

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The Mouth

Inside my mouth the brown hide of a bear
the clumsy hustle quick sweep of paw
rip of claws It's an awkward tool to cut out
holes in space By the time I'm done for the day
there is often no sanctuary for my head
only enough carved for a single eye
and then it's winter a need to close my mouth
whispers, saliva This rugged fur enclosed
within a membrane thin as those ghosts
that were exhaled, raw, into icier winds than anyone
now even wanly remembers My bear
trapped inside a thicket of maplesap, rumbles
thrashes about A fresh warmth coats his heart
Today the sun is exactly the size
of the moon Bear licks his paw
and my mouth covets the forest of honey

A movement of lips I savor what the sun
has brought Just a speck of sweet dust
The heaviness, a thick mass, lumbers into my throat
and sticks to the walls The honey is frozen
Bear yawns What can the tongue see now?

Over and over, the cold sleep

On the Ground

You advance ever closer
on hands and knees the gurgle
the primal drool You're at it again
rubbing your lips into the rug
to taste green wool red wool gold wool
dust of numberless footsteps
the heaviness of sunmotes
that lay down at last to rest

The flesh absorbs
all inquiry is in its trust
stratum and priest of the Black Forest
the crystalline lake

Wallow roughly in wellsprings
let mud seep through
your noseholes

sneeze out
smell those bones

the boogie-men
vanished even from Earth's bowels
swallow those cries
that cracked once lonely ice
ecstatic groans little more
than sprouting animals

On your knees you little prick
when you philosophize
When you part the lips
praise the snail
Make love on your knees
to God's Jap dragon
tattooed green red and gold onto
the carpet-grail Suck up the dust
clean it all up Culture
is on the ground, all ways the ground

White Painted Woman

for me to sing
to White Painted Woman
useless
my female principle:
to sing to myself
uselessly
not prayer
but woman:
to me, as the wind
useless
no Chiricahua
I can't be
I have no horse
plant no corn
no one who
resembles White Painted Woman
lives in my house
I am not
smoking pot
in the Apache wickiup
I eat steak
and potatoes
what would
the woman
say to that?
what can help me
become more womanly?
no antelope strays
into my garden
to starve
I don't despair
that nothing I say
is heard by White Painted Woman
I'm partly a man
and as Earth spins
so do I
in harmony
with such power

as spins
weaves knits embroiders
shapes pots from clay
makes
even so momentary
a song
 of use

O

...who came out of Egypt, the picture book
though bison, musk-ox, unicorn were there before,
their hides and horns craving us, our hands
to carve them into those hollows, almost pitchblack hollows
where we heard them bellowing, our ears
our shells, through which we heard, as a music
out of an old cave-in, the tumult of cascading rock
then the settling of hard bodies into brown fur
formed into cloudbknife cutting into walls:
the picture, filled in to solidify, earth of herbyde
faded, of course, even when Egypt was still a youth
still with a child's instinct for panorama
for the minute interior of a snail
now, as we see, the rude cartographer of our journey
I, fact of sound, which must be seen
through sound
as guide of the tooth, as god of heart
to be discovered, later, as just an animal
with a story to tell; out of Egypt
the trial-record, crib, crypt and wedding feast
the documents, that man behind the sun
that stranger who brushes against our thigh
whom we now know better, now that he has gone
into retreat, to think in his hermit-hut
of all those virgins he has left in our keeping
and soldiers dead in the sun—all of it hallowed,
strawberries wild in the fields, the packaged hay
the Carmelite down to his final claim on Earth
who says to no one at all what no one can hear
perhaps a vowel, no more, let us call it 'O'
for its circumference, within which the dog on his leash,
tight around the post, growls eagerly to himself
and travels everywhere...

We, outside, have learned to value innocent mountains (which, being there obstruct our travel) as much as highways

which lead us on
the white lines the yellow lines
toward the next stop
Clear thought loves the mountains, yes
and every inarable acre

Vines

Vines with clusters of white buds nudge each other
warp around one another within our bodies These vines
are ligaments of sleep They are green with white buds
and in the sunlight are still and patient whatever life
- they have is looming around their simple discipline:
to touch lightly to rub quietly to coil about as the sunlight
reaches in to them within our bodies We are spoken to
the vines speak and say no words it is their tongues
we hear subtle vibrations of the buds no more
than sprigs of whiteness floating down our arms and legs
Our blood billows in this languor as if to set sail
across unforeseeable seas The whiteness of sleep
which these vines sprout forth is also tied
to our bodies ready to lift us from our leaden stopping-place
loft us upward we are but a breath away from flying
The secret of our vines is helium they are filaments
of helium Our bodies moor them so firmly to the ground
they avenge themselves on us sigh into us their heavy petals
their curvatures a silky music three slow notes
that repeat themselves monotonously in, out, around in, out, around
That is all we can hear in, out, around The vines within us
surround us We observe them ceaselessly even as they
embrace us caressing, wooing It is easy to swoon
as lovers are said to do The white buds smell of honey
of apples of lumber their fragrances exhaust our senses
We who could fly as quickly as breathe hands bound for love
behind our backs feet racing to the moon in hardcaked ice
Vines nudge each other warp around one another
say 'sleep, sleep' We open our eyes to the darkness within
The stars hang firmly down from their sky If we caught one
its skin would be pocky, cool and lightly green it would break
as our teeth and nails dug in Our body in air
sucked out of its immobile cloud / suckled into
the lime-orchard, green and swift: sea without waves

Beginnings & Conjugations

Though no Beginning exist, there are beginnings
as when the scream engenders
a new blood There is flamboyance
in the born obligation to form a taste
for the staleness of roses

The nest of art cheaply made
though the wings articulate an icepick summer
chipping at expanses of gross weather
As we fly from blind fact
we emerge into dirtier waters,
the body hooked to its own weight
which, at the crest of its beat, is light
and musical

Always it's the song
we fish from the dead always a singular
flex of the bone, performed in liquid space,
without breaking

How we learn
is what we learn, arranged in such flight
as weaves within and out of the opaque,
aware of song in the soundless host
Of Silence there is no more definition
than of Source

We have within us
our bodies and these glow like stars
distant from us in our pastoral night We expand
toward that glow and ask for no gravediggers
to fill up with earth the unsaid

But a moment then
to release ourselves from song, to leave
the roses nesting in whatever forest
adjoins our lives

The Present Is Timeless & Vice-Versa

When the moment steals
the watch from your wrist
what you have done before
is lost, what you will do
forgotten

 This moment is water
and you lave yourself
in its darkest fathoms
You see only the water
Your eyes are crystalline
You love yourself
without limit

 in this moment
which has its walls
its floor and ceiling
Sooner or later
you remember something
It's always sad

Later you'll remember
this moment It also will be sad
How you loved yourself then
and not quite now

When another moment steals
the watch from your wrist
and you swim for your life
the 'now' is absent
Your life is in the sun
No shadow clings to it

 Later when you observe again
 the shadow of yourself
 you are no longer
 here

 This moment
was stolen from you,
as always

 You are sad to be
worth no more

than the watch on your wrist
You are sad to be
the shadow of yourself
whom you love, the shadow-lover
you who are able
to doze within the sun
though briefly
and without notice

Before & After

Bleached apples in some unvisited corner
a mouth stuffed with candles
in the atmosphere of closets
This might be the before
of the after we search for with pirates' curses
in the lesion between signal and response
'What comes next?' we ask in all gravity
as if chronology were a symposium
in which all events and all wishes
participated

So the human vanishes
in superlative enumerations of wheat and corn
in the sentence belonging to seacoasts
and the beyond that interlaces our metronome

Origin has spent itself self-indulgently
not a nickel left in the bank
all wires
were cut, the lights are out Mother has entered
that house from which formaldehyde vapor issues
through the vents between bricks Father
has clothed himself in a heavy chair
where he awaits the seclusion of a canary

No use describing the electric clock
which keeps its own score and has nothing to do
with what came before If you allow
the mousetrap to speak for itself
you will hear the grunt
of a bear If you visit the junkshop
where they sell guillotines and midnight seductions
everything will be priced too high

Those white apples you have saved
in your typewriter taste cool, their blue meat
is as good as a swim That's all God
can say about equity and the grand design
All of us wobble as the Earth
clears its throat and when we
tug at the pulley we are answered

by the snoring of owls

PULSAR

The forever of dead stars
swarms, tides
pulsing through opaque space tempo, sound
We place a stethoscope to Cosmic body
and hear these signals their impossible mass
the universe a Bach score, each note
weighing 50 million tons, the counterpause
perhaps even more

One star in the small galaxy
designated NGC 5253 is Kowal's supernova
60 billion billion miles from Earth

It is now flowering
(May 26 1972) as the nuclear bomb does
consuming its entire system of hydrogen and helium so brightly
it obscures everything else in its world
The finale, only a few weeks to cross the star
wilted, dried of all radiance soon the funeral march
forever the signal, forever the pause

Is it dead if it shines no more
though we hear it?

Is Bach dead?
Their life, I think, is immanent hair
the hair of their light growing in the grave

As Hares Nibble at Young Cherry Trees

Between the air and the white spaniels
as also the spruce

there is little to square
in this laundry getting clean
How within and outwith the boundary labors
so Eiseley's Split where one is seen
in another language loud with names
never silenced before Lauds, then
for the archangel of summer snow
and honor to the chapel fallen
below the earth

Of time we have enough
never had so much truth not since
the last letter from Pleistocene
Crap on that woolly log, System
Opt for the better view

that which is
both fabulous and on cue

Polanyi
you shithead, when Bukharin farted in your face
he learned how to die head-on
though you, lovely cockroach, possess
grace, thought's quick pace
and money left over for another crash

The spruce are white now, the spaniels
Small enough accomplishment
green

the less done
for an hour at Easy Wash

Lauds
the more intent remains
for Equatorial Africa and the chimneys
of Spain

Out of all this organized
slaughter surely one line is worth
believing A human arm
dangles from the surprised clock

whose alarm has left for the day

Waterlog

An alliance of rivers just east of Joplin Missouri
where a navy is being constructed

All believers

are asked to sign letters of intent
allowing themselves to be shanghaied aboard whatever vessel:
yacht barge Yankee Clipper Some would cruise the Ganges
some the Danube some would pitch their bunks
distinctly but distantly on the Mississippi

Various stars

Orion, Betelgeuse, some of the heavy far-out pulsars, etc.
are being invited to attend the launching ceremony
aboard the fleet's flagship King's Rook to Queen's Bishop 3
The opening gambit will be called Fire Island
or Deviled Egg Sandwich

something to do, in any case,

with Transformational Grammar

What motivates

this new navy is the privilege of water
which has surpassed all historical limits and markers
(in the middle west of all 83 surviving continents)

and usurped, to everyone's delight, such palaces
as gas stations furniture stores bingo parlors and lesser places
labeled in modest neon lights Good Eats

The admiral

in charge of this operation is Uta-Napishtim
Deucalion is first mate and his mate Pyrrha
is second (or bosom's) mate A fellow devoted unsinningly
to the White House, Noah, directs the shanghaiing
with full authority from the FBI and Teamsters Union
The State of New Mexico cannot participate in this adventure
It is too poor Even during its greatest flood
when Hopi Zuni Navajo and other eschatologies
were observed to wash away (and vanish in the bleeding dusk)
by such competent heroes as Edgar Cayce and Dick Tracy
even then this greatest flood contained less water
than the average popsicle

Without Synthesis

...actually this hasn't happened before If it had
the sequence would be Thud, Thud, Thud, and so forth,
bereft of the comma's silence There would be no
call for the silence we now call for, as for the grave
There would be life lingering in the bourn
of death, life without respite I imagine death as a comma
before the continuation, the phrase fulfilled,
a certain time terminated Whatever ensues
is no business of mine, no more than the gestation
of my 44-year phase I prefer, personally,
a twist of the hand which turns the spigot on,
the water frail, reddish, but steady Later, a torrent,
flashfloods of redbreasts and squealing breastplates,
the total armor intent on devouring my kitchen
The hand can accomplish this, then turn off
the reverie of its own manumission I like to sleep
as if no sleep had prepared me for the silver tone
of waking again Waking, remeasuring of sound,
sound of spring's first flowers and insects
gathering together in communal undertaking
If death is a comma then sleep is a colon
readying the festival of lights, on toward the dimming
of all punctuation When all terror is consumed
taste savors itself, hurtles from the tongue
into some backyard feast for cats, for raccoons and rats
Since this hasn't happened before there is only
this testy pinching of an ashtray, of the doorknob,
an examination I can neither pass nor fail
I hear myself abstracting the muse from a roomful
of objects, an oft-used cloud in the sometimes
daring sky: hardly Icarus though; no sun intrudes
on wings so long dispersed within the sea: mere memory
of a flight our fathers, lightheadedly, undertook
with cheap occult instruments My own trick
is a classic without precedent Like so, slow slogging
and I don't intend to arrive To forestall,
that's the way to stop at precise intervals
and record the omissions of those signs
that paused along the trail This sleep

is my waking Cicadas in chorus hum-&-Hume on
my particular pastel humor wayward, wry and dry,
a sip and the sad fix of the mouth, open
to its dream and, yea, to its doom...

In Memory of My Frank O'Hara

 Your feelings
fetched a low price in that
garage sale The orange-&-pink
bowl-style lampshade with fringes
brought you however a pissoir
in Paris You had never liked
that shade nor its lampbase
(a female nude molded
in white plastic front and rear)
The pissoir is blue with a live teenager
in its north window

 Your feelings
were barely decent enough to cover
 They were the texture
your skin
of dirty gardenias They smelled like
frogs on a humid summer night
when the air is locked into
a bedroom

 Your feelings
lacked Rudolph Valentino They were
too dogeared to suffer all those
pedestrian crosswalks, always got hit
 The price
by kids on tricycles
for your feelings was a paper airplane
which won't fly more than 10 feet
above smoke level

 You don't regret
the sale You are lying on a waterbed
in your bedroom, lofted in
reverie The garage was sold too
You invent one feeling
then another and so on Each one
is stored away in the holds of air
You lazily search the classifieds
for another garage

Some Banal Colors of America

This one gull, America, in the total harbor
statue in the water, scarecrow in the ground, ageless
with all ages, remembered and forgotten,
America, still green as its promises, and already
too black, too soft, too black...

‘a live coal that is black’; America’s blackman blues
which, if I could touch it, would scorch my bones
until I too was transfigured into actual thought

For the Spanish word of America I lapse into books
where the sounds are horizontal, and I lie down,
my face in the anthill, so when I awake
from such sleep as covers the land’s legends,
like an Indian haze, I shall be converted to that religion
whose pope is a blind sundial

To walk in the furnace
of this apple that glows palely in the sunlight,
redly succulent, weakens me until I am sad
to feel so weak, sad even to be a jew
even with those six million yellow skulls
hung so recently on my Tree of Life sad to have suffered
privately what should have been a blizzard of ashes
from Atlantic to Pacific

To the legions of America
whose white helmets, naively and carelessly,
flatten the Rockies and the Ozarks, whose chalky tongues
crack open all the peaches of Georgia, I can only report,
in whispers, of unusual flags stitched with streams,
molten in the sun, running through baskets of leaves
or with old flintlocks afloat like fish in a light green sky
flags whose anthem is a song that salivates
and breathes like mountains predating man
and his provender of music

To America, my personal origin,
which I recognize as a swatch of cloth,
a flutter in the lilac hours
a place to be, among other places, America of the people
in fluid crisis, sensual crisis, I pledge my black holidays:
to plant them in the water, in the scarlet earth

May they rage like hardy weeds underground, in the granaries
where Americans store their hardly-worked hearts

Drinking in the Lux

It was beer and tequila
 two long nights
at the Lux
as we argued with Dante Alighieri
about the propriety of light
at the bottom of volcanoes he contending
there was no circle for such light:
a mere moon in a watery eyelid

The children of Juarez are hideous
their eyes are beasts
 hungry so young
they quiver in the entrails of tourists
who rarely know they've been so sneakily struck

Beatrice was Rosario the first night
Teresa the second Rosario drank
orange juice but Teresa drank beer
Rosario was worth \$10 but Teresa
only nine Teresa insulted Gloria
in the middle of Gloria's grinding ass
Rosario was not there the second night
It was a student Antonio who
introduced us to both Dante was there
looking for Beatrice too, there at the Lux
He said there was no light in basements
We said in America there existed
flashlights He hadn't heard of them
but said in basements dark was the proper motive

The children of Juarez sell
American cigarettes to Americans
They are hideous not to be trusted
Two long nights quickly spent
to our last few dollars Dante said
he was in exile from the sun
We noted it was night in any case He said
we were all in exile We began
to wonder Teresa said he was a creep in Mexican
We smoked all the cigarettes Steve had bought

from the children of Juarez
Dante said the lighted tip of a cigarette
reminded him of Mount Etna
Old nostalgic divinity student, I thought
Next thing hell be bawling
in memory of Benito Mussolini

The children of Juarez are minefields
I must remember to step around them
on tiptoe

 If I should touch one
I'd fly apart

All that drinking in the Lux
the dollars spent This was
the bottom of something

 : the light
of something We were dimmed and doused
two nights in a row Only Dante
was clear As we walked to our hotel
I said, 'Observe the celestial affluence'
while pointing to the ground
A lady named Beatrice halted
as we passed 'Can't you guys
walk straight?' 'The light of Dante
is blinding us, Steve said "More likely
it's the dark,' said Beatrice who was in her 40's
accompanied by three male adults

 We flew to the Hotel San Antonio
like falling stars

 that last night
glad the children of Juarez were all asleep

Stopping at the Ramada Inn in Kingman, Arizona

Whenever, these days, I go to California by car
I pause overnight at the Ramada Inn
in Kingman, Arizona There the carpets are not of wool
so I don't wake up with a headache The corpses are the same
the ones I'm used to Their faces are greeny yellow
as the camera pays and plays But corpses still
Not much change in their position, even in Kingman
A man named Dave Nichols, I think, from Phoenix
is their local representative Corpses too
need their livewire man Believe me, I'm sold
on the whole fantasy, every scale-inch of it

The room in the Ramada is obtrusively clean
glasses wrapped in paper, instant coffee if I want it
and no headache in the morning

I have faith
Precisely dead

in those corpses, that they exist

I like that

as Dave Nichols softsells them
His own face yellowy green, not like Earthmen's: blue
A true vicar of the awesome dead I feel comfortable
in colorful Kingman In the Ramada Among my neighbors

Letters

Distantly, it is too late for death
and too soon for love The dates
of these affairs have been mislaid
Fire and ice, roped together,
our names are smoke in the wind

Distantly, why trouble to notice
that whenever I question myself
you answer We are the same rope
looped in a knot already slippery
with age

Distantly, you still complain
and I complain
that you love me
and you complain So distantly
it is the morning of the day
For all your wandering
after tomorrow
through allegorical romance, for all
your frayed ends and the blue eyes
of your candles, I breathe a homeland
which you can't hear and which I
am too breathless
to catch up with

Going Ape

Ape shambles more slowly now
and less often Ape drinks papaya juice
and wanders listlessly through the garden
of lapidary suns Ape proposes a cruise
by motorboat down the Lilliput River
He is a stricken animal
wart-brained, heart dark in cloudburst

His voice is the 'white strawberry
that grows completely in the wild'
deep in the woods where the innocent
His voice
would not notice its presence
does not growl at its own fragrance
the delicacy of its shadows
Ape hides,
miserly, within his body

He sleeps in fits as if even sleep
would crawl down his legs and loft them
into sulky flight Ape's dreams are poolrooms
in the slum district, downtown
many miles from the vineyards He
hears the hieroglyphs of dead Sundays
resound without cease on deserted sidewalks

Ape thinks of a cruise...
No, the riverbeds
are dry, the wind is dry

Ape believes rats
nibble his horoscope though classic fingernails
strum the grid of his lifelines Blue feathers
bruise his hide, clots of scarlet birds
rise from his eyelids

Ape chants
and prays for the hanging cage
its iron pipes such dumb staves
as may sway his voice forever from its reason

VARIATION ON AN ENGLISH CALENDAR

Water Berries

Water berries the salted and sweet
those that grow above the trees
and those that wait slowly
beneath the soil water berries
in Delphi's mouth water berries
in Thoreau's journal in the tails
of the four horses of Venice
and in the crowded forum
where the voters applaud their peril

Water berries at the source of candles
cloister of albino worship chosen
by all assassins ochre berries
berries of indigo and of the frost
that burns in the sun Flavor
of igneous rock of ivy and bog
of peacock juice Berries that melt
and berries that harden in the womb
berries that work and berries that sleep

Water berries blacken without reason
and glow with dim orange light
through the fogs of heart, high tides
of bloodbeat water berries fulfill
all regions of Cosmic body: stars
and buds

magnets and fingernails

Water berries cluster in the form
hidden behind your life the framed morning
the smoke of your words at night

White Panther

I camped last night in the ravine
northeast of Taos where the white panther
was rumored several times in recent months.
During the night I was counseled twice,
once by footfalls outside the tent
and later by an Indian, tall and hatchet-nosed,
eyes brown and calm as a bear's.
He said, 'Get up and look outside.

I opened the flap and there was the moon,
stony cold, slanting through my dream.
The spruce and pine were still.
The fire I'd built to cook my late meal
was a grey cloud of ashes.
I remembered the footfalls and thought,
'Of course, it was the white panther!
God has consented to believe in me.'

When I awoke in the morning
a crow had gotten wedged into my chest.
His wings smashed about furiously
and his 'caw-caw' was the voice
of the Indian laughing at me.
Despite his counsel I had slept through
my welcome. There is no white panther
northeast of Taos, not anymore.

A Critique of Mind, Within Reason

The Situation

How it is makes no sense:
the Queen Mary moored in a port of marmalade
to which we assent as the rock to its moss
and, more, because oranges illuminate
the wilds of logic and when oranges
are cooked and sweetened any ship would be a fool
not to set its rudder in so mad a treat
Nothing sad, no tears in seeing this vintage voyager
of oceans settled outside the city of Long Beach
a malarky for sight-seers

Peel the orange water,
cook and cool it, including the rinds
You can do it, the license is free
to shoot one mode of fact in the head
like a crippled horse There is no other salve
to relieve the pain of reason

If the Queen Mary should sail again
should transcend its harbor, its lights steering a passage,
exact and daring, through the blind nether side
of its actual decay

such accomplishment
would be a warning to practical men everywhere
It is the courage of a rearing trope
it doctors the malady of that runaground Enlightenment
wherein thought is docked to the graveyard

Fellow strangers, we can travel first class,
as children do, navigate through slime:
the monotonous enigma of our eyes and ears
We can get there, to the sublime virtuals
which move, always move, as mountains do

The Summation

Each speck of self is the sun itself
Reason is how, never why Let Godot wait
if he wants to How it is

is why Mind is as real as the Queen Mary
whose captain is Kidd, whom you've all seen
mid-leak at the nearest
Standard Station Wittgenstein would leak likewise
under a similar sign There's no jam
in Godot's jar, nor cookies,
just a small scale model of Sam Beckett
kneeling, licking mold lustfully off Queen Mary's deck
Strangers, try this imaginary game,

It's healthier

Speak it with your personal oranges
than you believe, even with all your faith
in Freud, Rasputin, in Greece & Rome,
in Stars & Numbers, in Cybernetics & the Primal Past
Reason is how you make it, why it is

Anti-Climax

Once the question has returned to its answer
how polished the surface of anguish
You lick it once-twice with your tongue
and learn it is a childhood
candy-apple The hard jelly is sweet until
you bite into the mustard of the fruit itself
Then your mouth is a philosophy
of snarled ropes

Today's March wind
has already passed and now disperses
an inquisitive repose You enclose your mouth
within a reverie and hold in your eyes
the necessary insects feast and aftermath

Already the crypt of an absence
has been planted in the ground Already
the first crocuses have appeared, in their sly
Already the answer
revolution, their yellow
was introduced in the opening lines
and the kites that followed wantonly descended

Rousseau's "The Dream"

That redbreasted, blackwinged bird
gazes serenely eastward at something
not shown. A naked woman
on a couch in the clotted forest
of blue, pink and yellow flowers,
and green leaves of assorted shapes,
gazes in the same direction as the bird.
One lion with menacing eyes
peers out from lush vegetation
at the spectator of the painting.
The other lion, also with fiery eyes,
stares at the woman's upraised haunch.
A moon-colored sun, or the moon itself,
is clearly visible, though hemmed in
between two clusters of dark green foliage.
The spectator's eye wanders from here to there,
uncertain. Where is the action?
Of course, there is none.

What moves

in the painting is the outer eye,
the one that is not inside the dream.
This eye, off to the east, looks into itself,
its own delirious bursts of color,
which the redbreasted, blackwinged bird,
during all this time, has been coolly observing:
this other dream struggling out of its night.

CLOUDS AND RED EARTH

1981

Placements

Soulfeathers for Albert Camus

In Albuquerque “the relentless
bad taste

reaches a point of baroque extravagance
where all can be forgiven”

The miles
of neon lights along Central Avenue
attract me as no other lights anywhere
I’m a tourist

nothing more
of this nightly bawdy passage
through the New Mexico plains

-Albuquerque is a desert

During the day
I can be alone with it I can make love
to it How can it resist me
helpless as it is a city of little character
and no repute? All it asks of me
is that I bring back flowery stories
from Sante Fe

60 miles away
Santa Fe is a bitch We would quarrel incessantly
There would be questions of fidelity

Relationships

When you say the clouds
are your special friends it is not
to disown the desert sun
this most luminous enchanter
for whom you bear your life
in a suitcase

The clouds are
a respite and a seclusion
You coriverse with them alone
at a table in the dingy smokehole
of a bar The clouds inhabit
a can of Coors as easily as
any other space

When you
lug yourself along under the sun,
that crisp sun so high a swinger
in New Mexico, there is always something
you leave behind

a forgotten
story a wise caution
You neglect yourself as if you were
a strip of celluloid

When the clouds
come around you can tell them this
they know what you mean

Bandelier Forest

Fir and pine
as they delineate the heights
recast the quality of light
These trees hold
within their branches
a sudden weight
which is of the eye

Still summer
and the sun is a gathering
of remembrances
its light a deer or dog
clinging to the scent everywhere
along the curving road

On either side the tall
fir and pine
the aspen massive
tree-laden light
The eye drives directly
into the slow, measured walls
streaming down
and is absorbed in shadows
in shadows of windows

Tall Country

It was a while before the woods
 showed up, while the cloudmasks overhead
 shimmered, greyish blood
 The hawk now spreads
his wings-his claws clasp wires
 along invisibly winding trails—
 holds fast to the wiles
 of air, and flares repeatedly into black spires

All birds are below the high fir
 Lower still, regions of human craft
 spoken in the loft
 of smoke, small tumors of desire
that grow upward with toxic grace
 though never so high as these trees
 where mountain goats graze
 never too near the gods who mute this place

Now the weather shifts toward elegance
 (an English garden, yellow roses
 lilies and lilacs, trim praises
 of hedge and cypress), intelligence
absorbed in stealth by woods and hawks
 The gods commence to speak
 translucent arrows of a book:
 to be read quickly in the glance of rocks

in a gust of pine, in faces that hide
 behind blue shade, nothing seen
 but what is in the sun
 nothing heard but what's inside
the cave of tongues So it is, the field
 tall country displays
 to eyes that inwardly gaze
 Breath sucks in whatever gods have failed

Summer Storm, Albuquerque

How to come near
so near your breath relives
another's death

You hear
the cicadas' electric circuits
that unison of many lives
tuned

to one purpose
Sweat
pours from the nerves
unseen

consumed by breathing
in quick beats
the woman

clammed up in her skin
by your wasteful humidity

unable to speak not knowing who
she is that you have stolen
across her life
in grey gasps that you hide
her light in your glowering head
the grey

hair the brain
covering the hot summer
glow in her groin

the rain
beating down in rivers

breaking open pods

bursting phlegm
of the gods releasing you at last
until in half an hour
you are quiet

stilled by the tranquil
capsule of an emergent sun
your heart blue again in
its usual space

The secret of who

she was
 not disclosed you are still
a ghost in whom she did not
believe

 It is warm and moist
afterwards the thunder with which
you pleaded for her mouth
was only your hard, heaving breath
and was not heard

Driving to Cuba, New Mexico

for WILLIAM EASTLAKE

Mesas in the distance
lavender
 the cliffs layer on layer
russet green and beige
Two hours being driven
 half dozing in
such calm no cage could hold
seeing the sun roam four-footed
across the plain
 The land sprang toward the
honeyed giant
 through the grey campfire
of my sleep
 Beauty
 what does it mean
but the beast arrested mid-leap
between morning and night
 to be clothed always
in the moment's scent
 We came
to the ranch
 I climbed its mesa
as if to verify this permanence
this brief blossoming in the ages' span
And found in fossilized wood
a landscape by Cezanne

Madrid Photograph

for JILL

There is a girl who hitchhikes
from one month to the next camps in
damp woods talks to the moths that
hover over blue campfires Her word is
Today Today as if no time could atone
for a lost father as if the burning owls
on their branches would expire if no eyes
answered The pieces of her life
are water the Pacific saltspray raw solace
for the smooth stone behind the forehead
of each day It is the clock in the talk
of men she runs from

I saw a photograph
Madrid New Mexico 1969 hair
over shoulders reconciled to the length
her eyes

of a near-deserted mining town
had traveled centuries a face inhabited by
slow summer at the beginning of autumn
the leaves to be taken home
and pasted on fresh windows Her face gazed
into the laurel of the lens a wisp
in the communion of all joys and sorrows

And where shall she go by what process
the calculus of love be recognized and how
dare she devise a reckoning? I told her
a dream I had

in which he (who was not
named) floated within the curving air while
the room stared floated until I who have
heard the secrets of birds (without understanding)
welcomed him back, confetti fluttering
in my head His face no more than
a thumbprint in my eyes I asked
“How do you do it?”

He said “It’s easy

Just let go of the ground”

And I released
my feet from earth and rose in a current
of light almost to the ceiling

There is a girl
who must create the man possessed of such
hardly human skill who holds the wild bouquet
to ease him down and radical numbers to bind his
heaven and earth together

At the D. H. Lawrence Cottage

Chopping wood with a dry axe
3 blisters in 20 minutes rhythm at
half strength 4 chunks and a tall Coors
2 cheers for Lawrence comrades
& his antique typewriter in San Cristobal
 one for the bull on his cottage
the other for that phoenix
painted on his pine
 the third cheer
absent / he's an old
wide-brimmed hat a blue shirt
he's a suitcase

There were friends and guests
who talked and drank Lawrence's ghost
hiding below with mice holding out
for the dark
 the dark man
a fiction

 The British prof and I
strolled to see the summer's Fellow
Coffee and a cigar
Frieda unmentioned in the talk
 Lawrence invisible
Come out
 come out
 take off your dust jacket
let the horses nibble
at your beard

The Colors of Time

for JOHN LOGAN

There's barely time

Original wood
framework to hold infiltration of silica
and secondary deposits / iron oxides
in small quantities

Agatized rainbows

Hollows in the wood hold
crystals of quartz harder than steel

166 lbs per cubic foot
after resurrection

You are a letter away
By rushing water

The aspen leaves
have fallen here

A Halloween wind drives in
from the west
with cosmic rustling of sheets

Milky Ways
for the candy-callers

Transported by Triassic flood waters
sediments built up
over 400 feet thick across the plain
When the Rockies rose
from the settled land mass
erosion began / the logs
drifted toward immortality

As the colors of time
knock at my heart
I write these lines for you
an hour from Erie

Barely time for a
glass of lavender wood

All the masks are dying

OUR SHIPS ARE PASSING

Their bright flags
snap in the storm

El Conquistador: The Seventh Floor

THE SEVENTH FLOOR

for STANLEY NOYES

On the seventh floor one 40-watt bulb
stayed awake through the shades of moon and sun
to tint the corridors with coppery light

On the seventh floor we could gaze
back at ourselves figures in a brown daguerreotype
of some historical dimension
in which we could

observe ourselves staring back like Spanish dons
There was barely enough candlelight on that level
for us to believe we would some later time

exist

A university in northern New Mexico
consumed by vacancy on the seventh floor
of its tallest dorm during those spring hours

when gods and sybils are called to leap
from their graves a university which awkwardly
flickered us on toward the blue light of another

emergence

Now we see it as ancient film:
the day-nightwatchman maintaining his indignant search
on the seventh floor for two men of words

who slept in one chamber that one night
and still are heard to whisper in the walls
and still conspire there in their coral afterglow

“Goodbye, Loves”

for DAVID & MONA JOHNSON

SAN FRANCISCO (UPI)-A 20-year-old hippie, high on drugs, shouted “Goodbye, Loves” and jumped the 275 feet from the Golden Gate Bridge into San Francisco Bay with his sandals in his hand Tuesday.

He came up singing from a plunge that has taken 364 lives.

1 Las Truchas

These clouds do not conclude

They are indigo, grey, in portions unwashed
white yellowish substrata appear
as windows of dried sweat in the sky over
Truchas It is a late-afternoon hour of
mourning for what, none of us
can say Perhaps it is we ourselves
who mourn for those irresolute agencies
moving slowly through our eyes
disguised as clouds

As we entered
the town we met a torn building
black from burning small windows /
skull's eyes A one-lane main street
thinly layered in asphalt

Fernandez
the garage-man told us where
White's gallery was “go down there about 7 blocks
the Presbyterian Church
a picket fence
20 feet high only one in town”

WHITE'S GALLERY

VISITORS

WELCOME

This town was Toledo horizontal and
brown adobe It was
Spain

brown vision of Spain
the penitent eyes under the marshals
of heaven, hoary, holding splintered batons
“electrified” (as today’s tongue
consumes the spiritual field off
in the distance

O specters
children smiling
your teeth small white clocks
that themselves don’t know
what time it is

2 Lama

They welcomed us to Lama with
communal smiles (This place a domestic
physical moon men bearded women
in long skirts)
and offered us
home-baked bread spread with goat’s cheese
alfalfa sprouts

An ex-Marine corporal

filing a curved chunk of branch
gripped in a vise explained
the 5:30 a.m. bell for voluntary meditation
the bell at 6:30 for imperative planning
breakfast and to work at 8
building
the women cooking 3 meals a day for 30
in evening dancing & chanting
the ashram
not yet structured the dues not yet
regulated hours of labor to equal 7
which could equal 6 or 5 as to
one’s ability not to be codified

Paraphrase:

“Physical dominant over spiritual now
as to our nascent need”

The brochure:

“It should be understood that

Lama Foundation provides only
the rudiments-tools and working area
What the individual makes of them
will depend on

the sort of energy
he is willing to commit
to this effort We emphasize
the extraordinary difficulties
involved on all levels
of this work”

blond muscular eyes voyaging
toward the earthly moon shaping a twisted
bit of branch into something whatever
humanly necessary The black girl said
“He’s beautiful used to be
in the Marines has
the discipline”

Part of a play written /
the labor in his hands, gloved
smoothing down the wood

“We realize that for something new
to be born
something old
must die”

Those who would live on this
moon above Taos
should speak to themselves
honestly

3 Las Truchas

Sunlight at 9000 feet unimpeded strikes through
to the vein streams down the mountains
of the brain across the brow
into prophetic sight white shadow
is monolithically black no light refracted
intense opposition to prisms
which comprise the heart in one day
we met Maniches face to ass

The Trouts is airless Lama perhaps
all air

White's gallery was an open
crypt the body punished to salvage it
for Jesus' mercy
self-taught paintings
had learned the ropes and whips, the chains
that thrash and lead a man to his personal
Calvary union in pain with One
Who spared Himself none

White himself
no angel in the Body of Christ but an Anglo
detached enough to bear a lantern
into the coffin where the town's Penitentes
prayed as he listened to the Spanish cantor
chant the albedos in praise
of the Holy Sacraments singing in his gut
the same stanzas White long white hair
near his heart the six-shooter silver bullets
scattered throughout his head

St. John of the Cross:

I live without inhabiting
Myself-in such wise that I
Am dying that I do not die

The morada "is easy to identify because
it is usually long and low close to
the earth Its length usually several times
its width shaped not unlike a coffin
Its massive walls are of hand-textured adobe
giving the structure a unique organic
sculptured quality It is the essence
of simplicity in design"

Truchas confined to an old fever dozes
through its days

(these clouds
do not conclude
at night in heat
squirms and turns on its cliffside

torturing itself to
in one violent motion
in one last straining

ecstasy
drop from the Sangre de Cristos
to the dead far down
“Their dead march with them
in the Paschal season They require no Easter
The Resurrection is present in their tapers
their flutes clackers matracas and
occasionally a drum”

4 Lama

Whom to believe?
The head lightens
and is held in a leaf Earth swells
in its pod
10 lbs of peas
at this height
Lama
onions alfalfa lima beans water trickling
into the gulley steadily
and the head
enters a green album arranged
pictures of love torn from the wilderness
and we look
into the eyes of a goat

Out of the sullen streets of individual
existence rises the dome of assertion
To the solar eminence these people address
their letters and craft They ask of You
warmth Your flowering radiance
aware that You are purely there insentient
a keg of fire bodiless unagonized
We pour Your golden blood into our spirits
get drunk on sheer light

And Christ
is a dead man whose presence here
consumes the pagan passion rites
of soil tribal paternity worship of

the clouds

that do not conclude

Those who depart, to California or
India, shall return

Who are the dead

but ourselves?

Observe a radish

dip a finger into mud
sit on a log You have achieved
life and henceforth walk among
the godstruck Hard on this hillside
they hollow wholeness out of absence
Calm is king in the hushed claims
of holiness

Rapture is death

Those who drink goat's milk
are bones in the meadow of Krishna

If they hold to their course
there is an Orpheus for everyone

5 Las Truchas

Finally to arrange these distortions
if they are Your years of time
pour through your bandages There are pools
of lilac and oregano behind your grimy
lids changing form as the blood charges
through its circuits as the nerves
close in upon the horses prancing in the lamplit

It is night in the tabernacle

streets

where the years' catch of wounded lie
Poor fish they are! fetid and rotten
Who could eat them

or lick

such wounds

Arthritis has whipped

Mr. White into a hump a hunch
Art has fattened him (his primitive guess
at the poison in his bones buried in the mounds

under the prison of his
brain) And he said:

They bury their dead in the ground
of their church and when the dead
grow too numerous they stuff the bones
into the adobe walls After many rains
when the walls have been washed thin
a thigh or arm reaches through
projects into air (again the air)
groping for air So many bones stick out
so many pegs a man could climb them
all the way up to the cross

White says he has died already
he has nothing to fear

not even

the Postmaster of Truchas

his town's

chief political figure and foe

"I know who stole my files"

"I'm going to paint flowers on my kitchen window"

"Monday I'll go to his house

"The kids raise hell at night"

with my gun"

"It's so peaceful here" "The smart ones
move away" "They drive at 90 down the narrow
street drunk bang bang bang" "I love it
in Truchas" "If he doesn't return my files
I'll start banging" "They burned down
the hardware store in the April uprising

Emanuel is too nice" "The Postmaster controls
the Welfare" "You have to be ready
to shoot" "It's a restful town the dead
are beautiful

Aromas of earth calm of the
nightworld insects in molecular whirl
ants and roaches at their duty
on pavement and dirt Stare at them
sufficiently and you too crawl swiftly
among them one with such lucid striving

while higher the lamps swarm harshly
into dark air They do not help you
to see / the eyes are trained to motions
beyond light the heart waits in shadows
it waits for a garden to bloom
out of song as the song enters the Savior's
pierced flesh and the Mother of Sorrows
embraces Him ah! Their gloomy love
You stand holding your breath in
your fingertips the rain runs down
your cheeks all you remember
is the island where you were young
the fruit on the trees the sap glued
to the bark You begin to walk
and walk until the dog announces himself
turn back drenched by the years
bitten by teeth that surprise you
from a distance Do you Believe?
In nothing but sun and moon
in what they have accomplished by their incessant
turning as you have stood
alone in the night
accepting your own presence fully at last
a youth again The lady with golden hair
who emerges from the doorway
is surely a goddess

6 Lama

the Cult of Life

Tammuz and Ishtar
returns from Christ's agony
formed as a child who eats
the goatcheese

of the new moon

"Where the grass was not, the grass is eaten,
Where water was not, water is drunk,
Where the cattle sheds were not, cattle sheds are built"

The clouds do not conclude
but open heaven again for the pagan

goddess the youth's mother his sister
his lover

Christ the fallen King
dies forever the church is fallow
His embassy closed We cannot relive Him
with our suffering He will refuse to sip our blood
at our last supper preferring as always
a fried catfish

The dead merely stretch their arms
outward from the earth's moon and grasp
the rains of spring to serve our eyes
that survey so curiously the surface of things
The dead have been here before
and lead us into that memory through which
we must newly pass

Deliver us
Adonis from the darkness of Hades
Gentle youth long brown hair brown eyes
beloved of Aphrodite wounded early
O Lazarus in maroon doublet
dead too soon
and cardinal leotards healed
it must abstractly be said

by beauty
that whispering song of our bones
How lovingly we fuck with nature
when Adonis ploughs the seed of our phallus
and Aphrodite harvests the swollen grain

I structure our most ancient epic into
personal terms

Handsome and profound source
first prince of my annals:
my own son almost 7 My daughter
somewhat older and cooler

oracle
of my only temple

There is a man
there is a woman

a child is born
No faith outlives the order

Proportions

Placitas Night

for STEVE, RoI & NEIL

as you walk from
How this moon
that casts a shadowy oval
on the cloudlit sky
leaving the car stuck in earth
as you cower
under the moon
you are one candle
among stones
a sputtering on two feet
There is no word
Behind / retreating from
home for
a silverless mine
snakes gophers moles of the ages
You are heading toward
The way you came down
has not held its ground
It has
not waited
The moon
holds you to its chart
Holds
you run
Soon
in this lost plot
It comes
a nowhere
the gathering up of all
comings & goings
You are together at last
with yourself The wings in your gut
strain at the walls they can't get out

they'll never
Slow slowly
you know
that the moon
has entered your life You go on

The Slit, The Blue

Behind your eyelids
the planet carries its load of blueberries
horses plunge one by one into dark arroyos
Lenny Bruce sings the Star-Spangled Banner
a black dragon spits blood

You try to stop its turning
for an instant hold it still catch one thing
purely in your mind
The soap.says ENJOY LIFE

A woman pauses before the camera
-and speaks
Is that what you heard
that golden rain as it struck the sidewalk
become cellophane

an orange
rolling into the gutter
She stoops
one arm straight down
reaches for it

Her flowered parasol
lifts her toward the hawk that hovers
for you also?
hovers

Then it happens an opening
a slit a blue

What had called to you
is your answer You are among the stars
chained to nothing but your senses
someday he will

Death is your neighbor
borrow you But so far from your marble planet
you have forgotten what earlier
was broken glass in your fist
When you return there your body stands
with its fireplace and slippers Again the barrier
of eyelids the countryside to be irrigated
day in and out the horses fed

the dragon locked again into the night

O not the same now no more never

The stars travel with you all space

enters your lungs when you breathe

Woman rain orange might have been other metaphors

What is unalterable

the slit the blue

Your former self follows you a grey shade

in a cloudless afternoon

Winter Passage

For weeks the sun
cold

To itself

another

There

Not the source
only as white is on the snow

Your body
wrapped in its coat
has left Grapes of Wrath New York on a
northerly route for Naked Lunch India

Driving snow mountains
distant on your windshield Closer
indigo clefts
the red clay
in the Sandias, rosy
snowrugs along the road sunfrost
over the land

As you go deeper
deeper you go home / New York
City where your body
stumbled from its cave

Home / your skin
as it absorbs the road
warmed by these mountains

"The way a
person holds his

and moves it"
New York / 1935
playing bottle caps
before the synagogue
little boy's body
shivering under God

You arrive

and your body
arrives
at the same
historic marker:

in Santa Fe you buy
a black Navajo hat with flat rim
feather stuck in the high
dome's band Stand
in the Plaza black coat hooked
to the neck
Everybody looks / you dance
war whooping
around the bandstand
Such dark and quirky
drag
Charms for the new Chief
Rabbi of Albuquerque

The Coral Fish

for ROBERT BLY

It was shortly afterwards, when I was making a field
study of coral fish in warm seas, among which the
function of aggression in the preservation of the species
is plain, that the impulse to write this book came to
me.

-Konrad Lorenz, *On Aggression*

Demoiselles hiding in the hand's caves
swim forth to drive away

the enemy

their replicas

themselves?

That blue trigger you hold
must finally kill the picassofish
No rival heaven may darken
the starry sky's

Your hand

so much alone

contains living water

seeping and receding

through the skin's skull's eyes

(crust on crust

whatever area

you've ever occupied)

Your hand

in act gives back to time
those floral formations you have
by breath and sorrow
ingested (when night descends
the beau gregorys

are dreams / flamboyant fires

locked in grey files) surfacing
a crude sensual force

that submerged

rages against itself

This is

the purport

swarms

lovely small swimmers salty bodies
flow from sleep into creation
as your hand steps lightly from
the sea's bedding of kelp
into the air
so fair
soaked in apples

soaked in apples

Supper at O'Henry's Country Bar-B-Que

"They shot the lights out" Frycook says
Last night's brawl

on High Chaparral or
mankind?

As Ray Charles
weeps hosannas in his box

As bombs

blossom in psychedelic rows
on rail- and harbor-towns
men and women of America labor
in Los Alamos Alamagordo Las Vegas and LA
by vectors of egglight
wasting their eyes

Wet glass sticks
to the slick table simple needs
resist us

We lose our minds
in a foreign tongue our best sperm
eaten by strangers

Drops of water drops of
grease love is heating its last raisins
in the bellies of men

and the stars are falling like snow
descending as fire on that other land

As Joan Baez says farewell
to Angelina

fire also dies
when the food runs out love is

it also dies
charcoal what is left afterwards
in black lumps

The Intellectuals at Okie's Bar

for Gus BLAISDELL

They are lovers of their own distortions
who sit in such darkness

music

steaming about them

beer swelling

their muscles / sense and temperance
tortured into hours of speech
to douse their minds' reflection

Ocean at night

leaps up in tongues of green illuminated
and dies on sand

spume

A residual humor flaps its wings
evacuates into air

The bar is

headquarters for difficult gymnastics

There is nothing outside but stars
and a sliced moon cold now in November that
arrogant Heaven peopled by the dead
Cars wearing holsters cruise
the boulevard

at one with those harmonious

seasons and cycles to which
the balls of drunks aspire:

to be contained

in Purpose molten fluid pouring
through strict cylinders

to arrive at

the laurel bush at last completely relieved
done with hessian duty into the arms
of a goddess more woman than ghost

We are not the mob that coils
around Fortune's rim Snake eyes
inhabit our bones

seeing fumes

canopy all gay processions (prophesy also

the pit where brains are buried)
so we refuse
to march
hippity-hop through Hell instead
our toes quick
as red coals
spend our laughter in heads of foam
matching the need for bright occasions

People

People you bastards
who can blame you on the times

It's no one's fault in early June
the poppies have already died

New Mexico is in heat now
wanting to fuck whatever it can

without courtesy or grace
Emerged from their grassy tombs

miller moths annoy the evening lights
Along the Rio Grande mosquitoes

riving heavy air desire
nothing but random flesh

Though the human heart
is hot for warmth

our politician in his white suit
enters a building

madly bent
on official business

The Anglo Coordinator

As the Anglo coordinator
for the 3rd Annual Southwest Poetry Conference
I have so far failed
to coordinate a single Anglo

I am neurotically troubled
The event is a mere two weeks off
in Durango Colorado
and I freak at the vision
of all those uncoordinated Anglos tripping
over their own feet

I, have no doubt the Chicanos and Indians
are in talented hands
but my Anglos, what a confused team
I'll have on my conscience!

None of them knows
the signals I have not yet devised
nor the comprehensive strategy to be used
in delivering our poems
True, the element of surprise
will be on our side
but what we critically lack is the totally expected

Can we depend on the others
to fuck up their lines? No right-minded coordinator
would risk it It is time for a
hasty ill-conceived locker-room prayer
something like: "Dear Almighty of the Anglos
bless our flabby metrics our dull rhymes
and give us credit for lots of guts"

Our Almighty is known to be half-hearted
much lazier and probably more incompetent than theirs
Still, he may help us put together
a potent stanza in the right place
a quick spurt of highly-regarded images...

though I think it's really no use
The 3rd Annual Southwest Poetry Conference in Durango

is sure to be a slaughter
You can imagine how guilty I feel

Fray Marcos de Mena

History records Fray Marcos de Mena
as the one who told it, one survivor
from the many shipwrecked, waylaid and slain
at the great water. One of three friars

and two sailors who came back to rescue
two Dominican fathers, by then already dead,
upstream. The canoe was still there
where it had been left in flight before.

Fray Marcos and the others paddled
up the river, sighted two small islands,
landed on one to retire for the night.
As it comes to us, this island quickly heaved up

its human burden, threw all of them overboard,
then vanished. Even so slight a portion
of land refused to allow them their sleep—
God's faithful and their men of water.

Frightened by life and by death exhausted,
they thrashed about in the river,
groped about for a solid remnant
of their past, some asylum on this shore

of the grave. And another island grew there
in the flow of their death and they arrived,
redeemed another time. From this place,
Fray Marcos tells us, these five Spaniards

saw the other two islands amazingly re-emerge
from the water. In 1553 two whales
swam down the Rio Grande toward the Gulf of Mexico.
Fray Marcos would not lie. Before God

whales were small islands in the Rio Grande.

Bitter & Sweet

Young women's mouths are sugar
Their spit sweetens the old man's tea
which is bitter

bitter the leaves
of coyote-brush and bitter the coreopsis
the mistletoe and thelesperma

Sweet

the mouths of young women
who clear their breath with spurge root
who chew fine corn meal to a paste

Bitter the old man's tea
while young women take water
into their mouths to soften still more

the pasty corn

 Their spit is sugar
for the old man's tea
He drinks bowl after bowl

bitter with sweet And though
he does not kiss any young woman's mouth,
he remembers His tea is hot

is hot

Indian Corn

Indian corn suspended from the ceiling
eight ears wired together. One is yellow
one maroon another pink still another black
These colors are imprecise they harmonize
with, and are, the language that observes them
hanging, at this angle, just above
the horizontal window This angle
is the eye's

Another corn is creamy
three others have no words The numbering
is exact, the sizes of corn descend
from smallest to largest
with two exceptions; again, there is definition
in the numbering

These cornshapes have been hanging
around for more than two years, the exact date
of their acquisition lost
though the place, Acoma Pueblo, remains
They instill no ideas
no fantasies The mind, holding them, is static
itself suspended; the hand has no impulse
to covet their polished surface What is of concern
is that, at last, they are visible

Birthday Party at Jemez Springs

JEMEZ SPRINGS

I sat on that rock
and let the sun melt in my face
There was the stream below
as I had for years imagined it
delicately blue frothing over stones
an 18th century sound
Handel at peace with his heart
It ran to meet the sun
an eighth-mile up a strip
of gold pulsating Fireworks
for my daughter's birthday
the girls on their own island midstream
Before that were the horses
five of them, wild I took their pictures
as they grazed on the other bank
Paul threw stones and laughed
at the small geysers
Lydia tiptoed to the girls' island
and became a blue sweater

With lords & ladies dancing
atop the New Mexico mesas
I thought of Vietnam
and the impossible poem
Those fireworks there! I had never
seen them What was a child
without skin Whose mother
lay there in her own green juice
What flowers grew
in Dean Rusk's eyes
Handel in his barge on the Thames
had also heard of war
but wrote music Horses knew
nothing of war and wrote nothing
My amulets were lost in water
Another stone another splash
A brown wind arose from the north

Girls and mother left
the island Time to go
Sherry officially II

My mind is not
I listen for
bloody enough
Handel while the Stones
bless our age for what “could be
the last time”

Lords & ladies I’ll believe
any gossip you tell me
Tell me about the
roses and cherry trees
that blossomed in your shires
Let me hear you scream
as your wigs catch fire

Drinking in Juarez

1 Drinking at the Manhattan Bar

sweet with slight salt
We had squid
at the Alcazar A whim to be
photographed The sleep on our faces
deceived the lens All that drinking
and we were cleverly awake We could
write our names on the tablecloth
in squid ink

All that drinking priorly
slings and zombies at the Manhattan Bar
two blocks from the bridge in Juarez

and long talk the sergeant from
Fort Bliss his daddy the ex-jockey
and the sergeant's half brother half Chicano
half American Legion from Korea
"All those people I killed" a whimper
huge gentle half Chicano He'd probably killed
no one / Billy Calley inked on his breast
in rum & coke, a dream image
of desired guilt

All that drinking
Benny the sergeant raised horses
on a hundred acres in Texas
His daddy once rode horses as he must have
ridden his Chicano woman: with tight reins
and a loose lip He was prancing
up and down the long narrow bar a pint
for his every size a squirt
for the mod hip chicks next table
All that drinking

Benny was serious
"Should have dropped the Bomb
on China in '58 No Vietnam"
We drank and listened like spiders
comrades in nothing that mattered
I said (because it didn't matter) "I'm a Jew"

and Benny loved it that I was a Jew
and taught English at the university
in New Mexico

His daughter may show up
in one of my classes soon
That's how much
we loved each other

2 Drinking in the Shangri-La

Our first stop was Shangri-La
after a long drive in the sun
after going wrong in wallowing traffic
going as far off course as the church
solemn Mexicans on the steps
in the plaza the streets jostling
chanting praying on the anniversary
of Christ's Crucifixion at 3
in the afternoon Good Friday 1971
and we, the two of us, weary
hungry unblessed on our difficult way
toward blindness toward some godless
Parnassus of the mind
mountain of no will and no desire
two travelers with our hearts in the air
we drove through the dark shapes
slow as sheep Christ without us
without Christ we ascended
slowly our vehicle a light
pagan blue and got beyond the religious
civilities into more delicate sanctuary
we got there a policeman directed us
and it was cool inside Shangri-La,
we found, is not a crowded place
in the middle hours we felt younger
less tired on the fringe of No Mind
Gin & tonic was our desire
not lamentation nor prophecy
not song nor the heavenly spire
Resurrection was a gin & tonic
that's how it was that good day
when Christ carried his death up Calvary

3 Drinking in the Alcazar

We arrived in Mexico's fourth largest city
followed by America America flowed
across the bridges from El Paso America
sat beside us in the Alcazar where we
drank sherry

A Mexican tenor
serenaded the four couples He sang
"O how we danced

on the night
we were wed"
in Spanish I had a religious impulse
to drink another sherry to toast the bride
or the groom whichever best represented
the influence of Yiddish comedians
on American culture I thought of
Barbra Streisand the songs of Jerry Lewis
how American "my people" were
as some perhaps sat there groggy-eyed
remembering how they were married
in a Broadway play

We drank more
sherry the Alcazar's waiters performed
their trick letting wine from the flask
roar down their gullets from a distance
of twenty Basque feet

The Mexican tenor
lost his voice our neighbors from America
lost their smiles and compliments
I lost my checkbook or somebody
stole it later a check for \$130.00

"#1063 Reported
turned up in my American bank
Stolen-Signature Irreg."

We had
our picture taken ordered another sherry
We were very merry America was with us
I think it was the Mexican tenor
who flashed our picture as he flew past

4 Drinking in the Lux

It was beer and tequila
two long nights
at the Lux
as we argued with Dante Alighieri
about the propriety of light
at the bottom of volcanoes
he contending
there was no circle for such light:
a mere moon in a watery eyelid

The children of Juarez are hideous
their eyes are beasts
hungry so young
they quiver in the entrails of the tourists
who rarely know they've been so sneakily struck

Beatrice was Rosario the first night
Teresa the second Rosario drank
orange juice but Teresa drank beer
Rosario was worth \$10 but Teresa
only nine Teresa insulted Gloria
in the middle of Gloria's grinding ass
Rosario was not there the second night
It was a student Antonio who
introduced us to both Dante was there
looking for Beatrice too, there at the Lux
He said there was no light in basements
We said in America there existed
flashlights He hadn't heard of them
but said in basements dark was the proper motive

The children of Juarez sell
American cigarettes to Americans
They are hideous not to be trusted

Two long nights quickly spent
to our last few dollars Dante said
he was in exile from the sun
We noted it was night in any case He said
we were all in exile We began
to wonder Teresa said he was a creep in Mexican

We smoked all the cigarettes Steve had bought
from the children of Juarez
Dante said the lighted tip of a cigarette
reminded him of Mount Etna
Old nostalgic divinity student, I thought
Next thing he'll be bawling
in memory of Benito Mussolini

The children of Juarez are minefields
I must remember to step around them
on tiptoe

If I should touch one

I'd fly apart
All that drinking in the Lux
the dollars spent This was
the bottom of something the light
of something We were dimmed and dowsed
two nights in a row Only Dante
was clear As we walked to our hotel
I said "Observe the celestial affluence"
while pointing to the ground
A lady named Beatrice halted
as we passed "Can't you guys
walk straight?" "The light of Dante
is blinding us" Steve said "More likely
it's the dark

Dante is a creep"

said Beatrice who was in her 40's
accompanied by three male adults

We flew to the Hotel San Antonio
like falling stars

that last night

glad the children of Juarez were all asleep

Rainbow Dome

My friends have built a rainbow
dome / wood and cartops
 old sinks and toilets
sun for heating

Earth is cold

One of them a writer
 quit writing
 to bide and bide
“This is too important
 to be wrong about”

By themselves
bunched together
 a tribe
“We are different
 from other people”

Earth is black it's white

They pray to the manycolored
 Eat from one pocket
sun
to another / many flavors
from emptiness
 sukiyaki redwine eggplant
They will make their own
 carrots and corn
 feed the chickens milk the goat
Some dreams they live
 are acid rainbows
some simply springwater or
red mesas
They say hello every morning
 to the sky
(Too important to
 say it wrong)
They are miles from me
the city cat who dines on mountains

in my famous alleys

Earth is snow and golden aspen

I stay and stay

too full to move away

The Beads

for JUDY GRAHN

Small black birds kangaroo rat bones
a feather ringed on a double string
with beads round and long palette
and rosary on which to count
minute blessings
those we are afraid
to touch the bubbles in our blood

The woman's gift of beads
crystals your need to
swell up your life
to ride the red engines of calm
past the broken armor
higher
rusting in fields trees charred
legs and brains floating in water

Your self's other enemies are clouds
that swallow the nearby mountains
saying "You also must lose your self"
They would dispel the beads
"You are
no larger on the starry thread"

Joy is helpless against such wispy
mystics To protest their vanity
is to risk a gaudy death They will not
allow you the priest who dances
only for your eyes They say
“Live toward infinity become air
Add your soul to the eternal numbering”
Ah, your new beads clothe you
in a spell Small black birds
kangaroo rat bones a feather This is
whitest witchcraft Your body escapes
its bottle and is of an element
with Earth

You count the blessings

giant-colors in the hand

Floating

It is this, finally, with woven insight
to arrange the terms in such balance
all wavering is canceled Seaward drifts
the captain and homeward the fragrances
There is daybreak to reconcile
with a short goodbye

I have seen
the iris blossom and quickly die
Pigments maps elegies stored
for 40 years alone I lie there
weaving madras stripes in air
Am I the captain or the sea

No answer but to rise when the
phone rings and say "Hello
Come on over"

as my body floats
across the month of May
over the Rockies
a painted Indian a painful rug
floats floats

while someone rushes to me
bringing a heavy notebook
a body

Landscape in Grey

Fields and mountains grey
as the first winter cloudlight
sets across the land
The road is grey
the deer grey cattle grey
no sun no moon
Shelter from all other colors

Shrill forewings of crickets
snake sliding along the earth
leaves hissing in the slight wind
twin skulls of now and then

The human skin
is a distant bell Listening
to this grey setting
you breathe more wisely
between this space
and that space

Stanford Street Poem

When living
 even with people you love
boils you dry each day
 what music shall
calm you Can the sky open that wide
to receive your cry

 The gag of love
steals your tongue what you know
of soil and sea flowering and fall

As other bodies call to you
a woman's teeth a man's beard
you approach them cold leaves in your legs
leaning on an old moonbeam
 the song:
a single crow on the baked bow

 snow on the Sandias now
 creamy fields below Taos

 water in hose will freeze

 nothing to reach for

you must
 dance

 with the trees

The Magdalena Silver Mine

Word has reached us here
at the Magdalena silver mine
that you do not love women

“Love” is merely another word
in the American language

But women exist and the word
has gone out that you
don’t love them

On my side, I have heard
the Magdalena silver mine exists
but I have never seen it

We could show you photographs

I have photographs of women
(sexually exposed at that)

but I’m not convinced
I have ever seen a woman

What proof do you need?

Only to see a woman

If you saw her
would you love her?

Of course

But if love is, as you said
merely a word...

If I ever saw a woman
I would erase the word “love”
and the Magdalena silver mine
would vanish at the same time

We insist the mine is here
in Magdalena we have photographs

I have never been in Magdalena

Why don't you simply drive down
from Albuquerque...

Not without a woman

Keeping Watch

for JoY HARJO

“Keep watch over the southwestern sky
until I get there” you write

Always

That’s what I do to hear myself
during the hours alone with my silence
This particular sky waited a long time
for me

and now it waits for you

It’s a way not a map for my eyes
maybe yours too

It’s why I’ve been happier
since I crossed the line near Gallup in ‘66
The mesas then around 6 o’clock under a hot
September sun were heavy animals
dark brown russet ochre shaggy and hard
under that constantly moving sky
These calm beasts were friends
whom I recognized as ghosts from a history
I hadn’t read except as a child’s tale

I watched the sky this desert ocean
and as I drove I swam in a good sweat
toward a form of home

For you the red horse wind again?
I remember its terrible force once
pulling at your bones

It’s fearful
to be greeted by your own heart
far from your first cry and bloodspring
as if you’d settled in someone else’s dream
I’m still afraid of strangers’ myths
but I keep on watching

Make it soon
Huge, ancient and flowing as it is
the southwestern sky needs you back

I see it a little paler without you

Jemez Stream

Wishing you well
the while
the whole day

I

have been there too

Name of that water
as it

on my skin
rolled toward me
from the mesas

Wishing you wonder
in that place

You
and the water
exchanging images

Over stones
the water flows

Sun's quick
flowers mark the course
of the dance

I have been there too
on the margin
illuminated
while time lapsed and
I grew no older

Wishing you joy
and holiness the whole
day a golden bird
for your shoulder

so that you leave
for a spell this
eyes cooled
century

in water

wishing you

A SWEETNESS IN THE AIR

1987

I. In Hawaii

I

Someone has poured mock orange into the winds,
early November trades that blow hardest
near the clouds, grey expressionist blocks
among the blue ones de Kooning might have used
to preserve these days. A mistake of course to believe
a painter lives in the sky, yet those white petals
shattered on the grass give evidence
of an art sheltered on high, furious ground.

2

A sweetness thickens the buds of winter
here in this land where the earth swells each season
with mangoes and pineapples, papayas
and the coffee beans of Kona. Weeds leech
onto the principle of amplitude
but even they carry the odor of chocolate berries.
If harsh cries disturb the night
they must be those illiterate macaws who have misheard
the dreams of their dulcet ancestors.

3

Today the city sways, caught in the vise
of heavily-armed air. White mock orange petals
litter the streets like confetti from Queen Liliokalani's
last parade. In the Washington Place palace,
where the governor now lives, her portrait.
looks at the viewer with all the marble clarity
of a shrine. The city sags again, almost bowing
to the trades' mastering force, and the citizens
fly along the currents, laughing at this carnival ride,
this pitching through time, then the Queen laughs too.

4

Yet I give little attention to the sea,
have never immersed myself in its beauty,
its literal waters. Perhaps it is the salt
in my eyes and throat and nostrils. Perhaps I fear
a deadly baptism. A man of sugar,
I collect the day's rain in a can, I heat it
and sprinkle in two teaspoons. I call the rain
a delicacy, the root-grower, maker of fields
and orchards. Then I am less afraid of the sea.

5

O honey-keyed doxologies! Even we who listen
behind the churches come forward into
brazen light. The bodies of women and men,

brown in the various hues of sand,
stand in themselves as praises under
a heavy sun. O song of beaches and spuming
waters, who but God can hear and not believe

so simple a gospel: tides, foam, creamy flesh.

r problems

y.

6

Solitary. So much alone that he rises
from his own body, occupies all the space
around him. He becomes his own environment,
as the rainbow swells from the rain
and arches back into itself
where no one sees it. A slow settling into time,
which never moves, even for a second
It is we, earthbound, who fear the roundness
of perfection. He closes his eyes,
smells the mock orange, lingering still.

7

/Ewa bird, engraved in gold, the coin with which
we pay for the sky. Lizard, framed in thought,
the tongue that pays for earth. Carp
of the heart, we hear you explaining water.
Unreasoned, a sun flows through iron.
These elements, four as in the ancient manuals,
comprise the seasons of our mastery, the quadrangle
of our feast, from which we make our myth,
the heroes and gods. A good scent, these friends
of our days, companions of our dreams.
A good sense of betrothal and birth as we open
the old to mint in blood the new.

8

& Having come here to their Oriental garden
not composed of bamboo and stones but of flesh
and a mixture of brine and green plants
interweaving in air; these tropics
older than art, surviving all waves
of tenderness and despair, all orange, mocking fire
and blackening of earth even to the ocean sands;
having come here, he proposes an order un beholden
to sedulous meter and rhyme, but to Eros and Psyche,
East and West of the mind's braided plumbline.

9

ant
He kisses the mock orange petal. She also
kisses. Mosquitoes gather by the stream.
A single fly streams toward the kisses. Below the pebbly
is or
problems
surface a lion asserts its religion.
He lights a candle and she lights the same one.
Sharp little sweetnesses. The air
a stream of pearls. Godgiven wax in which
day.
he/she melts. Shape of kisses. Bites.

10

Men and women, lost in the seas, float
for a while on the surface, foetus-like, stiff.
When the Coast Guard reaches them
they are sacked and packed in the boat's freezer
next to the meat and fish. Talking about
ice in lushwarm Hawaii, he told me
it was foolish to take these frozen corpses
back to land. They belonged to the sea,
let them drift, then, far down. It's either the sharks
or the worms. But I want to be happy and political,
to imagine that words can speak to the stars,
can define the stubble on a ghost's cheeks.

II

Lament in the stinking sugar-cane towns
for Our Man of Cinema. Lament for his voyages
through the frames of heaven, this editorial figure
of whom one may say his art loved the bearhugs
enduring in human eyes but also recognized
deep, sweltering pits where death smouldered,
hanging on along the rims. Lament for friends
and lovers, awake or drowning blithely after a lunch
of avocados. Lament for the sound Truffaut
like a child's truth and the enemy who hides
in truth's dense verdure. Lament the man
who served the intimate flag of anyone's
country. Lament his picaresque vigor,
his coffee stains, his women and piano players,
his salvation of the innocents. Praise we,
under this acrid sky, the surviving sweetness.

I2

Hawaii, neither here nor there. A visitor
allowed his moment in the sun, or to be wilder
in speech inside her rooms. Paradise
is enclosed, a space to be filled
with a measure of inclination to a matter
of degree. In these island latitudes,
green encircled by blue, he surrounds her
in being contained by her. This means
limit and control, subsumed in each other.
When we say, as together we must (the alternative
being not, not knot) our lessons interweave in a care-full
twining, one around the other. We say form's rope.

13

In this feminine summer, in these tropical islands,
words don't lie. The women of home send me
personal newspapers: one will divorce,
another plans for Paris, a third stalks the rose
whose very scent she wants tattooed on her shoulder.
They are closer to me here, in my remoteness,
than in their bright, fleshed presences. In my apartment,
alone, I sometimes greet myself like a drunken husband.

I4

Therefore, as I write, with Chinese, Japanese,
Koreans, Polynesians, Filipinos mingling with haoles
in my neighborhood, I must add to my account
these distinct accents, their essences, as these
affect the totality of one poetic body.

This America, westward to the East, begins
in water. It emerges onto pieces of land
and takes root as justly as coconut trees.

In the writing I feel damper than I do in New Mexico,
where the body of speech hears water only as an echo.

15

While fire burned in the fur of Kilauea
and observers cheered in their souls as loudly
as if they were watching a football game, elsewhere,
on another island, a grey limousine coasted down
from a higher elevation and turned toward
the Chinese cemetery. A man got out, looked over
the shrines elaborating the grass and waved
a hand. After some hours the volcano's fire
died out and everyone went away. The man who drove
the grey limousine vanished, leaving behind
a hand trying to sweeten the air. Traces are not original.
They hide in destiny, emerge as localized events.

II. In General

16

Whenever the light bends too far a strict
interposition occurs during which we glimpse
the primordial soma and the maroon foreshadowing
of human plasm. Someone in the room asks
how anyone could impose his eye so drastically
against the Earth's curvature as to prevent
the intervention of history. A rupture perhaps,
one moment broken away from the past, time itself
reeling off, on to this other vision-yet, viselike,
the retina, marineborn, holding to its skeletal seed.

I7

Back then, during the long nights when people
 sailed across many barriers of water, following
invisible directions, the stars opened
like oyster-shells. Those people felt gifted
whether they foundered or found the place
they didn't know existed. Some settled in,
some grew together like honeycombs, opening out
to others who came and scraped them clean. Dead stars.

18

These are dusty times. A man hugs himself
to keep from blowing away. When the wind changes
the scent of, let's say, lilacs no longer
lives in the shadows. It is dust, this aroma,
this arcane book, and the beauty of desire
lies in just this activity of decay
resurging. That's how the mind enters nature,
through the pores. A man takes notes, then the notes
take him, and they blow together, sounds of dust.

19

o believer in the circular way, you plan your mind
as the leaves change in faraway autumn, elsewhere,
while I lie here on sand, corrupting the sun
by offering it my flesh. The ocean that surrounds
Oahu remains always water with a blue cast
and a distancing to its golden, glaring rim.
For you the circle is a path to the same goal,
beginning to end. Which you will follow later
around the snow, one pure silence at a time.
But for me depth begins with a blurred, fathoming line.

20

Distracted by death, he passes through the halls,
eyes deliberating the method of his inconsequence
to general good order. When he is dead will the electrons
and photons of his life maintain their motions,
backwards? He hears no adieu, no bon jour
from his people-who are used to him. His heart
keeps going toward zero. Soon he will pass
from one meaning into another and no one but himself
or everyone else will be the wiser.

21

So the quite simple accident, the moment
at which a dog ran into the street or someone
fell from a scaffolding, and the same images
entered their beings, a sound of water
flowing from the tap, a taste of fresh, raw eggs,
the vision of self panting as if after
a long run. Then the laving with soap
until nothing remains but a trail of fiery bubbles.

22

Drinking long-forgotten mead, he improvises
a story about his colleague, once also a friend,
who now in the perils of his wife's death
embraces a black tree, believes it is knowledge
ancient as source itself. Dances with scarlet sap
staining his hands, dances in checkerboard steps,
the tree guided by him as if hearing him
throb for death. Because this is a story
made up in a trance, under the spell
of time's honey-liquor, only the romance is true.

23

Summing up, somewhere in the middle, he faces
himself as cultural fact. His recollection
of honeysuckle's white buds became an avenue
through a foreign city. He smelled his youth,
was compelled to learn in his body and mind
an admirable fate. While outside it rained
or the sun shone, he wrote down certain particles
of happiness. If he could materialize his own portion
of Eros, there would be more substance for others.
His own share in this broader economy
would gain a loving value, which inheres in self
only as it conveys ample Psyche to the elements.

24

Their eyes look at me, perforations
in the black harmony of things. They are indeed
a form of origin, the ongoing graph
that plots the universe. Who else but they
can pass the examinations? I hold them,
peel back their skins in layers week by week
and see how some grow larger. Even at the end
I am rarely sure we played the round game squarely.
When I go home I turn on the lamp,
eat a pear, sleep for a while; I close their eyes.

25

This nectar-and-ambrosia of each fresh morning
fills the lazy blood, a music that slowly ripens
as the minutes ascend. You fear the space you live in,
it's brittle, will break like the crystal
of a watch. When you leave on your walk
to the campus, a redheaded bird follows, soaring
and weaving its baton of a body through the blue score,
footnotes that accompany pedestrians along their daydreams.

26

Symmetrical fragments, the conductor explains. We extend a theme from eight bars, to nine, then ten, back to nine and eight. Lengthening—the extent of—the sweet melody still lingering at midnight over these high Manoa streets. We develop this theme, the conductor says, in bars of eight, ten, twelve, then the reverse. Sweetness is extensive this way, allows itself range backwards too. Continuing from eight, this time to twelve, to sixteen, and back so. Brio, largesso of mock orange repeating extensively sheet to sheet, especially the wordwinds, their sensuality—the conductor waves, waves, his hands—in the reeds, the seeds. It's all numbers.

27

in windy moonlight. A passage begins between
those who wander in the forests and those who stand
waiting for the lights to change. We know how little
the stars affect the fragrance in our bones
or the merciless affections of those who
love us. The horizon changes with every flick
of anyone's eyelash. Remember us, Mr. Smith,
as you relive certain motions of your last
life in the slowness and morbidity of a planet
too heavily weighted by human power. The mock orange,
frail as its aroma, borders the unfathomable death
of what we know, even as luteman Orpheus returns to us
with another new song from the dive below.

28

Listening to Copland's "The Red Pony," which is also
Steinbeck's, I hear my own childhood romancing
the exotic frontier, the West of my Bronx's
tight and sickly room. And now, having been there
and gone farther, this plaintive and heroic land
remains in my mind the rhythm I conceived.
Hearing "The Red Pony" in Honolulu, while the wind
bucks through my house like a wild horse, I know
there are sounds my body still waits for.
The years come on, they arrive trotting, prancing,
then they pass at a gallop. It's only now I wish
for a pony, only now that I could learn to ride.

29

Celan, my sweet man, your long death finally came
with a short shadow, and you flowed,
bottomless, along the loveless, almost silent
Seine. I sit here, candling your shorthand,
sly, torturing Stimme left over from life, lying
lightless at the bottom, selfs clearest water. Short lines.
Not lines at all. I take you into my mouth
bone after bone. Yellowing scraps, pages of teeth.

30

Now, having read Stanley Kunitz's Wellfleet whale poem,
I compare it to the daily smell
of mock orange. When he writes of the whale's
death, "on your way southward/to the warm lagoons,/
the tropic of desire," I feel the humanity of animals
such as myself, who live for a while
quite small beneath tall palms. Inhaling
white blossoms that fall from smaller trees,
I feel upheld, suddenly contained by the poem's whole
architecture of music, its long, mournful continuity.

31

Pain in the left big toe. The humor
of wet mock orange blossoms flying upon gusts
of stiff weather. Brahms' D Minor Piano Concerto
flows like golden marrow through the bones.
Nothing is settled by beauty, nothing lives lovely
in raw blood. Pain begins to remember
the long, supple fingers of Yo-Yo Mah,
his cello's very striding toward of earth,
resonant in yield. Bones, the barely audible call
of bones in the body's dew-laden grass,
its rhythm old and bucolic, sweet as fields of hay
trussed in bales. Then the baroque eclogue, then life.

32

I listen to another Blossom Music Center concert,
while in Mexico City the dead, burned, Pemexed
down to poor, weak memories, are being buried.
Schubert's Fifth-grand, noble. The slum's weary ashes,
the poor, those who were not invited.
And I, thinking about nobility, feel how sadly
out of style I am. Still, the violins bloom
and the cellists dig rich, brown earth
with each sweep of their bows. The fires linger
throughout the concert while the dead bow to their deaths.

33

Regarding the conventional beauty of a Matisse painting
you see a floral imagination illuminating
the human boneyard. Lacking odalisques,
the painter swarms through his fields and skies,
over his waters, with wings that ache
from the brilliance of their shadows. You regard
Matisse as a French vineyard, its harvest plucked
from the dead, and ground, living, into the feminine world.

34

Social interdictions progress by cognitive affiliations so that what is said reaches a degree of solitude no one believed possible. Parties form with crises, one cannot go from here to there then, the hostess will greet us with machine-guns. We who began to celebrate conclude like aged lions pawing at the caged air, from which the delicate but deep odor of maile leaves has disappeared. In the trainer's hands words become a sculpted ideology.

35

I hear it: the Christian must vote
for Christians. The young evangelizer
will not smell the mock orange that,
in the wind, follows its own belief,
an unexpected harmony for which no one
votes at all. Jesus, who was no Christian,
would have paused, would have caught
the scent. So much mock orange cannot be
martyred in a book. The zealot's message
is fearful: he waits for Christ in an alley.

36

Instant affectation? And then you realize
in the pressure of a man's hand on your shoulder
an affection more intimate than most
you have known. Although you just met him.
Although you're both sober and may not see each other
much in these Honolulu days. You think of going
to a florist, buying a lei for him, kissing his cheek
in the tradition. How affected that would be
in its unmanliness. And you a man. And he.

37

Once I imagined, walking at night in Moiliti,
that I was in my youth, guiding a lover
through the Bronx in July. The warmth
took me back and fragrance of the flower shops
on Beretania, although I know of no perfume
so pervasive then, back there, nor of a lover
nor even the fact of myself. I still think
my legs lead me on. A lightness in my legs.

III. In Disguise

38

Her heart settles into its web like an old thought,
a scribble on spidery legs. She waits on tables
at Horatio's, more mature than the others, a poet
and dancer, divorced from masculine emotion. A hand
beckons, someone wants. Her mouth opens, she spins
another thread along the floor, soundlessly. After work,
in the tired comfort of solitude, she breaks an egg
into the nest behind her eyes and hears that feathery thrust,
echo of some charm that flowed in her once, a humor
that nevertheless weaves airily through her carefully shaped legs.

39

Of course I am only pretending to be a man
pretending to be a woman, writing poems from the idea
of various women. I lack the body, the nature
As woman,
of a woman's ministrations.
I have not suffered the politics of rape or brutality
in the courtroom. These poems are second hand,
the first hand being occupied by my own
cock. Even so, I don't lie in style—
whose language offers itself as an equator
between two worlds. I, in making these words,
share the feminine conscience in embryo, a toddler
who must express its needs, its true mimicking of redemption.

40

Draft through the wooden window slars, again
a damp definition of pain. Then mock orange starts,
a different point of integrity in the same alphabet.
December's last short day and I touch my breasts
in order to complete them. It is all rounding out,
another year of suns and moons, which my body repeats
like a lesson barely learned. I smell the air.
It's the simplest thing I ever do. Then a distortion
in the lens so what I see is less the dogtrail
of a thought than its burrowing, the after-mound.

41

Always in Helen's slightly jasmined voice
an air of unmeant betrayal, Sue's love for her a bondage
they bear like a dull emergency. Smoothed over
by the rub of that lackey, duty, how can Sue
risk emerging into the luck of the day?
Thinking of Helen far from these Honolulu hills,
her lovestruck woman still likes Helen's sexy husband,
to whom they will stick, thickening sap to the maple-man.

42

Frozen papaya, sweet glaze of a fruit
natural in its need for warmth, for the devouring
mouth. When I receive your note
and read how seriously my thought disturbs your phrasing
I retract my wish for your presence here
where I live in a cold glass. The sour moisture
that lingers in my eyes will not come dry
even in this seasonless heat. You are safer
in your young manhood, behind the locked window
from which you look out into another dominance:
your own hand. My mind would sweeten like the fruits
my time has forced, but you must grow more wildly.

43

windows, my eyes flying inward to conceal
the fresh honeysuckle I'd brought with me
from the mainland: the frozen spunk of my main man
preserved in a jar. I am afraid, cowardly, so far
from his manna and the stiff drink he offers me,
to preserve me from depression. I have noticed
claustrophobic episodes in which I feel
I'm suffocating. Unable to smell or taste,
sleep or think, breathe or move. The common cold
aggravates the chemical imbalance, already present,
shaped by hormonal cycles. This terrible illness
of psyche, the raw dream of cock stuck inside me
like a bone in my throat. The storm lets up, I wipe away
my tears, can smell the stench of semen as I open the jar.

44

Since my thought leaks through the protoplasm
of leaves and grass, I cannot hold to the ledges of nature.
I look for something integral—a quenchless desire—
in his face, in what he says as he ranges over
the sexland I open to him with a smiling little
click. Not that I mind composing myself
as a painting for him to stare at through his drunken monocle
and take notes nor to be, as I am, a thing among
other flesh-things; what I object to is his nervous face
that changes attractions like a movie marquee. I will quit
my anger if he will take back his dildo. Nothing is
baser in deceit than a stale-fishy mattress.

45

I forgot how to advertise, he said, which
made him an unknown product. A polite
idea. A man among morsels, nibbling at extinction,
a most modest prize, I thought, who loved his
expetimental disgust with all self-improvement.
He said he was too young, not I too old,
saying which he retreated into blazing woods,
the smoke fragrant, lord, the ascending lair of lions.

46

His eyes invest me until I cannot believe
in my body apart from his hands forming
my round, milksweet breasts-sculptor of my flesh—
and the eye of my vagina looks
for his eyes amid the vast debris of visibles, to be taken
from myself by his thought, what he thinks of me
and of all else, my place in his digressions
and sudden exact investments, among these my eyes
which suffer in his power, suffer being
taken from me, all vision a marketplace.

47

She wants to feel a strong animal between her legs.

A zebra would be fun. Sucking a lime, she hears
Bach's Brandenburg No. 5 bursting in her mouth,
the tart juice of old music. The loneliness
a waitress feels, hours dying in cups
of weak, brown coffee. She wants to ride Man o' War
through lettuce fields, feeling his hooves crushing
leaves. Her mind wanders, a harpsichord
in fresh green light, the air of a new planet.
She can't remember the names of her lovers,
who summon her, whose words whinny in her ears,
leave her pawing the ground, rutting, taking root.

48

What to do? Her hands are long-fingered, strong
as she holds the three-week infant. Breasts large,
nipples attentive for the small, masterful lips.
She shows off the child as a mother of culture should.
Where is her lover? This is politics,
the raw nerve that seizes a moment of gospel
and makes of it a never-ending tune. People
hum. Somewhere Eros and the Love Goddess
lie together, abandoned, no more than a moral crisis,
and here the mother's eyes curve away, like any road.

49

She's gorgeous, you hear him say. Her blue
eyes hover over the landscape's sharp green blades
where ever-larger anthuriums grow brighter, slicker
scarlet blooms with longer, creamier antennae.
A doll, he says, dying. Month by month
he is less immune to the acquired system of his
disease, her gift given him through the blood,
those feral blue eyes luring him toward the ground.

50

One right spasm, then another. Glow-worms
live and die in the blood. A wise history
written with a quick pen, the heart's
fluttering, its flustery covey of words. Meanwhile,
mock orange floats calmly in air, not interfering at all
with her view of Diamond Head on a diagonal
to the north. In her mind the speech of Eros
comes from a past beyond conscious recall:
one tight spasm, and again, the stuttering angel.

51

This fabric, pure silk, spun by the worm-eaters
of mulberry leaves, coats my skin with jeweled filaments;
a fine, cold light. Its length to my ankles,
this gown suits me well-even in sultry Honolulu
where I mingle with my guests, inhaling the honeysuckle
brought from California. I am a whitehaired woman
with a silky character that some I know call mere wealth.
I adore a cool sensibility, a candle-struck wineglass.
My musicians play, they sing and dance the hula.
I pay them for mimicking the one I am not.

52

Yes, the soldiers, they want to die, it is their purpose
to die and linger in the air, pale adumbrations
of a lecture one delivers to their sons and daughters
whose russet roots go plunging down, earth. The tiny bells
of earth, clovers of the soul, lovers in the arms
of crystal Psyche. Stand among your moons, dead soldiers,
raise the stein to cheer on your speechless ambitions.
I who am the mother of your stones lie down
beside the same moon, which takes me in its arms.

53

All this fuss about mock orange, those bitty white
petals covering some ten feet of sidewalk
on Oahu Avenue just down from East Manoa.
True, their bouquet in still weather goes on for miles,
covers the hills, comes together in the bedrooms
of all the houses like the flora of a woman.
That's no reason to celebrate, a woman's no reason.
She's how sex catches your scent, Mr. Noseguy.

54

We had breakfast, grapefruit, coffee
and that saltless oatmeal he liked as well as
butterflies or the red-crested cardinal. Before he left
for work he picked a bouquet from our garden.
For the office, he said. Redhaired, fluttery,
his girl must have twittered when the scent of me
reached her eyes. She puts me in water,
my clipped edges touch the vase's bottom, where
I wilt slowly, watching them fuck, he dreaming of me,
she dipping a thought into her brain's cold pudding.

55

In my remoteness from men, I understand better
 why I was never born in any particular place.
The city shifts, changes course away from exact
mock orange. Someone smokes a cigarette
in the adjoining room. Wisps of the human
enter me from under the door. My motive records
on the nilly tape only abstract desire, word-facts
designed to forget themselves instantly, to remain as traces
of the actual. When I reminisce about men
I hear the simple multitudes of a sky. Who are they,
these ghosts? I drift, a mere sound among
cerebral chapels whose devotions subvert natural laws.

56

Eating the marvelous chocolate brandy mousse
at Friday's I was reminded of the woman
who opened a newspaper to a random page
and saw her photograph published there. The mousse
was as delicious as that woman, the same sweetness
with a dab of tart. I don't remember her name now.
It was in LA I knew her and I don't remember LA.
But she was photographed with her husband
who had just won an Oscar for film decor
and she saw herself feeding him brandname kisses.

57

This might sound like water dripping slowly
from a faucet, but that other woman, the poet
who read last night, writes knick-knacks. One hears
the common myna bird, then reads up on it.
Variety of notes, mostly harsh. A mimic.
Loud and aggressive, often comical. Walks rather than hops.
Lays 2-5 blue or blue-green eggs. This bird
often seen in pairs. Easy to strangle. Get it published.

58

A feeling shines out from her face like a bruise
leaving the apple, and my memory draws fragrance
from this leavening. Slender. Black hair cut short,
she reminds me of the dead woman I once had loved.
The one who, for all her liveliness, lived inside
a heart gone sour with too much risk. Beautiful
woman. Who loved other women, me among them. Now this one,
conversing at a party, to whom I am introduced,
also sees her danger. It is plain in a glint
the light catches in her left eye when she looks,
lips puckering in a smile. So it's you,
she wants to say, and I am still afraid of ghosts.

59

before her, left leg bent at the knee, inward; face
expressionless as she witnesses the eye
of the camera taking sight of her, zeroing in
on a desired object. I, as a woman too, have insight
into the feeling that remains like the flavor of an iris
frozen in her past. Even while her naked body
settles into the bedsheet and her fingers
deliberately press against her labia, opening out
the sign of her womanhood, the mute word
of her most basic trust, nothing changes in the way
her mouth, small and pink, stays pursed
on the brink of speech yet refuses to say anything.
She knows, as I do, who for the moment enter
her body with a bright snap, that nature speaks itself.

60

Her body scorns its whiteness, its expanse
of skin. Her body protests against its purity,
which even bronzing with lotion
under ultra-violet covering will not hide.
She wills her flesh to be a butterfly, then a cluster
of grapes; she would be an eagle, an oriole,
a field of fragrant roses glowing in their skin.
Viewing her whiteness in the mirror, she sees
her cold armor, her childhood among the executors
of a frozen estate. Her body begs for fresh life,
to be recomposed as a major work of love,
a sensual palette: her body in the state of its art.

61

She sits, legs under thighs, red-stockinged,
black garter linking to a black swimsuit
from which modest breasts stand out, exposed. I cannot
see her face which hides under the red architecture
of a hat. It is this hat into which her entire body
must fit, it is what the body began with.

A succession of doorways leads away from her, who will
not move, will sit, hands unseen between her thighs.

62

She lifts her left leg high, knee bent, and
looks toward her obsession sweetly. Or the man with
the sketch pad, his moustache curling upward in
two little c's, opposing. She wears gold shoes,
high-heeled, and a blue top-hat. Her
breasts are bare. The patrons drink and smoke,
they talk, they waltz like reflections of all
the Blue Danubes ever composed in the rain,
lamplight flickering on slick tombs. The
artist rubs out a line, waits for the girl to die.

63

You remind me of my arbitrary manner
in collecting images. How I insert
a renewal notice inside the purest of issues,
as if to say don't go away. I know the air
is lighter where you are, back home
3,000 miles to the east. And in such lightness
the heart reasons like a mountain-climber.
If I could prove to you that my age
is never the same whenever I count it
you would still accuse me of willfully
changing the world. Sweetheart, you are young,
for you spring is a season, for me it is everywhere.

64

In this woodwork, can it be?, one Indian's
head carved, burnished, eyes glaring yellow,
more a cat's than a man's, and I mooning, as they say,
over a presence never present, the metaphysical
energy of an icon. I have loved a man
of painted wood in whom I thought the ancient
river ran, the Biblical one, the Snake. Where fled
his war-bonnet, the bloodfeathers? I pray for
exile, with him, in his wherever. Eat me,
you burners, you dwellers in Plato's last symposium.

IV. In Language

65

Today I found our the lyric poem is dead.

No more of that referential bullshit. If you want
to say anything serious about the aroma
of honeysuckle, say it in borrowed prose. In that way
it will have credence as a poem, something
one might find on a bus, an advertisement for
honeysuckle (in a postmodern setting). Thousands of people
reading a poem only you dared to find.

66

Language believes in love, rudiments, the axe
that splits the career of a man like myself.
Like myself, a beginning to the problem of what
a man engages. When I bottom, boxlike,
to the bloody rings around her eyeballs, who
tops? Engaged to language, we both band together,
bond. A force together. When she later splits
am I the axe-wielder? Control is a matter
of words, of how they give and take, love, or spy.

67

She reads her poems in the Korean Studies
Center. They are like glass or a grey whisper,
bits of rain sliding down the evening.
She is the sound of partial anodynes
squeezed by a slight pressure in spurts
from pacific tubes. Restrained
the voice, cultured in a laboratory
where poets evolve like bells at proper hours,
in trusted circumstances. Afterwards
one Zen guy says yes, another says no.

68

Sometimes the grease works, a smoothy
with slippery black hands. Who would know
the rook in the barley field, devil-may-care
among god's sweaty hands, chafed, cuffed
by too many debts. Here's how Greece
works. Play it one hand at a time
and the gods, Demeter and the rest, will call
the rookman home. Pay up. Show the palms.
When the days end let there be no prayer up the sleeve.

69

Those grammarians, their combinations prescribe
immediate medicine, reduce my window
to a pinhole. No big light gets in.
Everybody likes either/or, not both; not sick
as he/she of my own sentence. Only one pronoun
steals my name, but I live in the weather
of both. In violet aftersun. In snow, blindness,
where it's almost black. No visitors. Aloud

70

After these last several years to at last move
my white queen into her properly black funeral—
a coronation. How long has she been exposed to light,
how long stood there, a mute, quivering piece of ego?
Last night, in a dream, I saw her clear as chalk
on a shelf in Hades. Having buried her,
I allow her to surface now from depth, transformed,
now that I have dreamed her power. My ally
from among the dead, strong white soul, be re-sourceful
as you teach me new words against the day's black king.

71

Loving the daughter in her, a name he gives
in his own defense, to say hers without blight
of body, his, or disconsolate design in soul,
what Plato meant without cant. O to be
sung by her eyes each morning and stilled
like wine in the tempered cellar of her sleep,
night decanted, drunk in sips of her name,
in image of her eyes' brown grain. No daughter,
no, yet as a vintage man, bottled for years,
dustgatherer, an excuse to profane
his philosophic idol. She, as access to love, opens
the sun, spills faded ink from his envelope.

72

Less is gained when the sentence unwinds itself
and retracts. The issue refers to less than imagined,
perhaps the relevance of mock orange, the suite
of scent infused from it. That a sensuous body
might exist in air, inspiring. So much is true
of people in their willingness—the sways
in licit intercourse between senses, that of thought
informed with outer signs. To block out
the attitude of mock orange would interfere,
like a city planner, with related environment.

73

The carved island, a crate labeled “Sunkist”
and a stage of passage. Shuffling noise
that enters the apartment which might have been
leaves rubbing. Fierce sunlight stretching
across the floor and after that a meditation
on randomness. Taking a chance, one opens
an eye to the mundane. So many chances
are taken: to give one is an opportunity.

74

/ 4 Hello, goodbye and love. The hula dancer
emancipates a song from its eye in the wilderness.
Carbon deposits. Carbon deposits erect stages,
entries in ledgers. Trees stand long
in shadows, remote as Muscovy and some truth
hidden in cells, atoms of geology.
The heart's ripe soot analogizes, divisions of labor
like value-strata, bats in the cave.
Tons of geology atomize Muscovy. We shell our ears
to disgorge the music, all those results of patience
and silence. Hello and goodbye, love, that's it
in a word, the willow-dance, the ravaging ages.

75

/ 5 He left the nudist colony, those verbal units
exploited by the imperial flesh. His revolution
180 degrees, turned other thinking around also,
all so then word-wise. Lust everything,
away from the surplus of lust, waverings
on imaginary Maui. Myth man he was, first to lust,
his tanned hide, wasting himself
on that brown-skinned blonde broad, wide-assed but.
Tight she, wifed to a mad-assed Confucian whose mind tasted
of. Morality reversed all ways counter-clockwise,
so no more, no soar. Head back in Oahu,
leave behind. Where the emperor of ice
and she, the royal creamer, together flesh.
Gathering in all that remains too bare,
he, a myth of a man, his followers feel
love's body fresh, true lust one, won in love.

76

Language, the sacred land gauge, which measures
by phonemes and morphemes each breath
of our Earth. Weak-kneed he/she walks
across the Big Island's sun-silvered lava scape,
and words will not stop walking too. Two birds
wave goodbye vaguely in the distance, twin
ambassadors from the sky gods or emblems
of our ceaseless lexicon. When he/she returns
so does English, the language of inches,
double-sexed. Mauna Loa and Mauna Kea
govern here, rising in their snowcaps, old ladies,
old men, the cooled fire darkening, holy, under us.

77

/ How valuable it is to describe something
exactly as it is, in words that re-place
that certain actuality. I say of mock orange,
“Its aroma combines with ordinary air. Everyone
breathes for a while a different air. The habit of
breathing changes.” In identifying the fact
I make an equation without changing anything.
The reader continues to breathe, the air imagines.

78

Thought exists under many different aliases,
one of them, being, the subject. Who thinks.
For example, a man stands in shadow under a tree.
A woman dances by in scarlet leotards. Elsewhere,
the camel, the owl. Someone pulls an oar
in the suburban twilight. So that there gathers
an essence, which is the fugue of a dream.
The tongue grafts endeavor onto the summery lake,
which dreams the sky. People go by,
thinking of a subject. Woman, camel, man, owl.

79

/ Not to distract the reader keep language
at water level, neither in nor out. That surfer's
political. Heritage Polynesian, or what?
Thinking no more than that board, lifted high
by leveling water. Waves belong
to the ocean, the beach? Water wakes up,
land sleeps. The water music, royal Hawaiian,
loyal to who we think is Marx, who, it was Alex
freed the serfs. Yet water still ends
where it does, land's end, where the board stops.
The reader bears it on a shoulder away toward
socialism, some green grave startled out of reverie.

80

So we, “scholars of the heart,” waver at the littoral,
observing Queen Anne’s lace in the froth of water.
Or we decipher a code of arms, this the happiness
of poets, sniffers of cherry laurel, high vaulters,
dopers and denoters. High in reverence, but
cherry laurel, alone in the world, refers to nothing,
whose only echo nothing is. Speech effect.
False flowers of water. Blueprints for star wars.
Objects of the world, O consumed by speech
in its restlessness, its risk to be ultimately safe.

81

He holds a biologically crisp view, holds it
in hand. While she manipulates, a skill of words.
Together they are one. Sexually independent
and believers in totemic projections
of the heart. They stack each other
above, above, higher, in a stark order
defining muscular terms. Their fuck dreams
“the utilitarian function of repression.”

82

This old-fashioned face, this grammar that walks
with a limp. This shape dormant under the sun.
Where have all the predicates gone? The sensitives
find luck, a voice in the source-pool,
common in health-seeking. Something lost,
something taken. Also in this anatomy, anger,
a wish for elsewhere and a somnolence in the white eyes
drained by too much light. You, a name in the ancestral wars.
You, the doubled, sulking in your tent.

83

Emotions dispelled by amples, drifts in
the borrowed zone. Ampules perhaps. The man
in the yellow slicker/the woman who calls him
long distance a civil ox. A certain drugged
state, probably Colombia. Or less obviously
Sri Lanka, ex of Ceylon and the British Empire.
Long distance waits to be called. Oxlike
because it is civil, because it is raining,
because cocaine is white. History, the state of life
in which time is returned to the lender.

84

Poetry's enchanting thought. Pale evening lime
light, orange-flamed. Through metaphor
a brightness falls, the figures of night begin to squirm
through life's first story. Eros sleeps in Psyche,
wish and fear in black illuminations, waylaid
by words on the later streets, Honolulu's anywhere.
What body has borne and mind remembers:
Francis Bacon's empirical captions, plastic faces, contorted lovesouls,
metaphors. In sex, This is That.

85

Slowly we notice or we notice the slowness
of mock orange dissipating, having en-joyed the air,
and we the air's low hanging, a vast relief over
the hungover city. Now mock orange, almost de-scented, leaves us with a
simulation of sadness,
an as-ifness. The primordial smell of saltwater
rests heavily now on the sweet old laurels,
which we absorb slowly, a rising and sinking.

SATURN IS MOSTLY WEATHER

1992

The archive witness contains only printed pages 22–30; two complete, otherwise uncollected poems follow.

The Game Refuge

A passage, this game refuge
near the center of a city growing
out of the sand. The fowl
are safe by this pond
near a great river. If we humans
could glide so silently
in our atmosphere, lift off
but not fly too far from our lives.
If we could see ahead
only to the next bracken-covered bank
and feel in our blood an endless
return to home.

No, the city grows
around us, the air dimming
with worn light. Heavier, this air,
weighted down by the fuel
that keeps us traveling on
and back, swift migrations
within defined parameters. The more we go
the further we incite a thoughtless need
to harry ourselves. To ask
of our own deadliness a refuge,
survival.

Green, abundant life
and feathered life. Mallard and duck,
this and the visiting geese
from Canada. Squirrels storing
their winter away. Bees thorough and full
in the buzzing.

A man comes
to look, to get away from his destiny
for an hour. He is distracted
by money and love. He is aware
of his death. Outside his mind
the city burns on from road to road:
another shape of wild life,
endangered. And he with it,
he in great numbers looks for
water, the lotus and red osiers,

somewhere set aside for use in passage,
time reset short of death,
that first thought edging on to the shore.

Festival of the Wolves

There is the music of the wolves.
They chant to one another
legends of meat and snow.
Their favorite skies are gray
and this music is very cold.

The wolves describe our fears
in narrowing circles.

Glacial fur.

Breath of
slit-open guts.

Wolves.

They smell our bodies
in the Arctic storm.

They close in.

Their music. The dance
of their steaming eyes.
They are delighted!

How justly,
how exaltedly they live.

A LOVER'S QUARREL WITH AMERICA

1985

The Renaturing Cycle

Dreaming is the psyche itself
doing its soul-work
—James Hillman

Slowly the axe grows crazy in catalpa wood
 slowly the bole grows out of itself
 out of earth
 it narrows down from simple standing
 into a bent sleep
The axe is brilliant in the shadows a blade streaking silver through mottles of sun
 a fierce energy
it is action
 merciless
 though later
 the axe will also tip against plankwall
 no light entering then its place of depth
and there
 leaning into sleep
 will be helpless as dried and sullied
 seaweed
A thing
 this tested instrument
 alone unto its acts
 undergrown by
 older life
 back then ages back
 that blackmoon country
 The tree roots itself in virginal sky
 a capsized umbrella
 a warning, axe:
whose shade is white and warming
 the undertow of
 objects
 (like the human night-soul)
 pulls counter
 the tides
 Everything survives in the negative
The day forgets

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September Evening

for Floyce Alexander

No more talk on the patio
September a dry blue refulgence clings to the sky over
 the mesas clings to the sky we remember
as the friend of all our years always blue always the awakener
Our talk diverged from what our lives were now although in the
 darkening blue the sky maintained its moment
 alive for us
I don't want to leave never again leave the
 finished history
of this calm somewhat sanguine witness to all our digressions
Sorrowful brothers let us not refuse even one resurgent moment
 and wherever it is we must go after this evening
I trust the calendar that rips mythology from its numbers
I trust the caves which no one has entered the sere petals of its angels
I trust the unblossomed heaven
I want to see one more breach like this one more opening
 to silence
 absence written in sunblooded leaves of aspen birch
 and yew
leaves ready to fall slip away into hollowing light Brothers the moon
 absorbs us gently
 all circles must end

Arbitrary Design

Hickory nuts lie smashed in fallen powdered leaves
Someone is preparing a charm
will sprinkle on gooseberries
phlox and sauce of papaya
Galapagos-egg saltspray grass of sorrow
then stir until ready to cook
“A foolish arbitrary design”:
the wind carries these words to me
in caravans of snow
everything has shifted from long ago
extensions, a traveling
That’s fine
When one is ravenous for love
even the corpse of snow
inspires an embrace
and one moment for the teeth to flare
flare out, dying
matchboxes
sucked into the stars
our crushed and mangled stars

“Something”

We want this to be about “something”
a fact if possible
or at least
a simulation
detachable
from the spherical music
like an organ
from the supernal flesh
It’s how one says it
the system
where we live
our crowded intestines
another
reels of film entangled, cutting into one
no longer separable
as images
Why then prolong this terminal discourse
about “something”?
It is enough to assent
that heaven is androgynous
and we are issues formed in time
dyadic and processional
Drapes around a nude figure
in stone or air

Bad Air Imprisoned in the Ventilating System

Scorpius, the nailed whip of wisdom belongs in that home designed by the father
of
skyscrapers
house devoured by glass overlooking any city its mystical lights collected
in the nightwindow's
frame
structure of devotion, shifting in earth.
How to
believe,
Scorpius
in so fragile a demonstration of mankind's power
Poison is everywhere
prepared to scourge the flesh of
natural
humor
and those who do not move their furniture into stylish pent-up houses where
god is tailor-made
Selfish prayers rise in air
vaporous towers
glass needles stalk the veins of our
sky
Robert Chetkin died a year ago
another OD come to light on the same day
Jean
Seberg
was found in her white Paris Renault 10 days in the devil's arms
staked and burned by Quaker Nixon's secret
agents
skull & bones actress
while Chetkin poet of disillusioned air
former student, arm wrestler
said to have been
lonely
mixed his wine with too many spiked wafers
unmarked
in
passing

like
 or not Mayakovsky Lenny Bruce many others whose names are closed to reporters
 and the
 times

Your glass house Chet
(round bespectacled face black hair a compact gentle man)

as well as Saint Jean Seberg's

also that punk rock slayer's

self-stung

all

Scorpius,
 toxic fingernails and gondolas of black semen
 beleaguer all

our vows

prayers are closets where dead bodies

hang

Why lonely Chet?

Why not lifeparties and walks

through

jewflower

gardens?

Why not a snow of blue and incredibly fleecy

bells?

As you

said

"nothing survives in the temperate zone"

Scorpius oversees the museum of stars

the church of broken

glass scattered

across the

heavens

The Hallway

Between here and there
this hallway vanishes
behind one
with each step
taken
Arrival then is from nowhere
as if one interviewed Kaiser Wilhelm II
after the final defeat of his generals at the Marne
“Was that it
a river? and therein my soldiers lie
washing back to some untraceable source?”
But the kaiser also is mysteriously not present
reportedly dead since 1941
a hard man to corner if one is a journalist and needs
just this particular interview for a raise or promotion
Better perhaps not to arrive to pause in the hallway
between this and that
Let the soldiers die in peace the River Marne runs colder now
and alters its course slightly
to accommodate history
There is no logos (so long after the lackword
of a beginning)
but what the hand inscribes and
thought erases from the child’s blackboard

The Epileptics

One who has done hard work
One who waits many hours
One who smokes and shouldn't
Another who finishes every crossword puzzle
Ourselves in cynical ecstasy
what can we say to people
who live their lives outside
the pen that describes our circle?
But we shouldn't end
on a question a thankless thought
you and I elusive in each other's arms
One who gets married
One who grows in trees
and these others whose edges are lapped by the seas
into polished architraves
No,
let us believe serenely in laughter
the laughter of our selves
who devour our own /
each other's
tongues

The Age Now Ending

So the Romantic Age ends

as it crawled through the mirror of brutal water
crawled headfirst body severed from its caul to the navel of statues
that have stood all night in the cold
bearing starfrost with stoic and inhuman
calm

The Age now ending questioned the heart
as if it were water and the heart answered clawing like a lobster boiled alive
How cunning the crustacean's quiet agony
for to speak aloud in such condition
would be to tear the cloth which conceals our tattered
set
all the actors caught gazing long into their armored glass

So this Age is a vision of melodrama
in which death is not tragic and sin lives grandly enough in a Las Vegas hotel
For those of us who cannot buy the heart's conscious cross
there lies the sea in its blue cape
the carnal sea

We stare out across it
toward its cessation
where we accept the mind's provisional line
marking us off as marginal creatures
concentrated into one horizon

A Good Story

He sits outside on the olivegreen earth
knees tucked under hands flat on his thighs
an impossible position

it seems
to sustain

Yet his head
small above the huge hard chunk of body
has fallen to his chest in sleep

Elemental visage the same harsh heavy blue
as the sky's lost between maroon dusk
and water's evening indigo

Overhead a scrap of cloud
illuminates his dream like an interior moon

He has held his place here
embraced by stone
from the beginning

Massive power moves through him
this dozing monument

immune from desire
whose image precedes all words

The Dandy

This dapper morning reflects a sudden belief in
imitation as it walks with sharp strides
 into the musky scent of the boulevard's aftershave lotion
 This morning witnesses
 nothing original in the shape of an apple
and nothing premeditated in a man's brisk legs
 when they discover emergencies under brimming leaves

Copies of death lurk at every corner
 of this morning in every art shop and Safeway
 in the famous cathedrals of France
 and brothels of Corpus Christi
Only tall humidity stands against
the wordy dandy who so charmingly confronts his image in glass
imagines himself a crisp lettuce
 a world that corresponds with amusing
 parables outside his clearly marked Exit
What wilts is the morning's muse on stilts

 And then coming back
 wearing the veil of dusk
 who would remember the gifted clothing the grooming
this very day's origin?
 Time's petrified scrawl signifies a repetition
 which defies all exotic departures
 bundles them away in burlap sacks that trucks pick up
and take somewhere
 Tomorrow gets up groggy knowing it remains yesterday
It gets dressed white spats and an amber bamboo cane
strolls jauntily into itself
 and waits at the corner for the light to change
 for the light seductive
O great swine O green eye boiling in the dreamlocked crater

Sediments

When he glares at his reflection
opens his maw in a huge black yowl
 he comments on the accretion of moments of instants
 and what it leaves in sediments
 what is not expelled
 by aptitude or tricks
 by sleep's enormous fugue
 by his mother taking him on a fair sunny day
through the ancient park
 with its statue of czarist Russia
 or his father dying
on the wrong side of Jerusalem

Heavily now
 a man of more than golden years
 he lifts one foot then the other toward
 the next Halley's comet
his lifeline broken into many abstract chunks
 He stares at his dry corroded tongue
 at the unfashionable map of his cheeks
 into his eyes' barely detectable rivulets of moss
 at his teeth which remind him of baby marshmallows
and refuses to be the victim
of his own heroic life

 He turns away from the face of the moon
 that old sunscarred pug
 that looking glass no breath stirs with dew
toward summer's pilgrimage alone
 along the tawny heatlines heartdrawn
 The pen in sweet humor spells its sand

Pointing to a Blackbird

Arms breast-high bent at elbows
fingers drooping down
 like leaves from an unwatered tree
 what does he bless
 stern-faced
 eyeholes black
 unseeing
 father, whom do you bless?
Surely not me who have with you
 only the meaning of mechanical birds
 clacking above in the city's marginal heaven

 You left behind a dozen rusty needles
instead of eggs
 instead of a lighted candle
Even you must have had a woman
somewhere on your tongue
 or the alphabet of olives
 or a knife's pure whisper

Father with owls in his fingers prays
for a kind word
 from the oracle of orts
 the toothless beginning of eternity

Or my other view
 the bluebird nourishing the treelimb
 as I look down from the mountains above Taos
 that bluebird
 I point to
 am able to point to
 as lovely in itself
 no reference otherwise
 secreting

A Good Story

This old and moderate desire for narrative
reminds me of autumn

of a drive we took through Bandelier's
turning leaves
scarlet, fierce gold and some still green
also those black denuded poles
shafts of a fire distant in time
harrowing still the high ground on the way
south
via Los Alamos
where everyone wears an image and
a name
Afterwards, continuing on
we came through the mounds and mesas of Jemez clay
as violently red as the leaves
and the sun that accompanied us
as hotly gold as the earlier aspen
of this fall we rode upon
as if it were some perfect direction
with a firm result
I know this was not so
The purpose of our way merely intersected
a certain hour of the season's best light
What story
can be told of it then
of leaves and earth?
No story but nostalgia
a weakness of the eye which hordes
its names and images
of the ear which listens raptly to the eye
and of the other senses
their taste for a scent of clarity
in whatever they read as they act
A good story flows across the air piecemeal
the smoke of trees
the smoke of trees
The weather hurtling toward us
flings one dry crow after another into the cages
where our words pace back and forth

wild
cursed by day and by night
lulled to silence only by fresh red meat

The Indian Capital of the World

In Gallup, in the Pizza Hut
 they go from table to table
 the sky behind them
 always tomato red
 they carry this sky
 through the smoke of their very white cigarettes
 the fumes the clouds
 which need a location
such as the sunspots in their eyes
 - when they hold before the patrons
 a pair of silver earrings
 or a turquoise bracelet
It's a long way to Gallup from anywhere
 the light after snow falls differently there
 the owl's last incision, the truth's
 first question
and they offer no solutions
 no revenge no whispering disease
 Cheap jewelry and a thin crust of laughter
sometimes dark sunglasses
 sometimes a sky that topples to earth
 heavily
 thick in buffalo dust

Man Asleep

Asleep at the wedge where wall joins wall
 wrapped in a blanket
overhead an airplane infinitesimal as a fly
 hums in a straight line
 that gradually fades into a point
 finite
 only in retrospect
while asleep against the wall
 the man of science
 mutters in patches
 words we cannot understand
because they are numbers occurring in a dream
 equations perhaps
 that would embrace the airplane's arrival, departure
and all other trajectories of matter
 into a single kiss
 a moment
 never abandoned
 a sound solid in the graph of time
 and also unavoidable as myth

The square root of a tree
is the wall against which he sleeps
 altogether an order of dots and curvy dashes
 that would resolve
 in enduring love
if that were possible
if the world did not vanish in sleep

Embrace in an Open Field

They stand in a field
under a yellowish light
inseparable
a single figure
Days will pass and they will not move
and those who go by will wonder
at so humanly sentimental a statue
They embrace under the same yellowish light
not of the sun
rather of more tedious consistency
of the same texture as their lips
longing to part
but unable to
as the light also
would change
if it could
Years later the motorists who go by and see them from a distance
say, speaking through the glue of their individual tongues:
This is boring
They should be torn apart
Are they alive?
Eventually the light does rot like a dead lemon
the man the woman
grow differently get a divorce
and someone who doesn't see them any more
someone who wished them bad
news
now yearns again
for that wintry light
their darker shape there in the field
formed as humans are
of blood, music and luminous air

Erotic Woman

This is what I like about her: that she
thoughtlessly spreads her body across
whatever plan of earth receives her
and lies still a lake
seemingly unruffled by wind
or the silent amplitude of her needs

If then she is a circle of water
if she is too prone to reside for long
in the harrowing streets
may a sailboat glide through her blood
a child's easy answer
to the problem of April and May
when the sun is still too alone:
a soft body in a gathering paradise

What I like about her: that she
does not awake with dirt on her face
with trembling legs and heart stuffed inside her sex
She will go out into the sounds
of cicadas and glassy buildings
will mingle with shopkeepers
on the classical shore
of her private ghosts
and not too quickly
open her purse
daylight of dolphins and horses

During the immense hours
she will meet strangers with her body
friends also
and with a spirit thoroughly large
encompassing reason as well as appetite
When she spreads her eyes her mouth
across the loud seclusion of another's
pantomime
her offering is not excessive

I like this about her: that she
wears her presence with a careless prescience
not wanting death but already storing it up

giving herself away
to the man in the drinking place
the woman behind the counter
Still, she holds herself implicit
her mind unclassified by strict space
in this or that barbedwire acre of weed or water
She thinks of pain
as someone she can call to
as a service of the spirit
and will not let go of her slender death
no matter how willingly she and anyone
obey her body's law

A Lover's Quarrel with America

The Caterpillar

As they stand on the threshold
his mouth senses
the whirring inside her body
electric
wirelike
something coiled, captive
struggling to emerge
perhaps as word
or cry
and this conflict or perhaps a wound that still hurt
as it entered her tongue
reminds him of a surrogate birth
an upward spiraling along her spinal column
the caterpillar
womb
vagina through uterus
caught in her throat
cracking open
so that when they pause
to open their eyes
a blue butterfly
issues from her lips
disappears with one willowy moan
into abstract happiness
the universe of butterflies

Ceramist

As she drinks the liquid from the soft cup
her tongue enters an unlit corridor
humid as the earliest moment she can recall
a blue flame a liquid flame
Her mood melds into the cup's handle
her mind a clay vessel
containing shadowy milk

She holds a woman's breast
cupping the flesh towards her mouth
Her tongue sucks the length of its memory
the long-ago liquid
which her eyes have never called by its name
She washes the cup from her feelings
body languorous from immersion
mind thoughtful within a capsule of sleep
so that she drifts entirely
in a bath
of her father's semen
swallowing swallowing
in order not to drown

Androgyne in Aleph

Speaks in a voice difficult with arranged symmetries
to behead the gloved tulip of gender
as if to be alone in a single self
required too many curves of geometry
Alludes to concentric pools
fishless
warm under a sun that never lingers
in the frozen zones
If she calls herself “she”
it is as choice
of one body against another
or with
To doubt but double
as in couple
Leans into her future braced only by light poles
into which and around her body winds
vine embracing
Dreams, fluid, flood
bodysap translucent spilling down her thighs
eyes tremble like water rippling
after the cast stone
Dream and dream parallel whatever she says
lover lover
curves her back backwards
feet on grass hands touch sand
The black poll of her sex rises, curious, through the fevered white leaf

Phantoms and Echoes

She suffers her monogamy
 with bruising intensity and a sly
 offering of her body to the imagination
 of imagined lovers
 Many days pass ineptly
 forgotten in the oven
 so black and spoiled
 they break in her hands between
 one lust and the next

 So the good skin of her face
 betrays a lost solitude
(but not the husband not the children)
 her sleep so dense with dryads and lovers
 that even awake they brush against her temple
 warm her cheeks with long tongues
 In hiding from these phantoms
 she covers herself with leaves
 lingers too often
 among humans as chaste with her soul-making
 as the squash and tomatoes she grows

 At forty she had become her self-portrait
 fully approved by the academy
 which is one of her acquaintances
 never asking why her eyes
 leak like cheap dye from their sockets
 why her mouth circles around itself hour after hour
 Yet her dreams say "There is a way
 A way
 Away"
 Again she visits her old photographs
 those lovely gypsies
 who know a grammar
 through the forbidden echoes and pools
 And then again it is time to go home
 time to close the book

Several Descriptions of Their Life Together

His arm around her shoulder
 their heads touching as they huddle together
 We see the seams running down
 their backs
 and nothing else
 Next she is sitting in a deep chair
 legs crossed
 wearing red sandals
 only a caterpillar of pubic hair
 visible
 And he kneels at the juncture of two roads
hitching a ride
 blue backpack on the ground beside him
 Afterwards they jog together
 across hilly grass
 fog coming in from the ocean ahead
 so that we imagine them
 vanishing in the water
 nakedly taken, sweating hearts beating hard

Finally we do not see her face
 only the black hair streaming down
 as she hangs in air
 arms spreadeagled
 legs dangling
 in some formal posture of sleep
 he stretched out flat
bareassed
 on tough brown earth
 head cradled in his arms
 beside him a jug
 that gleams under the furrowing moon

In the Desert Alone at Night

He hunkers before the fire
clarifying himself by way of
his perception of it
as a microscopic shadow
of the sun
although it is night
The fire is
all there is of voice
out there amid saguaro sage and juniper
whose origin could not be of the sun's law
but rather of those aleatory upheavals
which grow out of season
and not according to steady graphs
So the fire kindles, cradles his gaze
He rocks back and forth on his haunches
occasionally casting more sticks on the flame
keeping it going
as if his mind
depended on it
as it does
the stars reaching down
steadily reaching down
to pull him up
into their dense and charted communities
A stubborn man who squats
to keep himself a matter of earth
to leave the scrub of his name warm

View of the Riders

On horses single file
accompanied by slow violet shadows in sand and scrub
shadows like puddles of water irrigating fertile cropland
as I see them from behind

They head toward mountains
beige far before them
they themselves virtually black shapes in
the lateness

Horses and their riders hunching over
with only thin pale glints of sun steady on their shoulders
as if even these angles of light formed
but another aspect of their burden
I am not sure where they are going or why

only that the mountains
curve around them to the west
a slightly slyly darkening mass of beige
curve around them so voluminously so blankly
that the riders
as they wend forward
are suddenly for a second caught motionless in the falling away
of great heights
there on the rim of their odyssey there at the abyss

A Lover's Quarrel with America

Reasonable as gray flowers
in the valley of mushrooms
impeccable as a soft whiskey entering the spine
on spiderlegs
the history of America
spoils in its valise
left in some bus-terminal locker
Lacy brutal snow covers
the harbor statue
even in July
Schoolbooks remind us of sucked-out pomegranates
and buffalo bones lying stacked
in bosses' vaults
in khaki thinking
and lazy bedrooms
Talking about America the hero
opens his lips
like Hustler pussy
He sprinkles green salt on his hair
edges away from another discourse on cranky furniture
on bullfights and bearhugs
America he says is a platonic idea
a lens and a shadow
a white turd in the grass
I love America he says
like Baudelaire loved his whore
with lime on his breath
with a musical aphasia in his brain

Telling the Story

Revolution

That horse comes toward us as always
at a slow walk
its rider swaying only slightly forward and back
as it in prayer

How hot it is!
and the horse's advance so slow
we are not sure of being there, somewhat living
should it arrive

Black hat black shadows around his eyes
the rider has been in that same saddle
for hundreds of years
starting from that one moment
when we all realized
that Death is a huge word
and that we ought to hear it everywhere
This camposanto or another
who cares

Suddenly the rider's bleached eyes
enter our hearts as always
and we know
the masters will never offer us
more than a grain of life
more than a taste of water
not even a strawberry
from the norteamericanos nor even a decent bullet
from the rider's saddlebag
We see once more and still more
how slowly the horse approaches
how rigid the hand that holds the reins
we are condemned to wait wait wait to wait
and still to wait

Emergence

Golden sand along the shoreline

a single figure stares out into the sea
almost black against
penetrating sight

The figure does not move

a pillar in the sand
a luminous archive

mediating between sky and water

The littoral a membrane

through which solitary mind
bedazzled by golden sand
thinking louder than the waves
contains its idea of mundo
its black transparency
in the solar glass

This figure sleeps under the pale sky receding
a trace in the sand

memory flinging off water
to shape a voice
which at night screams out
the shattered beauty of a peacock

Gulls fly in at dawn

over wet kelp strewn in the sand
over the being that emerges once more
eyes glittering
from the mother's angry hold

IS THE DILEMMA OF PHILOSOPHY?

A mere sketch
inside the man's body he wore

Algorithm

"A romance with
 the material must be well under way" before life begins
 its lonely trust in another form
 The language of Pascal is the sum of its odds
 so that God varies in value
 as metaphor in prosody accentuates
 the similarities of things otherwise altogether
 unlike
 When one's life so longingly loops around the older
 parts
 of the
 brain
 which know what to say but not how
 the program begins itself
 Anxiety in these terms is not the self's influence
 rather it is the environment
 which turns thought away from "repetitious aggregations of concrete instances"
 toward "a single abstract insight"
 The artificially intelligent human
 corresponds to a flow/a flaw in the sequence of whatever river
 is precisely like itself but never is
 When I say I am anxious
 I mean I do not live my life enough
 am afraid of lacking the sum of my parts
 Numbers are safer than sounds but harder to read
 What answer am I to anybody's question?
 "Chaos is captured in law"
 But not God's who we learn
 must remain one integer among many
 Whose law then?
 Of words
 and the reader's interpretation of words
 someone said I wouldn't bet on it

Telling the Story

(for William Dowling)

Someone should tell the story
of the lovely young woman who at nightfall
leaves on her doorstep
a little glass of red wine
which in the morning she pours out on the few
chrysanthemums
that grow beside the house
She lives
intransigently alone
in a forest
where no other creatures exist
not even
bugs
No one knows where she gets the food that sustains
her
or, more significantly, the wine
Why does she have no lovers?
She exists as a solitary instance
of human law under a sun that snips
disturbing euclids from the axioms of her
surroundings
We may imagine then how longingly
she fears
the unexpected footstep
someone a sorcerer perhaps
or a simple man wearing mudclotted boots
a bear possibly its shaggy embrace already sketched in
by a big-city artist
who will dominate her night
She fears the enclosure of her dreams
by the dreams of another one
circle within circle
surrounded by an infinity of concentricities
In that superbly ingenuous way of hers
the lovely young woman contrived a geography
distinct from history

like a Sleeping Beauty who killed her sleep
and does not wish to wake
among sweaty pascals which read out
ancient moralities of the heart

In her forest alone
she remains indomitably loverless
What we don't know
(can only guess as storytellers do)

is that each nightfall's glass of wine

is lovingly
in loneliness
poisoned

Dilemma of Meaning

Nothing is more conclusive
than these objects

as they look at him
as he takes them in disguises them
to look like he does
None of them means
what he says
in describing them to his
sister-in-law
who
believes him
as she does her
mandolin
an instrument so gently moving
it carries him toward the greenest fields the bluest bay

The objects on his bedroom wall
the house's furniture
are problems much like
dice
whose spots are restless
or his sister-in-law's
long bare legs
Brother's wife
marathon
runner
one of those human objects whose patience exhausts itself
the subjunctive relationship
without fringes
Reason can go
no further
it cannot fall to the
ground
So then, the essential excerpt
So then, always room for his tongue
in the mandolin's mouth
always a minor joy
in what he cannot possess

possessing him

There Is No Reason to It

She expresses outrage
at so much verbal texture
in his heart
It offends her simplest desires
her hope of a transcendent voyage with him
to the stars and beyond the stars
their mutual solitude
a form of transcription
closer to collage
than all his words
which are closed networks
of allegiance
what is now called
classical modernism
She stops
a worried moment shading her brows
then understands herself speaking
in clumps
hard clumps
It is the times she says
The days are stitched together
with gray thread
and his heart is now painted glass
All right then
she will be his object
let him pour his deadly formulations
into her ear
let him display her
on his dirty finicky pages
her own words by now
stacked together
like leaves the leaves of an artichoke
green destinies that cannot breathe

Divagation from a Line in The Aeneid

“Old age in the gods is green”
not however the ivy that hugs the backs
of New England churches
or moss clinging to the boles of moist sunless oaks
Green perfectly nocturnal
inhabits the edges of forgotten customs
and witnesses the girl’s rape by her father
Green preserves ideas
in cultural bottles
and regards every morning
with a powdery gaze
When gods grow brittle in their towering glass
they return to their sources in slow pools
moonpetals afloat fresh in the water
where green freezes moment by moment
where green disengages
from truth
and emerges armed with wily music
Gods in their great age
do not protect
do not reveal
They are stealthy in sex
and ruthless
Their thought grips the human heart
with monotonous endurance
within little frames of iron, gilded
In old age the gods see through green eyes
Green accompanies their departure into the shadows where
furious trumpets greet them

Saying Is Believing

Dull afternoons when you look for something visual
when the air gathers moss before it gets to your lungs
when even God is a thought
 you sleep like the brown fedora
 pulled far down over the fat man's forehead
 and when you wake
 a stuffed hummingbird sticks to your tongue
 trying to lift off with all its meager memory

Sometime soon luck will be stronger than many bad mistakes
 You put on a gray double-breasted suit
 with a white hankie sprouting from the pocket
 go out to prowl for the enemy
 Saying is believing
 it says on the tape
this is a movie nobody ever made

NEW POEMS 1997

1998

Uncle Hymie

My Uncle Hymie
cracked his head in Friedrichstadt
and became a natural surrealist.

He would visit us
in the Bronx
and leave a memory
of his presence,
a circle in a Rubik's cube,
a picture no one could recognize.

The last time I saw him
he was wearing a tan suit,
well-pressed,
and a subtle
blue-and-gold tie
pinned to his light-blue shirt
by a rearing silver horse.

Hymie was one of my mother's brothers,
Sam's twin.

He had fallen from a barnloft
when they were three.

Later Sam got married,
became a sculptor,
mostly animals,

while Hymie sold
ladies' foundation garments.

Sometimes it was hard to believe he wasn't right,
but when that last time
he took off his jacket, his tie, shirt, and trousers
to show us the corset he was wearing,
my mother placed a hand
over my young eyes
and told Hymie to behave himself.

I remember this, how this uncle
became my favorite
among four others.

Expect Me As If I dure Elijah

Expecting Me

I would greet myself zealously,
suspecting I might forget to arrive
and lie in the water,
dreaming.
Mother and father,
buried
in Congregation Beth Israel's cemetery,
would they know me
now that I have grown older
and find less humor in nature?

The feast is held on Sunday
after an ordinary Sabbath.
I keep expecting myself — the food smells
like angels.
I have noticed
great crowds swarming
through the sunlight.
Expetimentally, I touch where my heart
should be.
I am deserted inside myself.
I realize that life is exaggerated.

Have I come alone or with others?
My parents, I know, expect me
as if I were Elijah
come to collect his respect
from the Passover dinner.
I have never seen him
even though my father
hid the matzoh under his pillowed seat
every time.

I will come, having lived with
My eyes
the worms.
will be powdered with dust.
Still, I will know my name
and welcome the presence that lives
on Earth

whatever his faith might lack.

I will grow
into myself like a flower from its precept.
The best news reveals itself in cycles.

I have wandered far
into the thick horizon where no Hebrews live.
I am ready to return to myself,
the one who expects Lazarus in the mail.

The Family

Lydia, my one wife,
told me if I took Bly to Santa Fe

that day
I should move out.
The children were up at the usual time,
a Saturday.

It was the last day of our family.

I found a hovel backed on
an alley
in the student ghetto
and stayed there.

Why was she my wife?
The children went with her back to the coast
to a temporary exile, though the pictures
that took their lives then
are not faded even today.

The mind is abstract and emotional.
Madness divines the secret of ellipsis,
acts surely on the evidence of voices
fed through a straw
to the brain's
deceiving motives. Or was it the blood
gone sour
before the will could lock into
its adulthood?

Lydia as a mother could not become then
what I'd hoped for her,
a reason against her slavery
to the moon's dark god.
I took away Celena and Paul.
I had earned them
through a pitiful iriversion of the wound Lydia
took long before, in the paintings her youth
once promised. Even later, in Venice West,
she'd sketched with skill
a man's genitals
and significant birds.

We three came to the garage she'd rented
for her work
and we shared the spoils.
As Paul said,
we were scavenging a life.
Where does love go during death?

from a side angle.
If she weren't so obsessed I could have
eased her into some sly comfort.
The voice in my eyes repeats
the words
it has learned
in describing her to myself. When we land,
she rushes to the front,
not even looking at me.
My eyes freeze her
in the frame when I stop recording,
and curiously edge toward her lover, too:
who waits like a taxi,
his meter
running

Chronic

I love you deliberately
 as if it were on order
 from the commanding officer of my helplessness,
 and I am swimming
 in your future.
 You say your mind is set
 on automatic impulse,
 on the eloquence of body.
 Wherever I go the feeling
 of disruption
 itemizes what I would say to you.
 How little you forget in my words'
 confusion,
 when I reply
 to the distance
 I hold in my arms
 as if it were you.
 Yet love is not an industry,
 and if I use
 frightening language
 I mean it
 to be
 no less than my confession.
 How terrible this sounds:
 could I be speaking
 in my reasonable Jewish way,
 you listening with Irish eyes
 smiling sadly?
 Right w
 My Rith Reads fran
 fift
 There must be this illness
 between us,
 the chronic pain
 you cannot share,
 the chronic fatigue.
 My birth reads from right to left,

revealing a difference in logic:
mine green but static,
yours as the seasons go.

Your blue eyes commit me to limits
set in bronze, a medallion of sorts.

The gleam follows me
as I move,

implicated

in a simple love
that goes nowhere.

The image of your legs in black

spike heels

is true as only time is true
when it stops. Then the sunlight
is someone else's, for whom you wait

speaking through your pain
into mine.

My Ginsberg Poem

The day after Allen Ginsberg's death,
I notice the hole where I sat or stood
or lay on my back. This is complicated by the exterior
that reclines into salt, near stunned simplicity.
He talked of Buddha, a friend in the listening dark
where anyone may hear the alphabet consoling

from aleph to omega. Some letters are never enough,
merely duplicating speech. Yet he wrote more feelingly
than friendship could suppose, for he was words'
doctór, to be lamented by all who can remember
his vision of time, the chance we all take.
He was in a sense selfless. As if he could be more

than the wish of himself. And he was. A friend's
friend. Holy the howl inside the mouth that alters
the century with lyric, satiric force,
a comet dwindling in space. Such is the dew
spread over the heart, one of the feminine angels
we have never heard of. He spoke in trust of spectral

music without solemnity, King and song of May,
who hustled wisdom along the streets everywhere, teacher
of more than grace. I who denied the dog in myself,
who repressed the illusions that brought me here
to this American desert, I sweep the dust of my bones
through the stones' window, thereby to configure

his voice as metaphor of Earth. Simple is not always
easy, the records show. Distillation equals a variety
of laughter, foam in the laundry basket, quick sizzles
apropos of this April when the rivers overflow.
Allen, rest in your sphere of sun, the gamble won.
Be thou, as you might say, the grizzled wonder

of our poetry, always youth among the ages and crucible
wherein we boil our words clean. Bring us back
to the flowers' multitude and the droppings of our digestion.
I rehearse this question you ask me without
meaning to. I flash through your naked hospitality

as one who never knew you well, but knew enough to want

to be kind in your reflection, and now reflect again
how your travels brought me home. Language
was your rough spot, the broom that left the world
with dignity, even as it spattered the air,
a fevered shower. You are already classic, definitive.
I thumb a ride on the road of your death.

My Parents' China

Having been born Orthodox
and asthmatic,
I marked the marching
tin soldiers
from the beginning of time. My chaplain
was not kosher. He had a blue
beard
that the army allowed him to keep,
my army.

We lived on the fourth floor
where my mother daily dusted the wax fruit
in a porcelain bowl. I was accompanied
by aunts and uncles, the breathing
of an ox
pulling the entire army.

I was ashamed of being
a Jew.
My father and mother
could not command my faith
except in silent films, their voices
resonant of early shtetl communities,
Baltic villages.

I did not fit in once I learned
English.
I've always straggled
as if to follow
was my only hope.

Then, I rubbed against metaphysics
to believe if I could
in a God not military
but anxious.

Who was I to manufacture fruit
for a black, polished table?
Or silver-maybe a wedding gift—
or dishes orange-and-white
bone china?

These colors repeat themselves
like a platoon,

marching, marching into fire.
British redcoats maybe
falling like apples
in that remote garden where I gasped
for my mind, never believing
as far as I remember.
We all died
as stereotypes of poor Jews
in silence, bearing no arms,
begging alms
from aunts and uncles.

If I came back from the dead
it was because I learned English,
right there
in the Bronx.
I still feel cordoned off,
inhabiting a nevertheless glistening
island.

I confess, I confess
in a parody of the confessional,
the paradox
of belonging
to a bridge of scholars
who mark time through the history
of the aleph.

I continue almost groundless,
hoping for a thought
that would release
my mad, dead wife,
all other raped and murdered wives,
also men who sweated in their beds,
so I could swear on anyone's Bible,
chant my bar mitzvah song
for life,
always life amid the polished brass.
Even though I relax now,
lacking Jehovah even more,
Jewish in complications,
Jewish in my ancient tribe, whoever they are.

Math Teacher

Perces Witt, who in her late 50s
lived with her mother,
taught Geometry and Trig
at Belmont High,
where I became editor of the school paper.
She spoke mildly and graded fairly,
believing perhaps that she was
content
in what her life
had chosen for her
and that the grades she gave
were evidence of that positive curve.
I understood along the way that once
she had been on the stage, had married
the manager
of her dance troupe,
who beat her up often enough
so that it wasn't long before she got a divorce.
She went to college in Indiana,
earned a degree.
She'd given up dancing at that time,
and men. I could see that her legs
were still fine,
the sort of thing that I'd begun
to think about seriously.
I learned these things about her
from my Journalism teacher,
who was her companion sometimes,
and possibly would move in with her later
if her mother died.
I don't know why
she told me all that
since I couldn't write it up
for the paper anyhow.

It was during a summer

I su A Candle els MY

Breathing

II

Surprises Even Gravity

Brushing Up

To do it again
to rehearse doing it again
I read prose poems by a woman
who refers persistently to her cock
and to lovers
with whom she uses it
Then too
I look at Motherwell's
collages
which remind me of Diebenkorn's
oils and works on paper
although they are dissimilar
There are these connections
which if I could do it again
would solve the question
of why I think in long terms when they are
really short

To believe in one's power
is to forget
the tubers in the ground
dying
I burgeon from that intimacy
somehow still forming
through whispers still
lodgers
among the mind's cold furnaces
And the woman who compels
the pain her lovers bestow on her
becomes the destiny of a deep red
dildo

I regret being so modest
barely knowing how to do it
to get it done
as Diebenkorn-Motherwell did it
and Gorky in the pastures where his youth
drove him to be united
with tall grass

I would munch hay if only
a single word of mine could satisfy

that woman
who moans
so successfully
in circles
alone in her lovers

But if I could paint
I would grow inside my heart like a patient
fig tree
older in daring

visual as blue
mists

I can't wish for
resentment as I scheme to desire again
as though this could never become
My mind is lost in her compilations of despair
Yet she demands respect for being a master of love
persistent in submitting to pain
as if it were the laurel crown at last

I do what I do more often than I think
The secret is not to think about it

but to wait
with ordinary surprise envision the oils
and acrylics
of Frankenthaler

References intuit fresh power
somewhere the inner world releases
and goes on doing so a wet paintbrush
licking at completion

Mind and Maze

Forgetting whom the dream favored
can be crucial Existence lies in wait

to corrupt

what was never soiled
in the mouth

and the same could be said
of Bernie's Beanery

where the artists gathered

to talk it over to assess marginal and
vivid confusion

But the dream too

asserts its art
as a favor

to the woman with tan
solid thighs

who sits down at a nearby table
smiles readily as if to ask for instructions

The soul is ready to swell to the top
where only the average mood prevails

These are all tricks
of the collapsible trade

that anyone can learn with frugal intensity

She in her beautiful way
orders a plate of luxury

The mouth decides to grow infinite

And where are those lectures on

Las Meninas

that drove the students
to all their mirrors?

It was an eating place in LA
the woman an iriverted idea

A casualty of the dream

The soul has fled incapable of adjusting
to this society

the mind a maze
where thoughts follow
rainbows in the night

Too much pollution exaggerates the effort
to acquire dimension A toothless widower

thinks he's a romantic
 whose line is broken up by
 crests and windfalls
 then an abstract drumroll
 The attractive well-formed woman
 leaves secretly
 The landscape vanishes I am invisible
 to myself
 So much to do so much to-do
 everyone so dramatic about a game of leapfrog
 Old cowboy paintings in the attic
 Long ago the world wanted us

Brainwork

Still the brain writes the still
brain writes

records itself
as if on a visionary island
beyond thought The voice
redirected by electronic
whispers
guides itself
by oars or

whatever comes to hand which is a replay
of thought

a gray moon
responding to moral
incursions

The brain is a carpetbag
impulses one

everyone a story

gathers together

or affixes
to expected terms

Mind satisfies brain energy
as if to agree that computers are simple
in the sort of direction
that accumulates knowledge
stuff and nonsense

To be actual
stimulates comparisons
all the vital fluids accept in flow
Ill-fitting synapses cross introvert sensations
palliate
what comes through
the soapy water
as a tributary cutting-edge

A businessman's thinking arranges the brain
in a meter-field
plus value negative
as regards the transformation

of one's endorphins Please be beautiful
the computer says
a brain of its own

Space wrinkles near black holes
the pull
surprises even gravity
when time disappears
perhaps hides in a sublime
intelligence
So thorough is the fascination
with those special muscles
of love that a time comes
when lips
suck up everything
in the way a good ear
completes sound

In its mass
life is formless
What can be said
regards the brain's body
as an opportunity to shape
the transmission of affect
Later the gray moon
shifts to a green way
It's all in the shaping
how vision argues for the body's feedback
amid evanescence
the time of our lives

Saidless

Quotation marks stand tall alone
nothing between them The voice
 which could speak
 empties itself of sound
 so that nothing could write
 even a sonnet
quoting Shakespeare
 The tongue exasperates
 thick
 stuck
 in dry saliva
Who could then reciprocate what
 remains
 hidden in the pen?
Nothing is a blindfold
The eye stares into capture
Praise can be earned only for excess
for what in form betrays by less
 than the kept
 oracle
Eyes abandon the voice
in quotation marks so that nothing
 can enter
 whatever happens
 Quiet
 as in a pause
 continuing
 as a buzz in the phone
 dry no answer
 ever
To review in meditation all the words
 that suffer,
 a complete xerox of events
 Simple bare quotation marks
 tell all that can be desired
from questions This then that rests
 in the core of breath
 the speech appropriate

to silence

And as Jabes might have said
the book is fully middle
which accounts for the blindfold's
gathering in
of all entelechies
the heart's womb
quoted in context To read believes
in gratitude
even if the signature is formless
Prophets wander through air
relaying messages
God waits as we do
Earth moves page after page
quoting its destiny

Waking Up Chilled

Yesterday the music said the sun
is a lonely system though certain in its
fruit-giving and place
among orbiting islands

But comment on the sun
is a lack of safekeeping
The human regards itself as a camera
of the sun
yet no one feasts
regardless

Humor waves its red cape
to the heart of its fruition
as if an animal could laugh
Who sees in its night

a soul?
Quotient remains side-locked as glorious
root
of chicken-wire
The world moves into range
of the lens and all music
whitens

a rage
following ordinary mutations

Nothing is less hopeful
than the wonderful nature
objects have
as some kind of residue of human
concern

Lines of littericks coincide
with apertures
and the cold
cry of lemons
fallow in supernal
longings

Art is left to hang among the brides
who wait as anchors in what the eye
can no longer

remember It is time to turn
the sand-clock toward Sunday
where the old woman knits
a sweater
for the music
that drifts through the little doors

Stevens might have said that fiction
is an opportunist considering
that what is true
might never be thought
A photograph
enlarges
the sun's departure
as if one could imagine a day
during which there was no occasion
A mood in the swing
of goldening leaves the merchant
for once
forgotten as a pin
in the sleeve

Mortality can be a fine thing
in the multiplying heft
between arms and legs
Who can be so right
as to never leave off consuming edges?
Yet the slate narrows
the pictures follow a totally black trend
The sun too will commemorate its dirge
as wind speculates too freely
the remnant of its ego Go to
says the old woman
knitting for time's dog
Do not define the superior epoch
no one relies any more
on the rusty
Grail

If the olive dries
in the sun's absolute
nothing can take away

the memorable taste
The dark horse wins the corona
Everything is original in its once again
and how the drive begins in combustible air!
what is known conceals
the happenstance
Go then stranger whose voice apportions
details
Your curious skin embodies the woman
sprawled in a field
alive or dead
like the Black Dahlia torso severed
from who she was
That is but one instance of gore and mystery
and as God is the witness
death was no motive other than
the incentive for waking up
chilled
and quietly remorseless

So Much Woman

In what has become feminism
features of coagulate

mortality

A woman
designs her copula
with lust for perfection

Texturally life regrets its passing
but what woman would want to dream only of suggestion?
Reason is its own cause the person it belongs to
admires the form of its love

But nowhere in feminism
does complication resolve into neutrality
which is why captivity as a mode of address
completes a cycle
Maybe women are not examples
as history expects them to be
but are heard
like raging bells in a sunny afternoon

Quietly who goes there if not acceptable in principle
to the surplus every hour becomes?

A woman applies
herself to being
recorded
not in a bottle

The exact witnessing
explodes in golds of paint to be stamped on the age
beauty's
ptime reversal

Anyone who moderates a conviction
realizes that face and body
need support from mythic order

The woman
I have in mind
speaks notably
of oppression

as of a summer
among the dry branches in men's eyes

their hands pumping the air
 punching it a woman between their eyes
 This woman originates
 breath she breeds
 words that crowd the air
with enough space to signify her evolution
 She waits just outside the door
 singular and protracted
 Time is a lingering craft used and using
 This woman belongs to the vision
that I can see only in that blackness behind the weather
Who can believe in the version of a postcard?

What Matters

It stalls the music says the man
who reads his litmus paper as if no sound
in the courtyard could retaliate
He expects the day to settle
into his womb
black sheep
that he is Yet could anyone cite
a juster cause than comparing “compression is all”
to poetics that aspire to community
among races? He reads acid
all the headlines red the brewery
north of his bench brick red
and who dares to come
bearing salt
and a devious station to the world?
We know that God
is too convenient
an incitement to the longer shapes of time
blown out on the rocks
The will sustains flowers beaten by
black hail without remorse
The man who believes in diamonds
shares only what he lacks
forensics in four senses
and the lack
presumes a music not yet forgotten
a bruise
deep in the moon
What alters is the brain not the thought
The man’s hearing stalls as it glares into wickedness
but others
We are not we
What matters
is that everyone race together
the marathon on and on
Black man rigorous
in presuming the lemon-lit morning
includes his shade
Heaven exists somewhere in love’s leftovers

symmetrical
Blood burns like oil
with its opposite
enduring the long haul
right right on the ball

Rilke's Razor, Jung's Version

This razor is terrible it fills the air
a triangle of mirror
as if we could
clinging
look into it
as it emerges
from the brown wooden box
If we are frightened
the angel
of archetypes
has shaped hope into an inlaid silhouette
of the Venus de Milo
to console us it would appear
by slicing away our too-human shame
Time is beautiful if we could
Who watches over us
share it with our lives
so that we may believe in
Rilke's angels?
Is there a name to relieve us
of our loneliness
our fierce expectations?
we are brief
The razor is our name
in happiness
yet refer to it
as a passenger we bear
Our unconscious is the therapy
we lack
To be human reminds us that to define
significance
is an obsession
too narrow
to see in the specular design
Our shame belongs to us
like a birthmark
We are in terror of beauty

the maze that guides us
out of our peripheries
where shadows move
prehistoric

Murder is the archetype
of our definition our angel who yet plays
upon our hope
We dissect in order to be healed
of death's foreshadowing

Rilke
master of pain and the rosethorn
he bled away from
tells us we live in fear
of our eyes

that we must change our lives
or go blind in Venus' groves
Yet he too smiled
for his countesses lived in Schloss Duino
rent-free

There is no closure
although to end needs us
frayed as we are by life sometimes old
or madly young

What good is beauty?
It is the good that freezes despair
in its mirror
This homage
loves Rilke though his wife his daughter
slept far from their share
of his life

He passed through
the razor anyhow
and now murmurs in the box Mel
Chin found for him
so that we hear him still
an answer in the mind of beauty

Forgive me if this that I know
is an old voice far from where I loiter
in this city waiting for
the child to summon me
The voice begins in a quiet synagogue
Hard to decide
if it is singing or manipulating
the air to change speeds but it is safe
to gather into it
I heard it first when the white owl
flew across my windshield
this in those days when I drove
that tomato-red Lincoln Town Car like any prince
quick in his blood
and it was then a soprano flagrant in its ease
a comfort its triumph
Watching the road
I could almost hear the breeze
whispering through my mind
a devotional air
something aspiring to peace
Lately I've taken to pressing God for another chance
though I'm not a criminal I think now
only when it recovers
its voice
My shoes rot in my thought
wandering as I do between incense-candles
and auto graveyards
Where do I suppose I'm going when I go?
Windblown chimes tinkle among the olive trees
Where I have come from
I'm a transient in prayer
believing I hold the universe in my blood
It will end in blasphemy The voice will cease
my hands lie fallow on the riverbank the child
will never come
The two tramps agonize over

antagonize
each other
More mercy in a cup of tea
than in all of piety
The moment goes awry
fulfilled only in its overflow

Ida

I see yesterday as if
it were tomorrow
the woman jogging
conscious only
of her body
moving through drifts
of departed weather
each stride
a muscle to be overcome
She will run six miles part of a marathon
others will begin and finish
what Pheidippides timelessly ran
cramped with victory
I know her I think She is my father's lover
I have lost track of my enemies
The woman I name her Ida
who speaks
from the Ozarks soft slanted words
Ida whom I first encountered
among Lee Friedlander's nudes
I couldn't see her face then as she lay
stomach down
on a couch back buttocks thighs
visible to the naked imagination
My father
turned his back to the sound
I thought of as my extraordinary wish
to draw as well as he
Ida studied in Knoxville Tennessee
to be a doctor of kindness
taking in men and women as strays
feeding them
From her mind she extracted
a Jewish ghost who was not hers
the name
she identified to me
as burned in the camps

But she wasn't
a woman I could bring in from her past
as if she were a concession to the perfect alibi
for which I wrote my exigencies

I handle my thoughts arguably as marbles
I would have lived in the Ozarks
if she brought me there
a return
to her speech curving
doubling back like an arch

My father still draws his angels
his deft hand reminding me of Ida
who has left a generous voice to take me through
the years' vortices
Time lost is no time but the present
where she pretends to die
leaving me
a segment of what she touched
wanting in me

Where is the living woman who arched her body
back in a sumptuous
regard of the silence

I have contoured
we invest in?

Ida
as a willingness to assume
care of my ego

She loved women too I think
as I read into a story she wrote
I study her direction
as a move toward the recuperation of the body
I left her in Tennessee years ago

I carry her with me
to the shadow of old age
I take care
of Ida
a story in photographs
staring at me
Time wanders in me

in Ida's creation
based on a few words taken at a party
But who is she that woman jogging?

Correcting the Motion

We calculate the em's and en's with a ruler
or whoever is in charge and thus delimit black
and white or yellow or orange

 This is to change a design into systems
 although that's old now
 and words delight in securing
 a graph for a documentary
 Alone we or I access
 the road ahead

To trim is not to compare not to apologize
 The mind shortens
 its voice

 How to resolve clarity
 becomes the kernel
of possible attitudes Nowhere does the print
evoke a formula more colophonic than

 history would
 demand We resist
 alternatives
 only because virtue is painful
 and fairness weak
Corporate windows glare
 maybe an investment
into the fly-man's eye
 in questions unanswerable shaped
 to find a home in bitter shadows

Foreclosure adapts to the page like birds
delineate the air to predict the source of flight
 Not everyone
knows a radius that could equal what is most local
Reading is love in the corner there as corporate as could be

 Arrival can be swift
 as those who have left
 do not return
 Frequently nothing absorbs the ink doesn't dry
 we hardly refine our hands
Or I exclude myself from the instant

Publication denies holograms
as if one knew the name
beforehand The alternative
to seduction
is removal of tar
from the voice promised
long before anything could be done
The short of it belongs to fame as required
among athletes of the main stream
of forgetfulness
Whatever fails to correct the motion
incorporates complexity
without the simple coherence the world expects
from truth
The vanishing American
is nobody but a printed form
I look like myself
only when somebody quotes me

Under Depth

And so there may be
nothing under
the depth
that anyone can invoke as subliminal to intention
Risen silence occurs
 venturing farther than intended
To go back volunteers another depth a past
 figural in the emergence of insight
 of the new
Two speakers converge
One into the other meet in common ground
saying largely an opening into a crowd
but it can't be said that they know an optimal mood
 heartening the heart
I understand their foreign language
without naming it
 is this a dream?
How I got there matters only if I intended it
 Depth under depth I wallow in others
 headless
 a trouble spot
I would worship the name of my silence if this
 would not demean it
I have gotten rich forgetting dreams
I forget my name in the book of reason
Who knows me wonders at the pyramid my life
has undergone the chops in style of gradation
 as a blue motif in what
 I can't help
 but see
 refracted as dreams' modifier
If what is beneath the world is a verb how to raise it
 so the act concurs with all the rules
 inscribed by science in myth?
 Usually blank words fill in
 the occupied spaces I read among Hebrews
who remind me how esoterically I have quoted
 the name
 that lies recumbent in willows

I look but make out only myself
as heart in image No more reclusion now
the fire wanes
I am one mood among all people and starve
for ashes in the silence of a vertical truth

FALLING INTO MEDITATION

1999

Falling into Meditation

And it is yesterday again when I fell
asleep while walking,
 then woke into the core
 of a dream,
stretched out without structure
 believing anyhow
that I would rise again,
an ancient man, wearing
 stones.

Lights flickered around me,
drawing air from a song somewhere
 at a great distance.
I couldn't identify the words,
 but my mind relaxed
and saw a photograph that looked
more like me than I did. For a moment
I thought my heart was numb, that it beat
 in the hollow
 of a phrase:
Messiah is no stranger
 to your life.
And I regarded my sleep as an
 opening
 in slow motion, arms
 plunging
toward the ground to a depth I'd never
 reached before.

I became a human statue then,
 weathering all weathers,
 apropos in any case,
a cast of dice that chance finally won.
 And one among many who praised
 the breath,
 for a time
 in mortality, When I rose
from the concrete bed, I sailed
 ke a paper airplane—

a Freudian paradox: could I be
civilized
and yet content?

Shadowy lights followed me
everywhere
during the sun.
I couldn't escape from whatever held me
in its motherly arms.
This is a gift, this season of birth,
as I stand now among the visible angels,
without falling.

Early Stage

Hypnosis didn't fool anybody for long.
Not even suggestion
was clinical enough
to answer
questions
gnawed in the snow.
Everything was temporary
at this time
and cure became
a hypnotic ideal.
Breuer shook his cane and
departed.
So much agony
in reckoning
the fury of creation.

One hears about the couch, and Freud
behind it,
writing speeches
for his future contemporaries
in the business.

Yet his early patients were aligned
in secret rows as if he would
account
for their chances.
His hands were wise
to take them
out of his cocaine prescriptions
and place them
on the other side
of the lulling screen.
He gave them names
that are legends
one speaks of now
in raw fiction.

Freud scrambled his eyes
looking for stories ancient in talk
about practice. Later

Including Sex

He worked to keep his mind
unembarrassed.

He failed to repress
the Jew by cutting off
a syllable:

Sigismund. Yet he was a Hebrew
even if Moses was Egyptian. Freud
was stark as a skeleton
in Hitler's eye, even though
the time had not yet come.

To be repressed
Is kindling wood
set to the burn.

Dusk waters the eye
of what we thought
was civilization.
I would have talked
to Freud
in Vienna if I'd had anything
to say

except that I was a woman
with a penis. Not homosexual
but a wonder in my own mind.
I convinced my
manhood
even while Europe killed itself.

What is personal
crowded Freud's mind like schoolboys
Going homeselves
at the clock
that martyrs them all, dull,
eyeless in Gaza, even if they see
well enough to stumble
through walls,
through daylight
when the sun
turns around

to its black side.

Then Freud was master
in somebody else's house. Virgins
grew
in the wisteria.
Their husbands flew in and out
of windows, leaving
tickets
for Tel Aviv, for Islamabad,
for Rome, Shanghai.

Already the drill drives through
these sexual children;
the girls boys know
quicken their stride. Who will be
lucky?
Or is that too emptied out, birdy omens
going nowhere?

1

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take rather a fact
of disposition and stretch it
far and closer
 in recognition
 of sex
 in psyche
as irony, dumbstruck as
 a child's
 lantern in the dark
 night of egoistic calm.

Portraits of the dead hang
 in sleep's gallery.
They must be called to answer
 for living their own lives
 parallel to death, which is
 to some degree
a triangle. Two lovers and their myth.
Orgasm is a tonic to be swallowed
 in one gulp.
 Freud's is a casebook
not to be opened until I have read
 the glossary
 that accompanies
his passage through Jung's apostasy.

Breuer's Case

Anna O said “chimney sweep”
as if her mind was stuffed
with ashes. She felt
Breuer's hands
to make sure it was he
who would hear her when she
talked,
who might after all
be a phantom of her history.
Sometimes she would climb a tree
during talk,
or figuratively when she thought
her leg was paralyzed. But she could
run away
anyway
when she could not move, when her mind
was automatic as a pistol.
Yet the poetry Anna O spoke
fled into a forest
without trees.

When helping the poor, she chirped
and caught a narrative older than
her age.
Her speech
disappeared
afterward, falling leaves in fall,
as if her mouth was a pitcher
holding water, which she could not drink.
And Anna held her mind
in her hands while hallucinations
fed on
melons and oranges. Eventually
her mind received the water:
the meaning of hypnosis.

Paralysis had kept her mind in a phrase,
petulant and coarse. Events lived there
on bread and water, and once

dead,
these events predicated
only refusal. Anna got out of bed
and visited the criminals of her past
without guilt. Her frequent absences
from herself
returned
as memories in a compact
idea
of time's burden.

Later, Anna remembered she saw
her father
with a death's head in a mirror.

Falling
to order this experience, she fell. Her father
accompanied the snakes
she observed in Breuer, who fathered.
her false pregnancy.
And then he abandoned Freud's studies.

Anna had prayed
having lost her German in the jailbreak
of her thought. It was after all,
dull
to live in the body
of her home: no avenue
for resource
of a lively habitation.

When Anna moved out,
her cure reversed her daydreams,
her "private theater" and gave her
a ticket
to reflections
after the birth of her consciousness
from the death
she had lived in.

Life in mentality changes with
syntax. Dreams explode,
The fragments
can heal
as when Anna O's "absences"

revealed secondary states meant to occur
as poetics, cues
with which eyes compose,
wrist startles.

Controversy: The Beginning

He held this idea
 in his hands
 so that.
 it wouldn't. fly away
n the migration of bats. An idea.,
someone might have told him, is
 a bird.

Freud wrote like a muscle,
attuned to the mind's red rubber,
the stretch between golden
 sources.

For a while he was
 X-rated,
because his willingness to live
 in the future overcame
what he owed to the past.

He once told a woman, injured
 in a car accident, to listen
 to Brahms.

This was not a treatment
 he would later think to use
 in the unconscious wilderness
where sunlight shows through
 only as a gap
 among bones.

Freud wrote in a dominant key
as others might occupy
 words as illusion.

For repression hinted at.
A fish
 in the bakery. Little could be
 done
 with zero sustenance,
 anorexia of the soul,
 although he used
 language
like a pinball bouncing off

objections,
non-confessions.

Freud treated memory
 with kind gloves,
something to show his vision
after the hour was up. He reversed
 views in mid-fall.
Sections broke off in the shallow
 universe,
 in the cradle.

Time results from loneliness,
the ego dipped in chocolate
 to entice bronze statues
 to follow
 human feelings.

Freud wrote as someone repelled by
 bloc parties, voters
consistently out of touch
 with. their own minds,
 which are surreal.
 He campaigned
 for truth
 in advertising
 no matter how hard it is
to hear the listener.

When psychoanalysis became
 commercial,
 voices plugged up earlier
 ears,
 synapses split.
The mind slowed
 to a drizzle.

To release the vacancy he beheld
 in the social frame,
 Freud
 wrote

barely enough to sustain
his living in bourgeois dreams.

Professional Dreams

for Dr, Denise Farnath

I took the hand-pats as surety
for a purpose I could only dimly fathom.

She brought me to
a winter garden where I slept
in her professional dreams
for several nights
as we carried on
the troubled healing.

To be the doctor at such times
when the chatter of a patient's illness
disturbs the rigor
that is learned in memory,
breaks open
those closed passages
traveled alone. Patience accumulates
like withered limbs in the eyes
that see
deep into alternative roots.

I talked about first names, I who
always hid
my own.
I learned Greg's, Bob's, Andy's, also.
But what's in a name when the one-eyed man
lolls on a lollipop, an old
geezer
with a mind to go back
into the bright imagination
of dawning light. Lick the dream,
he thinks,
before the moon comes
full circle on a stick, too sweet
to be denied its fulfillment, its dead
seas.

What the doctor opens with her acuity
may be nothing less than

a whisper in the dark,
from shade into glaring
distinction.
I make out only shapes, blurred,
thick as rocks,
I think like dry lemons, myself in memory,
a tune forgotten except as she
hums her own echo.

I am exhausted and sleep
with a patch on the wrong eye.
Later a horse will gallop
into my dreams,
a little loco,
white-maned, as I am.

My doctor's professional outlook
is the eye I lack.

My own
names
arrived starkly from
their local anesthetic.
That was long ago, in mind,
before she became the monitor
of my hazy meditations
concerning the letter E.
I look for vision to the language

my surgeon
knows.

Who can I be
that I lose the words to describe
who I am, one-eyed? She tells me--
I, the child
of my greater age—
how to spell what I cannot see.

Old Times in the Cat Factory

Choice wanders

where the mind allows its taxi
to rove in the wilderness
without passengers,
the time clock stuck at \$9.55.

When I was almost 10
I had no friends in mind, only myself,
wheezing in the room
where I played my gum cards,
including the rape of Nanking,
G-Men shooting down Dillinger.

I don't talk to myself any more,
having friends who
invest their life savings
in love at a high rate.

The Arctic Ocean's icebergs
screech,
shrimp chatter along
the South Carolina coast, oil rigs
clang in the North Sea.

Whales are also integral
to the water's echoes.

My speech hears me
through layers of fishing-and-tracking
memories,
the silence I cling to.

The mind nominates
worthy clusters that ring around sinkholes
where shadows go mad. A roadmap
of white fog
culminates in famished
boatloads. To argue
with whomever
rankles
my time clock,
a scourge, a routine
that eats hours like doughnuts.

Rhythmic change foreshadows a move
inside time, a mouse

 racing on its wheel
 toward a future lost
 in a needle's eye.

Cats caterwauled, broke in
on my music; Credence Clearwater then.

 I lived
 in the student
 ghetto
 during some of my -years
 at the U. of New Mexico.
My alarm clock never buzzed:
my sleep woke me. I lived alone except
 when a young woman
 occupied my vacant but eager
 assumptions.

 That was when
 a serial dialogue
 went on
 with my heart somewhere
on the West Coast. My children in exile
 there,
 as I thought of it.

Now spring again suggests a name
for my loneliness. Mannie's,
where I go for coffee
 every morning,
 may be my rescue mission.

Maybe there is a reason why
 daylight floats among
 the stars I
 wait for.

Blessed the green leaves
that bud in the season's blood.
 The silent word
 still clings to its branch,
ready to be pronounced at last.
The pen lingers in its blue state,

imprisoned
 but within, still mobile. Soon
 the calm the summer
 brings with its warm rain
will distill the purpose
 I hope for in meditation:
to outline whatever I am in solitude
with children's voices. I am inside
the child's museum, hanging from a wall.

Near the Laundry

You're driving me psycho!
she cries at him. He wanders off
in his car. She follows with her little
blonde daughter in her
red Toyota.

This is description so far,
but it's not a red wheelbarrow
that stands in the path
of the poem.

The mezzo
sang in a contemporary voice.
At the Santa Fe Opera the reflecting
pool
harbors all the faces
it has absorbed.
But the patients who dream
of fortunes during the night hear
solely
what the music says.

The narrative line
follows the young, blonde mother
to a sultry street in the northeast
heights,
where jewels tremble
in the gathering dusk. Looking at time
distantly, one
never knows how the face's
crystal
discloses an affair with bodily injury.
The air borrows light breezes,
called zephyrs,
from great Keats
or a bad poet from our own time.

Where is the little girl, I want
to ask.

Is she important to the story
that loaf's along

and has no answer?
Maroon sky, red wine.
I am happy.
I should vanish
before I explain everything
I don't know.
But I am one of the patients
who listens to the woman's abuse
and her mind
drifting
toward another planet. If only
I knew her
better than my brief view
can justify. Still, the voice
is patient and will not flee
too easily. I sadden, memorizing
the music in her cry.
I won't know her
if I see her again.
She had her back to me.
The man's face was blocked
by her figure. If description can live,
it must be through avoidance
of definition. Or, don't resolve:
be neutral.

Love Also Meets

for Celena

I throw out the alarm clock with
the trash,
refusing to recycle time
or to wake up
upside-down.

Termites ate my paper in Honolulu,
crowded with nature.
The rain-forest near Hilo is
sacred, as are the laws
of Pele, Goddess of Fire.

It is worth wondering
if truth is valid
in the play of the senses.
Rumor cannot be quantified in just
proportion
to the fixation
it wields.

Memory, explosive: the self
contained in brackets.

The Big Island's black sand
reduces to a ban on scooping up,
taking away,
or shells, or anything.

Desolation Walk recurs
as a fragment of alienation
from the life
one carries in a wallet.

Beware of comparisons;
speak only of the singular,
expound on it until it wastes
away,
faded and threadbare. I could learn
from myself if I could
listen
to how I sound in another's words.

Krishnamurti said pay attention,
concentrate
on the ghost behind the curtain.
The spirit enters truly
at the site of great seas.

It is nine years since
O'ahu
took me to bed
Time is also a lover when it
passes through the seed.
We married somewhere
in the sugar cane's
smoke.
So an image can alleviate the world
in the right alignment. Burning
the stars, I sometimes
think,
can lead to voices
from hollow-eyed gods,
or one's own family.

belongs not only to me
but to all
those who tell me
who I am. In this sense, solitude
is not what remains after
my shadow is sublimated
in thought or vision.
Since I am right-handed,
I touch my subject without
proof
of the left hand's
environment.
Justice also conspires in the
belief of its agony's
good reason, as I do
when I am being realistic,
whatever the tribute is worth.
When I read orally, a hitch in my mind
hunches me as if
to say
no, that's not where the song
parts from itself
but where it engages.
The meditation
is a lyric
except when it obligates
the music to turn away
toward mystical
surfaces.
I tremble in the dark stratum
where I am a blind ox
pulling myself
after what I think
I thought
before belief eluded me.
And turning to provision myself
for what may be the future's
pre-vision,
I let my eyes
wander into the corners.

I am also corrupt
 with logic, or that
basic step that prevents me
from going farther. Yet I do.
 Against resignation,
 I subject myself
as Heraclitean master no matter
 the divide I suggest
 as a way
 to police my avenues.
 Between here and life's
 old neighborhoods,
I look at the film, I populate
the windows I fly through.

FREUD BY OTHER MEANS

2002

*...death instincts are by their nature mute and...the clamor of life
proceeds for the most part from Eros. —Sigmund Freud, The Ego and
the Id*

The Life of Eternity

Most of eternity hides
in the past, sullen as black
ink.

A molecule of it
is history. The doctor
allowed himself to drift backward
as if there he could find
a peach
older than Greek mythology,
but keeping fresh
the juice of what we have always
dreamt.

Even in his wildest patients
he has never seen the timeless.
As he aged, the doctor visualized
civilization as a place
of vindictive loss.

Creation is modest and
vain.
Psychoanalysis, over a hundred
years old,
is young
as any June butterfly.

In the scheme of eternity
everyone will die. To keep the mind
in its gray box, almost safe,
almost mad,
is a minor occupation
among the gathering stars.

As a medical man, he knew how
the eyes of humankind blink on
and off

as if they too
traveled great distances
around a particular god.

Somewhere else on another
planet,
oxygen, if any, might have

dissipated, and people
are not human, might not breathe,
 their sky solid
 as a cinder block,
they, evanescent as smoke.

Civilization, the doctor thought,
 is only what we think it is,
 the mind
 a bowl of cherries
practical as a roller coaster.
History is more famous
than the future, having lived longer
 in crystal and blood.

A beetle climbs the wall of
 its home.
 unhurried.
 a form of bric-a-brac,
 too lazy to care.

Ego is our cooked goose,
the doctor explained in his writings,
his vision of dispute and discontent.
 How much eternity
 remains to us who imagine it
 as a holy distance,
a forever of incompleteness?
Enough for God's lifetime
 Enough.

Escalator

The escalator
is a dangerous enemy
who could trip you
 one step at a time.
This is how the mind works,
synthesizing dream with substance.

 Or as Jung
 alternates
 with Freud
The substitution
of ground for holiness
claims voice as a reason
for old tribes locating
 the sun
 as figures
in the act, at the window.

The future derives
from sleep, evolves into gods
 and animals.

This is a process
that F. chilled into
 vintage prose.

Jung warmed
to the blooded world,
not alone. The human collective
describes the enormity
of a single voice. How the
 minotaur
 poses like God
in his mystical cellar.

Yet F. too brings the good news
that deciphers time
in focus, traveled by a map,
 as if one could say
 there it is! now is as good
 as anywhere.
Everything is abstract

in its origin almost
as if Plato
believed in the verity
of his good republic.

The escalator goes flat by
steps. It continues
as breath does:
two men in blue suits with vests.
The moving sidewalk is
no less.
It slows into watchword, and if F.
abhorred the occult,
Jung compared sexuality
in the psychic order
to a hidden grammar,
dogma on the harpsichord.

Organized
mystery, lens-defined
hyperbole.
A science rises from obsession,
shaped like the Golem of Prague,
but who remembers
his song?
Jung catches flies
instead of fish.
F. hangs his briefs
on the line.
The world is all
alone,
all there is
to imitate.
Time limps behind
the escalator, F. stands
with a stopwatch,
Jung with a camera.
Mind in slow motion, caught in breath.

Tall World

Melancholia.
The heart flaps its wings, but
 doesn't rise.
It's the end of psychiatry if
 90 percent of impotence
 and frigidity is organic.
 Sadness infects
opportunity. The boy on the
 shoulder
complains of indecent proposals, but
 will not grow into them.

It's a tall world in which
humor stagnates and someone like
Homer gets lost in translation,
 although
 he sees enough
 to drive himself back
to Greece.

How does your analyst talk about
 his wife/her
 husband?

The face in rictus
can't discuss
 how it fed
music through its teeth.

The boy became
 a painter
of red surrealism. He met
 Rimbaud in exile,
 corrupted by art and madness.
 Still boys,
 still arriving from the country.
The boy, unnamed, described his life
as winter in the seed. He clanged
against his future as a businessman.

He felt better

when he changed his name,
author of sexual voices
as he heard them
on a drunken racing yacht.

Confused by thought,
the brain clutches itself
like a crab.

If the organ is impotent,
whose talking cure
will halt at that moment?

Think of your house
under centuries.

Passion is enough
to paint in red cloves,
a burdened
table.

But no insurance
is better.

When will day
cling to the brain-figures
of night?

The man suggests a lesion, or
did he mean a legion? Running
guns
too fast.

Life
has no insurance.

Doctor Gachet leans his head
against the air.

Van Gogh noticed
a fly
in his mantra.

Doctor Jung collected
conscience,
as if to splice events
into a caricature of the human.

Even so, no image
was enough.

No use following the man
beyond the stages
of success in the billions.
Secretly, he had always hidden
a Derringer in his
mind.

He died like a lamppost
standing up,
lit by a blue light,
hazy under the drifting stars.

Bad Dream and the Friend

I

At the corner of war and money,
the curtain opens a supposition

that age
will go

gently enough.
Civilization rubs us

the wrong way.

If only we can
be happy for a brief time,
like all happiness,
our minds

clear,

the weather blue

as in childhood.

The muse would not
terrorize

us

as the past does.

I dreamt of war: the Nazi doctors

in the camps,

treating

their patients to death.

And I

in it,

an American soldier, a hollow contour.

One of them

threw a hand grenade,

and my head

exploded

I woke

with the book I was reading

in my head

like an echo

of that time.

My son said:

so stop

reading that book.
A dream of annihilation
wishes for
such instruction.

II

This critical friend
is in a condition,
blood
seeping
from his guts. He recurs
like the full moon,
red
in his heart,
going out, waning forever
He dreamt
perfectly:
versions of tradition
in song and ballad, and of
the moment too:
political in his roaring salt.

Going, the ephemeral, the phone bills,
liberation as
a mode
of conquest.
Going, the roof,
the cupid.
Gone those early days
harbored in forgetful mind.
Gone, a woman,
Elizabeth, red hair
glinting in lamplight.
The jeweller fits
diamonds into our eyes'
setting.
A pear falls. The friend's
heart goes out:
red, frying.

Surreal Love Life

Someone who appeared,
 head leveled, a disgrace
for public relations, determined
a woman as centerpiece
to the domination of owls. Each sweet
 sway
 encourages designation
 as the favored wineshop.
Entropy in clusters
 figures in F's calculation:
the swim of soup
in the mind's cadaver.

One can go from stutter
 to cadence
and call it a theory
 of accidentals.
E's thought winks
 at his fellow
 headblazers.
Why did Freud brood except to please
 his young lovers, who
slept
 in the cellars?
Beyond which there is no

older than she can be.

Yet if F. loved
no one could recognize it
in the sexual attitudes
 of his blue papers.
He troubled the air
 by breathing it
 so dominantly.
 When the story
 runs out,
 the white-fingered Lord
assumes a special value,
a stalled hypothesis, as if F.

dreamt in colors.

The situation retires
for the night. Martha's sister
is thought to be the woman who
leaked
into F's mouth.

One attempt
is never enough to secure
the cherry trees.
F. is not unknown to love,
but is old enough to drive
a strong suspicion.

The surrealists, of course, veered
into his headlights
like frigid antelopes.
They oiled the unconscious,
crossed
themselves with red hearts.
They believed in transcendence
as the name of words.
F. was a man of connections,
a tiger leaping into
sunflowers.

Success doomed them all.
The French stood in line:
Breton, Desnos, Eluard.
Breezes cooled the hot
pastry shops of
Vienna.

Stravinsky. Picasso.
Nijinsky.
None of them ever died, so suddenly
did the world around them empty.
Freud, in his pajamas, still waits
in the vestibule
to greet
Mother Night with questions
and surprising, incurable answers.

A Trickle of Flame

Took the winter gun
as token of independence. Of
 someone
 to mail to,
 accident of occasion
when the wall turned blue.
For a change, I don't think
 of F.
but of how crisp the firmament
 is today,
as in the picture-book of childhood
 before the onions
 sliced my time
 in half.

I read that the ideas
are available, but put together
 with bad correction:
 a flutter of
 wallpaper.

F. returns in organization, a tilt
 in key. I order him
 like breakfast.

The faucet releases dimes
in the marketplace.

Very well then, he was a chain
 of command. He was good
 like toast.

I saw a trickle of flame cross
 my lover's eyes, otherwise
 black like salt.

But she had said assault, something
salmon in the skillet. Could he
 help me?

The correspondence was technical,
 a ghost in the factory
where ideas
were turned out much like
 indignant water.

The door handle broke
as I turned
 it
 to my left,
 away from trouble.
F. spoke
in my thought in Tom McGrath's
 voice,
 my teacher
when I was young and still believed in
 tuxedos.

The girl had a blue necklace
tattooed around her neck.
What weariness of pain
can break us all! As when

 declaims in the amphitheater
 outside Greece
 an organic analysis
 that I can feel
unburdens my love, rusting in the
 years.

Parts of speech do not help.
Water is too gray. Particular episodes
grind in the brain.
The Carmelites leave their winter
 quarters.

 The sea is pure fish.
Why didn't I choose Jung
who contains a charm of symbols?
 If I question
it is because I believe
 my teacher's poetry lives
 starkly,
 without attenuation.

The picture-book of childhood
assumes less importance as I move
toward my shadows in the brain.
Yet there is reason

to predict
a sun in silence.
I have murmured the name
until its flesh has peeled away
and the bones dried
in valediction.
Home is where my lover lies
open,
eyes of flame.
We wait only for thought's indulgence.

Our Group Back Then

It was 40 years ago:
all the plums I imagined
have not survived.
We sat around
in a contemporary
way.

I said what I believed
to be evidence
in that case.

Their focus on F.
was not clear. Mine was
hesitant.

Sometimes a roof
knocked on the door. Little lapses
in suicide
occurred.

The head guy sustained intervals.

To be wrong
turns out a simple
syllogism. A way
station
away from
whatever was said
in the beginning.

Afterwards we went
next door

to the deli.

Whatever remained was eaten.

Yes, we staggered after truth.

We lifted 10 times our weight

How antlike our eyes,
seeing

their choice
of dimensions

like yesterday's salad.

Often we liked each other
as proof of similar ghosts

in the bedroom.

I confronted a woman,
told her she was
a gadfly,
poking around
in the world's business
but hardly touching mine,
as I wanted.

We weren't supposed
to fraternize, yet I knew
love

scurried about
in temporary homes.

I was married, had found my limits
of sexual wonder:
sex as intruder, another.

Time skipped the senses
as we talked
inside the clock, moved
by hands
we couldn't hold.

The pity of therapy
is its incandescence, fireflies
that weave through each cranny
of air
only to lose in darkness
the breath of knowledge
in a gasp, a wheeze,
body's betrayal.

The mind maybe
learned
that it's just the brain,
acting out its cues, as it must,
on a stage
with dimmed footlights.

We slept while we talked: fond
whispers
we could barely hear
through our dreams.

Later we went home separately
and considered how well
a thought could end.

Professional Dreams

for Dr. Denise Farnath

I took the hand-pats as surety
for a purpose I could only dimly fathom.

She brought me to
a winter garden where I slept
in her professional dreams
for several nights
as we carried on
the troubled healing.

To be the doctor at such times
when the chatter of a patient's illness
disturbs the rigor

that is learned in memory,
breaks open
those closed passages
traveled alone. Patience accumulates
like withered limbs in the eyes
that see
deep into alternative roots.

I talked about first names, I who
always hid
my own.

I learned Greg's, Bob's, Andy's, also.
But what's in a name when the one-eyed man

lolls on a lollipop, an old
geezer
with a mind to go back
into the bright imagination
of dawning light. Lick the dream,
he thinks,

before the moon comes
full circle on a stick, too sweet
to be denied its fulfillment, its dead
seas.

What the doctor opens with her acuity
may be nothing less than

a whisper in the dark,
from shade into glaring
distinction.

I make out only shapes, blurred,
thick as rocks.

I think like dry lemons, myself in memory,
a tune forgotten except as she
hums her own echo.

I am exhausted and sleep
with a patch on the wrong eye.
Later a horse will gallop
into my dreams,
a little loco,
white-maned, as I am.

My doctor's professional outlook
is the eye I lack.

My own
names
arrived starkly from
their local anesthetic.

That was long ago, in mind,
before she became the monitor
of my hazy meditations
concerning the letter E.

I look for vision to the language
my surgeon
knows.

Who can I be
that I lose the words to describe
who I am, one-eyed? She tells me—
I, the child
of my greater age—
how to spell what I cannot see.

Yellow Stripe

As if it were the stripe
I follow, yellow. In my dream,
the shade barely mentioned.

But this was not the sun
I followed.
A lunatic on the loose, a fragment
of despair wherein
the location
is solid. A dawn
somewhere in my passion.

The others come after
I push,
and the Congresswoman loves me, other
than the party. Belief
holds a bouquet,
without a budget.
I am left to her right, where the sun
creeps in.

Another day I follow in my desire.
Time upsets what I can't see,
the chauffeur dying at the wheel.

My position
is aligned with space too
awkward
to modernize. Certainly I come
bridgewise: a locus outside
the dream.

A priori, the poem
in all this
ended before I could
tell it.

The resin in my wound
is her idea of conduction,
which reveals a detractor.
I am not wise enough
to detect

the motive that campaigns
for her love. The train left
yesterday
and followed a single
track
whence so much woman
thought to be alliterative.

Too flash, I think,
stopping in the middle
of winter. The snow conducts
moderate illusion. When will
the asteroid come?
Shadow lurks,
stuck in similar
anchor.

The yellow line
is behind me, as I see in the
construction
of this dream:
man-made, artificial,
in which I hear
the raucous peacock scream.

Off-center, the bearer of zones.
Sex is the counterpart, what is not
dreamt of.

Syntax, left in the church,
provides. If I wake up
from language,
no one will know.
One whodunit
is just the next one, and Heather
will do me in like a felon
for love
of Washington.

Yesterday approaches
fresh as a clean window.
I stop and alight from the dream,
where I have been on the road

too long.
She takes my hand,
an appointment kept.
Applause. O, applesauce! One more
act
to go.
I forget my lines.

The X Factor

Jesus, many-sided messiah,
not yet come,
ever coming,
extends from the older prophets:
Isaiah, Elijah,
Jeremiah.

As a Jew, I drink a wild cup of
red wine
every day
for my health-the way has been long
and restless. Overhead,
a vulture lowers,
ecstatic.

I am incarnated as ego,
id, libido, superego,
as are all.
The day disguises the German-speaking
master
from his prey:
jelly world, excellent blood,
taboo.

Mind is a pilgrim,
footless but energetic. Nerve goes
before you can time its destination,
and forever the hour stops
at the childhood corner
where God stood
in the intersection, dazed
by sheer imagination.

Now Father Freud implicates
a fixation
as a dramatic mood in which
the moon shadows alder and oak
in a romantic liturgy.

Now is a good time
to reflect
on the cloudy breath of his books,
when submerged in art and poetry.

Relatives rescued him from drowning.
But in other cases,
he visited with bouquets,
departures.

Time to go home. The winter
startles us,
beseeching
as it does,
beaching the whales,
as it does.
Poetry continues,

the doctor
listening to heart, lungs,
which do not lie.
Voice at the last
culminates in visionary
silence.

Weighing the Balance

A certain lack
of balance
criticizes me,
my slack departure into
vagueness where I feel
my walk
slightly above the ground. What
causes this
is age and a loss of
clarity in choosing neighborhoods
outside my nodding voice.
In the movies
I am dark,
a motion among seats
occupied by sinister people
ready to throw me down.

Descent is more difficult than
rising in this new dust
that coats my lips, dries them
as meditation prefigures.
If I am dizzy in my self-analysis
of Freud
it is due to my
running eyes that
see temptation in words
as a form of courage. It's all
visual,
a vision bound to
corners of Plato, who
saw shadows where men were,
and perhaps showed in mind how ideal
the hourglass was,
based
on sand-pyramid
scales.

If I trip, serenity calms me.
Fallen into trust, I blink twice shortly,

a long look, my own Morse
to rescue.

When I change voice to a classier
villa

I think the philosophical republic
will welcome me as a liar.

Coda takes up what I left behind.

This winter
is slow in piling up snow.

No moisture
restricts how smoothly
the great doctor's wisdom
lies in shadows.

Fire answers the blankness of thought
when not filled with words
assigning understanding.

Spring's light lifts copious
signatures as if one moved
through the first question preserved
in stone.

Plato was not Freud's
favorite Greek, only
an idea frayed in transit.

Jocasta, mother loved in body by
her young
king,

knew little
of the temperature she wrought
in art's
science. She held me
when I was young and her son.

On my own, I catch glimpses
as I tread on, warily, afraid of
stairs,
longing to look clearly
at those younger years
shadowed in memory.

Was I ever healed by Freud's
dream-children?

Warily, I am alone, my self

framed by wood-nymphs,
the woman I love screened
behind abstract principles.
I, ptime character, mover
 in all my fictions,
 lean lightly into
 the spring winds,
courting nature's first law, love's
scribe
 tossing about in the balance.

X's and O's

They are teaching
 football players
 manners:
how to eat with double forks,
how to drink sanitized punch, how to
 say hello,
moving their lips without their
 hands.
It is grueling to be exacting exactly
 off the field where
 corpses
 lie buried,
so near to ancestors, those boys, tackling
 one after another.

In another century, in Europe,
that would be a good day of atonement
for all those dropped passes, those
 shapeless blocks. One
 is never enough
 to squeeze
 the lover's hands,
to frame silence as a force
to seize the analyst by the throat. Those
 days,
when hope was equal,
linger even into dotage as a thread
that leads away
from that ancient bull.

 X's and O's are just
for those who sleep under bridges when
 night comes
 in judgment.

 They too played
football
in their time
 of increments and swollen
 eyeballs.

Today there are women too,

rummaging in their hearts for one
last
cheer.

The analyst's job is to shatter the eggs
of the ego almost as well
as Dostoyevsky, Kafka, and some other
interior linemen. Poems also
for the broken edges,
where the whites of their eyes
turn green.

As those barns that double
as cloisters
grow cool, memory-laden,
all those good times!

To sleep is to waken into darkness:
shadows of the sun, and
as the analyst
proposes,
the normal in brackets.

To list all the names
everyone shoulders against
all other names
would be erroneous, a fumble
in the end zone.

Recovery comes late for some:
even the analyst never gets too far
from her analysis.

The aim of God is often
unsure,
and so it is a sign
of indulgence to accept the analyst
as a part-time mentor,
not as a religious but as a connoisseur
of the sex trade. Let
the moment
slip away,
she urges: it is the wrong one,
it seduces with banal signals.
The idea is, wait till old age, aim
with a flabby

foot
for the center
of the goalposts, lie down
on the bench. The rest is quick
and to the point.

Ego Symbolizes

I am ridden
to tears
by a squint in the map that colors
F's early symbolism. Oedipus
smokes a crumpled cigar in the bar,
beard white as camphor balls. The father
reads a passage around the block
three times
as if to prove heartshaped love.
The daughter conceals
rhythms that dry on the line.
F. is causal: yesterday's
hero.

I suggest to myself
implausible virtues. Truth is
louder than words. Psychotherapy
adjourns.

F's science
has moved to another neighborhood.

I am lost
without his provocations,
and regulate my sins
with iron testicles.

He wrote of ego
as the conscious misfit,
the white knight of uncharted
regions.

I am lost
in Aztec civilization
with one extra
heart
for the executioner's knife.
F. taught me how to scream
after the canyon's echo.

Tomorrow is yesterday without a past:
a thought especially
effective

when I recognize symptoms
like dry mouth in New Mexico.

My death trots around me,
harbinger of rubber horses.

F. is a collaborator
in my life.

And yet someone said
Jung is more interesting. I think
this is because he collected more
symbols.

He said mother
and all the mothers
answered the call.

He and F.:
psyche's tectonic plates.
But F. is Godless, represses
the lachrymose syndrome.

He will not weep for
the hardening
of my blood. Jung cripples
my anxiety.

I am my process. I regard the night
as a lost day, during
which I could dream within reverie,
with the ego's help,
though ego even so,
would risk the
the deep bogs.

Who is God
that F.
symbolizes Him?
I, who am not

a Symbolist,
live in mystery, -,
my own father.

This is an afternoon among others
when I read the sun's shadows
that compose my image.

F. has moved out. He took his
cigars,
his clock,

and all his life savings.

Making Real

F. clings to the wings that
 culture
 lets fly into thermodynamic
 levels otherwise subdued
 in women's arms. The man
 waits outside, limp
as noodles. Whatever chooses to abridge
 toward distraction
 is a feather in his eye.
Especially the king's
 fool
 remarks the greasy
 ancestor. Honda Accord
demonstrates a material
 skill
 F. could discern
 as a fact compounded
 of social enterprise
in common with smooth
 capital.

Yet, tactfully, the maroon moon
 hangs in the sky
 as a woman hangs
in the man's loop. Or dug

 his lap. A vacation
attends what was there before
the action vacated. We spell our
 name
 with five zeroes,
 as if to be in that zone
 requires
 rehearsed
amplitude. Or the woman dead,
 surfaces
among killer whales.

 But we don't get this
 from F.

or his
acolytes, for at no time
is he more charming than when
he expostulates against well-tutored
women.

That he is dead
is a concept that recoils
in the mind,
springs loose among bodies.
The thought he conceives
realizes, makes real, what warriors
sang in Provence,
warblers like rain,
like passages.

What happens then is that
his case
gives us conceptual
accuracy if not always fact.
Weapons are an index
of simple blood-smart. They flow
across pages, warping sound.

A woman hopes for
visitors, likely as angels,
genderless,
former spooks.

F. takes us in confidence that we too
reside on Arcturus,
purple as in a child's astronomy.

What we do must identify
combinations of genes that
fabulate our motions
on blankets
on the park
grass.

When all is said, nothing remains
but hierarchy.

Time swivels
on its loop.

A creaking chair points to
a complexion of austerity.

We think Bartleby
is such a man.

Then there is a combination
safer than what we
 imagined
 or F. pointed out
in advising adjustments
to invigorate principles.
He was the man who, in part,
corrected the century.

 Yet
 he could not make
a science of repressed
awakenings. He could not
 repeat
the mother in the son nor
extrapolate sin from the unconscious.
He revealed in the sense of
 a poet
 in good prose.

It is easier to live
among people divined
from animal guts than
 ephebes
 marching in jungles.
Where does luck exist
before it shows its black ink?

 A fact, then,
 in the avant garde,
 though F.
saw such faces half in shadow,
the other half in growth.
He may have believed better
of his enterprise
than his words occasion.

I, for one, still intuit
the velocity of his truth.

 The lion
 stretches,
 growls softly

into the microphone.

Freud in California

California dried up in me,
the song stopped
on a note. What was rendered
deserved no description,
The group met
late afternoons. The weather
grew hair.
Freud spawned
the surrealists, who slept
with their eyes open. Ordinarily,
someone
would quote
only part of the sentence.
Ordinarily, we would go home
after more talk. No one knew
the world
after it was fried in oil.
Vastly concurrent.
My thought slept
in the snow
that I imagined.

Suggestively, the group described
a general portrait of someone nobody
knew,
California was at stake.
It was wise
to have moved the continent
westward.
The threat
posed in the window,
the feeling of being
elsewhere, approached by naked women.
Forcefully, I clung to a root,
below me
the rushing water
of a tear.

How far can we go

in illustrating avid influences?
As a group, we were fishy, demanding
the cure
by eloquence.

One night I dreamt of Freud with onions
but would have preferred him
with macaroni.

It never rained
while we were shining.

But what were
the problems? How intellectual
might Picasso women be?

There were witnesses inside the radiance:
the black moon of stars. I told her
I could do some of that,
the figure in the patch.

We talked it over. Painted selves
in a coffee shop next to
the building.

Whatever the angle, I could see
their vague descriptions.

When I left California

I was worried news.

Therapy remained in the back of my mind,
suddenly gregarious,
a weight I could stagger.

The reason was distinct:
olives in the oatmeal.

The Women

From somewhere
the words describe the silence,
coming from noise,
from Cage's runaway
notations.

Once the truth came from baby wails
like a passenger on a red-&-green
trolley.

We don't hear
cameras any more either. The cop
stands with his tired
pistol,
without guile,
a filled motion of vacancy.

When Freud came along,
some women trusted in his future,
thinking they too
needed a penis.
Envy, he told them,
the canary's
tweeting.

As if they were maligned
by nature,
returned to noise,
the sweet of heart
raged like peacocks,
or diverted words: more subtle peahens.

Jealousy,
he said, fears
the dark. Children thought
in measures
of uniforms, police. The one
on the corner walks
from evening lamplight into
groaning alleys.

Polymorphous is not
perverse, as the guru imagined.
Cage's precision is the waking

of random forces,
as the I Ching projects.
And children read omens
like miniature prophets.

Ozone protects Earth's blue
marble
some of us play with
at the speed of art.
Great master,
tell us now from your secret
files why women
say so breathlessly what wisdom admires.
Castration is the middle term
of the trinity that shapes
perhaps conciliation
between
male rhyme
and female's tender obituary.

No use explaining:
Earth consumes its own gravity.
The aleatory rises
from the level plain.

Dear daughter of my sometime energy,
how I played in your contemplation
as when I wished for any dream

you could give me
to change my way,
put me among
the high ancestors, the deep
originals.

I praise the eloquence
of chance
that thinks for me
as I dream. I move
to Freud's
other goodness, his dazzling eye
in mind's microscope.
Women are not his vision of genius:
they are too jealous.

He worked backward
from logic to vulva.
I see in my daughter that marathon nature
that passes by the clever horseman.

This Might Have Been a Case

F., when he waited
for lab results, was
the middle man between candor
and transcendence. What if the

patient
betrayed his illusions?

His field
was round as a marble,
sperm encased in glass.

Atlas
in consequence.

A young woman, call her
Lili.

So much case in her mind.
Weary of compulsive influence:

a radio,
old Emerson,
Little Orphan Annie.
There is a time gap.

The results were conspicuous
like the gold watch

F. wore with its gold chain
in his
vest pocket, always the arranged
hour.

She thought in poems,
she bruised her eyes
on words.

The rabbi
had enrolled her between God
and the medicine cabinet.

Did F. lust for Lili? Did he even
know her?

She is not a case he mentions
among the early devils
of his breed.

One thinks of F. as a

peninsula
riding high in muddy waters.

His voice
had cancer, too.

He wasted the perfect broom
the burghers of Delft
had bestowed on him
in a Vermeer painting,
now lost.

Frequently, he polished his boots
during the casual rites
of summer.

A bleeding mind suggests
the independent choir that still
sings
after thought's

has expired.
F. sometimes worked a case
backwards
as in saying and so forth before
external
sources
had been cultivated.

This Lili was not of his devising,
but her case was always
opening out.
Vienna's mayor, handsome Karl Lueger,
an anti-
Semite,
escorted Lili
back and forth,
although she was only a name.

Theory is sometimes more
than paper, as wind
is more than air. F. did not
write
abstractly. His cases
were dignified, dressed properly

and passed with
the speed of
life.

The rabbi lingered
in Lili's breath,
sweet wine,
Old Testament
cramps in her legs.

Mercy
came to her,
flying over the rooftops dressed
like a bride.
She vanished from her own
imagination
when F., a future still in mind,
fled Austria to drift away
among London's shops and
bobbies.

A Question of Dogs

My mind in disjunctive order, its
 white stripes
 and black stripes
cancel whatever halts
 in the road
 without reason.

Zebras in phalanx, I, like a judge,
scanning interludes. Is the sun
 Jewish?

Maybe. As I
used to ask Ma, is that dog
 Jewish?
That depends on its owner,
 she always said.

Even then I blushed to think of a woman
on the table, thinking of questions,
civil disorder in the single
 bathroom.

I think of passion
 as tea or biscuits in the Tate
 Museum.
Freud in England,
dying of poison in the jaw.
This when I was older and devout
in prayers I didn't understand.
Meanwhile, where did that woman go?

I talked myself
 out of the cure. Adherence
 to a tin code
is like never knowing, why
 Orphan Annie?
When God talked to me then,
 I thought
 it was
my meager knowledge of Freud.
Truth, a balancing act, and I
 a touch of

vertigo.

i plan beyond
the worried flowers.

Something spooky
in a glowing red watch. I see
time
going so fast

my eyes can't keep up.

Morning
and the bamboo poles
hurt the rain. I remember the
woman,
a chocolate shake
right in the middle.

Who foresaw the danger
I lapsed into in the distance
louder than wakefulness? It wasn't
a dream,

I'm sure.

I'm tired of dreams,
mentioning them like a list.
I'm not any better than I was before,
confessing
my first kiss.
I feel like a
parallelogram.
my rooms tilting.

Enough, I think. If I could have
met Freud,
what a fellowship!
what spirit in the flies
buzzing on the windowpane.

A long service
predicated on small experience.
Surely I can draw
a good hand.

Water bubbling on the burners
detaches: balloons on the

ceiling.
A sentence
hovers in my back yard.

I surrender to words that move me
around:
bits of climax
in the pudding.
End of the sentence completes the edge.
I ride a zebra and fall into anguish.
Freud again hangs by my hair,
not much now that I'm old.

Composite in Black and Blood

for Mary Rising Higgins

Black man

sleeps in his own
blood,
a taxi
pulls away.

He was holding his baby,
a shoulder given to affluence;
his wife maybe

was she tan only
in that light?

A famous
literary figure who
what about that MacArthur?

He came to read on campus,
sleeping then through
his own blood.

She is tan,
maybe black.

Outside, the leaves
shine, but he was nice to me
before that,
before the fake shot
pushed his blood out.

No reason
to be shouted in the blue
atmosphere,
in the worried
black's calling.

The word is less than mourning
compared to his frozen shoulder
where the baby was still
as ice itself.

The other woman
smiled,
I think,
at me.

Definitely white,

and I was unwise to the way
 we protracted the range
of his sudden sullen witness.
The MacArthur fated the taxi
 pulling away,
or did the wrinkles
in the black man's eyes
 harden the air?
He snored into his blood.
The smiling woman
 verged on bliss,
 though only the fresh
 snow
augmented the future.
I slept in his blood
 while the baby
organized a simple death
 in my cold temple.
The clock came suddenly
 out of the west.
I didn't know how much
 longer
I could draw
 the water out of his heat.
Was it the fury of his name
that brought me to the door
 of his terrible
 look?
His blood ran into
 the river
where the mountains ended.
Topographically, I could never
 complete
 the index that molded
 my composure.
When he woke, the theory
 began.

Narrative of Conscience

A breeze blows through my worksheets
at five o'clock, when the sun,
in its decline,
opens out
to the owl
of the local universe. I have
followed
my feet
through the turnstile
of this time,
last night's kitchen a dream
where I strayed barefoot,
crawling,
not knowing
this was a phase,
only excess of being

Lithe forms of women slant my mind
to wayward afternoons
when in youth
I took purchase
on punishment.
There is always
too much to think of. How could
anyone
rise on the shoulders
of reverie
to see down below a scarred winter?

Freud was only
a name
in the crackerjack box.
Later, he slept in me, I, crank
of masturbation,
early riser
to a girl's breath
in my mouth,
comrade to beasts, siphoned
from liquid books.

Writing is too narrow:
a world glimpsed as a formal
target.

I aimed low at Freud,
crawling on all fours,
under the table, wax
fruits upon it.

Old now, I read
poetry, and write
for my heart's flickering.
Old Yeats, be my darkness,
beam through me a glow
of your Byzantine
years.

If in language there could be
reward for lines
silent in meaning
yet above mere duty,
I would speak to Auden's
limestone.

Song, though old-fashioned,
remains the lodestar,
from back then when syntax
refused the noose.

The third millennium:
before it dawns in 24
circles, spaces already its
numbers
through asteroids' perilous design.
I call for mother, too dead
to believe me. But then she was
a bastion,
protector of my childhood,
adolescence, young manhood.
In my new age I try to wipe
her blue eyes from
my fingers.
Freud, help me
sing
one or two of your great

oneiric sex-songs.

I sell my dreams now
for pennies by the pound.
 It's not too late
 to believe
 in Jung's
collective irony. I too
am a myth, as described in prologues.
Walking the labyrinth is an ancient
 spiritual
 exercise.

 I have walked it
on filmy shoes to scan
 its negative. My penis
 wakes up.
I think it wants to shout.

I might have been a Language poet,
 but of course
my tongue is too long
 Instead, I
 respect
those who crack each word
with a mallet until it cries
 with joy.

I am the narrative
of my conscience: I hold the hand
 of strong masters.

I am pitch black, though
a light swivels through my head.
 Yes, old fellow, I talk to myself
 in brackets.

 The main story idles
 in lemon-light.
Nowhere to go but here,
where I eat oatmeal, mango, Cornish hen,
 and pull along the shy God
of my heirs.

This Caption for Life

He is young, just out of middle school
where he studied the gaps
 in his life
as if this could teach him
 the habitation
 of his days.

He hears shots from across
the border. But this is merely
 Exhibit A
in the more likely definition
of a clinical study by white-suited
 people.

 If he survives
he will be cast in mythology
as one who learned early
how to ride the mourner's
 prayer like a horse.

This is a sentence. He is guilty of
leading a private life.
He never heard of Freud
or any of his progeny.

Time is left over
when he sleeps, his heart
blown away by many incidents.

 There is something
 textbookish
about his constellations.

 He is his own persona,
 embittered by the changeless
 rotation of the Earth.

Failing at the birth of life,
Earth is weightless, harbinger
 of a more solid air, in which
 even Mars could breathe.

Losses can be articulated
solely by good songs of a

hand that reaches in stealth
or the practice
that teaches the ordeal of
gravity

Yet, to earn patience
is a mortal
exercise,
as though death could not
matter
except to idealists. One hungry
guard
at a crepuscular outpost
can't justify a reason for
therapy. The cure
for his life
exhausts itself
in the synchronized version
of myth.

But Jung is too early for his mind.
He will pace to and fro,
shouldering his rifle,

until the wind
blows through his head
and he fires
at what is only a whisper
across the border.

He will not stay at his post forever,
he will be relieved, will return to
his village
a hero
for having survived
life in an average way, as it is
thought
by other harvesters
of all their dead
moments.

His face will be nurtured
in primitive newspapers,
in yearbooks of colored obituaries.

Controversy: The Beginning

He held this idea
in his hands
so that
it wouldn't fly away
in the migration of bats. An idea,
someone might have told him, is
a bird.

Freud wrote like a muscle,
attuned to the mind's red rubber,
the stretch between golden
sources.

For a while he was
X-rated
because his willingness to live
in the future overcame
what he owed to the past.

He once told a woman, injured
in a car accident, to listen
to Brahms.

This was not a treatment
he would later think to use
in the unconscious wilderness
where sunlight shows through
only as a gap
among bones.

Freud wrote in a dominant key
as others might occupy
words as illusion.

For repression hinted at
a fish
in the bakery. Little could be
done
with zero sustenance,
anorexia of the soul,
although he used
language
like a pinball bouncing off
objections,

non-confessions.

Freud treated memory
 with blue gloves
something to show his vision
after the hour was up. He reversed
 views in mid-fall.
Sections broke off in the shallow
 universe,
in the cradle.

Time results from loneliness,
the ego dipped in chocolate
 to entice bronze statues
 to follow
 human feelings.
Freud wrote as someone repelled by
 bloc parties, voters
consistently out of touch
with their own minds,
which are surreal.

 He campaigned
 for truth
 in advertising
 no matter how hard it is
to hear the listener.
When psychoanalysis became
 commercial,
 voices plugged up earlier
 ears,
 synapses split.
The mind slowed
 to a drizzle.
To release the vacancy he beheld
 in the social frame,
 Freud
 wrote
barely enough to sustain
his living in bourgeois dreams.

Diamond Tongue

With metalinguistic courage,
the voice puts on its lipstick. Femur
blessing, the as if of a fading hour
when the face breaks
its stumbling body.

The analyst intrudes
with a white
voice, to be charred in so minutes,
a precise value.

I had at first not understood
how the diamond could wait
that long,
the consequence so disguised.
I asked him how the mouth
could suffer so.

He avoided confrontation
by heaving a chair through the rose
window,
stained glass spraying
through the time
of intercession.

Afterwards, I would soak my mind
in saltwater
for an hour, or as long
as it took
to trespass
the fatuous intensity.

Somewhere, when the voice stops,
a culture breeds another science,
crammed into reading,
sight strewn about
like a dead camera.

If she wears the diamond
in her tongue
why discourage her,
whose need
must be greater than mine?

In analysis, there is a quota
 of dubious propriety,
such as sextuplets asleep in the way
 the night moves toward
 France.

I speak to her with a tourniquet
 around my voice.

The doctor's ears stiffen
in his rush
 to the bloodstained mountains.

Sex interrupts the tongue
 in the shoes
 of fluency.

The heart is incorruptible—
you know this without professional
 birdsong.

I reverse my eyes. I think
 I was founded
like a company. In the east,
she is strumming lightly no matter
 the noisy rain. I hear
 only the checkmarks.

When I leave, laughter
precedes me, and I try to
 catch up.

What is left
 is a sticky analysis,
 a voice without
resonance. My friend's expertise
follows me in the rearview mirror.

I am safe in her sound
despite my analyst's assurance
 that I am not well,
that I love what displaces me.

The birds
on their high wire begin
 the morning
 like chirping targets.
The day will be assured and costly.
Some zero-man will pay

for the Earth to rent
a new inner
 space,
 yet there are enough words
 for all of us.
Dusk will come, darkening
 the shadows. The brain's
 ocean
will go on until its metallic
insistence at last ceases,
 when the night falls into
 its diet of wandering sleep.

Late Judgments

As F. would think of it, the wound
fills the mind. The mind, in its swarm,
fills the body,
bloody
in affection. Similarly,
an index coerces odd gods into
a mix
of old words and new meanings.

The lamp:
oil in a vessel, wick lit,
mentioned among the heavenly
bodies.

Lamp light—the avenues new
in the evenings when the mind's wound
electrifies its patience.

F.'s skull a flame
in the night watchman's lantern.

F. watches the world
accommodate its last judgment
murmuring defiance as it goes.
But he is too early to be an ending
no matter who
defiles him
with his own wound, printed
in valedictory books.

He is among the chopsticks
of science,
whose head rested
on his mother's pillow.
He could not finish his
dream.

Bounded by the still emergency,
the crowd
spills over, spills
like beer-foam.

It will lose its
head. F. speaks

to the curtain
as if Polonius, struck,
would bring it down. Then a beer
in Vienna, a Jew-baiting city left over
from the Hitler war.
But F. was a stranger in the
Kingdom islands.
He regarded his final papers as a wizening
assignment.

Words listen to each other.
This is the mystery
of the world's synonyms,
of reason without
a hat.
Somehow, when the words are there
when you need them,
the memory's riches
avenge the drought
that often afflicts
the watery eyes of an old man.

He sits in his office
with a client, also a refugee.
They talk about history
before the bombs
would fall on England.
It is the wound's future, a barrier
whose life leaks
as destiny wills.
But then to be a doctor
dozing while merciless enemies'
laughter
becomes new with
plunder,
slandering.
F. dreams like a bear in a winter
of resurgence, before the fresh mind
of spring.
To die
is the last emergency:
cows still give milk, horses
gallop into the shadows,

boulders dry up.

Freud Inquiry

In thinking a poem of Freud:
I'm slightly afraid the warm weather

may stop

Dictionaries pronounce
only what is explicit.

The human mind can be articulate
despite its thought.

The warm flowers
dispute the bees.

More becomes less likely
in a Freud poem. A tricky
customer, so I

think in advance
of what could be rued
in isolation.

I will observe in meditation
his approach to women
who repress incest
as a matter, of course,
in blind Oedipus.

In his practice, Freud consumed
freethinking organisms
to reach a tighter pulse than could be
broomed in comprehension.

But he darted out, camouflaged,
from mind's thickets, swarmed in fact
through dead lines
if I write them that way
and miss.

That was then in Vienna.

I think Freud was right
in assuming
his patients
were obsessively bred
on wine and chocolates. His truths
are not scientific in the way
a wristwatch is:
take rather a fact

of disposition and stretch it
far and closer
in recognition
of sex
in psyche
as irony, dumbstruck as
a child's
lantern in the dark
night of egoistic calm.

Portraits of the dead hang
in sleep's gallery.
They must be called to answer
for living their own lives
parallel to death, which is
to some degree
a triangle. Two lovers and their myth.
Orgasm is a tonic to be swallowed
in one gulp.
Freud's is a casebook
not to be opened until I have read
the glossary
that accompanies
his passage through Jung's apostasy.

Including Sex

He worked to keep his mind
unembarrassed.

He failed to repress
the Jew by cutting off
a syllable:

Sigismund. Yet he was a Hebrew
even if Moses was Egyptian. Freud
was stark as a skeleton
in Hitler's eye, even though
the time had not yet come.

To be repressed
is kindling wood
set to the burn.

Dusk waters the eye
of what we thought
was civilization.

I would have talked
to Freud
in Vienna if I'd had anything
to say

except that I was a woman
with a penis. Not homosexual
but a wonder in my own mind.

I convinced my
manhood
even while Europe killed itself.

What is personal
crowded Freud's mind like schoolboys
going home,
flinging themselves
at the clock
that martyrs them all, dull,
eyeless in Gaza, even if they see
well enough to stumble
through walls,
through daylight
when the sun

turns around
to its black side.

Then Freud was master
in somebody else's house. Virgins

grew
in the wisteria.
Their husbands flew in and out
of windows, leaving
tickets
for Tel Aviv, for Islamabad,
for Rome, Shanghai.

Already the drill drives through
these sexual children;
the girls boys know
quicken their stride. Who will be
lucky?
Or is that too emptied out, birdy omens
going nowhere?

Depression

That Jewish kid with the Brillo pad
in his hair
feels like myself before
I learned to speak
English.
I visited
a therapist
once a week. She listened
to my stories
and prescribed a walk around
the block
every day.
She spoke German,
but flexibly.

I was depressed
like a dead horse.
Paul had gotten married
some days before.
I was so anxious that
the wedding
go well
that I walked in wet cement
for weeks until I got stuck
and lost my shoes.
They kept on walking
through my head
like military boots.

But speaking English
was secondary
when I struggled onward
toward my 13th birthday.
All that youth
a mistake. I was old
already
in the wet year of the monkeys.
I breathed through asthma:
walrus

of wheeze.
Dr. K. later told me
she had almost hospitalized me
for asthma of the brain.

I penalize myself
for walking too slowly,
not keeping up. My knees
are bottle-caps,
my feet, sponges.
My wife walks behind me,
dead.
The world is my poltergeist:
a leprosy
of the soul,
my infinitesimal share of
the universal
embrace,
though as yet undetected
in the slides.
Dr. K.: Goodbye. You were a kind
patient.
And you, though younger, were
a motherly
archetype.
I'm on my own again, on American
tiptoes,
waiting to be kissed.

Dramatizing

It is said that the dream
dramatizes

an idea.

Stubble in the wound, and a gray
visitor hovers above
hallucination. The ends do not
cohere

to form a loop.

Gray eyes predispose.

The lieutenant colonel stands off
wiser

from his youthful background
in homosexuality. This was the dream:

lion covering
ground

oward the kil
if a dangerous mar

Hemingway?

I aim, hit
a domino. All fall backward
in one long, curving
sweep.

Yet we spin our eyes, blurs,
academic resistance.

Who would relive the idea
of a hand groping for the
heart?

The kill is a kind of resurrection,
pulpy heartbeat. Interpreting figs
is the last resort
of a waning mind.

Waking, the moon low
in the morning light.

The first resort is a spa
in central Germany. I swim, draw

nine times in a row.

A man I don't know

suggests I cancel the dining room,
instead go naked
to his wife, who, he
assures me,
waits for me.

I wake up in her arms, forlorn,
blue flashes
going off in powder,
maybe rat poison.

I can no longer
ask
who the strange man is:
he is I.
Jung would say I am the archetype
of the hermit, in love
with my disgust.

This is a reckless view
of Narcissus, the pool of my eyes
lonely, seeking only
itself.

By my wife's ashes
I occlude
all sexual syntax.

Blue is the dominant
color
of patience.
The dream records instances
when God was alone with His
beast.

Already the locusts
swarm over the belly
of the dead man.

A crisis flies up
from the shades. No one
can leave through the wall.

I age again, hairy like a water
buffalo
standing in its own
shit.

Time drifts, unchecked by sudden
stops.
I bite into a pear,
lie down in the stinking grass.
I imagine a world like
any other,
and embrace the body,
hold it in my arms,
afraid it will tilt down
into the hardening milk.
One page after another
rolls off the copier,
green after red after green,
a book
with sound acoustics.
The eye glows in the city's
blackout
when all lust
curves into fast legs. The stranger
speaks
in the words of a stranger,
how he says
to the woman: don't be frightened
if I hold your hand. A moment
later
the fog swallows them. The plastic
canary
fills with steam
from a Japanese teapot.

Make It Orgazmic

The round ego
sounds with spherical egg
in mutilation
of series.

The therapist claims that
social dysfunction
is a private matter, shyness
the fate of young Jews.
The therapist catches innuendo
by the beard
as if
to chop it off.

Jung never met Pound
but they were
symmetrical.

Next we learn to liken image
to a recurring afflatus.

The bridge
is conjunctive
to discussion.

White flowers remain
in the discourse.

Eventually,
the ego splatters
on the frying pan. White rose
occludes.

Make it orgazmic, Ez
says.

Jung says that everything
happens at the same time.

Dead nuclear fuel transported
to the WIPP site near nuclear
libido,
source of neutrino
nightmares.

Gray rub of dusk
compromises time implication
where redwoods grow

what the therapist
forgets.
Mules on their feet,
förgoing incident
in the quiet yards.
Miles of redemption.
Jung years.
Ez much too stylized, too
damp.

We could live in the frat house
if we could somewhere
steal
a den father.
Water is the x factor
behind the junipers in our gardens.
Who are we?
We are wet,
our eyes drip shadows.
None of this is beautiful,
if one accords
language a part
in fate.
Jung analyzes Pound
by letter, finds no subject,
no one who fits the collective
murder in the park.

Let it rest in nature like a pious
bear
on all fours,
looking for a cabbage.
The light at Yellowstone
crawls farther away from
its limits.
The little girl offers the bear
a banana. It is shot
on the spot.
Pound wuz at St. Elizabeth's 13 years,
too proud to feign sanity.
Jung, in Switzerland, on his knees,
in his cage,

prayed to a marginal myth.

Thoughts, Loving It

How does something sound
inappropriate
to its cause?

Love is power,
the engagement.
Stiff seabreezes dominate
the mind,
wafted along
so much the incident
of its termination.

The process is like using the hands
to mold
words.

Psychology begins at home,
what you practice,
the praxis of it.
If the father was pitiful, now to speak it
with judgment on the edges.
Mother, too
repeats phrases
that depict her sad
inheritance.

The body
must be a friend sculpting
reason,
not rising from a departed lover,
but in testament to what is right
about confusion.
To keep in mind
is inevitably the test, a tact
enacted
in daily reply to self's dogma.
Rich is the dialogue
between synapses.

Owning psychology becomes helpless
in thought. To pay for
critical information

one uses words like children's
blocks.

Anyone as icon
becomes vain as once the troubadours
wrote poems to their paramours;
loved and loving
as they thought.
What came of all that
is no more than a technical description.
Don Quixote.

When plastic night enters,
psychology develops the film
of daily usage. Here is sculpture
as bottom line,
marble in its rage.
Reason runs throughout,
pursued
by the Furies, predators
let loose from psychology who later
follow those horses
left over from movies.
What is this but complexity,
or possibly
the other:
man of woman's idea
of green, the motion of green,
like a huge worm shadowed by forest
where the foot is blind.
To avoid allegory,
the hands shape words in curatorial
order,
sometimes reaching
all the way to humankind.
. Waking up is serious. It brutalizes
dawn/ dusk / dream,
body already wild with arrivals,
with place to spread,
with feelings
to believe.

Of Rats and Men

I

It scurries like a rat
in a series of loops, such
feeling
that cannot hold
its monstrosity
in check.

The mind moves in lament
for a yellow slicker
in the rain.

To say it is his other
personality
leaves out of account
who the woman is
he could not leave
alone.

But no matter:
the trace is cold.

He opens his genitals to the wind
as if this was a force to make
his prophecies true.

Under analysis,
he grew foolish
like cloth of gold,
old-fashioned conquerors,
barnyard cock-a-doodles.
Not observed in the best literature,
he lost his lady
to the stars, glaring
like bad light bulbs
to the naked eye.

He is more of a basic action
than his name would qualify.

To disguise his reasons
would fail his case.
Yet philosophy must be

technical, otherwise
the love goddess
must confess to the
academy
her sins.
The rattlesnake
appears
in the driveway
emerging from what is left
of the unconscious
like a piece
of someone's body matter,
still writhing.

They called him Rat Man.
His rat was a penis aimed
at his father who,
though dead,
lived in Ernst's hidden copy
of the mind's extremities. Good Ernst
masturbated
like a housefly
rubbing up
against the window screen.

In the Orient,
they used to unload a bucket of rats
onto the criminal's backside
and watched
while the rats chewed up
his anus.

Ernst felt a regular, sidereal anger
crumpled up inside
his legal briefs.

A worm also weaseled through
his nocturnal credibility.

Love aroused him to silence
until his fingerprints
were finally
whited out
in the Great War.

Irony Apropos

F., the square waltz,
forgathers what could only be
 torments, beginning glide
 squeezed from
 moths.

Feeble the light that squanders passion
 in dark stages.

That woman who reminded you
 of what child
 you'd left foundering
 in chocolate milk
returns as your wife's maid.

For all that
 you made it to an elite
of self-examination.
Only the sexual survives as an interlude
 between
 black-hatted
 gentlemen
and buskins at ground level.
Altogether a fix of
 muse-imbibing:
poets on parade.

And after Io what number slides
 through mud
 to graze an assemblage
true to its word in hundreds?
 F., the grass
 is red
 where you have stood or lain,
father of dreams, warrior in
 galloping
 trousers.

We wake along your path
who can no longer lie in your
 memory.

To bring Easter eggs
to starving America was not
your sole motive.

Only you
record
the long-term patience to hold
against those who threw
stones at your mind,
and still believe in attacking
your ghostly-thick
eminence.

Women,
who might have
saved you,
recur in evening wine,
fist of semblance.

All has worked as a bromide
in the darkening drink.

You are now
the liar of Hamelin
by the court of so many lemmings
floating amid kelp.
Justice is not so neat
as a composite biography.

Your progeny live in dried-out
wind.

Lucian Freud paints
thick-veined legs, big bellies, fat
jowls.

Esther Freud writes about
Glasgow
some fictional German property
west of love.

Who else follows you now in that family,
devoted, perhaps misunderstanding?

So it goes, human
affairs in groaning corners,
sometimes the wit
to leave alone

flamboyant objects by conflict
despoiled.
But then F., you were a Viennese
and wore the mind's medals
on a camouflaged lapel.
So much dense gloss
to be faced
in dangerous couch-rooms.
The night-woman, slow in her age,
cleans up
the debris.
London,
your last conversational office,
where your mouth
died
even while your memory stalked
thin Jewish women in red hats.
Are you still talking,
taking the cure wherever
the sky fails?
Moments ago I saw you, F.,
in my frame of mind,
bearing a logic
to memorialize your art
with its scientific urge.
Only its beauty is true.

I can't repeat you.
No one else can say the words you
wrote
with infallible accuracy.
Neither yours nor Jung's
chthonian world,
hidden side of Earth, which only
the moon
can face.

We justly wonder
at the news you brought us
a century ago:
lacking proof.

Traces

I have already done
the thinking
as sharp vectors
engage the thought, which is responsible
for the victim, who dies
in wait
beyond the snow.
This act of experience nurtures the various
genes
that can't not experience
what they do
or are done to.

Take that which
controls the tongue or lets it flap
uselessly:
I choose a certain comfort to narrate
the time I spent walking in the small park
behind my house
when a black terrier barked at me
too closely
and I couldn't grip
the quick emotion. I stood
later, forgotten in the truth
of a prickly discomfort.

Nowhere could I resent
the favor of my animal
consciousness.
When I think
of my body
I am the self of the subject,
which I express as a plagiarist
of Hamlet,
bis particular experience.
The sky is what dead poets called azure,
not a bad word
for romance,
although sheltering gifts

is also effectual. The sudden space between
two emotions can be sliced by two sharp
vectors,
differently acknowledged.

Yet if I think precisely
who would I know as an expression
of what is always left behind?

My first girlfriend would not dance
with a Negro,
not being a Negro herself.
She was brought up in southern Ohio where
elements of theory that weigh
the slavery of liberation
didn't exist
in several disguises.

She was otherwise modest and carried
a Derringer in her purse, having lived
mostly

among poor whites
near a hilly climb from Echo Park Lake.

I didn't know her Caucasian limits
until after the first flowering
had overflowed our dependence
on what we associated with love.

Years afterward she visited me
at my typewriter. Slightly overweight,
she said, because her husband was elsewhere.

Bright in her talk she was, and I
in my blush felt nothing
but amity

for such long remembrance.

Though my heart was theoretical
far beyond the snow that fell in many acres.

She might be dead by now,
I tell myself.

Regardless of Cupid's broken arrow,
I burn incense, pitying myself.

I think back
because it is harder to think forward,
the future besotted as it is by emanations

not grounded in fact.
That's the "always suppose"
of nature,
of human predilection
as forgotten news:
even the past a brown alley.

Thinking that I am done, I don't think.
Vanished faces tie up the phrasing network,
in which I praise
sun and showers that passed long ago,
before I could name
who I was to be.
The quintessential is forever out of phase
like an illness
in the word.
But I think of some rare beast
that runs to ground the victim,
swift in her death,
and thinking this
I too lodge in the eyes of myth.

Twisting Plane

Wear down gradually, granite
dry, dust cooperates, the hurricane

eyes
the shore.

Time to think about
such quality in the moon,
wolf waylaid.

Time gutted, an instinct.
F. stands,

a cactus
plant
in a red, chinked bowl.

Who misgives is a gift from
Gertrude.

But speech is
a physical act in the mind,
F. always elegant
on the cusp of disorder.
Six sides like a dead fish.

And he worries
afterward a context word
lacks.

Bees
stuff the air, vicious,
says Gertrude.

F. thought of scallops:
undersea equation. When
the Marx
Brothers
arrived in Leningrad,
they ate herring
in Lubyanka,
charged with disrupting the humor
of collective farms.
F's world
goes on
without him, mildly conspicuous

in all the wasted dreams
of human discontent

His wife grows flowers
in his hair. You're
the perfect wife
when he thought of her sister.
Beauty sought under
skin's paste,
but she loved thinking
his thoughts,
vacations
in the Alps, a noble drone
in his masculine hive.
She wasn't attractive enough to find
another man.

Dream: at a table
in Mannie's restaurant,
sitting in a wheelchair
where waitresses pushed him
toward a table,
the wheels resisting,
the cashier
watching.
Whose dream, Gertrude
inquires,
as she is awarded a lush painting
by Medicare?

I dreamt I was Freud afraid,
the passing moments
leaving more to chance
than his world could answer for.
I awake
in bits, holding
a furled napkin
to wipe my sweat.
F. wrote a note
to me
in which he explained
that I would inherit his mouth.

I took this
two ways. Asleep again,
I could not remember
what trolley I was to take,
in Moscow.

F. writes a letter to his wife:
Goodbye.

Left in the folly
of a motion
in the hind part
of an alley.

Who goes there becomes
the salvage of his name, as if
he saw forward
to the faint of his analysis,
dragged like a dead dog over thought's
apparitions.

Justice is only
a mood? But he will hold it
in perpetual
flareligh.

F. muddled in dirt, accuses
the handshake of tyranny,
of vast apostasy in the core
of friendship.

Jung exploded him
like a sudden, huge firecracker.
Synchronicity
was a special field,
a practical joke,
predicated as it was
against the elder master.
Heaven is loud when the angels
troop in,
like gods
in Wagner's
Valhalla.

F. would be lonely now,
not even Anna to hold his mind
in the bowl of her hands.

His years edge closer to his
last case.

Religion is an atheist
commodity.

He is kindest in the moments
after the seas flood his eyes:
he is lyrical.

His friend Lou Salome became
his culture's love goddess,
intellectual temptress,
blackest bread. Gertrude, source
of white words
on ebony dishes.

So time solidifies
in E's pen. Gertrude, in Paris,
deifies language as she defies it,
taking it
apart.

His wife saw
to the cooking,
Minna chipped away
at the bronze
case notes.

F. was certainly neurotic. He
transposed passion and exhaustion.
Everywhere the age accumulated
money, seeped into
depression.

F. steps on a cockroach. Later,
simple birds, without memory,
revisit their past
and die.

On another revision
Freud writes:
I will be revised
in the years
long ago. He sleeps in England
before Hitler's war, the first paper
bombs
falling on the land

where he no longer practiced,
where he read life
as already blown up.
He walked
the brain's maze the wrong way,
right-footed,
under mature lightning
and was struck by his own life:
a moebius strip,
the twist of thought
aligned with Thanatos
even as Eros lived,
even as he snuffed out his last cigar.

Falling into Meditation

And it is yesterday again when I fell
asleep while walking,
 then woke into the core
 of a dream,
stretched out without structure,
 believing anyhow
that I would rise again,
an ancient man, wearing
 stones.

Lights flickered around me,
drawing air from a song somewhere
 at a great distance.
I couldn't identify the words,
 but my mind relaxed
and saw a photograph that looked
more like me than I did. For a moment
I thought my heart was numb, that it beat
 in the hollow
 of a phrase:
Messiah is no stranger
 to your life.
And I regarded my sleep as an
 opening
 in slow motion, arms
 plunging
toward the ground to a depth I'd never
 reached before.

I became a human statue then,
 weathering all weathers,
apropos in any case,
a cast of dice that chance finally won.
And one among many who praised
 the breath,
 secure
 for a time
in mortality. When I rose
from the concrete bed, I sailed

like a paper airplane—
a Freudian paradox: could I be
civilized
and yet content?

Shadowy lights followed me
everywhere
during the sun.

I couldn't escape from whatever held me
in its motherly arms.

This is a gift, this season of birth,
as I stand now among the visible angels,
without falling.

THE CURVATURE OF THE EARTH

2007

Only Gene Frumkin's three authored sections are included from the collaboration with Alvaro Cardona-Hine.

Spain: A First Visit

The Good Dream

for Flory Gonzalez Cenzual

Two old men safe inside her eyes,
here in Madrid where bombs have died
among the morning trains. Flory works
near the Atocha station, one of several blind
spots attacked, unforeseeably, by whatever fate
guides the future. Her main business with us
is the menu. I look through my appetite
to see how I might serve her honest hands.

A.'s Spanish links me to her understanding.
Here in Madrid the alphabet
is different. Here I am not even
a schoolboy. Flory has said she wants
children: so a devotion to new life survives
all the killing. But why do I choose her—
amid the noise that wracks my thoughts—
to be a model for the good dream?

I suppose I lack within myself
what I fear. To be whole is not possible,
alone. I need friends like A.,
who can speak for himself and me
directly, giving both of us definitions by which
to travel the world. And someone
every once in a while like Flory,
from a great distance, affirms a sudden
congruity. We eat and drink at the Atocha
Bar and Restaurant where sometimes
the lights go out. Some failure
of electrical power, as in people:
heart and brain going dumb the louder
the voice of a merely imaginary god.
I thought almost immediately of invoking Flory
as the real reason, the way.

Death and the Museums

When the six blew themselves up,
one police inspector paid their price.
The widow is seen weeping. Thought
collapses into a wedge in the blood:
the policeman, there where I was,
cradles his fresh death. This is not

a political venue in the ordinary
sense. I stayed for a week among
Madrid's museums, living in another age,
yet reliving the moment's death also.
Our time is unrelenting in its red cape,
the bulls charging from their

hidden place. It is five o'clock
in the afternoon, and we shall not
escape their horns. We shall be
terribly hurt before this time becomes
its history. I was not a witness to these
crimes, not a sacrificial bull,

but read to from El Pais.
Alvaro and I took a tour to Toledo,
walked its narrow, medieval streets
and perhaps were closer, for awhile,
to ourselves. I was suddenly
ancient, a Sephardic Jew, in a

twelfth century synagogue. In the cathedral down
the street, El Greco's self-portrait
is among the viewers of The Burial
of the Count de Ordaz. The Greek's neat black
beard haunts the deadly black clouds outside
in a sky lost to the Earth.

The dead did not come near us
in Madrid: only such memories
as one could gather in so short a time,
one week among the great museums.
In Segovia's palace, Ferdinand and
Isabella again send Columbus on his way.

The Girls of Madrid in Their High-Heeled Shoes

HIGH-HEELED SHOES

A drizzle decorates the air we walk under
where the Metro has dropped us off, Alvaro and I,
looking for the lost treasure that multiplies
every day we are on the ground. And here,
I observe the girls of Madrid,
long-legged, everywhere in the sly mist.

It is not that New Mexico lacks the long legs
of women, who mature into girls. It is just that
here where I live we think of the ordinary
world as real, which of course is a trap
for the unwary. It is just that there is
this other world of high-heeled shoes and long

legs clicking in small steps through the mind
wherein they will never stop. Madrid, city
of tall buildings, old to a depth we can only
measure by watching in this rain how
the spring begins, how the old men and women,
holding hands, balance the high-heeled shoes

moving all about them. The girls of Madrid
articulate in their style the glitter of water
in fountains, the freshness I feel in the air
under the drizzle. At night, I hear the patter
of high heels as I sleep in our hotel. Are they
outside the room or an echo in my dreams?

In the morning Alvaro reads the Spanish news
to me, then we take lunch at the Plaza Mayor.
A good guitar accompanies the girls in their
promenade across our fantastic eyes. Later,
the real world asks us to pay our fair share
for the music. Back home I rub the vision clear
and hope time will preserve this tiny panorama
wherever I go. Can the long legs of Madrid
stride as far as Albuquerque? We are speaking

of mind's deep reaches. Imagination wraps
this time in Spain in gold foil, to be opened
in moments of splendor and high romance.

Where We Come From

For several days the wind is easy
in Madrid and the rain is slow. I wear
my new cap and Alvaro his black beret.
How everyone identifies us immediately
as Americans perplexes me, since Alvaro
looks acceptably Spanish and, as a Costa Rican,
speaks the language. It must be I who carry
some American I.D. in my white beard.

There is the guy in the space behind our hotel
who coaxes me to buy the trinket he is selling,
saying, “Hey, man....” In that space between us
and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte
Reina Sofia are a number of booths offering
gewgaws and a restaurant due to open for dinner
at 8:30 on Saturdays and 9:00 on Sundays.
The announced times, we discover, are irrelevant.

Our New Mexican palates are greedy
for enchiladas and tamales, which we never do find
in Madrid. These are homely bits of information
I’m feeding you, reader, no doubt another
index to my place of residence where the dollar
is less impressive than the euro. Then there was
the night when we wandered into the Atocha Bar

and Restaurant where I had my epiphany as Flory
waited on us so brilliantly. There are many
passages I could summon up about our sometime
failures to overcome directions, yet the people
of Madrid supplement their arrows with vigorous
twangs of the bows. Everywhere the bits,
the moments, mount up as sources of oracular delight.

The Mind Loses Itself

The mind loses itself on the Metro, so quick
to bring us our distance, smooth in red metal.
Yes, the bombings ride with us until we reach
the platform of our destination. The trains

are so fast there is no time to linger in whatever
thoughts might have come to us. The number of
those who died might have increased in the hospitals
yet how many are known to us? They are newsprint now,
yellowing pages in the papers' morgues.

We are here, in harmony with our intention
and ready to go on with job or vacation. Spain
has moved its military out of Iraq.
The terror bombings brought Iraq to Spain, although
we in the trains might not imagine how brimming
death can be before it slips into its downward stone.

At the table where we might be sitting, prior
to moving on to the bookstore, we silently absorb
the many people who live on and forget those
who don't. We could say in our hearts that,
after all, we didn't know any of them, we who
might be only tourists of death. When we go back

to our homes or hotels, my most fearful thought is
of the coins I did not leave for the woman and child
who sat on the sidewalk, begging for their lives.

Among the People

Many people move into my eyes everywhere in Madrid. They merge into a picture of my native New York, although this double exposure is quickly useless, a firefly in the evening. Americans are more visible, they almost float from one graffiti tunnel to another. In Spain the people appear to emerge from the Metro exits unmarked, the bombs having exploded in the long past, before they were born.

But I remember the dead, without knowing how they recognized their doom. Here I am three blocks from the Atocha station, once referred to by John Ashbery in a poem. Here I am, a pedestrian in that poem, soon to take a train to somewhere, holding on to a fast ride. The people seem calm, at home in their history, going to a place they must think of as their destination. They go on, as I do, claiming a niche in the instant.

Before I go down the steps, I buy three pairs of briefs. When I wear them later, the fabric is especially soft. It is all part of the evocation of this trip, no less memorable than the walk through the Alcazar, standing on a hill with its collection of armored suits, as it has stood for centuries. Someone back home asks if I was scared being in Spain at this time. I say no, not with all those medieval men in armor, perfectly polished, on my side. Not with all those old kings still living in the great hall.

Neither were the people scared as they swayed on the train to their job or to the airport or to meet a lover. At least I saw no terror in their eyes as they held on. As we all hold on wherever we are. I am different now in a way I could barely describe as lime in my orange juice. Somewhere in my

memory, the furniture rearranged, I look into
a mirror, trying to see what shade comes
to me now—as I lie on this new bed—that I
remember as a torn queen of hearts
who blesses me in my scarlet fever.

Where Is Franco Back Then?

Where is Franco in all this? Where is
Lorca? Where do street signs bear their
names? In Granada many of Garcia Lorca's.

Spain for me was a picture card of Don Quixote
until I touched the hours of Madrid, not
as a clock-watcher, but as a daily series of eyes.

The city lures me into the night. I want
to feel a fragment of its dark design
and destiny. Of course, I hope too much,

although I do manage to write of its people
and age, but not with enduring, breathing knowledge
as I would like. This work keeps exploring

my time there, where I began and continue
here at home in New Mexico. My words,
I know are plain and do not attempt exacting

standards of innovation. They maintain a vigil
over the visit in April, that most gentle of months,
when I was surrounded by Spanish, especially

Goya, El Greco, and Velázquez, now suddenly
my good friends, and Guernica, long in my
remembrance, in this city seen, in one great

sight, renewed, fresh as if I had never seen it
in books. I have read histories of the
Civil War, one by Edwin Rolfe, chronicler

of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, which fought
on the Loyalists' side. I knew him briefly, early dead,
in Los Angeles. Where is Franco in all this?

I am told that on a train to France, a Spaniard
kept entirely to himself, even his language as if
forgotten, hesitating to offer his countenance

to others in the car. These were the Franco years,
when even the gods were in prison. Then the man

suddenly exploded into a rapture of speech to the new
community. The train had crossed the border.

The Mediodia

In the Mediodia, the shutting of a door is a momentous disruption of the Spanish spirit, which on the whole, is patient and decorous. These slam-slams go on day and night and into the night-morning when the noise clashes with a last hope for sleep.

Even more, it is the men and women, standing in the halls outside their rooms, exchanging humor at 2:15 a.m., who are not funny but laugh at everything. Then too the teenagers who, let loose for Holy Week, spend their nights throwing beer cans

that clank on the floor. When the American girls arrive at 1:30 a.m., perhaps to share in the Holy Week high jinks, the situation leaves good proportion behind and I am faced with my native language humiliating me from the area of the elevator, which I think

of deploying as an abyss at great speed toward the moon, all aboard. Otherwise, the Mediodia responds well to its reputation with a proud history, having housed famous guests from Spain and elsewhere, who could vouch for the thick walls, now modernized by a very thin architect.

Mythical Birds

Mythology guides your brush
into a chosen world, vigorous absorption in the birds
without name
or taxonomy.

Someone enters from outside the day
as you lean into the sun that exists wherever your words
linger
among the mildewed goats.

The language you speak in Spain reflects an earlier apprenticeship
among the black heralds,
the dream anxiety of rain forests.
Your poems sweep and drive.

If this is not strictly biographical, remember how words transform reality
to a form
elliptical but also a garden.

When I say Alvaro Cardona-Hine, whom do I mean?

In the winter, you are summer, with the smile
of dried apricots,
sweet in moonlight,

believing in Vallejo like a chromosome. And your words at times,
trickle out

in the slow movement of chimney smoke, in the unfolding
of a larger landscape than any
you might have trusted.

For if you think in English,
it is Spanish.

When you paint in musical terms,
how does your life in poetry prepare you?

Nothing ever continues in the same way. As you prime your canvas,
the words interrupt,
clinging to your eyes

so that you must erase the blur and start over,
although nothing has been done. Then the miraculous bird
closes in and you are caught between the twin mysteries.

Your hand doesn't tremble
as you write in your pad
whatever gleams ahead.

Etcetera must be said before
 we retire for the night,
in some rustic house in the woodland. You go back
 to where you began, to that maze
 without exit,
and the entrance that is already barred.
 Still, you are here,
 you weigh the world,
 create what is absent, finish the job.
Always there is room for the opening, so necessary in our time's
 fragility,
 when the mythical bird can find little food
 and little air.

Traveling Around Madrid

How lonely the future feels,
as if no one were there.
Yet here, in this Spanish city,
everybody walks about in the now
as if gazing into forever.
So many, having lived through
the Franco years, probably intuit
a melodious refrain that will move
with them across the intervening
years as it sustained them
to this time of the good king.

If the future, then, accommodates
such time as passes from now on,
it is well to think that depression
is only a chatter in the psyche.
Fiery bits of metal hang in the sky.
A vacant space fills the bus's
departure. No one is ever on it,
although passengers get on and off.
This is one of the mysteries
of Madrid buses. What is to be said
about taking an angel and going everywhere?

The plan to visit Franco's grave
is aborted but not because transport
is unavailable. It is his grave
that is unavailable. It has gone
from earth into the lonely prison
of the future, where nobody
recognizes him, nobody leaves flowers.
There are other things to fear:
railroad tracks that go as far
as the eye can see, beyond anywhere.
Will the angel come, will the bus?

American Dreams, Spanish Dreams

When I got home from Spain,
I thought of going to sleep
as a spiritual exercise on a par
with soliloquy. I engage
words on what imagines me
in Spain.

These unite
in Spanish-speaking dreams, which
I understand perfectly. In American
I wouldn't see the images as a form
of thought. They would diversity,
spread away in mysterious locations.
Hearing them in Spanish

motivates
a distinct character of two men
walking. This prearranged condition
invites me to a group
of taxi drivers. One of them,
I recall, took us from the airport
to our hotel and charged
thirty euros.

I dream that we walk from
museum to museum, sometimes on
our knees, and inside we view
what we can even as our knees
grind on the floor. The female guards
do not think we are unusual.

When we return
to our rooms, I take my weariness
to sleep, this time in American.
I am worried about the Roman
numerals on the clocks that are twisted
into contortions like a Bacon
painting.

Is this the meter of time?
Then I recall the cabdriver
who took us back to the airport
for twenty euros, including a generous tip.
Here, on the home ground, I keep ten euros

just to check on Spanish dreams.

Madrid Recedes

as I look through
the wrong end of a telescope. The city
is smaller than its presence a month ago,
when I walked there, part of its
motion. It seemed abundant then,

a gigantic muse, my pen in the hotel
room, ready to loosen its words
on the white, blue-lined paper.
My subject then returns to me, although
less imminent, as if it had lain

in the sun too long, lost some of its
sharp outlines, but still not a thoroughly
yellowed muse. The waitress, Flory,
what color were her eyes? What color
is Madrid now that I have left?

Memory distracts from the essence
of experience. A brick falls from
the true building. I try to turn back,
as this summer approaches, into a time
already lived, forsaken in a dim tunnel.

I can barely understand how the people
still walk and talk after the trains blew up.
This must have been, when I was there,
like the second day of a new world.
I can't shave in that world. Time

does not run counterclockwise, and I am
left with whatever those days are now,
superimpositions on still photographs.
Now must be amateur time, untested,
living in a coming attraction.

A Stranger in Hawai'i

Haole in Honolulu

Arriving in Honolulu, I immediately
started counting Asians and realized
they were more than I. People told me
I was a haole, Caucasian stranger
from another shore. I invented
a song for myself, not like Whitman's.
I was not multitudes, but a grain of sand.

Here I am, writing about my ego
in the disconcerting waters of a cloud.
I want to go away and not pretend to be
a visiting professor. But the faculty
of the English Department knew me better.
My mind, via a small engine, traveled
west to the International Line. A day

this way or that didn't matter. I admired
a native of these Islands who had been
to Ohio, married there, and shy of men
ever since. She didn't mind calling me
"sweetheart" in a public place where she worked,
but meeting with me, the two of us,
was like a hatchet in the cupboard

of any domesticated flight. She was part
Asian, but I didn't know what part. Enough
though to imagine me in Ohio, and bad luck.
The department was kind and most
of the students, so I felt honorary, able
to construe myself as a member. She and I
were never alone, witnesses of a Hawaii,

from where, after all, I had to go home.

Exile Among Paper Clips

As a place of exile, Hawaii would be
a form of orphanage. To be young again
in this culture, a man like me
could learn the value of swimming trunks
and the defeat of too many questions

about my birth parents. This America, this
other place, surrounded by water
everywhere, a somewhere much other
than my birthplace, exists as an unexpected
foreign desire. Born in New York, city

of sequestered intellectuals, I could not
shape the reason for my exile, except as an
interlude between home and further discussion.
My parents were no longer the question,
but a decision ingrown, a factor in my adoption

by a warm winter. I could not have imagined
that being reclusive had heightened the gift
of shock in my new circumstances. Life
might be a shadow I could lift above my head
with such strength I could not have believed

beforehand. I was foretold that new friends
would lead me through this Paradise, where
I would have something to write home about.
Exile discovers a reach into water that clears
the mind of exigency and rumor, washes
away the frail curtains fronting old thoughts.
I would meet in Hawai'i a hand that would
squeeze the warmth of the longing for fresh depth.
I am writing home. A short memoir like this
insists on flowers, the honorary lei, an instinct

for the method in which a particular luminescence
acquires the gain of captivity. Where to go
in these Islands? I am temporary, lost
in frequency, in poetry that is the heart, still in
the beat of home, and of Hawai'i, fragrant orphanage.

Elegy for John Unterecker

I rode with Jack to the Volcano Arts Center
on the rainy side of the Big Island. We read
some of our poems on a tall, bracing stool. Then
dancers came out and performed, and after that
we drove to the boys' boarding school
on the sunny side. That's the way some things
happen, in a mixed order, like stones, like life.

At the headmaster's house, the daughter,
Chinese on her mother's side, returned
with an empty jar from the black volcano beach.
She had given back the sand she had taken, now
hopeful that the goddess Pele would forgive
her temporary trespass. This was to be
a memento, the sense of the sacred land
that is the Islands. Few places remain with

such impact as we pursue some other land's
cadence. Jack knew the names of birds and
flowers and trees. Jack himself was a sacred
person, if such exist outside the Testaments.
Years later was my last trip to the Islands,
my third as a guest teacher. I arrived to hear
that he was dying. Perhaps people, all of them

are holy, but Jack gave that wish a certain
particularity. His nature grew out of the soil,
as if there was such a thing as a heart-bloom.
He once wrote the story of Hart Crane that I'd read
long before I met him. His own poems spoke
in my hearing of health, his voice resonant, young
in his age. I never heard it again on that last visit.

Ah, Youth!

Truth is mysterious, especially here
in Hawai'i, which is home to the most
material youth culture in the country.
Waikiki and the other beaches are crammed
with bronze, tight skin. As I am walking,

limping, on University, a young asshole
in a car's passenger seat tells me
that I am old. I want to respond,
tell him he might not ever
get to be old, but the car has passed on.

I am limping because one ankle
has a pain, left over from a break
I suffered slipping on ice
in Albuquerque. This was a year
before I left to teach in Honolulu.

Truth was strange there, and I never
did assimilate it, because truth is
different in different places.
The woman who took me to concerts
and operas in Blaisdell Hall,

was lovely, white-haired and living
a divorced life. Another young asshole
in a car called her "Grandma,"
as we were leaving a concert
on our way to steak at TGIF

Those days I could eat much, comfortably,
instead of chewing slowly, now hampered
by partials, top and bottom.
The truth is that I was in limbo,
waiting for my life to catch up with me...,
or the reverse. But is that true?
If so, this form of terror years ago
diminishes. At seventy-six, I remember
Hawaii as being vigorous in its high humidity,
a time when I made many emotional

errors that I still do not excuse.
Encountering them now, I feel the past
as an expired torment, even
as I move toward the ultimate aloha.
My desert home is the living aroma.

Lying in Bed

As the moon dwindles to a legend of the sun
I lie on my bed in Albuquerque, squeezing my years
in Honolulu into a meditation on earlier days
when I thought I was a comma. The rainbow air
coincides with my child's vision of all the colors
I could use in making a crayon landscape with a pause
at every corner of the gray Bronx. On Oahu, so far
from my childhood, I crawl into a green passion:
an old man delaying in this leisure, filling out
his creation with what is to come, surrounding
with black lines the contour of a life. Still,
this time is only for a time. The people I have come
to know have not been replaced, except as a distance
I have had to travel. Islands in an ocean, this is
the landscape I had long ago imagined as a fancy
now become prophecy. I write this, lying on my bed
in this new year, still in present tense, everything blending
into the moment. Friends, loved ones have died here
in New Mexico, Colorado and everywhere that remains
shrouded. I walk now leaning at times into
the weather. I am afraid to go down steps without
a railing or a hand to hold onto. My head
lingers behind me. Hawaii taught me to repose in faith
that the ocean will harbor me, as anywhere will,
when finally the sun unravels into a deep-red thread,
leading to a knot, a period to mark the end of all questions.

On Visiting the Volcano

They show that film of Kilauea
bursting, its demon flare lifting up the sky.
And with it a fresh stream of consciousness,
as if one's brain is assaulted and flows
to grieve among the resulting ashes.
The volcano's cave stores up its flame
for the sudden day when it will

emerge from its night. It is a deadly
blossoming like an exploding bomb
that kills a Bradley full of men.
But Kilauea is only, aimlessly, doing
what it must when nature has the urge.
I have never seen it blow, but when I dream
of my birth, I remember some noise,

my big bang maybe, as my ears just opened
and splattered the world with their hearing.
But how did I think then? Was it always
like a volcano hovering in air, a blast
in my lungs? This magma under my pillow,
is it the good fairy or a lit suspicion
in the dark? People in search of splendor

visit this sometimes frightening place
on the Big Island as they might the
USS Arizona Memorial in Pearl Harbor.
History can happen all the time, even
in the future, where one might wake up
and feel a season never come before.

In Solitude

Among those I recall most well
in the quilted field of my Hawaiian
memory is a warm woman
from Lutheran Minnesota. Certainly

more attractive than anyone her age
in the Islands. Her eyes looked like
hearts in motion, straight ahead
or in valleys back in Vietnam,

her ex-major ex-husband then selling
real estate in Honolulu. She sat with me
in Coffee Manoa. We watched
the rainbows arching over the hills.

All we lacked was love in a time
of depression, mine, left over
after my son's wedding in Albuquerque,
during my semester as writer

in residence at the U. The eyes of my heart
never could see in that poignant air
what ability there might be
to question my permanence

as a being in solitude. I look through
a green doughnut this December,
snow on the ground, and think I could
eat the entire hole in those sweet days.

This Guy

Feet like spatulas, turned outward. Maybe he danced on his toes, on point. But otherwise there is nothing about him I remember. He passed, and that was the sum of him. Much of Hawaii was chimerical, the startling waves at the north shore perhaps cover the rocks now. One plants oneself in a prism of light and changes color with the years.

My time in Hawaii brought me near to the palm trees I knew in L.A. After effects of the melancholia that traveled with me could be seen in the gray face people asked about. I had to assure them I wasn't dead. Coming home, leaving the palm trees, which grew only in tropical rooms in large houses in my high-desert city, I recognize the blood I've lost.

He danced the way he walked, within a Japanese backdrop. Why I think of him at all, without meeting is one of the tricks of memory, an outpost in the mind, left unguarded. The trick of memory is to make sense of such extraneous matter among the gray flies that thicken the quiet depression. I welcome back those colleagues and students who laughed at my humor, unknowing

they saved my life by their visits to my muddled zone. My cheap car carried me to the Ala Moana shopping mall and others as well. The neutral people were helped in the gradual correction of my synaptic lobes, and soon I could hear well and feed my mouth local candies. My grad students read their poems in class, and I could hear the wellness of their words. By the time I leave, the clear morning will last all day.

The Girl at the Beach

In Honolulu I was reading *The Bald Soprano*
when one sat down beside me on the beach
blanket. It was difficult to know why she
mattered to me. The waves were singing
in a low mezzo range, I listening, hoping.
It happened that she was a student in my
Survey of American Literature course and
of course I had noticed not only her bald feature
but also that she was gifted physically, very
feminine with, I thought, an honest tan,
perhaps an Asian influence. Beside me,

I felt she was looking at my profile
as I stared out at the ocean. I couldn't read
the play any more, her presence an insouciant
fact even as we remained distractedly silent,
as if to speak would spoil the glamour of our being
there together, her head glistening under the sun, while
I felt my sunscreen growing redder. She wrote
well. Her papers attracted me with their perfume.
This was a great aesthetic moment in my teaching
career. Sitting beside me, she had accepted
a measure of my indolence as I lay back

on the blanket, which she was sharing. I didn't
know if she was indeed a soprano, a loose thought
that came to me, trying to fit this occasion
to Ionesco's play, still loitering in my mind.
But I didn't ask her about that, thinking this might
be crude, dovetailing her into the play's title.
If she wanted to speak, why didn't she? I had no
line of patter that might bring us closer. Enough
that she was bald and alluring, adept at silence.
In my class she never spoke either. This was
a solid beginning to a satire on tragic decorum.

Iron Caves

The universe is always in doubt,
scraggly pieces everywhere, holes
where there should be only emptiness.

In the long chain of distances,
the Islands link unfathomably
to urban questions, to gray streets.

Who goes by without looking?
The female singer whose voice is
operatic if she would let it be,

but she sings in the lyrical matrix
of home. Her daughter does
the hula as it should be done,

without shaking sexily. Thinking
is a way to romance the iron
caves where the body stows

away like camphor in clothes
left behind, an ocean's distance.
The singer lives in beauty

and desire for a world-text
in love. Pieces float by,
her hazel eyes fixed on beginning,

to detach at least one item
from the glossary, art's vocal mood
bringing that man to link her

to the stranger's beckoning. His penis
would husband in her a phantom music,
rising to life from his unknown dust.

Sunburn

Wherever I go I see what I can of me
in a bookish light. Even in the wildly
exuberant colors of Hawaii, I feel
slightly faded by the pages of print

I bring with me from New Mexico
ineluctably in my mind. This would be
like another skin if I tried to photograph
myself. Soon, I say, I will get a nice

sunburn and scare myself with my scarlet
face and neck. I was told about the sly
sun here that in ten minutes it will slide
over one who is fortified only by books,

and rub itself all over, even the slightly
unprepared body. And that's what
happened. But how foolish to write
a poem about a sunburn, once it is achieved.

It endured for me two weeks, after which
I felt almost like a local, at the same time
realizing that everyone would know
that underneath is a haole bookish light.

Exchange Professors

Phyllis was my Hawaiian friend
before I knew her. We traded jobs
for a year, she going to me and I
going to her, so we still didn't see
each other, or maybe both waving over
a distance, Hawai'i to New Mexico, etc.

She lives in Albuquerque now, where
I remain, also retired, with a sense
that imagines Honolulu more than it
remembers. I was beyond tourist class
there. I played poker in absentia,
everything except Texas Hold 'Em.

Phyllis now goes everywhere, leaving
her yellow house to the gods, but we
see each other among the silver
meridians as the hourglass shines
into the night. She visits her children,
fiancé, and a fellow poet now and then.

Her blood circulates faster than anyone's.
And we still desire, talk about
friends and colleagues, her eyes sparkling
in ocean light, she in her Quaker happiness.

Multitudes

In the meantime, it was too soon
to realize how the students visualized
Walt Whitman's portrait. That is, how he
looked to them behind his beard. Half
of them Asian Americans or just Asians
whose perspective was Pacific-angled.

In "Song of Myself," they saw a man
carrying too much baggage that wasn't
his own—or too much his own. Most of
the haoles saw him that way too. A braggart
and a humbug, they thought. What business
did he have being everybody else?

"Yes," the professor, a visitor from
the mainland, said. "What business, indeed?"
He stood in their consensus, too full
of himself. A bloated poet, too old and fat
to survive as a surfer. But the professor

justified Whitman's effort to be a speaker
for the people of his new country,
professing an optimism that was hard
to climb, always upward until he saw
a brick wall in his afteryears. But yes,

Whitman was right to scale America high.
Then the Civil War and the millionaires
and corrupt political bosses changed
his view. The students didn't value his
system of values on the better ground.

To them he was a sham, a Victrola—which
most had never heard of—that had a slow
roll onto a surface, black with grooves,
a poor instrument for waxing great energy.
The professor walked in stilts in Waikiki,

thinking the sand should never have got
that tall, and all that rolled through his
mind was Whitman's majestically sad

poem, “Out of the Cradle Endlessly
Rocking.” Two birds calling out for all.

Two Muses

Continuing in the Spirit of Heloise

for Anne Valley-Fox

My friend who drifts into the single arrow
of love, impaled like her medieval precursor,
struggles in her blood-wounds. She is angry
at times in her poems, but looks back over
her shoulder, someone's love must still be there.
My friend also looks straight ahead, where
life welcomes her poetry, her enduring beauty.

Heloise was an abbess in love all her life
with a man who lived his time in the logic
of spiritual anger. He had no balls
after their passion had passed, and joined
the society of monks and gave her
too little heed. Peter was a great teacher,
but what he taught his lover later in life

was to maintain herself, disciplined,
without him. She was wracked by his
wayward disputes with other philosophers,
how disagreeable he could be with those
who did not agree. They came together again
after fifteen years, after he could say nothing
of love, having lost it with his balls.

Still, passion, even if old, can exist beyond
natural barriers. She exhorted him, who
was writing books on theology, on the
nature of the Trinity. After all, they had had
a son in their time of all-out, blatant sex.
Heloise was a woman of most astute learning
and depth to hold her own. She wrote the better
letters of the two, when their correspondence
was thick with climactic joys, and fruits
could be picked at their ripest moments.
Peter, though, was the celebrity desired by students,
hated by bishops. Heloise adored him even so,
she his most precious gift. They are famous
today for their letters, idealized through centuries.

My friend has earned through her poems
a manner of fame, in her courage also,
to come back into her life without death
masking her face. She does not love
a man whose balls have been strangled
and who might, in his grief, abort her love.
She teaches her words to mend the years.

The Sun Freezes

Age, a clue to the supreme problem.
In being old to be corrupt in desire
is a staggering blow to the middle,
the woman so much younger, eyes
clamoring in her myopia. The sun

freezes all hope for meaning, day by day.
I would not compromise the friendship
that is already mine of long standing
with any depletion, the source of
water that fills my dry mouth in our

desert, where my seasons live happily.
What I think of is the distance
that divides my shimmering road,
each way. I cannot hold still to simply go,
and returning is too long. My eyes won't

stand the strain nor the mind
absorb what it cannot hold still.
One writes a dogma to rub out
the new love, to remain throbbing
in the already composed common

ground. The fair woman does not
miss what has not been supposed
in her future. Age clearly leaves
its mark: a wondering if time could
have left no trace of fresh desire.

Shadow in the Dark

She drills through my mind like a wound
that I feel bodily. There is no place to go
for me to heal, no method of meditation
I could treat as someone else's love. To dissolve

her image I must blacken my thought, no light
piercing through. Life waning, no prospect
in reason's mourning. Self-judgment rises
with dawn, slightly lime, breathing the satisfaction

of merely knowing her. I suck the morning's
lemon as the day accumulates its household
memories and errands to be done. She moves
with me, a shadow in the dark, and soon

I will sleep, the wound easing, but to forget would
be best. No, I don't dream her, my drug shuts down
such pretenses. Today is my shopping day.
I will touch the eggplants and the seedless grapes.

Late Love

My love so late attending, feels alone
in my small Albuquerque home, except
as a grace hidden behind my eyes.

Too late as the years fly. One who is
dearer all the more, vivid in her praise
while I hear her voice from a distance.

She is an intimate warning in my
retrieval operation of a life lived with
little ceremony in a low light. This

love moves slowly, but at a harmonious
pace, just so, for my mornings when
I open the curtains to this new vigor,

a momentum in surprising ease
of composition. The poems with whatever
rightness, surprise me in a way that fills

age's cavity with fresh earth in desire,
in speech on a revolving page, as I race
to hold it still. The fate of this surge

cannot be foretold, but her hourglass
measures the beginning and end of love's
tapestry: the spin of youth's old age.

Beckett Lived On

“Forever” tries to befriend us. Fact
tries not to matter. She goes and
I do not see her. There is too much
ellipsis between us. She is gorgeous,

for whatever sense it makes, and it is
stark where I am. The asteroid rolls
toward us. When I think of it, Beckett
lived on, but my student shot himself.

The moon grimaces in pain.
Why should I go, when she surely will?
Now the aftershock of her smile,
the one she left in my corner

of the room. I am abandoned,
holding her still in my arms, from which
she has disappeared. A dot hangs on
to the thin cloud in the sky.

“Forever” is before and after.
But which? A dromedary carries us
in its hump. We react in our dodge.
O the corpus! How delicious we are!

But, away, she will not return.
No matter what the moon says.
She has outgrown her pain. Power
is not her type. Nor is my fake skin.

Let the Lines Stand

It will be hard to erase each other
now that she is a beauty in my lines
I had no longer thought to find there.

Even should she move to another vision
of herself and me, I have her written
in immovable ink through my mind's

open spaces, where she can be at ease
in her dreams, and mine. This affinity
subverts in thought other obligations

thicker than easy passage from now to then.
Our words are the clasp that holds us
together, but after they are all spoken

what can engender in us a certain place
wherein we can see each other a step up
from limbo? Patience. Let the lines stand

as long as they can. When they fall,
even then, I will hold her, speechless,
the lines still there, still held to their page.

A Note on the Erotic

It was just another erotic daydream.
Nomenclature drives us to the devil, he said,
casting about for some descriptive words
that could believe in themselves and he
in them. But to describe is never enough

to deliver the right feeling and to write
is at least one step away from ascending
to what was meant to be. The woman
who is the heart of the naming does not, of course,
respond to being so objectified.

The erotic believes itself while it is in
process. It must in order to be honest,
although exterior fragments enter in
as a sort of caulking. Bodies are at
the center of the erotic mind, but

nothing happens there without a muse
of love. How direct should the vision be?
That depends on the daydream of the moment,
how it forms beneath the conscious
level in the dreamer. Women, typed as muses,

should not be elevated above a common self,
to a false queen of hearts. There must be
equality between dreamer and dreamed
in the action undertaken. Sex surely
denies a gap, an abridgment in sensual

discourse. The erotic celebrates what
is only an element in a wider source
of pleasure. The two, if so it is, must
wait outside the event to come, hoping
they will gain a host to their lack.

Fitting the Sketch

for Mary Rising Higgins

It is less the habit of beauty than
the vision I have of it, on location
in our human myth. We have gone through
the smoking waters and heard the alarms
ring out our presence. We don't need

rescue now, only adequate skill to make
ourselves fit the sketch we have drawn.
It is not an easy sketch, but one in which
pain is implicated. We try to open poetry.
We work to earn a place in the hurtling

years. The word love doesn't appear
much in the descriptions we make do
for when we step out of our myth's
embrace. You and I live into our language
as we can, denying nothing to the sequences

of our real stories and equations as they
exist. If we have a life of the soul
it gathers in our eyes, and it keeps on
even as we ascend above our means. I risk you.
You are a temperature, very hot in the waters.

I am cooler, a mild doppelganger following
my sleep, wherever it turns, you either
ahead or behind. Our myth is neither pagan
nor modeled in time. It is our long friendship,
bound by lightness, that resists questions.

Persistent Healing

You hear the neighborhood through
a stethoscope, loud heartbeat
in the broken heart. Transfiguring,
I go toward the inner darkness
of my own disfigurement, not visible

but still alive. What cure there is
comes from your persistent healing,
the words you live in, and I with you.
I feel like your echo chamber,
healing in the hearing. I am stronger

in your belief even as I write with you
in mind, beyond the rational at best
or worst. When I conjure your presence,
after these years, your real person is not
far behind. Our years, circuitous yet

close, demand our attention like
a June-bug bomb, loud for a moment
then soft in the night air. Your
language consumes ordinary speech, and I
learn to read you with an open ear.

Sound Verifies

World glides through the window, section
displaced from the otherwise. You see
far ahead: there is a someone. She is multiplied

in purpose, a gathering of her demons, for which
you have no more speech, only a hope of shutting
the window. The world teeters on the edge

of dimension, burning. Equally, your sound
verifies itself. No matter who says it:
the grim, dim What? You turn back to the computer.

Your words challenge the anger that smokes
the air outside the window, sirens two blocks
away. No, your work energizes. Whatever

the tension built-up over years. World is not
implied but given in visualistics. Type
molds a reply to silence across the daughter's

telephone. You risk foreclosing, although
I am here, a sphinx. To say anything in type
helps little, answers already closed. In this

setting forth a theme, I love the consequence
of your writing, boldly set against
common order. My time is fast.

You are working. What have I left out?
Everything that is included, even love
in a modest way. Our years clarified, cemented.

Aspects

Our lines do not rhyme. Instead,
they create their own phantoms
and their own plasma, rhythms
of other times and ascensions.
It is riddling to be so lost in what

articulates us. The hours relapse,
and we are contained in passages
that feel us as we them. The hours
expand, and I go with you into an
environment that leaves us both
in an upsurge: wonders of the lyric

world. Then to assess where we are now
becomes an unnecessary duty.

We are here in the same city, near
the lower edge of the Rockies still
topped by winter snow. Will we-when
the hours no longer seep so quickly

through—be ready to say more at the stillest
moment? It would be good to have
a painting of our lives with even the black
tones lighting us in our own orange suns.
You go before me and I hear your lines
flowing back, a sky leaking through my pores.

The Exact Moment

So this is the exact moment. She doesn't think the response will illuminate her willingness to listen to the other side. Such sentimental blather! I figure we have

gone through or averted how to say it without qualms. Yes "figure" is the right word. It points to the body as a term of arithmetic, and now is the time of adequate

recognition, the choice that forms the rest of our lives: the remainder, the need to abstain for a while. For perspective in our choice of words, how to perfect

a relationship that once verged on dialectical fusion. We don't alight on and return to the subject any more. We have our orders of language that encapsulate feelings,

that invite no remorse, but rather preserve inquiries into what exists, now and likely will into the future. What may be left of us are the signs, in our different remains:

our printed wills pushing through all detritus. We write now for ourselves and those who understand that our meanings are grains of dust in the all-around panic of living.

Pure and Hybrid

Her poetry is pure, mine a hybrid
of character and the strains of hypotheses
connected by language. I don't compete
for some need to show a pure intercession
of holy water in a Chinese boudoir. I fracture

the ongoing narrative or what might
result in an inclusive image, top to bottom.
The nature of her singularity is words
to fulfill a motion, visuals in type
that draw in a four-color future. We reside

in our small universe. Friends reason
with us as we write our way into difficult
meaning. We have been doing this for years,
one profusion at a time. In all that passage,
she has led me to the waterfall, and I have

jumped well beyond my ability. So if I call
her my guide, it is because she dares me to see
how well she lands from the flying trapeze.
Still, I work disjunctively between earth
and obsessive desire to touch my constellation.

In the Halls of Poetry

Years ago. Time burbles in the boiling
water, and we visit the halls of poetry,
admission paid in lieu of free passes.
We wrote in the visitors' book, giving
false addresses, and read many others

that we knew from our research. That place,
nevertheless, forced us to review our own
shortcomings, more than the mere words
we were learning to adumbrate at the time.
The sensual aspect of our search contained

more adjectives than we could use. You
let the language flow freely after many
inspections of many lexicons. Some strange
words surprised me, and I was lost in
the thicket you opened up, and I blundered

in my own practice, having learned less
in the halls of poetry. I clung to simple
collocations, my feet in the mud, my head
soaking in the allergies. Finally, I stand
where I stood, sinking in, but always

prepared to adjust in this new century
to older speech, when certain contents
cannot be expressed without flush left.
I have lived longer and bear with me
a hundred mops to clean the halls of poetry

of all damaged innovations. Except my own,
those impure allocations I add to the sinister
quotidian, which you have long since
abandoned. I am devoted to you and wish
the life of your language a long, famous cycle.

UNCOLLECTED POEMS

Periodical texts not reprinted in the available books

At the Kansas City International Airport

(to Victor and Dzikka Contoski)

You sipped J&B's slowly with soda
two hours or more Snow outside the sun momentarily floated
in the clouds, then flashed off airplanes came and went
under glass You waited two hours
to be raised and reasoned back to another place
Alone, waited, the chair swiveled

The cloudless night before
with Vic in Lawrence, Kansas, after the reading
most of a gallon of Almaden Chablis
drunk by 3 a.m. Bronze bells you were, both,
sounding the dark Wine and the speech of planets do mix
at moments of stillest power and sleep afterwards: lucid,
thoughtless

to awaken later that morning
and hear the man from Lawrence Aviation
tell you too much snow for their shivering craft
You looked: the windowpane, the farms of Kansas,
white, Fort Leavenworth, white, cars and people,
white

The bus then, the slower way
to the white airport time to wander and flash pictures
in the fields

Slow J&B's with soda,
swiveled and waited, secure, on the warm side,
inside your glass ball at last As a child
you turned the ball, with its Chinaman within, upside down
to have all the snow you wanted

You did not wait
those two hours There was nothing better to do
You were caught in motion, as you wanted to be,
a man of snow, warm inside You floated, thoughtless,
sober and powerful as that child

unaware

that you were snowing

Identity

There is yourself and not yourself
There is the one who sees
the sun descending fraction by fraction
into the ocean the one
who awaits the lucent aquamarine
present in the ocean's departure into night
There is that one for whom
such an event chills the bones
and who endures it
as the moment of supremest pleasure
and sacrifice

Then there is the other
who plucks the sun from the sky
keeps it raised before him
throughout the night
It is the lamp
which must be kept burning
even inside the recesses of sleep
This other must initiate perpetually
his own grief
and walk the daily streets
without noticing they have all vanished

American Foreign Policy

You offer a pair of wings to every courtesan
who possesses those properties you most admire:
long legs, large tits and a face like Marie Antoinette's
These wings are constructed of virgin gold and set with
opals rubies emeralds sapphires jade and plastic balls of helium
The two wings are connected by a box-shaped engine
to be fitted on the body like a backpack

You are now in love with Marissa who
besides the touchstones mentioned above is also equipped
with a penis A surgical maneuver recently improvised
by that old guru Dr. Strangelove She is a woman
unmistakably but her penis is much larger than any man's
outside the Guinness Book of World Records She could
father millions but instead sprays her eggs into men or women
like dum dum bullets

Marissa the courtesan
is the democratic lover of your dreams Her greed
is wholesale, she will rape what she cannot acquire
freely You shave her head and strap on the wings
you have given her She is your bald eagle of the flesh
worth billions of dollars Marissa complains
she is too valuable to fly merely for your pleasure
But her engine is remote-controlled, her button is pushed
she is aloft

Again all the gold and jewels
prove too burdensome Somewhere off Hawaii the mission
develops a problem A surfer looks up indolently from his board
observes a naked winged woman with a huge erect penis
splash into the water and sink A residue of foam
commemorates the image briefly

Another defeat
But your technicians and jewelers are already at work
Tanya is more beautiful than the last and her penis is fiercer
This time, finally, your wings may carry your lover to God

Terrorism

Green moss grows on that man's cheeks:
you see it with six eyes The breasts
of the woman you once adored
are stained inconsolably by glass nipples Natural or not
the bodies and souls of human beings are troubled
they call to you for deliverance
from stone and mist

 You place your name
in the hat of a foreign ambassador and become
his head He is your passport
to stockpiles of guns and wind
so you travel far distances without leaving
your cellar Somewhere else your lungs breathe
the yellowing air of Jerusalem

 There is pleasure
in dying sooner than your brain Let the sun
tick on its monotonous phrases
now that you have set your heart
to explode at a certain second
Those others who die while you blossom
into the orgasm of a bowel movement
are figures of chance not related
to your ministry

 You are now destroying
the Golden Calf and sit with Michelangelo's Moses
on his marble throne dominating the tomb
of Pope Julius II in Rome

 The job is done
You lift one foot from the earth and learn
the other is mist The Calf bleeds and bellows
with no more dignity or hope than an infant
The Laws you held in your hand ready to bequeath
as a brand for your chosen people
were illegible from the moment your hand
clenched into stone Long ago this was
when your fingers stiffened
around the words you never learned to say

Another Backward Glance

It was as I knew it would be
The darling daughters of the Vatican
sprung leaks at the worst possible time
when I was already back home
under the prickly-pear sky of November

I believed when I was in their company
that all 3 or 4 or 5 of them
were statues who would laugh water at me
or smile too fragrantly That was my own
disfigurement of their cloister

So I didn't kiss even one of their breasts
so public then in their summer prayers
Now those breasts must be snowed in
by this week's northeast blizzard
storing up milk for the spring rebirth

Those leaks I've been hearing
are not theirs but mine I stuff myself
with secrets It's what I do to live
They were ready for anything I suppose
while I wore a white cap and white robe

and spoke austerely about the sun
What were their dealings with Rome?
Maybe none maybe only Buffalo
Since I failed long ago as a friar
I've been snooping about women's bodies

haphazardly as if God and his airplanes
would spread me out like fertilizer
What I'm slinking toward now in sly November
is one woman with a devil-may-cure tongue
faithless but honest eyes and an imaginary life

so that we may sleep as spies together

A Whiskey Bottle, A Manila Folder

He looks at the woman She breathes a vapor
blue and metallic that rises some inches
above his hair It's not unusual each person
externalizes the life process in a different way

He has trouble breathing loosens a button
on his shirt which now resembles the tunic
he wore in the armed service of his country
Certain nerve gases used by the enemy

caused him to tear at his throat vindictively
She is friendly her eyes bloom in two
sudden bursts and fall away No doubt
of it though her vapor was meant for him

He reaches up an empty whiskey bottle
and scoops in some of the blue metallic substance
She tells him his temples are glowing
with metaphysical summer There it is

the contact made the affair begun
They will battle to their bureaucratic death
Next morning he refines this erotic wilderness
and hugs it inside a manila folder

The Explanation

You want to explain it. That's what it needs. Everything else surrounding it, contained in it, is a perfect fit. No person of accuracy and integrity would demand more from it except this explanation you propose to make. Go ahead. Why are you lurching about the rooms and corridors like someone uncertainly human? We're all ready to listen. Say something about it, even if it sounds crazy. It will inevitably, in the end, sound crazy anyway. You refuse? Then I don't like it now. I liked it exceedingly well before you refused to explain it.

Faith

To hell with you if you're just going to be upset. I didn't

mean to rub grease on your face. It was an accident.

You have no faith, I know, in accidents. Well, you're

not supposed to. You're supposed to have faith in some big plan

that accidents fit into. The plan makes accidents feel gawky and

gauche. You know, as if they didn't belong. But what the hell, the

big plan says, since you're here you might as well hang around.

So you don't have faith in the grease I rubbed on your

face. Well, you're not supposed to. Just go wash your face.

Following

I didn't realize you were going to follow me that day.

I thought you were going to turn the corner and head on home. I

walked and walked and still you followed me. I kept pointing to

corners you could turn, but you ignored me. Not exactly. You continued to follow me.

Finally, I was able to walk no farther. And that put an

end to your following. You can't follow what isn't moving.

I just stopped. You never did figure it out, what

happened to your following. How long's it been, fifty years? Sixty?

How awesomely I've wasted your time!

A Trick of Memory

You are absorbed with memory. So you accumulate a household of delicate situations, glassed in by a single mind cornered

by its own rectitude. What you remember best like an aphrodisiac are the crimes of others against your heart.

Only when, around Christmas, you forgive everyone in an orgy of total recall, is your heart adequately avenged.

Disquiet of Reason

Stuck on herself. As if she were a collage of bodily
parts. But arranged according to some self-inflicted theory, the
beauty of certain proportions aligned by nature. So there is a
grafting on of how we speak to a human conscription of sunsets
and diamonds. Thin layer of voice heard emanating from under the world. A
dream trapped in corruptive daylight. Vanity is only one tactic.

Crises

Stored away, the medallions of this or that crisis.

Collector's items a few of them, but most are already cheaply
pawned. No way to distinguish the rich crises from the run-of-the-
mill. In broker's dialect, the knife-scream is slowly dissected to a
bloodless whisper. Interpreters know at least two languages but they
are always, without exception, a syllable too late.

poem for childhood

We walked the tide on stilts
hearing the talk of birds
near the waves far below us
quicksilver calls climbing their ladder
to show us
the world is swift as slippery tears
But now what do they say I don't know
I haven't heard from Crazy Horse in years

Child's brain / aquarium
of open mouths and glassy eyes
swallowed all it saw and heard
The world those days was a prize
But it bled grew small as tears
so quickly I didn't even know
I haven't heard from Crazy Horse in years

The green heroic soldier died
his tunic chipped and bayonet broken
the gallant fortress finally tore
in the middle of a war
the ambulance ride
stopped at the spot
where the fourth wheel
vanished beneath a cot
A wind fills the hollow atrium
where chiefs and soldiers played
where the boys of our bodies stayed
The wind is cannonshot the wind is real
and blows my eyes toward that game of tears
Custer's last word was spoken
on my Big Horn rug a World War II ago
And I haven't heard from Crazy Horse in years

Publication. First published in *The Outsider*, no. 3 (1968), p. 157; reset from the complete *Reveal Digital*/JSTOR page image.

Last Week of September 1973

Auden is grass Neruda is water
Autumn is dying summer's eye still green,
bones warm in the afternoon flutter

You reach toward those luminous shapes
which clothed their bodies Blue oil
oil of the gods lightens the steps

you follow in breezes The poets are dead
lamps among shadows, green swallows
in the birdchalked throat They fled,

so differently, their words: earth of Neruda
heavenly Auden blended by death's mortal blues
In the sorrow of tongues you salute a

red flag a white flag but their gift
falls to earth, still too green,
torn from immaterial shapes You cannot lift

their thought nor still their poems
Only a few worms are yours in the blue deaths
you haunt the pulse of certain ruins

you shall inhabit after life is spoken
The poets are greenhorns now
landed safely in gods' country, speech broken

Autumn is flying summer's eye still blue

Publication. First published in *Stooze* (April 1975), unpaginated; reset from the complete *Reveal* Digital/JSTOR page image.

Maps

That strength to be alone, she possesses it
like a tool. She invented a bronze moon
to hang over the city at night, to reflect not
the sun but its own immanence. I think to
judge her work seamlessly.

When the city retires
from gossip and swizzling, she imagines it
as the public place of her dream life. A transpositioning of limits. The city's
maroon brick
buildings, still rich in old wealth, against
adobe.

She maps tirelessly an underground system
of intimacy: the Body Shop where the Moon
Goddess is reborn; no more Eve
in the Snakepit. Art, she says, is the sanest
illusion. Gazing into her moon, my eyes read
the shadows as pomegranate juice,
prescribed
for aborting unwanted little gods. That's my imagination
racing too far from her creation. Even as she
buzzes through the city on her motorcycle,
wearing a tux to Louie's Bar and nothing at all
to La Posada.

In her city, under the moon,
no opposition exists between naked and clothed.
No good is not evil. God has no name, neither is He
unknown: He is the Mother principle, haven
of all signs and significance, which we understand
via the diagram of our bones.

Our questions, she says,
are atoms in the rain. Our answers divide them.
She would have us live in a language
that contains itself like Ouroboros. To me
it's Elmer's glue, the white seasoning that shows
through the cracks in logic.

I use her shoulders
to stand upon, to see over simplicity the people's
representatives confronting each world as it happens,
their teeth clacking, dice on the table-top,

snake eyes and all the coziness of 7-11. Again,
I miss the joy in her evocation.

 She's trying
to like herself better, to take in the devil
in her lust. She builds the city with love
in mind, but it reflects her solitude, her need to be
secluded from others who thrust themselves into
all vacancies.

 Her city walks its dogs
without a leash. Duchamp hides around the next
corner. She prefers mystery to a physical heaven.
Many bronze people inhabit her city, and many
of sapphire. She is the map of her motorcycle's
comings and goings.

 She is the amazon who battles
the satraps of the Stock Exchange. I can't see her anymore,
I can only hear her voice. It speaks and sings;
she is her own opera. She is an arrow always pointing
to the center: her own inwardness whose shadow casts her body
into transparency, through which her city comes clear.

Publication. First published in *Caliban* (1989), pp. 49-50; reset from the complete two-page *Reveal Digital*/JSTOR witness.

Selective History

A stale voice left in the radio. The beauty of this age is the power of its description. Many years since Marilyn Monroe posed naked for death, just after we returned home from the Beckmann retrospective. Dahlias line the driveway. Some edge for a figurative calendar. Yellow crabs. No waiting in line; however, the mood changes with calibration of sound, whether serial, occlusive or aleatory. We're all divorced now, but we weren't aware of it then.

Lost her head. Not Marilyn, however, not Milton Greene's calendar, for which she also posed nude, not naked. Only death deserves. A sight for summer's eye. We all remember the garden adjacent to the old L.A. County Art Museum, the rows of dahlias, hyacinths, azaleas and other breeds. Coming into New Orleans on a foggy night. Yellow crabs. We were shocked, as I was on that New York night when I was old enough to read the Jean Harlow headline. Almost as if the world is blonde. Or the snowflakes wither. Death deserves as much lubricity as we can forgive. Awesome inflictions. A mood flutters.

Three friends died in the crash, another arrived nearly intact, while he himself suffered a broken back from which he remains paralyzed waist down. One prepares by imagination. That was then, the Dickson Art Center on the university campus. How sublime the flowering of this rich, conservative old man. Shocked at the time. Prominence of yellow crabs. Provenience.

Funny Valentine. The Haig on Wilshire, small and smoke-filled. Chet Baker on trumpet, Chico Hamilton, Mulligan. And Kid Ory Dixieland. Dixie. Where she lost her head. Her pink house and bathtub. We weep for her ghastly taste, wanting her back, older and divorced again. Yellow crabs. The fleeting instance of bananas. Interludes. Between and between. Along the way dahlias, fog. Raw pose reaching for the telephone to freeze death on its way. Too warm though. A stale voice that day.

Publication. First published in *Chelsea 45* (1986), p. 44; reset from the complete *Reveal Digital*/JSTOR page image.

Outnumbering Any One Way

Too much kindness in a style infects the humor
 with summer's disease. Skin softens, eyes reflect herons
 in a pond, their instinctive lingering in a single
 stance. Teeth grow shadows in summer, the darker laughter
 more visible in the kindness of silver. Thought, in self-love,
 wends back catlike along its phantom trails,
 and sleekness gradually assumes its voice. The kind one
 is better as a liar, a bit wooden, a jester stitched
 to the back of his lord. The kind one distributes her style
 among the several tributaries of a supreme river,
 and she does not weaken in sickness; she laughs
 out of the corner of her mouth. He witticizes
 doggedly to divert himself from the one way, the too-insistent
 kindness that one day will hoist him to his knees.

you write: i'm back now, though not with Fred, but
 in Winston-Salem where Joanie lives. she's been a darling sis,
 mothering me almost as if I were the younger.
 the kids are back in school, Alan at SUNY-Buffalo (just starting)
 and Marlene finishing up high school. so far apart in distance,
 but I think close in spirit. my mother is as well
 as can be expected. believe me, I'm glad
 to be off Oahu. a very strange thing happened.

just as the goldfinch brightens in summer, my memory of you
 turns to me with a voice clearer than unimpeded breath.
 i refer so much to words that life pleases me most
 when I can almost phrase you into presence. you are not here
 with me nor there in some former blessing, but a formation
 of words possible as a single brushstroke on air. style outnumbered
 any one way of saying anything. it harbors delayed attitudes,
 beginning with a goldfinch, brightening in longer exposure
 to light, in measures ripened by time in unapprehended
 recesses. because your figure lacks the subtle shadings
 of anima, it refers me to stylized beings, hieroglyphs

drawn on an obelisk. This is not psychology. It is a separation
 from all moments of repression, an embrace
 barely perceptible in its source. watching a goldfinch alight
 on the seedbox, I seize you who are missing from this life.

my voice calls out and yours answers, then another voice,
yours also. All divergences converge. Here, here. Hear.
Francine, who is Jewish—which I don't remember telling you—
and Ralph knew this sculptor, Goldenberg.
he was apparently a good sculptor and a kindly
generous man. he used to go to the beach with them
quite often, Francine told me, but he always wore
a T-shirt. he'd never take it off, no matter how strongly
he was urged to. he said it was a kink of his.
so how can you argue against a kink? one day
at the beach when they were with a bunch of other friends
a couple of the men got after Goldenberg to take off his shirt.
of course, he refused. and he couldn't be persuaded.
Theodore Roosevelt was born in a New York City
subway terminal. The trains go by so fast it takes a trained eye
to see the glasses and moustache. He visits
the subway to look for his house, but the trains are moving
too fast, downtown, uptown. A big bull moose
was born in Theodore Roosevelt's head; he stuffed it,
trained its head to hang on the subway wall
where modern graffiti overshadow it. Whenever he returns
he feels insubstantial, the parts of his body moving
too fast, some downtown and some up. Get hold
of yourself, he says, but can't. His big stick, of course,
splintered long ago, his glasses cracked, his moustache
fell off. The trains whiz by and Teddy can only wave at them
abstractly, constituents of another day when his house
stood solidly in its tracks, no matter the subway already advancing
toward a new city, which remembers his name, his house, everything,
remembers his bullying rush through the infant hours of our century.

finally a couple of the men just grabbed him—
he was an older man, in his sixties—and tore the shirt
off his body. you'll never guess what they saw.

Goldenberg had an "SS" tattooed near his armpit,
which I'm told is one of the places where the needle
hurts the most. "SS"—can you believe it?

If one thinks a wallet in American, is this a neural
event concomitant with thinking an exactly like wallet
in German? Having left his wallet on a table in Vienna,
the man returns to find it missing. What has he

found? Is it German if he is American, germane at all
to the neural question of what is immaterial
and what physical? To locate his wallet, the American must be present
at the site of that table, where the wallet must also be
instead of in his thought alone. This question is interesting
only if one cares about finding what is missing
in what we call intuition, which is not exactly a thought
but the intimation of a presence in thought usually
alien to it. Is intuition the same in German as in American
even if in both languages it is the same wallet,
a brown one with a gryphon stitched in its leather?
Is Vienna the same city? Is my intuition the same as yours
in my language? Such problems are interesting only
if we have lost sight of the physical. Is losing sight
the same as thinking sitelessly? Be assured your wallet
is safe. If you keep in mind what is already stored there.
If you believe Vienna is already a myth even before
you leave it, a place long ago, once physical but receding so fast,
already, that your intuition acts entirely as a future tense.
Having forgotten your wallet, can you still feel its neural mystery
as a past object now ghostly, a question to be asked
later, when you are not even thinking of it in German?

goldenberg, whom they had all thought to be a Jew, who identified himself
as a Jew, was in fact a Hitler Stormtrooper.

all Stormtroopers had "SS" tattooed in tender places to show
their machismo, but Goldenberg, who was such a nice
and even talented man, what a shock! as it happens

Francine had relatives who had died
in the camps and ovens. can you imagine how this
made her feel? and what was she to do?

The bird's chest incandescent like an old woodstove. We hear
no chirping from this assemblage that stands doddering
on two matchsticks. It is passive, a still life in a bric-a-brac shop.
Then the bird's blood-eyes flicker, something moves through them,
drawing us despite our distaste. Feathers stuck on wings,
beaked head strung to body, this creature pretends to sign for
reality. Its creator clearly blundered, despite

the dance in its eyes, which we ourselves mimic, just for a moment,
before good sense constrains us. In that moment, when we
forgot how fragile reality is, did something alight in us

as on a bough, carry us through fresh, numinous air?
Whatever flew through us was childlike, a Halloween trick.
The bird tumbles down, ignites itself. We were fooled.

the Goldenberg she and Ralph knew was one man,
the Stormtrooper was another, a Goldenberg they couldn't know
at all or even imagine. what was the just,
the moral thing to do? which man were they to believe?
later on Goldenberg admitted his past life. he had shared
responsibility for the deaths of many Jews, and others.

now you are writing to me on a sheet of paper that has
no other side so that when I read I will be looking for
the absent side, certainly not a carbon
but, then, what could it be, this sidelessness, a profundity
of art versus physics? truthfully, I don't know how
to hold this page of writing, where to grasp it, certainly
not on its reverse side which, as I have already stipulated,
is unavailable. that is to say, your address to me
has no witness, no backing. i can refuse to read
what you have written with impunity before the writerly law
since whatever you've said is without dimension, is certainly
less than a surface. you are so clever to communicate
by circumventing even so elusive a surface
as the Möbius strip, which at least curves and is
describable. here I must meditate on a dynamism conceptually
evasive, impossible except as a concept of art without reference
to possibility. such writing as you are doing
leaves no sign of itself, is in fact a pretense
at vanguardism. stop this writing right now before it's done.
it can't be done. are you thinking of an oral page?
don't think of this. nothing I say will authorize you.
legally, we are the same mouth. let's not say what
cannot be meant, although this is better than a one-
sided argument consuming many, though brief, artless pages.
Watching the Orioles play the Royals in Baltimore, he
timed himself from future to past, a mood in pasture
brought on by his sense of grazing, the players below,
as they hit or fielded, moments of departed heat. This was evening

when moths and gnats, the entire industry of insects, moved
in waves across the arclights. Recalling

that time to come when he was dead, he compared this living
to wrong directions. He could have been out there
on the field, pounding his glove or stretching his weighted bat.
Oh the herd of intention, to be a star in the minor heavens!
He thinks he will be alive on Arcturus 36 light years
from now, ever waiting no matter who wins.
The turf greens in his four stomachs, and he hurrahs
for the home team as if he knew his business, his light's exact location.

his life since the war's end had been an atonement.
although he couldn't convert to Judaism because
he would have had to lie about his past, he nevertheless
studied Judaism and had taken on at least the outer trappings
of a Jewish life. francine and Ralph, too, remained
in a quandary. meanwhile, Goldenberg went off
to Carrara to purchase marble for his sculpting.

She dreams, wearing a white, wide-sleeved blouse, appliqued
with satin apricots. The usual horse clatters through the barn.
Ziggy Elman's trumpet angelically sings, although she does not
hear it so much as throb to Krupa's drums on another disc, the moon
perhaps, the tides sweeping away blanket-to-blanket
patterns. This is her dream, a zigzag, an improvisation
on the ballistics of her life. The checkout, a rubbed
impression in molten metal. Blood swirls in her brain.
Someone observes her from within her belly. To dream
reminds the others of a sail gliding whitely into a moon
stitched like an apricot on black satin drapes. Curtains,
someone in the audience quips. Taps. Lights out.
Cooler jazz now, electric, what we call neo-groin music,
without the saving partition between angels and the dead.

if style is a voice, who are you? Disassembled,
dissembled, a culture violates the singular portraiture
with which art approaches its maker. so you wheeled around
toward your appointment, disappointed it was a man
without mail. Multiple astounds with its singularity, almost
insular in force raying out over the host of variable skies.
you impose, with tears in your words, the penal
on the penile, distending constriction by warding off
tumescence. Yet style, a blessing in its burgeoning, a haven

on earth. you are, that is, you smile at the immortelles
you hold as if they were letters to be read or recomposed
into an artful contour of the screaming night. Yet voice overcomes
style, mimics culture in hope and despair, various
as the winds' completely complex directions, not to be overly simplified
by meaning. you are French, are you?—why did I
think so? Perhaps deconstruction reconstructs in vision
of language act differently than any single referential unit
would seemingly allow. now you are readying for bed,
taking your words with you into your dreams, smiling, a style
among the dozens your facial accent assumes each day.
The ways are many, the voice is one. you think you've
heard that before, but can the spokes in your wheels revolve
that quickly into sexual details mailing themselves?
while he was there, inspecting the marble, a large chunk
fell on him from a high place and instantly killed him dead.
it was like he'd been trying to make a new model person
of himself, in a sense, a statue. and what happens?
he's killed by the very material of his new being.
talk about irony. if you were to try to make
a poem of this stuff, what reader would believe it, right?

you, who are no duty, give me license to do
what I must imagine was a way to do. if I am forgetful,
you will remember me at the right instant. if I stare
too long at sun's midnight, you will blind me
with sudden sight, in mind seeing all again as in
the first instant. all ways, how you smile itself
a style, one of many, like the weather. if I write of you,
it is the muse of my moods, many so old I can barely recall
what memory hides them. The memory too, you see,
is not alone, is life's sundriness, its pharmacy.
when I feel myself most alive, least dusty in the blood,
you rise in me, a sudden hot sun ascending through clouds,
through snow itself. should I say miraculous, you would laugh,
delighting in hyperbole, to think of me helpless
in lonely abandon. This is not how we speak in the modern manner,
the cadence is older, of a simpler trust, and what I say
represents a state efficiently moral, though roughly designed.
trust your weather, love me whenever: I hear you.

just too cockeyed a turn of events. i wouldn't

believe such a thing if I hadn't been given it as exact truth
by a dear friend. even though Francine has some knowledge
of the so-called military mind via her ex-husband,
Goldenberg was beyond her understanding.

Look, Stunt Woman applies her makeup. In its office
the Corporate Ego makes up its mind, a sly touch
to affect the rouge deal, take over the powder, eye
the shadow. Break-a-leg, Stunt Woman, that's the wheel
of the deal over waterfall. Corporate Ego cracks a joke in half.
Shell time. Peel an eye. Rind on. Stunt Woman hangs
on Whitney's eggwhite wall where Corporate Ego spots her,
splatters in fact. It's worth any backward fall
through phony glass. Make up, it's only a game
as in foul, pretend as you will, swell. Or shrivel with
blood-trots. How you fell, Stunt Woman, head on into
oblivion, Indian lady not even drunk, supposed to get high
on heights. But Corporate Ego lives on the 51st floor of what used to be
the World's Tallest Whiskey Bottle. Too much distance
to make up. Here's a hand, Stunt Woman, though it won't
replace the fog that coats your red-eye flight into the all-star
pigeonhole. You can be replaced, says Corporate Ego, by any
whistle-stop in any war-whooping crazy picture show.

Wherefore this report enters obedience, climate in size,
perdurable. Question the foretelling as bond
to incident. Refrain closely from distinction as cup
to saucer, wherefore a steam aligns with commodity.
Then in structuring voice regard telltale dramatics as host
and fireside. Quickly a barometer registers high-low
grudging cartels. Thus in card flame a hand supports as many
blue-chip stocks as water buries. Distinction relies
eminently on ideas already briefed in crystal. Prospects, if
limited, connect to markets limned to reflect fuel tanks.
Keep alive a mordant ear, listen to street squatters. In panhandling
describe the curving fingers in terms that refuse
to squirm in index or any other context. Buy when the bet
fulfills a promise you made to yourself when drunk.
Wherefore a motion compromises this report that ends
with a clogged signature. Maple syrup from Vermont
acquires value when the boss of signs agrees

to end construction. This questions motives in assigning
a soldier to duty before the votes are counted or the straight

shows its weakness to the bluff. There are also cliffs
that have strong names from which jumpers gain stature
as they fall. These are but a few of the rigged contingencies.

her dilemma, whether to break with him or accept him
as the proto-Jew he was trying to be, was of course
resolved by a hunk of marble. a strange thing,
and oddly after Francine recounted the story, I felt
very ambiguous about her—and Ralph too.

i re-create nothing by naming you Sweet Honey
in the Rock, yet the Sweet Briar auditorium fills again
with breath and bright costumes. i call this a sugar
in the memory, a cream, and I sip it cold now.
i sit at a table, absorbed in fading film, you
alive somewhere among the greenest fields either of us ever
slept in. and I don't think I am crowding possibility
by assuming it in how you smile: so much the hardnosed orphan,
the pepper on my tongue in the blues of night.
the auditorium fills, the five women sing black
gospel, the signer weaves her fingers into speech even I,
who am not deaf, can hear. yes, the heart goes sweetly low, grows
from grief to grief, you the tensed bow, the smart arrow.

we'd been having fun as a threesome. it was good.
even though I couldn't explain it to my mind, my body
accepted the situation. but now there was a turnabout.
how could they have been so misled by this
Goldenberg, a Nazi of the worst sort? (is there a best sort?)

in fact, I felt like their accomplice in some
shady design, a "ctime" against humanity.

Everywhere a window. Inside the room a pineapple
on a dish, some peaches, the striped tablecloth and curving
drape. Through the window several red-roofed buildings
stand as guardians of the mild blue sky. Somewhere this orderly
arrangement
exists, of objects sure of their place in thought,
the window conserving the room's interiority. No one thinks

to look out. Later, some years later, this very situation
looks dangerous, the security gone laxer, the peaches nervous.
What has changed is the window's position, although it

looks the same. The red-roofed buildings press against the glass,
and also the sky. One is no longer stationed in the interior.
Objects have suffered the wearing away of sufficiency;
they darken from the exterior view, are visible only
to depth penetration. Eventually windows will be useless.
High-Risk Woman spares no one her love.

If this means she aspires to the seclusion of a stool
in the music room overlooking the practice sessions
of her lovers, then how many hours can the day hold?
Never enough to say I am too old for her or she too
standard for me. Love is her greed. She returns a modest welfare
to the musicians. In the other way she offers everyone
her aspiration. To inspire, High-Risk Woman would breathe love
into the word itself, the brightening rod of her bird-making.
The generous requiem, I think, for which I am too dead
to compete. All is nothing in taking sparing
at its word. High-Risk Woman climbs off her stool,
laces her boots. The musicians look to her. Clarinet?
Oboe? Or as still as silence can be
in our air that aspires to sound, even to the hum
a cricket confides to earth in its iridescent death? The rod entices
as it waves away all that chirping. High-Risk Woman leaves
enigma behind when she leaves, behind still ahead.
so that's why I'm glad to be away from Hawaii and staying
with real family. even for a short while.
i don't know how I feel about women now. i don't know
if i'm really half gay. all that matters just now
is accepting myself as a good person.

Cauterized in consequence of love, tarred away,
annealed if not healed. my thought retains the raw coast
it began with, you jogging the littoral mind,
quite naked. this is but an angle of vision, what I think
may be too raucous: seagulls swooping across
your way. Different versions exist of the same
love process. How does one believe that one's personal
love is not inevitably public? if you are a system,
will I learn it, like word-processing? i will move

to Washington and drive along the Potomac, whose banks
bound a visible utterance, the long line of a nation,
and you, a quite naked statue escaping from your place

in the museum's garden, will finally burst into ashes.
We lament willingly what we do not dare to learn.

fred wants me back. i haven't informed him
about my Hawaii "adventure," not yet. maybe I shouldn't.
i don't think going back to him would be a solution.

Compassion begins with a 40-watt bulb in a room
not far from suicide. The woman stands before her pocked
mirror and considers how beautiful she is. The mirror
is much too small to contain all her beauty, and her dim light
blurs still more what she thinks. We hear the story
about her: how she left her husband and two children
for a woman, who then left her for another woman
who lives in France. Her husband, a Spanish professor, speaks to her
once a week. He asks her how she feels
and comments on the spiderweb growing under
her 35-year-old eyes. Under is his word, under the surface
of her lust grows a worm, under her footsteps waits
the stiff ground. On a table she can barely see in the mirror
stands a bowl with two brown apples. The refrigerator hums
periodically, deep-throated, hungry. She reads her own name
in any book or magazine her hands pick up. She could be
a portrait standing nude in Dutch light, a distillation of self
already gone far, to another country where the language
preserves her fingermarks in its dust, the oldest, dirtiest
glass she has ever looked into. She would not speak it,
would not open the door to her husband, would forever smile
at her children, would ask for death where her woman lives.

Publication. First published in *Caliban* (1988), pp. 131-140; reset from the complete ten-page *Reveal* Digital/JSTOR witness.

Dreaming About Kathy Acker

He has these dreams about Kathy Acker
in which she sucks the sky out of his breath
and he regains a measure of his guilt
only by reversing his creaturely intent, by
recoiling what needs to be.

The dreams evolve
into crushed rectangles, the grass all around
tipped by blood. Windows freeze with everything
in them. Kathy, he says, concentrate
your mammal space where the robot-muse could enter.
What he says always curves around a body
that is not there.

After every dream
he wakes up with lacerations, contusions.
Who has beaten his gratitude to be dreaming
of fishnet stockings worn by legs long
as one of his thoughts?

He leans to prefer
plane geometry, lines without content. In one dream
the robot-muse scurries from between his toes
and flies into a window screen, sticks there.
Why does he live in Los Alamos?

Kathy Acker
speaks to him, he can hear her. She calls him
filthy names. His potential might be experimental,
as if someone learned him without heart
and he suffered footloose leotards, someone's
last tango, or whatever form dying chose to take.
He tries not to wake up.

He will not succeed.
In the most decisive moments he manages not to be
bisexual. Thinks the certificate could be altered,
according well with such limits as Kathy Acker
proposes. He coils into himself, regrets
how righteously he acquired his guilt.

Publication. First published in *Caliban* (1991), p. 138; reset from the complete Reveal Digital/JSTOR page image.

History, Biography: French Series

14

More the articulate dodge than
 refunded paintings, the friend's wages
 did not total
compensation lost due to too much time
 violated in
 Nice.
 Painting desired ornament,
 arabesque or white chalk
 sketching the black paper of women.
How to criticize a warm climate
 defies energy. One confines a name
 to its somnambulant mirror,
affection altered by fame. Or
what amounts to subversion, somebody's
 strong sister, motifs in stages, red curling
into hard lemon. Yet one works
 until the end, even with a bed
designed for the artist's extension,
arms with billiard cues. The eyes maintain
 a majority.
 If standards confuse
the viewer, starfacing never does, meant
 as it is to promulgate dwindling news.
 During the wars, one chooses oil
 as providing a grand conflagration.
He painted no corpses,
 except his own. And he lies
 covered by a radiant palette.

15

At Verdun the loaded word
did not detail the gratitude
of semantics, the loud
reports devastatingly brief
and angry, from lord to cleaning-lady
the same ethics pervaded the psyche:

bring us
Flanders.
Land crumbled into reminders
of land.
Cameras
shot blue tinges under the eyes' crystal.
After the announcement, ungainly divisions
occurred
as if by preference, summa cum laude
or otherwise by secret vote
of the industries involved in securing language
as a beachhead into salesmanship.
Certainly it was clear that
establishment
meant
less than meaning could.
But everyone afterwards was pleased
by all the containment announced
in all the sluggish bulletins. Some preferred
average accuracy. Still, no one could
develop any more bullets than were used,
not even for bloody words.

18

We need not understand
even if it were possible. How to
embrace the order we choose?
Godot anticipates a structuring
tree,
the reverse of weather. In French
the eye is oil,
excavating existence
as compression, all embroiled
in layering the 5-&-10 of incidents.
Design in triplicate. This occasions
voluntary obsession,
with decimals.
To brake in
or out,
stop, gaudily

on guard. Yet to propose mathematics
of last things cannot be posed
except as a resistance to
the occult.

One tramp inevitably invites hundreds:
a carrot, a turnip, somehow luckily.

We break up desire
into rare wine and crusty sponges.

We eat out in the rural,
a passion for deceiving Paris.

Lastly, one glove is displaced from
hand to hand, a section of mouth
oil's cadaver,
wittily. How brave the Sun King's court
to actualize an understanding
of the world without suffix.

In our own time there is
gratitude for the questions we pose:
our lives silhouettes
on the tabula rasa.

Publication. First published in *Caliban* (1993), pp. 82-84; the printed selection contains movements 14, 15, and 18.

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TEXTUAL RECORD

Sources, exclusions, and unavailable witnesses

Complete book witnesses used: *The Hawk and the Lizard* (1963); *Locust Cry* (1973); *Dostoevsky and Other Nature Poems* (1972, collated through the 1998 reprint); *The Mystic Writing-Pad* (1977); *Clouds and Red Earth* (1981); *A Sweetness in the Air* (1987); *A Lover's Quarrel with America* (1985, as reprinted in 1998); *New Poems 1997*; *Falling Into Meditation* (1999); *Freud by Other Means* (2002); and Frumkin's sections of *The Curvature of the Earth* (2007).

A complete census of the twenty-five relocated JSTOR/Reveal Digital files added seven print witnesses not present in the previous edition: "poem for childhood," "Last Week of September 1973," "Maps," "Selective History," "Outnumbering Any One Way," "Dreaming About Kathy Acker," and movements 14, 15, and 18 of "History, Biography: French Series." Reviews, reprints already represented by book texts, and Frumkin's prose criticism are documented in the research census but are not duplicated as poems.

No complete readable witness was located for *The Orange Tree* (1965), *The Rainbow-Walker* (1968), *Loops* (1979), or *Comma in the Ear* (1990). Catalog records, preview pages, and recordings are preserved in the research archive.

The partial scan of *Saturn Is Mostly Weather* begins at printed page 22. It preserves "The Game Refuge" and "Festival of the Wolves" before entering poems available elsewhere. Its absent, apparently uncollected contents include "Salmon in the Pool," "The Brown Dog," "The Inexcusable," "Father to Son," "The Mandelstam Poems," "After Reading Some Poems by William Bronk," "Correlating a Woman," "The Moon at Canyon de Chelly," "Stages in Assembling a Mirror," "The Armada," "What Was Left Behind," "Jackdaw," "At Such Times," "George Ruth's Middle Name," "The Singer of Manoa Street," "Young Woman Much Older Man," the title poem, "Origins," "The Rain on Oahu," "Weather and the Quiet Stars," "Above Taos," and "The Metaphysics of Paper."

PennSound preserves readings from 1991, 1993, 2005, and 2006, including work from *Comma in the Ear*, *Dostoevsky and Other Nature Poems*, *Freud by Other Means*, and late unpublished poems. The complete downloaded audio archive accompanies the production files; audio-only texts are not silently converted into print.

COLOPHON

Set in EB Garamond on a six-by-nine-inch page, following the Julia Boynton Green production system. All pages use the project's cream paper field; book titles are italicized in prose and bibliographic contexts. Cover art was selected from the poet's existing production archive and recentered for this edition.

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HISTORICAL FRONT MATTER

Gene Frumkin - Collected Poems

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Acknowledgements to Saturn Is Mostly Weather

Restored from the original source scans

Acknowledgements to The Old Men

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It was reprinted in full in *Manoa*, Vol. 1, Nos. 1 & 2 (double issue).

A Lover's Quarrel With America was originally published by Automatic Press (Albuquerque, 1985).

"Rilke's Razor, Jung's Version," was presented orally at the art exhibition *Inescapable Histories: Mel Chin*, sponsored by the Scottsdale for the Arts Cultural Council as part of its Poetry Series.

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"George Ruth's Middle Name" reprinted from *Yankee Magazine*, published in Dublin, New Hampshire.

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