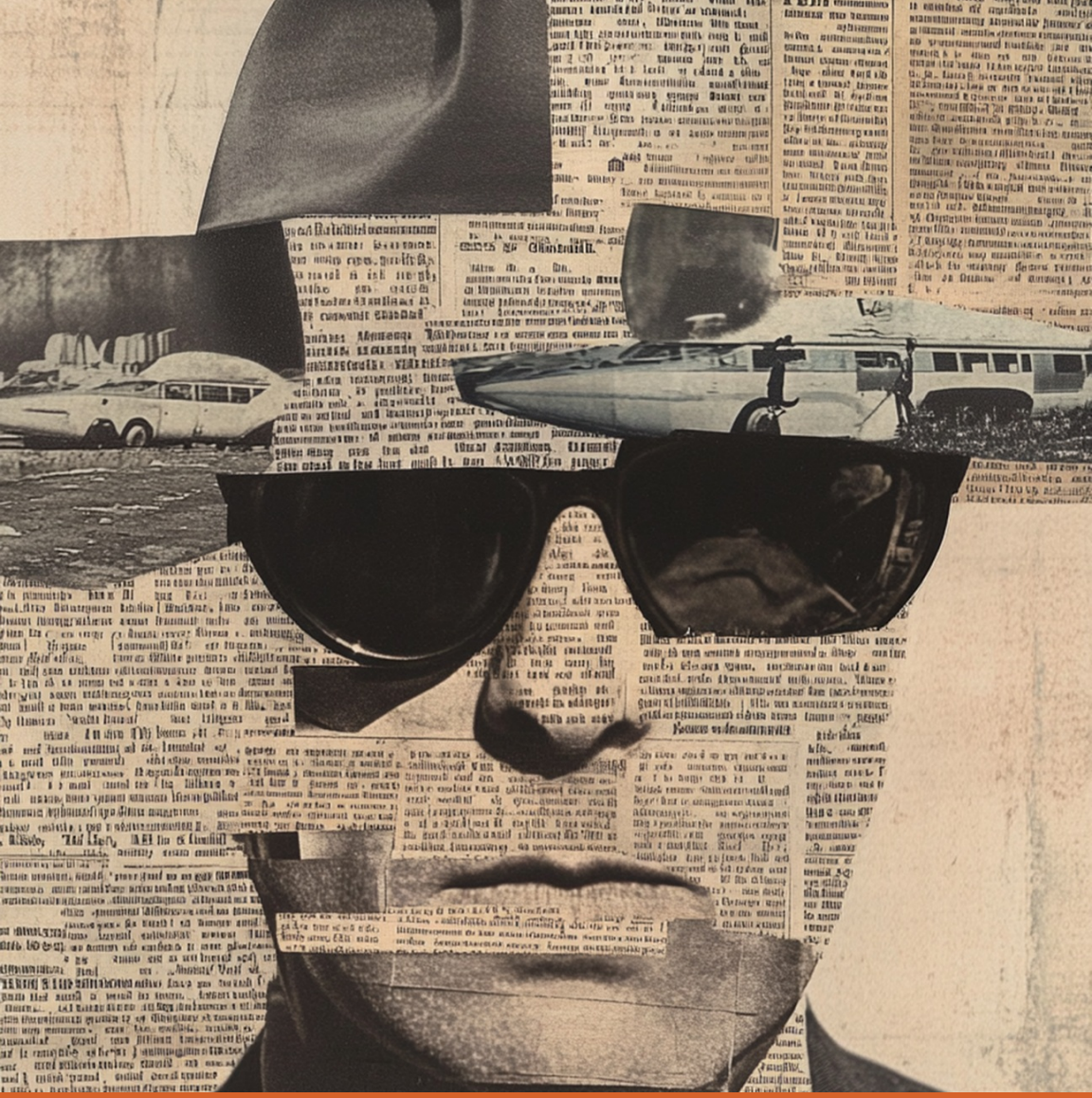




LAWRENCE LIPTON

Collected Poems

BOOKS, PERIODICAL POEMS, AND ARCHIVAL RECORD

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

The Text-Tech Papers | Los Angeles, 2026

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Collected Poems

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EDITORIAL EDITION

This edition assembles Lawrence Lipton's two poetry books, the substantially different 1953 periodical version of **Rainbow at Midnight**, and independently located magazine poems. It follows the author's later text for poems republished with minor alterations, while retaining genuinely reconceived versions separately. Typography, stanza structure, lineation, and intentional indentation have been checked against the original scans; page-column wraps have been rejoined.

Lawrence Lipton

October 10, 1898, Łódź, Poland – July 9, 1975, Los Angeles, California

Edited by Brian Kim Stefans

The Text-Tech Papers

Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry

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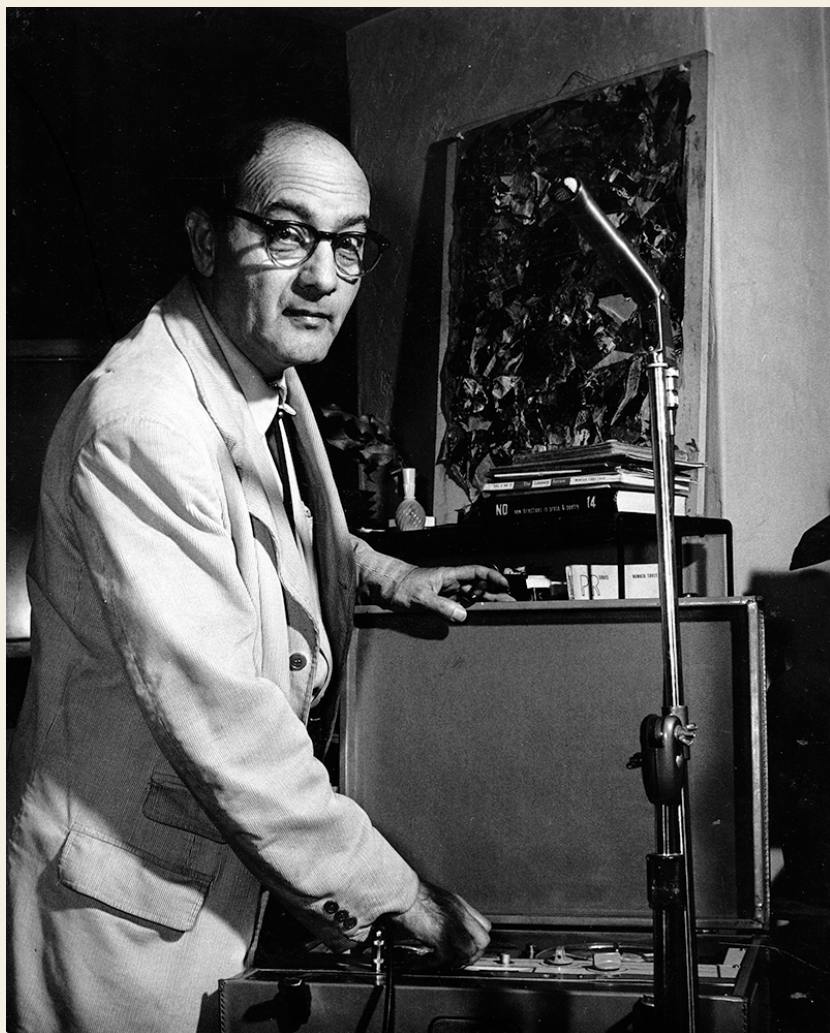
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ARCHIVAL IMAGES

Portraits and documentary witnesses



Lawrence Lipton with a tape recorder. USC Libraries Special Collections, Lawrence Lipton papers.



Lawrence Lipton giving a talk. Photograph by Lou Edwards; USC Libraries Special Collections.



Lawrence Lipton with the Device for Undisturbed Human Awareness of Beauty, 1965. Los Angeles Times photograph.

INTRODUCTION

Lawrence Lipton, 1898–1975

Lawrence Lipton moved through several American literary worlds without staying safely inside any of them: immigrant Chicago journalism, mid-century social fiction, the little-magazine networks of the 1950s, and finally the poetry-and-jazz culture of Venice West. His poems are public, argumentative, and theatrical. They turn the airplane cockpit, the atomic age, the factory, the nightclub, and the ritual stage into places where reason and myth can confront one another. *Rainbow at Midnight* (1955) gives that ambition its largest architecture; *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), selected by Lipton shortly before his death, carries it into the improvisatory rhythms and embattled bohemia for which he became best known. The surviving periodical record shows that this career was both longer and more fluid than the two books alone suggest.

Stage I | Chicago formation and early writing, 1898–1948

Lawrence Lipton was born on October 10, 1898, in Łódź, then within the Russian Empire, to Abraham and Rose Lipton (the family name is also recorded as Lipschitz). In 1903 the family emigrated to the United States and settled in Chicago, where relatives and friends had already established a foothold. Abraham died when Lawrence was fourteen. The loss created both an emotional break and an immediate economic crisis, forcing the boy to combine self-education with paid work. He first trained his eye and hand as a graphic artist—one biographical account records an award for his illustrations to a Haggadah—then turned increasingly toward newspaper and publicity work. He wrote for the Yiddish *Jewish Daily Forward* and served as publicity director for a large motion-picture theater, jobs that helped form the visual, topical, and performative qualities of his later writing.

During the 1920s Lipton entered the unusually fertile Chicago literary world associated with Ben Hecht, Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, Sherwood Anderson, Harriet Monroe, and the magazines that made the city a center of American modernism. His poem “Solitaire,” published in *Pearson’s* in 1925, is the earliest independently located verse included here. The poem’s question—how loneliness can be made into song—anticipates the tension between social isolation and communal art that would occupy him for the next half-century. Lipton continued to work as a journalist and wrote fiction, criticism, and magazine essays. He married Dorothy Omansky, who died after several years of marriage. His second wife was the teacher Betty Weinberg; their son, Louis James Lipton, born in Detroit in 1926, later became the writer, actor, and television interviewer James Lipton. Lawrence and Betty divorced in the late 1930s.

Lipton’s third marriage, to Georgiana Randolph Craig, joined him to one of the era’s most successful mystery writers. Under the name Craig Rice she published screwball detective novels and stories; the couple married in 1940 and divorced in 1947. Later recollections claimed that Lipton contributed substantially, and sometimes without credit, to books issued under Rice’s name, but the extent of that collaboration remains disputed and those titles are not assigned to him in this bibliography. His own signed literary novels, *Brother, the Laugh Is Bitter* (1942) and *In Secret Battle* (1944), brought the social conscience of his journalism into longer fictional forms. In 1948 he married Nettie Esther Brooks, who remained his partner until his death and later helped preserve, describe, and publish his work.

Stage II | Poetry, flight, and the atomic age, 1949–1955

By the early 1950s poetry had become Lipton's central form. Little magazines including *The California Quarterly*, *The Dalhousie Review*, *Departure*, *Epos*, *Flame*, *The Miscellaneous Man*, *Olivant Quarterly*, *Patterns*, *Whetstone*, and *Zebra* printed portions of the work gathered in *Rainbow at Midnight*. The long poem first appeared in *The California Quarterly* in 1953 in a four-part architecture substantially different from the three-part sequence published by the Golden Quill Press in 1955. The book, selected by the Book Club for Poetry, moves from the language of flight and instrument panels toward a dramatic cantata of hierophants, postulants, and choruses. Its first public oratorio performance took place in Beverly Hills on June 12, 1954, with Margaret Meredith, Jeff Corey, Robert Sherry, and Charles Meredith, under the direction of Edmar de Laurot. The work's recurrent argument—that technical mastery without moral community ends in catastrophe—gave Lipton a form broad enough for science, war, theology, psychoanalysis, and political satire.

Stage III | Venice West, poetry and jazz, 1956–1965

After settling in Venice, California, Lipton made his home at 20 Park Avenue an informal arts center and became a teacher, catalyst, recorder, and sometimes controversial spokesman for the local bohemia. He began sustained experiments in poetry and jazz in 1956. In 1957 he produced and directed a series of concerts that became the first West Coast Poetry and Jazz Festival, a two-week event dedicated to Dylan Thomas that played to capacity audiences. The following year he produced *Jazz Canto: An Anthology of Poetry and Jazz* for World Pacific Records; John Carradine's reading of Lipton's "Night Song for the Sleepless," accompanied by the Chico Hamilton Quintet, exemplified Lipton's conviction that the poem was an act completed between speaker, music, and listener. His essays on Kenneth Rexroth, Nelson Algren, artistic poverty, and poetry as performance elaborate the same aesthetic.

At sixty-one Lipton became nationally famous with *The Holy Barbarians* (1959), his report on the Beat world of Venice and the West Coast. The book included Allen Ginsberg, Kenneth Rexroth, Kenneth Patchen, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gregory Corso, Stuart Z. Perkoff, Dylan Thomas, and many less celebrated local figures. Its success helped establish Southern California's claim

to Beat history, but it also turned Venice into a destination for tourists and reporters and hardened the “beatnik” caricatures that local artists resisted. Some participants believed Lipton had exploited or simplified them; neighborhood opponents used the publicity to intensify campaigns against the Gas House and other bohemian spaces. Lipton nevertheless continued to argue for an integrated art in *Art Is One* (1961) and for sexual freedom and reform of laws governing abortion and homosexuality in *The Erotic Revolution* (1965). His politics joined libertarian dissent, anti-materialism, civil-liberties advocacy, and an often combative suspicion of institutional authority.

Stage IV | Underground press and afterlife, 1966–1976

In his final years Lipton wrote the long-running “Radio Free America” column for the *Los Angeles Free Press* and remained deeply involved with the underground press. He also amassed an extraordinary audio record: more than two thousand tapes in the Lawrence Lipton papers preserve readings, interviews, conversations, and poetry-and-jazz experiments with figures including Langston Hughes, Kenneth Rexroth, Pauline Kael, Dave Brubeck, Buddy Collette, Stuart Perkoff, Frank Rios, and Eileen Ireland. Lipton selected and arranged the poems for *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* in 1974. He died in Los Angeles on July 9, 1975, three months short of his seventy-seventh birthday; Nettie Lipton published the book in 1976. The posthumous collection is not simply a supplement to *Rainbow at Midnight*: its long breath-lines, jazz dialogues, street satire, and Venice poems register a later poetics of public speech. Together with the periodical texts restored here, the two books reveal a writer whose career stretched from Chicago modernism to the Southern California counterculture and whose central project was always to return poetry to a living social occasion.

EARLY MAGAZINE VERSE, 1925–1954

Stage I | Poems published before the first collection

Solitaire

Who can make of loneliness a song?

It has no love, no fire,

No fever of desire,

No beauty, no pain—

One only knows the days are long... and long—

Ah, who can make of loneliness a song?

If love comes

In a swirl of passionate dance,

With lifted breasts

And waves of wet, sea-tangled hair,

Her fingers pluck respondent strings

Till flesh is flame

And fancy sings....

Or when the amorous night

Grows musical with stars,

And that great pearl, the moon,

Lies buried in her bosom,

And the wind of a sudden

Comes warm from the hills—

This too is song....

Or pain—

One mother hears another is bereaved

Of her one only child;

She writes:

When I heard that your baby boy was dead

I pressed my own child closer to my breast.

Love, beauty, pain... these things,

Come swift... on wings

Storm-driven, musical and strong—

But who can make of loneliness a song?

Publication. First published in *Pearson's Magazine*, vol. 51, no. 1 (February 1925), p. 35.

Rainbow at Midnight

1953 periodical version

Part One: Night Flight

take-off

(Kitty Hawk, Dec. 17, 1903)

Henceforth space by itself and time
by itself, are doomed to fade away
into mere shadows, and only a kind
of union of the two will preserve
an independent reality.

H. Minkowski

I.

Twelve seconds, mark it well. In space and time
No longer than the first conceptual thought
That launched the brief millenniums of man,
Laid down the flaming measures of the mind
Yet left a morbid lesion still unhealed
A fractured Adam with an Adam's Fault.

No matter. Fallen but with Reason crowned
He scorns instinctual Eden, powers a wing
With charnel fires from Cambrian seas distilled
Storms heaven again with mathematic eye
And since that first abstraction split the mind
No longer asks the mythopoeic Who
Demanding only to know How, not Why.

The old faiths loosen, fall away. Look down,
The spiral of the centuries is coiled
Around an alp whose root is in the sea
Whose steps are measured eras ring on ring
Dividing reason from the mythic dream—
Evolves the wheel, the sail and now the wing.

2.

This was to be no ordinary century,
The very torque and turning point of time;
Keen bladed for the forward thrust, on wings
Prefigured by no prophet in his dreams
This groundling guns a path into the sky.

Computing drag and lift, resultant vector,
Finds new coefficients of the will
Explores the mind's dynamic and the soul's
Stagnation point; Bernoulli's theorem
Transformed into a common apothegm.

No omens and no auguries attend
The scene; the rite is secular and plain.
Man come of age succeeds to his estate—
Parthenogenesis of the cosmic egg
Self-conceived and self-inseminate.

3.

Cogito ergo sum. By taking thought
Man has added cubits to his stature
Creates himself, out of himself distills
Essential ichor of elan vital;

All things are possible. Our bright retorts
Precipitate a culture—now the word
Recalls to mind bacteria more than books;
If Newton's apple falls it falls ad hoc
In proof of Newton's law. A worthy cause.

The only ghosts we know are in the spectrum
Imperfections in diffraction grating;
It is better so. Our ignis fatuus
Is no foolish fire, no will-o'-the-wisp
But only methane gas: to be explicit,
Carbon-Hydrogen, four.

4.

Laboratorium, no longer meaning
Labor linked with prayer, now conjures up
No Ouroboros, no Hermetic dragons,
Only test-tubes, charts. Of all the gods
Only Eros is permitted wings;
New-fledged in Vienna, reapotheosized
In Zurich, de-sublimated in Chicago, lays
His Psyche on the analytic couch.

The pleasure principle is plain. The age
Impatient with Platonic nonsense, prone

And prurient takes its ease, al fresco in
The park; its bed the Sunday comic page.
Brancusi's bird, a hieroglyph of flight
Beside the primitive mask. In Grand Palais
Donatello au milieu des fauves.

Dubito ergo sum. Our Anthropos
Is logical to a fault. Our Athens needs
No Paul. The Unknown God is Truth.

5.

The Century of Man. His hand directs
The camera's eye, his mind seeks out, selects
Among the multitudinous footage, finds
A frame of reference in space and time.

Slow motion of the runner, there a point
Significant, a moment rare and beautiful
The diver dives and then, reverse, she rockets
Up again. You sweep away the grime
Of ages; see, the Neolithic potter
Fashioned these, and flung them in the teeth
Of time.

And speech, man's oldest monument; alive
Upon our living lips today is ancient man,
His gestures caught in breathing pictographs
Preserved as insects are in amber or

The mastodon in Pleistocenic clay.

6.

Restore the book of bones and beasts and men.
Jerusalem, her holy mountain. Rust
Is on the sacrificial knife; where priests
In blood up to their elbows documented God
And stoned the prophets. Let the tomb reveal
The saint his cloven hoof, the hero-god
His feet of clay. Unwrap the cerements,
Unseal the lips that to Osiris lied.

Unriddle all arcana, cryptogramic
Charts of secret and untraveled oceans
Sunken islands long since overborne
By ancient unimaginable seas.

7.

Restore the past. Knit word with word and bone
With bone. Fill in lacunae in the text.
Reveal the writing underneath the gloss
Lay bare the skeletal structure stone by stone

But gently, brother, gently. These are sign
And signet of the quintessential anguish.
Fear and wrath. Incunabula of men
Who ate the bread of trembling in their time.

And whether on reindeer cave or Karnak's wall
Etched out the selfsame hope. Set their stamp
On history's page, then died and left their bones
Between the battle-axe and the votive lamp.

8.

The word is Youth. The word is Progress. I
The heir of all the ages, from this height
Survey my world and godlike call it good.
Fiat lux, from chaos conjure light,

Create all things in my own image with
The automatic the immediate word
I blast the banal and I break the norm
Revaluing all values and all form.

And now behold the miracle of flight!
Across the bright meridian of noon
Wild horses storm unbridled to the sun
The world is young and life has just begun.

Then lock the door and file the script away.
The play is ended; if recalled at all,
Remember only with the long-drawn breath,
A poem of love remembered after death.

9.

Here is the curtain, dust enfolding dust.
The last prop, a folded fan, is left
Upon the boards where it fell. The guilt
Is scabrous on the royal box. No man

Has lifted hand to fly the final drop,
“A sylvan dell, with shepherds in the lower
Left, and at the right a well.” The seats
Yawn upward to the high proscenium arch.

Dust is on the green tormentors, high
Under the iron beams the wings are greyed
With distance. There the door stands open for
The final exit that was never made.

Attention! Action! Let the worklight down.

Call all hands and let them set the stage.

The actors stand impatient in the wings.

Music. Lights. A new play for a new age!

dead reckoning

O Zarathustra... caught in thine
own snares, self knower, self hang-
man! “Why didst thou strangle thy-
self with the noose of thy wisdom?”

Nietzsche

I,

Then has it come so soon that in our youth
This task is laid on us to fly by night
Across a wilderness of empty sky
Where no horizon looms nor any sign
Of visible motion, neither cloud nor star
Nor any mark to take our bearing by?

What was it went awry? Did we not take
The metric readings, riddle out the charts,
Correct the compass, find the agonic line,
And by that ledestar set our course aloft
Upon the cleanest winds of heaven into
The newest dawn of time?

And now to see the night close in so soon;
A self-deception, what we took for dawn
Was no beginning, but the final glare
Of sunset, blood-red for a dying day.
And did we build our gallows then so high
Only to dance at last upon the air?

2.

That night the graves were opened and the dead
Walked, Barbarous kings with blood upon their brows
That ravaged to the perilous ends of earth
And left their spoor upon the naked plain
For vengeance of the hunter, eye for eye;
All the dead we thought that we had slain

Rose up, A savage pageantry that wound
Through crooked streets of cities devious
And dim; macabre saints, the rack and rod,
The prelates temporal, the drunken lords
And all their silken syphilitic whores
Within the shadow of the crucified god—

A thousand years of Europe, and our years

The worst. Theirs was the arithmetic tread,
The patient mile; a swift progression ours,
And geometric; where they walked we fly—
And measure progress by our numbered dead.

3.

Lost, and listening to the motor drone
A blasphemous *Te Deum*, mocking the false dawn
That lured us to our doom, I think of him
Who, drunk with Dionysus, launched the breed
Of Supermen, despised the crucified one
And hanged himself (for reasons of his own)
Upon the selfsame tree.

And you, Hart Crane,
Who would have rung what sounding changes on
The verb to fly, surrendered to the sea,
Torn, perhaps, by ship's propeller—an irony!
The machine absorbs the poet—contrariwise.

Enough. It is a bitter jest, God knows.
Drunk or sober, you were not the last
To take that way out of the mind's dilemma.
In this clockwork universe, our brave
Mechanic dream turned nightmare, it may be
We too have found our Purgatory, hung
Between a heaven that mocks us and an earth

We fear, and hunger for
Who was it died
In battle—they or we?

thunderstorm

Behold, God is great; we know him
not. He draweth up the drops of
water, which distil in rain... the
skies pour down. Can any understand?
Job XXXVI

I.

A thermal incident, no more. Occlusion
In the classic style. A High and Low
With all the isobars in proper place.
“Out of the chamber of the south cometh
The storm, And cold out of the north...
The breath of God,” Elihu said. We know

It’s atmospheric pressure. A given number
On the Beaufort Scale and counter-clockwise
In accordance with Buys Ballot’s law.
A vortex system moving at some thirty
Miles per hour. “God thundereth marvelously,”
But the voice we hear is not the Voice
Out of the Whirlwind. We are rational men.

For metaphor let this suffice: Two giant
Actors on a thousand-mile-wide stage
An awesome drama of the atmosphere,
Or vaulting Tropic versus crouching Polar
Wrestling in titanic conflict. Still,
An ephemeral Depression, nothing more.

2.

But here, my hearties, is no schoolroom text.
No blackboard navigation. Here the arc
That leaps between the positive and the negative
Is no equation. Here the isobars
Constrict the heart and all the arrows point
To where the nerve-ends meet. Here every sense
Is false. The ear is deaf, the eye is blind.
A spark of primitive fear ignites the brain
With demon thunder and black rain.

And now the universe has stopped. The stars
Black embers on a bed of ash. The moon
An old brown wound, the sea a stagnant pool.
The eagle plummets to the earth, a stone.
I freeze with panic fear, and from the pit
Come brute and bitter things, the faceless ones
That beckon to my doom—and down I go

My fingers frozen to the stick.... Am I
A savage cowering in his cave? The cool
Geometry of reason answers No.

3.

Time was when as a child I knelt alone
Before the feet of Moses where he stood
And tried to read the shattered stone;
Time came when through a year of nights I sat
Beside the deathbed of my old desires
My eyes the uncut pages of a book
And sought to puzzle out my many lives.

Spore of what plant, east-borne or west,
I never knew; Moor, Byzantine or Slav,
What blood mixed with the blood of Jew;
A stranger ever and a child of change
Face, figure, pattern of the hand, always
A little strange; always a stranger and
But lately come, across the wilderness
On broken feet; and stopped perchance to peer
At my own image in some window pane
Would ask, What am I doing here?

4.

I do not wish
To put too fine a point upon it. Not
That we have had our poetry of revolt,
But that it passed into the official canon:
That's unique.

And from it stems when all is said and done
Dachau, Belsen, Kishinev, the wrath
Of Rome and Babylon.

'Twas always impolite to point, and when
The finger's sharp and bony, probing under
Skin made tender by good living, power
And pride—the wonder is some few of us

Are still alive.

Our means outmatch our ends; something between
The comic and the cosmic hung; a situation
That's ideal for clowns: as when against
A certain April blue hung bitter fruit,
Yehoshua bar Yoseph, friends, a certain Jew.

Take our Jeremiah with our Jesus then,
Graft of the same vine, whereof the fruit
Is wrath... and wine.

I do not wish to put too fine a point
Upon it. Not that we have had our poetry
Of revolt—others had it too—
But that it passed into the official canon.

In this unique,
And Chosen (for our sins, no doubt) we stand
On palace steps, before the city's gate,
And pointing say: Thou art the man!

Part Two: Fanfare For A Delayed Exit

Century of Progress"
World's Fair, Chicago, 1933

ritual of the lights

Canst thou bind the sweet influence
of the Pleiades, or loose the bands of
Orion? Canst thou bring forth Max-
zaroath in his season? or canst thou
guide Arcturus with his sons? Know-
est thou the ordinances of heaven?
canst thou set the dominion thereof
in the earth?
Job XXXVIII

Prepare the time-event
With Wagner's Evening Star. In lieu of God
Project upon a screen in diagram
Arcturus; for his outstretched Finger draw

A beam of light through telescopic lens
Focussed on a photoelectric cell
(As Michelangelo's God transmits to Adam
The vital spark) and thus complete the circuit.

Fiat lux! Let ϵ denote
Terrestrial time, and see the speed of light
At 6 times 10 to the 12th power miles per year,
Allow for factor h , for certain variants,
Planck's Constant and Pythagoras' pants—
And presto! neon streams across the night.

The Moving Finger writes (as Omar said
Who also pondered astronomic laws)
And having writ, moves on—to keep this date
With Westinghouse Electric Company
And Mr. Rufus Dawes.

Amid the smells of popcorn and
Of frying fat, Haggard late
Of Paris, frustrate émigré
And now frustrate expatriate

Ponders the Promethean rite
Behind a wry sardonic mask
And pours himself another drink
From his bootleg pocket flask

What does it matter, Arcturus or
Aldebaran? The wind is fair
For France, and here I sit
With bootleg liquor at the Fair

All honor to the mind of man
Whose brilliance blinds and overawes
And to the thousand billion cells
That answer to the name of Dawes

And praised be God for Westinghouse
That now has something more to sell:
The brain that brought Arcturus down
May yet bring Satan up from hell

Then who shall chain us to the rock
And on what lonely mountain peak

What mad and muscular Heracles
Shall save us from the eagle's beak?

The fault, dear Brutus, lies not in
Our stars but in ourselves, alas,
Says Haggard; stars can wait, our day
Is brief—and freshens up his glass,

Will the Management permit a question?
To what end? Egypt oriented
Temples to Arcturus. Travelers
On land and sea sought out Arcturus as
A guiding star.

The thing goes deeper.
Fire from heaven, the Promethean rite
Has been a symbol of creative thought
(Whether stolen from heaven or by grace of God)
From Hesiod and Aeschylus to Pope
“God said, Let Newton be! and all was Light.”

One has a right to raise a point of taste.
In Galileo's Rome the telescope
Became a trick for mountebanks to gull
The simple in the market place.

And has it now become a trick to light
The neon signs that advertise the wares
Of hot dog merchants and concessionaires?

Wherefore to all concerned, small thanks,
Says Haggard, Science is the mind
And Labor is the hand; the rest
Is belly and a broad behind

Science can be bought and sold
Ownership is heaven-sent
Labor is a tool; what counts
Is profit, dividends and rent

Labor is a work of love

And therein all the merit lies
What is it but the debt we owe
To pure and private enterprise?

Who shall measure it in ergs
Or match in terms of honest toil
The charismatic virtues of
The U. S. Steel and Standard Oil

Who yet shall make the dollar glow
With light from Leo and the Bear
And snatch the fire of heaven itself
To flush the toilets of the Fair

In parting I propose a toast:
To decent liquor; to a mind
Unfettered; and the effluvium
Of natural female unrefined

The hour, alas, is growing late
Says Haggard, and I'm getting tight
Further deponent sayeth not
And so good night, garçon, good night.

invocation for a world congress of religi

I,

The ways to heaven are many and man
Has tried them all: the poppy, cocoa bean,
The Tantric Buddhism, and God knows what
Inventions of the Greeks. Emasculation,
Temple prostitution; science too,
Alembics and equations, secret numbers,
Spires, and stairways winding to the stars.

They took the rhythm of their hearts
And froze its motion into stone,
Their roseate hopes of heaven they upflung
In tall rose-petaled windows, and their prayers
Upgathered in a haze of tears
Through which the sun shot rays of healing light
And that was God.

Always at the birth
A Herod, at the death a Judas.
Do we dare imagine the king's death?

What may we tell in Gath, or publish now
In Ashkelon? Who was it put
The crucifixion on a business basis?
Prayer wheels spin alike in Lhasa and
In Rome. The roads to heaven are many
And lined with brothels, abattoirs,
And money-changers' booths, Our Eve
Is a conventional nude in swank saloons,
And Adam emasculate behind his fig leaf now
Keeps regular office hours.

Come close, for I would speak softly
Concerning those who walked the earth
With some ineffaceable image dreamed,
And died for it. A poem chanted by
Some poet in a rented room
Is overheard by vulgar ears,
Repeated over the back fence with
The monday wash; a tale lost in the telling.

Such a life was Jesus, among others;
In whose name empires were built
On the mistranslation of a word,
And fortunes on a typographical error;
Lacunae in the text, a scribbled hand,
Forgotten memoranda on old bills
And backs of envelopes.

I can well believe it, having seen
How one may make his life a poem
Brought to life; beauty and terror
Amidst the billboards and the juke-boxes;
Known only to God's fools, to lovers,
And to simple men. Perhaps also
To those who sin and suffer the guilt of it.

I speak of these, for whom reality
Did not begin with the morning coffee

And end with the evening paper;
Who could turn from battle, heat
And detonation of the kill, to where
Some lone enchanted bird sings his heart out
To some high wonder in the hills.

2.

By what devices shall we fix
The time-event where the Thing
Is intersected by the Name that names it?

What coördinates shall bridge the gap
Between them?
We fabricate a speech of number, size;
Rename the names of demon, god heaven,
Zero for the Sunya, Nothingness, and for
Infinity the two linked circles;
Split the mind in conic sections, find
Hyperbolas and parabolic forms
As pure as truth and beautiful as light:

Define and redefine it as we will
It is a beauty void of love, as cold
And lovely as a loveless hand; the chill
And opalescent beauty of a dry
And empty shell. Here is the place for God
In our hypothesis.

Not the well-rubbed, all but faceless
Coins of Glory, Praise and Power,
The borrowed dignity of capital letters;
Not that we are vain, imagining we
Have squared the circle, bridged the parallels,
Defined the Tetragrammaton,
Equated mercy with the atomic chain;

Not, please note,
That we have given a definite value to
The ineffable X, resolved the opposites,
Or found the link between Jehovah and
The high impersonal linked circles of

The mathematical Name.

Not *god-ghuto*, the one implored, but worship
In its proper sense of having *weorth*,
God as sum and summit of all values,
Shorn of meretricious praise;
The logical necessity, the X
That stands for all we seek and do not know

And keep on seeking; that in all
Humility and nothing more.

And having defined our terms, restored
To human speech the clean intent,
An honest man may once more speak of God
Without embarrassment.

in our time

And so we bring this broadcast to a close.
From this room high over New York we
can see far across the waters of the bay
and out to sea. The sun is rising on this
fateful day of September First, Nineteen
Thirty-Nine, and where the sun is rising,
there in the east, the sky is very red.
Radio Broadcast by Robert Trout

I.

Whether by fire in the black night
Self-tortured for some half imagined crime,
Whether in the green of spring
Hard riding by the storm-beaten shore,
Or in the carnival of falling snow
Blind fingers in your tumbled hair—

Not knowing how to begin
Or what to do
Now or never or forever
What to say
When life says: Yes, or No?

Whether on the high table-lands of war
Rustbitten by cold doubt, supine,
Whether in the well-fed cushions, drugged,
I sip slow-breathing peace like wine,
Or when the purple river of my veins
Ebbs with the rhythm of the final breath—

You rise and pace the floor,
There Radio-Victor sits in chaste moderne
And blares insanely to himself
Between the bookcase and the easy chair.

Minutely now you comb the air
For music, find it, kill it with a twist.
How nervously you twirl the dial,
For nothing pleases, nothing is,
Well, shall we say, decisive.

Better crash of static counter-
Irritant than whine of sentimental
Music in a world gone mad.

2.

Again the cry is war. Prepare
The Pyrrhic victory again.
To slay this beast we now become
As beasts ourselves, that once were men.

So poke among the tenements of Paris
Search among the slums of Calais, find
The erstwhile Mademoiselle from Armentières
And say:

O ma chérie, remember when
Amid the thunder of the guns?
That palsied hand, the same
That sent us overseas, now sends
Our sons, dead fruit of this our dying world
These twenty years and more,
To make your undernourished girl their whore.

Not quite official, but the High Command
Is realistic in such matters, let
The May-flies flutter from the sand
And writhe a moment in the nuptial flight;

The Gold Star Mothers meet to send their thanks
For this indulgence, gents, that to their sons
You grant the unofficial respite from the guns
Before you fling their bodies to the tanks.

Again the cry is war. High hat,
Gold braid. The presses run black blood.

The radio shrieks hatred in a dozen tongues—
Kilo-megacycle, superheterodyne—

You laugh your gallows laugh,
You shrug your shoulders and you sigh;

Turn off the radio.
We are as men condemned to die,
And waiting for the end.

Deal out a hand of cards, my friend,
It will do to while away the time.

4,

Weld flesh with steel then
And give the steel a brain
Call it the arm that strikes
This thing men call a plane
Call it the man made weapon
Call it the steel made sentient
Knowing where and when

So take your apple of a world
And see it whole
Sun up to sun down round
From pole to pole

See with what high disdain
We span the Great Curve or
From winter cloud drop down

With thunder and black rain

Spin the world, my masters,
Here chalk in a line
And here plug in a pin

Play out your little game
Hamburg, Balaclava, Austerlitz
The stakes may change
The pawns are still the same

And we
With speed and thunder of our wings

Hand on the wheel
Heart made of steel for striking
Will lost in the single will
Bereft of pity and of love
Blast deep foundations for
A world we know not of.

Part Three: Point Of No Return

point of no return

I.

There should be silence after storm, the peace
That brings the soldier home; the war is won.
And yet there is no peace. We stand midpoint
As at the Pole where all meridians meet,
Where time has lost all meaning. There is no
Direction here save only one—

Inexorably down.
Too late, too late for empire. Gone the world
Disraeli made; God's vicars and the Cross
With Vickers Limited not too far behind.
Repeat again and for the hundredth time:
We gave them telephones and roads. We brought
Their sons to Oxford.

On what terms?

The hawk trained to the hand that feeds it brings
The bird down shrieking from the shrieking sky;
The dog fed at the baron's table licks
The baron's hand. For every English pound
A pound of flesh cut closest to the heart.

This was the most unkindest cut of all
Age thou are shamed, Rome thou hast lost the breed
Of noble bloods, profaned Burke's Peerage and
The British Stud Book. Is it Ghosts you see
Of Amritsar or Omdurman? Teach the mind
That made the Gita to respect the bold
Churchillian line.

I see a face
Amid the fires of camel dung, Doughty's,
And the mask of Lawrence, faith betrayed;
I see your Miltons and your Cecil Rhodes,
The Nightingale and the Maid. Your sun has set,
The night comes down. Babylon is fallen, fallen,
And all the images of her gods are broken
On the ground.

2.

The heirs assemble.
Decrepit Lochinvars they come too late
Out of the west; gone lewd in their decay
They tempt with gold what Britain took with guns.
They gat no heat. The well runs dry. The eagle
Waited too long for the lion to die.

America, amor, amore. America
Was love, America was promise.
America for a time wore the face
Of FDR as Athens wore the face
Of Pericles.

Novum ordo seculorum,
Now these too polite dissenters fade
Abandoning the field they never won.

Thought itself becomes suspect, and virtue
Wed to vice still keeps her maiden name;
Corruption walks the halls of state and sits in
At the palace poker game.

Our Alarics when they come
Will find no caesar to dethrone, only
An effete Valens, bribe-takers and
Embezzlers, even a blunt barbarian will
Disdain to touch. Dehumanized we fall,
Corrupt, decapped, deracinate and dumb;
And at the last self-murdered more than slain.

between two worlds

Dialogue for Joana and The Pale Young Man
Now that Spring has come again,
elbowed on the window sill, you sit
and watch the coming of the rain,
forehead pressed against the window pane,

You say,
“Torn between two worlds,
one has a choice to make.”

From this window we can see
how Spring comes on,
not singingly as we
would have it, but with black
artillery of the skies
to blast alike
the withered willow and the budding tree.

You speak of choice,
What choice have trees
that stand as villagers might stand
and watch invading armies swarm
across their land?

You turn your head
and something in your face
beneath the grey-green light
recalls long-fallen leaves....

Come, let us make a jest
as men will do
about the things we crave
and fear the most.

Spring comes too soon this year. Too soon.
A sleeper wakened long before her time.
Yawns bleary-eyed and scratches her behind;
A pimply Venus on the half shell, rising
in a fume of Vaporub
with just the slightest snuffle of catarrh

“How droll you are.”

How then shall I put off
my cap and bells?

How undisguised
shall I confront my life
and with my naked eyes
stare down the naked knife of time?

Yet one must somehow make
adjustment to the world, you say.

Look now how rank on rank
the grey combatants move
with swift outriders on their flank.

And think
how humble smokes arise
the humble chimney smokes
rise up and stand
and then as if compelled
by some contagion of their motion move
to join the massed battalions of the skies.

You speak of choice.
What choice have we
whose every hour is held in thrall
whose every breath is measured, we
who wake to see
the master’s shadow creep across the wall?

Say, Time the spider weaves
and year by year
enwebs us to our doom;

Or say that year on year
his moving hand prepares
this cairn to be our tomb;

And say again
what all men living say:
If this be so
live only for the day.

Say this, and having said it, think
how now the ticking of the clock
is louder, faster! Stop your ears
against these tyrannous hammers? Hear
how now your pounding heart repeats
this tocsin. Time is in your blood.

“Yet somewhere, surely,
is a nodal point.

A point where forces meet,
between the knives of give and get;
a point of balance—finding which,
this trembling finger may suffice
to still the frail imbalance of our lives.”

In days like these who holds the scale
with even balance in his hand?

This tiny room,
the plain, unpolished wood, the bars
and rings of chromium, modern things—

What is it but a crumb
the master leaves upon his plate
for you and me?

What are we after all
but window-shoppers in a world
to which he holds the title
and the key?

They own us, Every breath we breathe
both day and night.
Do not think those hands
so gentle white
would hesitate to sink
their well-groomed nails
into your naked eyes,
so desperate their hate
of all we love and they despise.

So take life like a naked blade
and bend it in your bleeding fist
and slowly, slowly twist it
till it snaps,

“But one must be assured
of certain certainties,”
you say.

See now how spring the lover comes.
What certainty can stay
the certainty of hands
that close around us now.

How like a death, and yet,
how like the warm encirclement of love.

What is there in us that so fears
yet craves
the smothering embrace of storm?

The time has come. Have done
with biting fingernails
and pacing back and forth
across the room;

Nor, locked in one another's arms,
two against the world,
lie back and nurse a foolish hope
while knuckles whiten on the fist
that grips the gallows rope.

In days like these

when every sun
that rises is a signal gun
that summons to another day of war,
a war that knows no truce
whose battle lines are flung
across the family dinner table
between father and son
lover and lover,
a wire invisible and biting sharp

You raise your hand. I know.
I know just what you mean.

I look into your eyes and on my brain
your still unanswered question burns
like letters on a screen....

And now,
the windows running grey with rain.
The ashen eyes,
the incommunicable pain.

I turn to go. I stand
and hold my hat.
What shall I say? Between two worlds
we hang. Between the agony
of dying and the fear of birth,
too late for this world and too soon for that.

Part Four: Rainbow At Midnight

the ritual of community

The Hierophant

Men have always
Known the answers long before they knew
How to ask the questions. The land, they said,
Is God's and rightfully belongs to all.
Within the tribal brotherhood the act
Of labor was a sacramental act,
The exchange of goods a ritual performed

With reverence.

Chorus of Initiates

Labor is a sacred thing
Not something to be bought and sold,
The fruit of labor, whether of hand or mind,
Is hallowed fruit.

Chorus of Postulants

Weep not for us
We lived with death
Here thinking festered
In the sores of hate

Weep not for us
We gave too little pity
We who sinned without pleasure
And suffered without pain.

Chorus of Initiates

Labor is a sacred thing
When love has entered into it
As when the iron is hot the metal takes
The shape the hammer lays on it.

Chorus of Postulants

What shall assuage us, we
Who spilled the wine

And drank the lees, and dying
Pant for water without thirst?

The Hierophant

There can be no community of man
Where men are prey to men;
Cut back to the root, the source
Where means and ends were severed,
There you will find the things
Of primal worth: these three,
Sacrament, rebirth, community.

Chorus of Initiates

Labor is a sacred thing
The need to give and to receive,
The love of human fellowship
United in the ritual ring

I weave your cloth
I build your house
I grow your food

We sow and reap, we mold and spin
Fashioning the finished from the crude.

The Hierophant

Customs, cultures, all are intergrown
Forever widening the human span
Family, tribe and nation, now the world
Is fatherland and motherland of man.

Chorus of Postulants

Rededicate our lives, restore
The sense of wonder; men made brothers
Not in name alone, but deeper,
In the ritual ring. Fresh sacraments,
New meanings valid for our time,
A world reborn, a new hierogamy.

There shall be wings that soar above the storm
In that supernal calm where simple men
Imagined heaven once. There is no turning back.
The course is set. We must go through.

Chorus of Initiates

And yet no word is lost
Of all that has been spoken, no deed wasted,
No life given in vain. These dead, and these
Now living who shall be the dead tomorrow—
Through the years the cost of human gain
Is all these unknown dead, these bitter,
These anonymous tears.

So let it be a rainbow of the night

The spectrum whole but in a minor key
The perfect circle never seen by day
And at its center, white, the sign
Of things to be.

That when the fire goes low
We be not smitten blind whose eyes
Are seared with splendor of the noon,
But patient as the night, we with some few
To keep it burning in some quiet place
Breathe on these embers, till the span
Of night is run, and a new sun ignite
To send it in another twisting spiral up
The slow circuitous ascent of man.

Chorus of Postulants

By what science then and on what paper graphed
Upon what curve of night descending shall we find
Not darkened lands but cities fabulous with light!

Publication. First published in *The California Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 3 (1953), pp. 16–42. This four-part periodical text contains extensive passages and an architecture not retained in the 1955 book; it is therefore printed as a separate version.

A Plug Hat for the Archetypical Man

The basis of skyscraper construction is the underlying
steel frame—the “bones” which
carry walls and floors, and
which have given this method
of building the name of
“skeleton construction”,
WPA Guide to Illinois

I.

On the window sill the pigeons
strut and swagger

It is a matter of record
that the Board of Directors is opposed
to all irrational numbers

Also the location is to be regretted
the sky blinds the bookkeeper

There have been crimes and disasters

Morning is a white collar
too tight around the neck
one swells in the night

Noon is a paper napkin
bloody with ketchup

Night is a warmed-over dish
between bedtime and midnight

At six the Slovak women
will bend over the waste baskets

On the window sill the pigeons
strut and swagger

We have been given to understand
that scotch tweed is a mode of being

Also that respiration follows

the curve of wheat

And the Masonic ritual resolves
the riddle of the infinite piece of string

On the window sill the pigeons
strut and swagger

Certain things are accepted

It is permissible to gorge
on the wings of white butterflies

One may also harness the lightning
to incinerate garbage

It is likewise good form
to wipe one's nose on an orchid

Duty is a mahogany box in a steel-glass tomb

When the clock in the tower strikes five
he will pause for a newspaper
in the doorway—

under the window sill
where the pigeons
strut and swagger

In this no matter of great consequence
is seen, save only this, perhaps,

That those who sit above the salt should take
precautions lest a bad example set
before the people should breed discontent.

The tall helm of Achilles in his day
suffered a like indignity no doubt
beneath the Trojan gate

But he had Homer to present his case;
moreover there were omens seen
and auguries in birds

The thing could well have been a thing of state,

The august Emperors of the East were wise

in matters touching royal etiquette
hence the ceremonial umbrella

Double, triple, for good measure; and
not to be outdone, the pope's
official parasol

De rigueur and S.O.P. in all processions
displaying power, authority and renown,
the helm, the miter and the crown,

A wise precaution, Let the great beware
of inadvertence in such matters,
Who can say? It well may be

That kingly power began to wane the day
when through some oversight the common fool
chanced on Caesar straining at the stool,

Lawrence Lipton
from "Rainbow at Midnight"

Publication. First published in *Coastlines*, no. 1 (Spring 1955), pp. 18–20, with the designation “from ‘Rainbow at Midnight.’” Not included in the 1955 book.

RAINBOW AT MIDNIGHT (1955)

Stage II | The first book

Air-borne

I

Mamacocha, mother sea, remembering
 The amniotic eons, capsulate
 Within the cradle of your womb, between
 The stony pelvics of the continents
 Before the foster mother earth received me
 At her breast: a thing of watery salts
 Compounded of the tears of God, ascends,
 Ad astra brazened on his wing.
 Forgive the boast. It masks a 'secret dread,
 As anciently that first prehensile fin
 Clawed upward out of stranded seas, sun-dazed
 And drowning: in the hostile air, to die
 And leave behind an unforgotten fear,
 Forever afterward we struggle into life
 Born blind and with a gasping cry: so now,
 I launch a wing upon the wind-spell night
 And hide my fear behind a boastful brow.

2

It matters not how strait the gate (I said)
 How charged with punishment—the scroll
 Was bright with promise, being still unrolled—
 I make my fate. Who fear the swollen seas
 Let them be churched and bedwived with the hills.
 One day the sea will rise and maned with fire
 Ride in and fall upon them from afar;
 The wind is for the winged and the seas
 For Argonauts, pearl fishers, shooting stars.

So I boasted in imperial line
 And launched invictus on the unconquered air
 As seeds take wing on the perpetual Trades
 Invade far continents, upset the balance
 Of economics. I called it good
 And counted up my gains. I said: the lion

Makes no penance for his strength, the eagle
Was designed for flight; our century
Is born to winged power, and Nature is
The pattern and the prototype.

3

Say then that I honored God as Nature
An impersonal and ungallant foe
With such beauty as the python has
Coiled round the pig. Deus sive natura,
Little did he know who ground his lenses
There in Amsterdam his words would brew
The bastard potion of the Superman.
An irony! That which quenched the Jew
Had given the Teuton fire.
A sly misreading of the text? No doubt.
In what sacred name was Carthage sacked?
Ententes, alliances and leagues; the cross
Is cast in iron and sold for human blood.
The bishops always bless the battle flags.
Infinite substance, ergo infinite might;
If God is all then all that is is right.
The syllogism is complete, the scene
Is set for action, in ein augenblick
The helmets rise from Kiel to Wien.

Publication. From *Rainbow at Midnight* (Golden Quill Press, 1955), pp. 11–12.

Dead Reckoning

I.

Then has it come so soon that in our youth
This task is laid on us to fly by night
Across a wilderness of empty sky
Where no horizon looms nor any sign
Of visible motion, neither cloud nor star
Nor any mark to take our bearings by?

What was it went awry? Did we not take
The metric readings, riddle out the charts,
Correct the compass, find the agonic line,
And by that lodestar set our course aloft
Upon the cleanest winds of heaven into
the newest dawn of time?

And now to see the night close in so soon;
A self-deception, what we took for dawn
Was no beginning, but the final glare
Of sunset, blood-red for a dying day.
And did we build our gallows then so high
Only to dance at last upon the air?

2.

That night the graves were opened and the dead
Walked. Barbarous kings with blood upon their
brows

That ravaged to the perilous ends of earth
And left their spoor upon the naked plain
For vengeance of the hunter, eye for eye;

All the dead we thought that we had slain
Rose up. A savage pageantry that wound
Through crooked streets of cities devious
And dim; macabre saints, the rack and rod,
The prelates temporal, the drunken lords
And all their silken syphilitic whores
Within the shadow of the crucified god—

A thousand years of Europe, and our years
the worst. Theirs was the arithmetic tread,
The patient mile; a swift progression ours,
And geometric; where they walked we fly—
And measure progress by our numbered dead.

3.

Lost, and listening to the motor drone
A blasphemous *Te Deum*, I think of him
Who, drunk with Dionysus, launched the breed
Of Supermen, despised the crucified one
And hanged himself (for reasons of his own)
Upon the selfsame tree. And you, Hart Crane,
Who would have rung what sounding changes on
The verb to fly, surrendered to the sea,
Torn, perhaps, by ship's propeller—an irony!
The machine absorbs the poet—contrariwise.

4.

Enough. It is a bitter jest, God knows.
Drunk or sober, you were not the last

To take that way out of the mind's dilemma.
In this clockwork universe, our brave
Mechanic dream turned nightmare, it may be
We too have found our Purgatory, hung
Between a heaven that mocks us and an earth
We fear, and hunger for—who was it died
In battle—they or we?

el

Publication. First collected in *Rainbow at Midnight* (1955), pp. 13–14. Copy-text: the author-selected version in *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), pp. 59–61; the later text regularizes punctuation and makes several small verbal revisions.

Thunderstorm

I

A thermal incident, no more. Occlusion
In the classic style. A High and Low
With all the isobars in proper place.
“Out of the chamber of the south cometh
The storm. And cold out of the north...
The breath of God,” Elihu said. We know
It’s atmospheric pressure. A given number
On the Beaufort Scale and counter-clockwise
In accordance with Buys Ballot’s law.
A vortex system moving at some thirty
Miles per hour. “God thundereth marvelously”
But the voice we hear is not the Voice
Out of the Whirlwind. We are rational men.

For metaphor let this suffice: Two giant
Actors on a thousand-mile-wide stage,
An awesome drama of the atmosphere,
Or vaulting Tropic versus crouching Polar
Wrestling in titanic conflict. Still,
An ephemeral Depression, nothing more.

2

But here, my hearties, is no schoolroom text.
No blackboard navigation. Here the arc
That leaps between the positive and the negative
Is no equation. Here the isobars
Constrict the heart and all the arrows point
To where the nerve-ends meet. Here every sense
Is false. The ear is deaf, the eye is blind.
A spark of primitive fear ignites the brain
With demon thunder and black rain.

Time rolls back. Millenniums of life
Flash before me in a swift montage;
I am a savage squatting by the fire

I feel it in my blood and bone and hair
For I am he and what he was I am
In immanent Time Present I am there.

Above the bony ridges of the eye
A god is born, a thing of hope and fear
Imaged as the yoni or the lingam,
Bird or beast, stone or tree; the lightning
Strikes and from the thorn bush blossoms forth
That terrible red flower, a living flame
The hieroglyph that spells the name of Power.

3

Here in the awful vortex of the storm
The sound of rain is like the voice of doom.
I gaze into the Void, my senses reel,
I am a creature bound upon the Wheel,
Blind, unborn, and weeping in the womb.
All means are ladders to be cast aside
Before the final leap. "Life is a bridge,
Build no house on it; a journey, take it
And walk on." The ways are many but
The goal is one, and at the final hour
We walk alone. Storm music of the wind
Along these wings the voice of all the burdened
Of the earth is in the wind tonight.
The fuel burns low and still no beacon light.

Publication. From *Rainbow at Midnight* (1955), pp. 15–16.

On Instruments

I

And even as inwardly the compass veers
Now here now there, so in the upper air
Valved heart of racing steel with fire-blood fed
My brain the figures on a dial, fog-blind
I ride the storm to where the finger points.
O I have come with trembling to this hour.
It well may be that in some ultimate North
Beyond the reaches of our farthest flight
The great auroras of the future write
Their pure equations toward a final sum,
But here as yet within this narrow room
The figures blur and all the gauges dim,
The needles tremble in the feeble light.
This much is plain, the fearful hour has come
When certain dread decisions must be made.
The moontides of our years no longer run
Their measured course with even ebb and flow;
The Questioner will brook no more delay
Nor let us off with sly evasions now.
These questions must be answered Yes or No.

2

Our yoke is fastened with a Gordian knot;
What shall it profit us if some impatient
Alexander cuts the knot again?
This is a knot that bleeds, and war a sin
That leaves its mark upon the guilty brow
(In words of every language save the one
In which the law of love is given) steeped
And stained in custom like a painted grin.

Our age is pivot of the wheeling eons,
More than fate of empire or the war
Of classes is at stake; the sanity
Of man hangs in the balance. Cities tremble

In the shadow of the Bomb. Rockets,
Radar screens and guided missiles, these
Shall be our homeopathic charm against
The Bomb. And what shall save us from ourselves?

Publication. From *Rainbow at Midnight* (1955), pp. 17–18.

Forced Landing

I

There should be silence after storm, the war
 Is won, and yet there is no peace. We hang
 Midpoint, the Pole where all meridians meet.
 There's no direction here save only one—
 Inexorably down. Here we sit
 In silence, thinking each his separate thought,
 While jets scrawl villainous lines across the sky
 Shrill in the higher frequencies of fear,
 Atomic trees flower into poisonous flame,
 Outshine the sun, drown out the thunderous
 Antiphonies of sea. Was it for this
 The eye of science peered beyond the scope
 Of light? For this unerring fingers held
 The scalpel delicately poised for swift
 Incision in a room with lights? For this
 The sanity of hands grown old on tubes
 Of glass? For this line music of the wind
 Made visible in swiftly moving steel
 By air and rail? And tools machined to blue
 Precision moving micrometric to
 The millionth part—for murder mechanized?

2

Emplane from stations fixed in space, or mounted
 On white tundras of the moon survey
 A heaven of unblinking stars—two tickets
 Front and center at the Resurrection?
 Airfaring men, across what fear-struck lands
 To what high arc of anger do you climb
 To seed what thunderheads of hate?

Ours is a casual martyrdom, sideswiped
 By history. The young that come thereafter
 Still will come upon us with a face
 As ancient as an ape's. Our too polite

ci Dissenters fade, abandoning the field
They never won. Thought itself becomes
Suspect, and virtue wed to vice still keeps
Her maiden name. Our Alarics when they come
Will find no Caesar to dethrone, only
An effete Valens, bribe-takers and
Embezzlers, even a blunt Barbarian will
Disdain to touch. Dehumanized we fall,
Corrupt, decapped, deracinate and dumb;
And at the last self-murdered more than slain.

Publication. From *Rainbow at Midnight* (1955), pp. 19–20.

Inquest

Lock the door. Let no one leave the room.
A crime has been committed here. An old man
Stricken on his bed, his face turned to the wall,
A derelict six days dead and stiffening
In a rented room. The headlines in their short
And ugly words of violence report a miracle:
This morning at the Mass the wine turned water
And the bread to stone. Cold April comes.
The fruit is still-born in the seed.

Agnosco ergo sum. We've come full circle.
Velocity, cohesion, color, sound,
Waves and radiations: *res extensa*.
Giordano Bruno chemically changed
By thermal action; Jesus on the cross
A rearrangement of the particles.
The man of science with his final breath
Defines the event: a thermodynamically
Stable configuration known as death.

Signs and rumors thrive. In Africa
A gateway lonely and tremendous tall
Leaned one hour against the moon and vanished.
Divers drunk with rapture of the depths
Have perished with a strange compassion, and

Airfaring men have seen God's murdered eyes,
Burned blind—such is the venom of our fears—
Dart between the tracers and the flak
and disappear. We take this testimony

From lips of dead demonic men whose eyes
Gaze inward on unspeakable things. And I
Who cannot witness to their truth record
These singular events for what they're worth.
Let each come forward in his turn and speak
If he is innocent of the crime. Or guilty.
Tried, self-judged, self-sentenced and self-slain,
For who is guiltless? then let each confirm
The primacy of love, lest past rebirth

We die and leave these large ignoble ruins
To house the wild and innocent things of earth.

Publication. First collected in *Rainbow at Midnight* (1955), pp. 21–22. Copy-text: *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), pp. 57–58; minor changes in punctuation and accidentals are not separately duplicated.

Fanfare for a Delayed Exit

If we believe absurdities,
we shall commit atrocities.
RADHAKRISHNAN

I

Prepare the time-event with Wagner's
Evening Star. In lieu of God
Project upon a screen in diagram
Arcturus; for His outstretched finger
Draw a beam of light through Yerkes'
Telescopic lens, focus on a photoelectric
Cell, (as Michelangelo's God transmits
To Adam the vital spark) and thus
Complete the circuit. Fiat lux!
Let t denote terrestrial time, and c
The speed of light at 6 times 10
To the 12th power miles per year,
Allow for factor h , for certain variants,
Planck's Constant and Pythagoras' pants—
And presto! neon streams across the night.
The Moving Finger writes (as Omar said
Who also pondered astronomic laws)
And having writ moves on—to keep this date
With Westinghouse Electric Company
And Mr. Rufus Dawes.

2

Amid the smells of popcorn and
Of frying fat, Haggard, late of Paris
Frustrate emigre and now frustrate
Expatriate, ponders the Promethean rite
Behind a wry sardonic mask, and with
A finger flick brings in the radio,
De Forest's and Marconi's dream:
Some day a child might fall asleep

In London or in Rome, to Berlin
Broadcasting Ein Kleines Nachtmusik.
The perfect word, low-voiced and sure,
Timed with trembling prescience, spoken,
Without fear, and heard a world away—
Now sold on measured scales of time
As once they panned a profit from
The brain-pan of a Watt or Faraday;
Chain lightning to sell nostrums,
Sex and sadism dished up between
Slices of Denatured Bread
By courtesy of beer and aspirin
Our lists of battle dead.

3

Yet none the less the program went
As scheduled, flags and ticker tape,
The appropriate words in mimeograph
Were given to the press: I WILL,
Engraved in ferro-concrete and
Emblazoned with the seal of state
Till someone switched the beam
Two thousandths of one point of arc,
Brought in the light from some remote
Far-wandering star shot into space
Three thousand years and more ago
When Nathan walked the earth, his bony
Finger pointing at the palace gate.
The Citizens' Committee, scandalized
Took refuge in a room with shell-and-pea
Statistics wrapped in well-laid-plans
And old quotation marks. And Haggard,
Knowing how the monstrous lie
Begets the monstrous act, is shaken
With a vision, Man self-slain,
Spinning lifeless on his inch of dust
Amid the thousand thousand liveable worlds,
Embryonic, viable and prime,
In galaxies as yet unglimped, unguessed,

Lost in the trick arithmetic of time.

Publication. From *Rainbow at Midnight* (1955), pp. 25–27.

Still Life with Figures

Thirty Years after "Portrait of a Lady"

Lengthening shadows on the wall
lunaria in a brown pitcher
and a stainless steel mobile.
On the cocktail table by Noguchi
Henry Miller and *The Yale Review*.
Mahogany and formica,
eclectic compromise between
the chaise longue, circa 1920
and the latest plastic Eames.

It might have been in such a room as this.
Joanna dormant on a low divan
head framed in one encircling arm,
nice, how the arm under the head
brings up the breast
so round and firm beneath the silk,
a curve of music rising from the thigh
and mounting to the high arch of the hip—
Giorgione's sleeping Venus with
a Lucky poised twixt tapering fingertip
and fingertip. She deigns to speak:
"Ah yes, Beethoven, brooding, deep,
and always at the end
that doubting afterthought.
Sometimes I wonder, did he know?
Sometimes I almost think..."

And Mr. Lowenthal opines
that on the one hand it is gauche
to chant the theme of bread
and bread alone, while on the other,
well, who was it said—

"But O you christs that die upon
the barricades, God knows I'm with you—
in some things."

It might have been in such a room as this.

Upon the wall within an antique frame
 rustbitten grass, a tree,
 and at its foot a figure splendidly alone,
 (it might be Piety), her face
 the viscous white of an intestinal worm
 her frame cadaverous as a herringbone.
 “Primitive, ur-surrealist, quite modern,
 really. After all—”
 (*Gemütlichkeit and comme il faut*)
 “the Church was art and wisdom in her day.”
 And Mr. Lowenthal lifts tolerant eyebrows
 as he cautiously suspends
 his nose-glasses with even justice
 on one finger-end.
 The pale young man nods thoughtfully
 and concentrates his gaze
 upon the mantelpiece, where on a ground
 of mottled sepias and greys
 a bowl of unclassifiable flora blooms
 in two dimensions, an Etruscan urn,
 an old hat superimposed
 upon the outlines of a broken chair—
 Chicago River Braque, by Paris out of
 Grandma Moses and *Pierrot lunaire*.

Our hostess brings the candles in.
 The scene is now complete. With music.
 The long line of César Franck,
 like surf along an endless beach,
 mystical, monastic, and yet sensuous too:

 the satyr’s hoof under the monk’s cassock.
 “Something out of Abelard and Heloise,”
 Joanna says, and smooths her bound hair back.
 At her feet, the pale young man;
 he nibbles on his fingernails.
 The learned Dr. Glumming meditates
 on Spengler, and the cultural lag.
 Dear Mr. Lowenthal stands on the stair
 and with abstracted air

explores a molar cavity and
inspects the find with scientific care.
Now at the Steinway Jascha's fingertips
ooze Werther pain on drooping eyelids.
“Let me see you always as you are tonight.”
The scene is still played best by candlelight.

Vivacious Mrs. Glumming in her youth
(*Confessing between sips of much too much*)
nursed a vision of the world redeemed
by T. H. Huxley and François Delsarte,
with Maxfield Parrish furnishing decor
to grace the hymeneal rites of Reason
wed to Esthetique, science mated
with the liberal arts. Now fifty odd,
quotes Allen Tate and walks with God
and Mr. Eliot, in a play by Sophocles
cum Noel Coward. These fragments
shored against her ruin, a trifle tipsy
but with fat aplomb
braced against the spectre of The Bomb.

Night scent of rose in evening rain
invades the room. Joanna sighs.
The pale young man essays to touch
one dimpled knee. The small lewd ears of Pan
peep out between the bookcase and the door.

I think his dainty lacquered hooves
would make a clicking sound
like French heels on a ballroom floor.
Our pale Prince Hamlet shrugs, “Alas, I lie
upon these thorns, footfree with poetry
or oath-bound teaching poli sci,”
And Mr. Lowenthal in pointed paraphrase:
“Ivied halls do not a prison make.
Let come what may, meanwhile we do
what we can do. And for the rest, *apres nous*—”

Dr. Glumming coughs, and stares about him,
lost; a bird that seeks its nesting place
on an island newly sunken in the sea.

Outside a steady rain descends.
Our hostess rises. "Shall it be
late coffee, or another round—?
This lovely evening, music, talk and friends.
Tomorrow—who can say?" and quotes,
quite unselfconsciously,
"our beginnings never know our ends."

Publication. From *Rainbow at Midnight* (1955), pp. 28–31.

Summa Theologia

When the monks boiled down the Dumb Ox
for the market in holy relics
they quoted the Angelic Doctor
on essence and being.

Friends, when you nibble your nails
be sure you swallow the pieces
lest the Liberal Clergy find them
and conjure with them.

They patched up Genesis with three hairs
from the beard of Darwin
who knows what they shall yet do
with Einstein's fiddle.

Publication. First collected in *Rainbow at Midnight* (1955), p. 32. Copy-text: *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), p. 83.

Memo to Historians in Interstellar Space

Herewith at spot marked X on chart enclosed
And sealed in lead and concrete
Writs replevins bonds debentures and
Accounts receivable

Alliances ententes and coalitions
Duly signed and sealed
The flags the battle plans the eagles and
The President's regrets

An artificial heart in stainless steel
And functional design
An electronic brain that counts the stars
And tells the time

A fragment of the true cross activated
Enclosed here by the Pope's decree
Will serve to fix the radio-carbon date
Of the American Century.

Publication. First collected in *Rainbow at Midnight* (1955), p. 33. Copy-text: *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), p. 37.

Special Broadcast

Bulletin! This morning before dawn
The warden and the priest fled,
When all the prisoners. walked out
Having lost faith in their bars.
The impending global war collapsed
When the electronic brain went mad
And prophesied the names
Of all the casualties.

The bird that set fire to his nest
Thinking himself a phoenix
Failed to rise from his ashes
Being a vulture.

fade

Publication. From *Rainbow at Midnight* (1955), p. 34.

Between Two Worlds

Now that Spring has come again,
elbowed on the window sill, you sit
and watch the coming of the rain,
forehead pressed against the window pane,

You say
“Torn between two worlds,
one has a choice to make.”

From this window we can see
how Spring comes on, not singingly:
as we would have it, but with black
artillery of the skies to blast alike
the withered willow and the budding tree.

You speak of choice.
What choice have trees
that stand as villagers might stund
and watch invading armies swarm
across their land?

You turn your head
and something in your face
beneath the grey-green light
recalls long-fallen leaves....

Come, let us make a jest
as men will do
about the things we crave
and fear the most.

Spring comes too soon this year. Too soon.
A sleeper wakened long before her time.
Yawns bleary-eyed and scratches her behind;
A pimply Venus on the half shell,
rising in a fume of Vaporub
with just the slightest snuffle of catarrh—

“How droll you are.”

How then shall I put off

my cap and bells?

How undisguised
shall I confront my life
and with my naked eyes
stare down the naked knife?

Yet one must somehow make
adjustment to the world, you say.

Look now how rank on rank
the grey combatants move
with swift outriders on their flank.

And think
how humble smokes arise
the humble chimney smokes
rise up and stand
and then as if compelled
by some contagion of their motion move
'to join the massed battalions of the skies.

You speak of choice.
What choice have we
whose every hour is held in thrall
whose every breath is measured, we
who wake to see
the master's shadow creep across the wall?

x

Say, Time the spider weaves
and year by year
enwebs us to our doom;

Or say that year on year
his moving hand prepares
this cairn to be our tomb;

And say again
what all men living say:
If this be so
live only for the day.

Say this, and having said it, think
how now the ticking of the clock
is louder, faster! stop your ears
against these tyrannous hammers? Hear
how now your pounding heart repeats
this tocsin. Time is in your blood.

“Yet somewhere, surely,
is a nodal point.
A point where forces meet,
between the knives of give and get;
a point of balance—finding which,
this trembling finger may suffice
to still the frail imbalance of our lives.”

In days like these who holds the scale
with even balance in his hand?

This tiny room,
the plain, unpolished wood, the bars
and rings of chromium, modern things—

What is it but a crumb
the master leaves upon his plate
for you and me?

What are we after all
but window shoppers in a world
to which he holds the title
and the key?

They own us. Every breath we breathe
both day and night.
Do not think those hands
so gentle white
would hesitate to sink
their well-groomed nails
into your naked eyes,
so desperate their hate
of all we love and they despise.

So take life like a naked blade
and bend it in your bleeding fist

and slowly, slowly twist it
till it snaps.

“But one must be assured
of certain certainties,” you say.

See now how Spring the lover comes.
What certainty can stay
the certainty of hands
that close around us now?
How like a death, and yet,
how like the warm encirclement of love.

What is there in us that so fears
yet craves
the smothering embrace of storm?

The time has come. Have done
with biting fingernails
and pacing back and forth
across the room;

Nor, locked in one another's arms,
two against the world,
lie back and nurse a foolish hope
while knuckles whiten on the fist
that grips the gallows rope.

In days like these
when every sun
that rises is a signal gun
that summons to another day of war,
a war that knows no truce
whose battle lines are flung
across the family dinner table
between father and son
lover and lover,
a wire invisible and biting sharp

You raise a hand. I know.
I know just what you mean.

I look into your eyes and on my brain
your still unanswered question burns

like letters on a screen...

And now,
the window running grey with rain.
The ashen eyes,
the incommunicable pain.

I turn to go. I stand
and hold my hat.

What shall I say? Between two worlds
we hang. Between the agony
of dying and the fear of birth,
too late for this world and too soon for that.

Publication. First collected in *Rainbow at Midnight* (1955), pp. 35–39. Copy-text: *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), pp. 105–112; the later setting is used here and minor variants are summarized rather than duplicated.

Night Song for the Sleepless

(The curtain is down. The house lights are dimmed slowly and the sound of cannonading is heard, like distant thunder. Presently a piano is heard, softly, as if through a closed door, in Beethoven's MOONLIGHT SONATA, first movement, increasing in volume as the curtain rises revealing the drop, a replica of Picasso's GUERNICA, bathed in a faint red light. The house lights are dark. The red lights go up on dimmers till they reach full intensity, after which they are suddenly extinguished as the music of the piano is drowned in the noise and flash of air bombardment. Again house and stage are in total darkness. The distant cannonading continues dimly, under the music of the piano. Now the stage is flooded with moonlight as the first voices are heard.)

Wood and string
beneath your fingertips evoke
the things that are the things of night.

For us the day has never been enough.
Is somehow incomplete. We wait.
What will the evening bring?
Perhaps the phone will ring.
Perhaps some unexpected guest—
a word be spoken for too long unsaid.

The old faiths loosen, fall away.

What strengthens us against the dread
of waking? Night and day
a nameless terror walks beside us—
Is it vengeance of the fallen gods?
lays ghost fingers on our flesh.
We steal along an endless wall,
no door in sight.
We pause. We run. We stop.
With pounding heart we bruise
our naked fists against the stone.

We are the sleepless, we
who make the night our day.
Some hunger unappeased—

Last night I had a dream.
I stood amid the ruins of a church.
The grass was dry. I thought—
If only rain—! The sky
went black. I heard a fearful sound,
but whether storm, or locust,
or black dust, I cannot say.
The rest is blurred, but I remember this,
I woke with rapture racing in my veins.

When will it come,
the all-obliterating rain,
sweep this venom from the air
so we can breathe again!

(The cannonading rises)

These words are whispered in hushed rooms,
are breathed through barely parted lips.
A name is heard. Across the newsprint of the world
a curt command is seared
in letters of black flame
margin to margin.

A voice emits the word, shuts out
the breathless wheedlings of the radio.
M-day!
Drums roll, bells peal.
The mail will bring a letter with a seal:
“Report for duty”
Then what shall we say?

(The cannonading diminishes, and the dancers appear)

A dozen hands outstretch—
Here, take and drink!
Drug the pain with this!
The poppy...marijuana...
Flay the flesh with

passion...

Make a mimic madness. See
how edge of fear is blurred,
a down, an under-going, sink

into the dim half-under world,
the dream of death in life. And now
walk tall upon the earth. Now dance
in haze of music overheard.

And all the while
in Amazon the blue and orange
toucan preens, the boa glides,
the poison arrows fly.

Tibetan wizards sway
from side to side.
“Yamantaka!” they cry,
and raise the Yama
with their wizard eye.

The geisha dances.
Fingers whiten on a secret hand:
A knife is passed.
He does not see or hear,
flower-fingers mincing on his samisen.

And naked bodies on the naked earth
enkindling passion with the half unseen,
draw on the night across their limbs
like black chiffon.

While undersea the fronds
of ageless vegetation wave
gigantic without sound.

(The voice pauses briefly as the music diminishes to a
close)

Or have we lost
that ancient cunning, you and I?
Nightblooming simples rooted deep
beneath some moon-bedeveled stone,

dark knowledge that we once have known.

(Exit dancers. The piano picks up the opening bars of
the CLAIR DE LUNE)

With such a world to rise to, such a day,
why break the merciful assuagement of our dreams
with waking, soon or late,
to such a morning, morning grim and grey,
with news of war beside the breakfast plate.

And yet, and yet,
perhaps there is another way.

Wake late. You find the morning mail
Slipped 'cross the threshold, on the floor.
The boy brings up the flowers,
blue mist, for a secret thought.
You take them, barely opening the door.

The maid appears, invades our twilight
with a broom of sun, but briefly,
leaving books and bed inviolate.

The blinds are drawn again.
Obliquely bars of turquoise and of opal move
across the floor—the clock
and color of our private day.

Now rises wind to seaward.
From our window seat we see
the riffled wave, blue water wave.
On high the castled cumulus,
sunpainted mistflowers wave
and purple in the west,
while in the blue and silver east
sits Han, his sampan still
becalmed upon a sea of silk.

Now night. Her back is hunched.
Invisibly her fingers work
with silver on black samite,
the moon her candle—

Throw up the blinds and let the moonlight in!
for talk—declensions of the You and Me—
and music between bed and bath.

(For a moment the cannonading rises to eclipse the
sound of the piano)

Forgive me if I interrupt
the long legato of the Clair de Lune
to lay a sword between the water and the moon.

Could we be numbered among those
who give of brain and muscle, flood:

the veins with venom,
callous fingers to the feel
of killing steel,
and on a given Day:
cool some red machine-gun with our blood?

Perhaps we could. The will is in us.
Whether or no we say the things they say
We mean the things they mean.
Yet this is plain:
From thenceforth we are mad,
for hate distorts the brain;
as anger does the face, and yet.
perhaps the world is needful of our hate;

The old faiths loosen, fall away.

What does it matter, war today
Tomorrow or another day. The end
The far end, that is never
even half in doubt. A world
where all may rise at last
above the level of the hunting beast.

Yet still he stands, the old one,
gold, blood gold, for murder

in his feeble hand, to kill the thing he fears.
Stands old and wrinkled in the pitiless noon,
His breath gone bitter as the years

and full of death; life in him a sickness
only death can cure.

Stands tall and seeming strong,
yet by his window shade, nightly
as he passes by, the undertaker
sets his watch.

What does it matter now? Not line
of logic straight, but devious, torn
from the womb of time, like Genghis
clutching in his fist the clot of blood,
a world is born!

(A fist descends upon the keyboard with a crash, and in
the silence that follows the voice concludes)

And now this new thing is come upon us
to torture us with hope. To him,
The New Barbarian then, what shall we say?

You are not nimble of wit
as they are
Their words are shiny and sharp
like steel filings

Your words are blunt
like forged hammers

Theirs is the pride and polish
of a distinguished corpse
dressed for burial

You are the primal stuff
formless, inarticulate and rude

They are clean
with the cleanness of a corpse
washed for burial

You are dirty
as a newborn babe.

Publication. First collected in *Rainbow at Midnight* (1955), pp. 40–44. Copy-text: *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), pp. 74–82. A recorded performance, read by John Carradine with the Chico Hamilton Quintet, appeared on *Jazz Canto* (World Pacific, 1958).

Rainbow at Midnight

A Poetic Cantata with Speaking Choirs and Dance Episodes

*Has it not been told thee that the gods
made a bridge from earth to heaven,
called Bifrost? Thou must have seen
it; it may be that ye call it Rainbow.
The Edda*

Publication. Sequence title and epigraph from *Rainbow at Midnight* (1955), p. 49.

The Great Good Place

Entrance of the New Barbarian

Voices of the Brethren

Who is he that comes
Knocking at the gate?

The gate is fastened
And the hour is late

His countenance is young
Fierce and full of pride
Hear, he knocks again
He will not be denied

His face is ruddy but
I cannot tell his race

Ruddy? Tell me does he
Wear a Russian face?

His visage bears the mark
Of every race and clime
Since mankind first arose
From protobiontic slime
Good omen. We have watched
for such a one to come.
Bid him enter. He
may be the awaited one.

(The New Barbarian enters as The Postulant)

The Hierophant

Our sages tell of one who comes with power
Of every race compounded, he the sum of all.
His ensign is the builder's mallet and
The reaper's scythe. On his head is wisdom,
In his hand is peace. And on his brow
The sign of things to be.

The Postulant

I am he.

The Hierophant

Then tell me, son, how comes it that your hand
Is stained with blood?

The Postulant

You speak of power,
And peace. What peace is there save the peace
That comes with power? And when was power bought
Save at the price of pain? As when that first
Deformity the thumb opposable strained—
With how much pain and on what dire demand!
To fling a killing stone—and formed that miracle
The human hand... Or when the mace, -
Still wet with carnage or the hunt, became
The builder's mallet... New ways make new men.

The Hierophant

It is a thing to ponder.
Those who take the sword for love of man
And those who take it out of 'hate, leave
The same sweet sickly smell of death
Behind them.

Unwelcome thought,
Taken to heart it well may paralyze
The hand of action. I state it now
Only for the record; to be filed away
In a corner of the world's conscience,
To be remembered, it may be, another day.
What do you seek of us, you who come
Engirt with power, and full of pride?

The Postulant

I will be frank. We know that power
Won by force cannot be held:
Save by consent. To win allegiance
Power must have sanction—

The Hierophant

By a higher power?

The Postulant

We know no higher power. Our faith
Is now in man.

The Hierophant

Semantic sleight-of-hand. For thought is act,
As much as deed. Man creates his gods
And in their image recreates himself;
Are they then less real than he?
He whom your act creates, he is your god,
And in your act you worship him.

The Postulant

We worship nothing, no one. God is dead.

The Hierophant

The god of church and state, a hollow name.
He never lived, the god whom you have slain.

The Postulant

I had surmised as much. His image
When it fell gave out a hollow sound,
The spear that pierced his side
Drew neither blood nor water.

The Hierophant

Only the living bleed. He whom you sought
To slay is deathless.

The Postulant

Then it is well,
For there are those among us who have need
Of such a one as he. Is it not strange?
Having all things that the mind can image
Or the hand devise, they still look back,
Call it perverse, a certain cultural lag,
Yet in their secret thought a fear is born;
They would raise up the altars from the dust.
A force like this may well get out of hand.
It is a thing of state. I will be plain.
We need a god that we can trust.

Voices of the Brethren

What talk is this?
 We've been deceived!
He seeks a captive church,
 A thing obscene.
This Barbarian would be
' A second Constantine.
It is not such a one
 For whom we wait.
Should we not thrust him out
 And bar the gate?

The Hierophant

My son, the thing you ask
It is not ours to give.

The world you fought for you have won.
Now, what you want we do not have,
And what we have you do not want.
Go in peace.

The Postulant

 But wait.
You spoke of peace. I have heard
There is a peace more precious than
The peace that's won by power.

The Hierophant

More precious than the metals you transmute
In the cyclotron.

The Postulant

 I have had
Intimations of this peace.
In the stillness of the night.

The Hierophant

Even in the midst of action.

The Postulant

Our means become our ends.
We had not willed it so.

I have seen enough to split the planets,
Yet I own a certain anguish,
As of something lost.

The Hierophant

Then listen well.
It will not suffice to boast of Progress.
All your science will not help you now,
Nor that you cast your sword into the scales.
The gold you seek is not found in the atomic pile.
Unregenerate you stand, the crown and pinnacle
Of Economic Man; triumphant now
And crowing on the chopping block of time.
Remember you are rude and like your foe
Unclean with blood. You the hammer
Will be cast aside once the thing is fashioned,
In the book of time your name is signed
To a million death warrants, carte blanche;
Your own name heads the list.

Voices of the Brethren

Therein the web of guilt is spun.
A day of hubris comes
An ancient vengeance of the sun.

The Hierophant

No matter. It is done.
The crime committed, in whatever name,
Is still a crime and must be cleansed.

The Hierophant

The Hierophant

For remembrance!
Emblematic of the Fall!

The Postulant

Behold the figure of a man.
The bridge of bones supports
An engine. Into it is fed
The fuel at one end
At the other ash.

How fearfully and wonderfully made!
A breath of heat too much
A pinch of cold, and lo!
This miracle, it shrivels up
And stiffens to its death.

Behold this vagrant midge
Upon his inch of dust;
Beneath his feet, the earth,
But yesterday it was his womb,
Tomorrow it will be his tomb.

Above, the mathematics of the stars,
Too large for pity and too far for Love;
A fear is born, it stirs
The feeble amperage of the brain
And every tree is figured fire
And from the sky black rain!
Where then is balm?

Chorus of Initiates

Patience, man is young
An infant in an infant world
His god an idiot god. From birth
The thorn is on his brow
The nail is in his palm.
(*The curtain rises on the Ritual of Remembrance*)

Publication. From *Rainbow at Midnight* (1955), pp. 50–56.

Bal Masque

Do you not know that there comes a
midnight hour when every one has to
throw off his mask? Do you believe
that life will always let itself be mocked?
Do you think you can slip away a little
before midnight?
Kierkegaard

The Postulant

This room is too small for my wings

Chorus of Initiates

If the walls should fall back
to the farthest horizon

If the rafters should rise
to the stars

And the great cluster of Hercules
hang suspended like a chandelier;
With condors volplaning
under the ceiling?

The Postulant

I should be amused
but it would not be enough

38;

Chorus of Initiates

If the rose gold flowers in the panels
should burst into living bloom
and smother us with perfume

If the sea should rise
under our dancing feet
and the naked bodies of women
glow blue with the electric light
of fabulous fishes

If the bored waiter should bow
and set before us the canopic jar
containing the viscera of the Twelfth Ramses?

The Postulant

I should think it droll
but it would not be enough

The Hierophant

Nothing is ever enough
This is the precious malady we nourish
Promethean, each on his rock
This is also the omphalos of art
Never let a wound heal.

Publication. First collected in *Rainbow at Midnight* (1955), pp. 57–58. Copy-text: *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), pp. 38–39.

Fête de l'Âne

For Buridan's Ass

What the philosophers say about
reality is often just as disappointing as it is when you read a sign
at a second-hand store: "Ironing
done here." If you should come with your clothes to get them
ironed, you'd be fooled; for only the sign is for sale.
Kierkegaard

The Hierophant

Now in the third hour
they lead the beast to the enthronement
garlanded with onion, the fool's rose

See him stand, between two bales of hay,
the epiphenomenal automaton
and bray his blasphemous Amen
while goliards chant the office of the day

The Postulant

If rumor is to be believed, the mark
upon his back is cruciform,
whereon a veiled figure rides

But whether the Virgin or the Fool
it is not given me to see

The Postulant

In matters antinomian the management
is most discreet... I only know

I heard a voice and saw a lifted hand
ignite a torch and put it to the veil

I think the voice cried Reason!
and the hand was red
A mere illusion, surely, nothing
to excite the press, and yet I swear

The air was sharp as urine and the noise

like noises of the newly dead.

The Hierophant

This too I see
the giant spiders loosed upon their prey
the python coiled around the pig
the clown they crucified upon the tree

Chorus of Postulants

Is it true as they whisper, hissing in your ear,
the spear was tipped with novocaine?
Science at an atheist's Mass!

They have put Three-Star Hennessy in the vinegar;
The head waiter is polite but perplexed

"Myrrh? What is myrrh? The gentleman
ordered ginger ale and cracked ice."

Chorus of Initiates

Who was it won the cap and bells
with loaded dice? And why did no one
but the ass behold the angel of the Lord?

Or hear a voice that cried?
"The cock shall not crow
till thou hast denied me thrice."

The Postulant

No one can say. But this I know:
In the excitement that ensued
the ass devoured both bundles of hay
confounding the philosophers.

Publication. First collected in *Rainbow at Midnight* (1955), pp. 59–61. Copy-text: *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), pp. 44–46.

Pons Asinorum

If two sides of a triangle are equal,
 then the angles opposite these sides
 are equal.
Euclid

The Hierophant

Yawn mandibles of tempered steel
Gnash and groan and gorge
The darkness shudders and shrieks
Silence! the iron bridge
Has swallowed up the night

Chorus of Postulants

What are we waiting for?
Already the spider's hairy belly
 is slippery with blood

The earthworm is a twist of jelly
on the dirty sidewalk

The moon a black smudge

Wipe off the knife
and lay your head aside

What have we to do with cormorants
or the entrails of mice?

The Postulant

If a great wind should come
Cold from the hills
 Swift, with a cavalcade of clouds
 Clean, with a promise of white trumpets
 Strong—

If a great wind should come
Cold...swift...clean...strong

Chorus of Postulants

We are not sanguine of defeat

The footprint is every where
but the sky is too low for flight

Tomorrow we shall divine new causes
seek new ways

And if the melody is lost
among the rivets and the high towers

We shall disembowel the earth
and impale the architect on a pointed star

Though the smoke of their uncounted chimneys
befogs our eyes

We shall outstare their frosted windows
and strangle their pride

The Hierophant

The rising bridge broadens and shudders
against the sky

There go the stars and now the planets
darken and go out

Winter steals in under our ribs
a pointed poniard of ice

The heart bursts in a flowering poinsettia
The tongue is a stone

Chorus of Postulants

Shall we dance till morning?
Look! the sky is red in the east
The watchman is heavy with sleep
One hungry sparrow hops about
over the snow

Chorus of Initiates

This is the way of their demise
First, the clean edge of hate
Then, redemption,
Then silent fall of a leaf

There is no time for devices.

The Hierophant

And now the bridge narrows to a fall
Subsiding to the kiss of parallels
Night is reclaimed in a skyrocket of stars
The moon puts on a feathery boa
Against the frost...

Chorus of Postulants

We know the far tomorrows will arrive
on scheduled time

Here we lie, unhallowed unremembered
and unwept

So lay us in a box of standard size
and bury us the regulated depth.

The Hierophant

I said: How shall I mourn
The death of those who never lived

Who never sought to scale
The perilous high places, nor

Descended to the deep
Nocturnal waters where the healing is?

All these unborn dead
For whom no candles burn and no bells toll.

How shall eternal rest be granted them
Who never knew the labors of the soul?

Publication. First collected in *Rainbow at Midnight* (1955), pp. 62–65. Copy-text: *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), pp. 39–43.

Metamorphosis

About the first watch of the
 night when I had slept my first
 sleep, I awaked with sudden fear
 and saw the moon shining bright
 as when she is at full... Then
 I thought with myself that this
 was the most secret time, when
 that goddess had most puissance
 and force...
 Marcus Apuleius

The Hierophant

Make solemn requiem for these

Chorus of Initiates

For these who revelled in the pain
Of loving utterly
They suffered joy
Too beautiful to be endured

For these who tasted starlight
And were slain

Who lay eyes up in moonlight
And were drowned

And these, by fame consumed
Their flesh made fragrant
In a fiery rain
All these were of the kinship of the mad
Whose hands are white upon these hands
Whose lips make mimic thunder in our veins

The Postulant

Here on the uttermost bourne of sense -
Where pain and pleasure meet, my brain
A mad Gethsemane, your breast my Golgotha,

And for my woundes fyve, my need
More strong than any love, this nail
Your pity, tearing at my pride,
Thé pennons of my conquest blurred
With agony of doubt, this choice.
That is no choice, and for my spear
The one irrevocable word

This is my martyrdom and here
They plant the bloody tree,
But rear it high, a portent
And a symbol to all men
Flung large across the April sky
Now garland me this cross
With eglantine, on my taut. nerves
Vibrant sound the chord
That shatters towers
And every station of this cross
A city fallen to my sword,
That I may say
This is my chosen death
On this my chosen day

Chorus of Postulants

Who is she that haunts our dreams
Mother, huntress, virgin, fury,
Lilith who destroys her children,
Eve the mother of all men?

Chorus of Initiates

She the root, he the flower
Cave and mountain, darkness, light,
Earth and sun, sea and sky,
His the day and hers the night.

Chorus of Postulants

We have forgotten her whose brightness
Was the rainbow round his throne,
Unmindful that the day to eyes turned north

Is but a lengthening shadow on a stone.
What vengeance will she take, what arrows
In the day what dreams by night?
What dread oblation shall we make,
What humble gift can we bestow?

Chorus of Initiates

Go quickly, lay this offering
At her feet.

Chorus of Postulants

Go quickly, Jest you tell us
What we dare not know.

(The curtain rises on the Ritual of Return)

Publication. From *Rainbow at Midnight* (1955), pp. 66–68.

The Ritual of Return

Penitents look up, elate,
Where she beams salvation;
Gratefully to blessed fate
Grow in re-creation!
Be our souls, as they have been,,
Dedicate to Thee!
Virgin Holy, Mother Queen,
Goddess, gracious be!
Goethe, Faust

Chorus of Initiates

By the small waters waiting
A waiting and a singing while waiting

Chorus of Postulants

What have we not endured
Forgiving and forgiving!
What have we not endured
The night, the morning
And the secret hour!

Chorus of Initiates

It was the month of the crooked bay tree
Season of golden fishes,
Why should we writhe upon the saw-teeth
Of desire?

Chorus of Postulants

These were the stirrings of neon
By the night the wind rose and
The silence in the room was running fire,
No moon rose in that night.
No star-shine needled-through the black
It was a time of waiting now
a; By the small waters waiting.

The Postulant

From floor to watery ceiling, mile on mile
Now upward mounting altitudes of sea
Rush by. I wake to hear a voice
Repeat a long familiar name, my name
Gone suddenly strange and new.
I wake, yet there he stands, gigantic
In the sea, his two misshapen feet
Mired deep in unremembered dreams.
He, the ancestor, Caliper the Index,
Marking the cranial ratio, orbital span,
Flat femur, cross section of the hair,
He the handicapper, biologic auditor
With delicate ageless hands
Forging chains of genes and chromosomes
For us—who is himself enchained,
His wrist manacled with number,
His heart the metronome
Of biologic law, predetermined beyond
Pity or desire, from first to last.

Chorus of Initiates

Then sudden the moon broke through
And from her silver wing
Rose one high long illimitable note
As on a silver string.

The Postulant

Through shimmering waters on an oblique line
Through wavering ribands of prismatic light
Her undulant hair a wave of marble black
Her feet white satin on the spun-glass foam
Her breasts poised goblets lifted high
Her lips proud as a bended bow, vibrant
As the strings of some great instrument
Down, down she came to where I lay
Aslant upon the drift of light.

Chorus of Postulants

In that place no cool of gently breathing peace

Nor red heart-lifting trumpetry of love,
Not these, and yet, the lethal blend
Half woman and half child, the bruising lips
Remembering the pain-impassioned face
Remembering the scented rain.

Chorus of Initiates

O not the upward mounting stair
Spun glass on silver stair
Nor foam on silver water mounting,
No, not these; but sudden
The turning of the head, a leaping flame
Remembering the pain-impassioned face
Remembering the scented rain.

The Postulant

And there, seared upon my breast
I found, when morning came,
In one unbroken figure stamped with fire,
The perfect image of her face!
(*The curtain rises on the Ritual of Community*)

Publication. From *Rainbow at Midnight* (1955), pp. 69–71.

The Ritual of Community

The Hierophant

Men have always
Known the answers long before they knew
How to ask the questions. The land, they said
Is God's and rightfully belongs to all.
Within the tribal brotherhood the act
Of labor was a sacramental act,
The exchange of goods a ritual performed
With reverence.

Chorus of Initiates

Labor is a sacred thing
Not something to be bought and sold,
The fruit of labor, whether of hand or mind,
Is hallowed fruit.

Chorus of Postulants

Weep not for us
We lived with death
Here thinking festered
In the sores of hate

Weep not for us
We gave too little pity
We who sinned without pleasure
And suffered without pain.

Chorus of Initiates

Labor is a sacred thing
When love has entered into it
As when the iron is hot the metal takes
The shape the hammer lays on it.

Chorus of Postulants

What shall assuage us, we
Who spilled the wine

And drank the lees, and dying
Pant for water without thirst?

The Hierophant

There can be no community of man
Where men are prey to men;
Cut back to the root, the source
Where means and ends were severed,
There you will find the things
Of primal worth: these three,
Sacrament, rebirth, community.

Chorus of Initiates

Labor is a sacred thing
The need to give and to receive,
The love of human fellowship
United in the ritual ring
 I weave your cloth
 I build your house
 I grow your food

We sow and reap, we mold and spin
Fashioning the finished from the crude.

The Postulant

Rededicate our lives, restore
The sense of wonder; men made brothers
Not in name alone, but deeper,
In the ritual ring. Fresh sacraments,
New meanings valid for our time,
A world reborn, a new hierogamy.

There shall be wings that soar above the storm
In that supernal calm where simple men
Imagined heaven once. There is no turning back
The course is set. We must go through,

The Hierophant

In that day which is to come the Word

Will mirror every act of man entire,
Will move and make as well as mean.

In that day the Word will once more
Make the corn to grow, the sun to shine
The rain to fall. In that day
The horses' bells and the cooking pots
Will be holy. We can only point the way.
Bury the past in you with reverence,
Lest it rise up to haunt you.

The poet is the world's remembrancer;
He does not proselytize, he proclaims.

Chorus of Initiates

And yet no word is lost
Of all that has been spoken, no deed wasted,
No life given in vain. These dead, and these
Now living who shall be the dead tomorrow—
Through the years the cost of human gain
Is all these unknown dead, these bitter,
These anonymous tears.

So let it be a rainbow of the night
The spectrum whole but in a minor key
The perfect circle never seen by day
And at its center, white, the sign
Of things to be.

Chorus of Initiates

That when the fire goes low
We be not smitten blind whose eyes
Have seen a splendor of imagined noon,
But patient as the night, we with some few
To keep it burning in some quiet place
Breathe on these embers, till the span
Of night is run, and a new sun ignite
To send it in another twisting spiral up
The slow circuitous ascent of man.

Chorus of Postulants

By what science then and on what paper graphed
Upon what curve of night descending shall we find
Not darkened lands but cities fabulous with light!

—The End—

Publication. From *Rainbow at Midnight* (1955), pp. 72–75.

LATER MAGAZINE VERSE, 1956–1963

Stage III | Uncollected poems of the Venice years

A Midnight Poem

This month the moon is bold
white as a cow's belly

meadows between mountains rest
under golden rust of light

pale coats of cloud pass
brushing clean over the eyeball

the moving ocean breathes deeply
a living lung beneath my feet

animals I have never seen tremble
in that love between hunger and hunting

in all this gentle green natural night
there is so much quiet martyred dying

Publication. First published in *East-West* (Autumn 1956), p. 12. Not located in either poetry book.

Improvisation on a Theme from “Bird” *Parker*

Hag-ridden by a berserk ape
with red-hot pin-point eyes
ten stone and breathing hard
serpentine and sleepless staring
he came down from that high place
pierced by the torture of a thousand cuts
fire in his belly and a snatch
of bloody hair in his fist
man, he said, there must be a mainline
somewhere to that real gone sound.

After that the rooster crowed
by moonlight saving time
up all night and roaring into red
and singing morning, man
who gives a damn for late sleepers?
pink pants and silver toenails
a chick with free-wheeling hips
and no cover charge, like sex
the odor clings, the smell, he said,
is just to keep the squares away.

I think he saw in four discrete dots
the corners of a square and tried to find
a central fifth round which to swing
the magic circle. Azazel, holy and outcast,
roamed the chasm of his heart, Grand Canyon deep
a billion years from rim to river.
Don't stand there looking foolish, man,
with your umbrella turned inside out,
come in out of the rain, he said,
the joint is jumpin.

Publication. First published in *Prairie Schooner*, vol. 37, no. 1 (Spring 1963), p. 87. Not located in either poetry book.

BRUNO IN VENICE WEST AND OTHER POEMS (1976)

Stage IV | The posthumous author-selected collection

How to Listen to a Poem

The word

Heard with the throat

*heard with the lips minutely
with the muscles of speech*

As the eardrum swings with the jazz drum

*the temporal bone the eighth nerve
quavering labyrinthine to the brain*

The image re-imaged

*scanned by the mind's eye
televised image by image*

As in the dance

*the viewer moves with the dancer
mimetic with the muscles of motion*

Response as in ritual

The poem as act

*poet to listener to poet
closing the circuit*

Out of one plus one

*not two but a third
the other*

As worlds are born

As in the act of love

Publication. From *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (Venice West Publishers, 1976), p. 1.

Bruno in Venice West

For Giordano Bruno, burned by the Inquisition in the year 1600

Velvet and warm sweat under the torches
the Procession entered the city, tall bronze men
on the bronze great horses and the boys
carrying banners, the fat prelates wheezing
under the icons, and the musicians

Up Main street, pausing to erect
the great crucifix in the Circle
before the U.S. Post Office, turning
into Windward avenue to St. Marks
Hotel, their flags and vestments, clowns

In motley, peddlers hawking live birds
and Turkish sweetmeats, drunks and tarts
lurching along under the colonnades
like any Saturday night, the P.A. horns
blasting rock 'n' roll, sob ballads

At the tavern doors, the winos
wandering in and out of the alleys,
blinking in the neon lights, and you
Giordano Bruno between the halberdiers
and the smoking torches wandering

In the wind off the Pacific, here
in this our Venice by the western sea
as when, hooded, under the marble
colonnades of old Venice once
you walked, cursing the Doges; burning

Sapphire and crimson under his golden umbrella
the merchant prince, over the pigeon droppings,
among the trash cans, Kinney's dream
of gondolas and gondoliers, his
picture postcard Venice, chicken wire

And Pittsburg Pipe and Iron, the columns
plaster, peeling now, the Grand Canal
fouled up with oil, the derricks taller

than windmills, we too, O merchant prince
live on to see the dregs and ravelings—

Tall steel and glass, high windows,
greed piled high on pride, the blessed
percentages; in vaticans of wealth
the popes and antipopes give audience
to the press, the old putridities,

And men go gibbering to themselves
aloud, hearing nothing, bereft
of all the simple certainties.

“When the first button’s wrong, all
are wrong,” you said. Bruno, Bruno,

When the iron key turned in the lock
and the door clanged shut and the iron hand
moved in the darkness, Bruno, was there
sword play in the streets, the torches
of the Night Watch lighting up

Cut purse and slit gullet, perfumes,
pomades, the stinking armour,
tapes, vomits, silk brocades?
Here the century that began in plush
and diamond stick-pin elegance

Explodes grotesquely beyond fire and ice
orbiting in vacuums of space
mathematics of disaster, madmen
trapped in spidery black geometries.
Do you remember Tintoretto’s

Mounting circles within circles?
Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus.
The bible shouter on the corner
speaks in tongues (I hear bullroarers
drums of Africa!) The neo-Platonist

Newly dead, dumbfounded by his immortality,
Newborn in worlds he never dreamed
where life steams out of methane gas—
Bruno, Bruno, pinned to the center of

the burning wheel, Adam Cadmon

In his mystic circle—"All is good
and tends toward good," you said.
I walk beside you, unseen by
the halberdiers, up Ocean Front,
wind whipped, slat-beaten, leaden-eyed

Past Dinty's hot dog stand, a lush
holds out a spastic hand, a junky
hustling for a fix; the moon
is coming up a size too large,
smog orange over the mountainous east.

Is it true the end is fire and ashes
and no phoenix cries? Bruno, in
the cold wet sea wind mountainous
words tell out the last dark secrets,
what is there to hide? know

Four hundred years have not sufficed
to cool those fires; the gentlemen
of Florence, Genoa her ships at anchor,
blood and incense rancid in the Roman sun,
the poisonous wines of Florence, serpent

Women walk with hooded eyes—what
was old Venice but a tourist trap,
city of traders, merchants, speculators,
middlemen, promoters, bankers—
jeweled slippers in the pigeon shit.

This, Bruno, is the Grand Canal,
swamp scum, litter; that's old Michael
toting a six-pack to his rented room,
the window shades are drawn on Teena
and her lesbian lover, tears will flow—

O Sappho of the golden eyes—this door
conceals a love of three; those eyes
in the window, broken mirrors in an empty
room; rags and ashes, old newspapers, doors
rot on their hinges, and the old go mad

Numbly contemplating death; hand
reaches out to hand, a child
dreams in a fever; old Cap in his
tiny shack reads by a ship's lantern—
upturned faces under water, eyes

Like a stunned carp's. This bridge
has no approach no destination,
hung between two hells. Was there
thunder in your heart the night
you pulled the crystal vault of heaven down!

And Tintoretto's angel hosts lost
endlessly in endless space
with Thor and Adonai—they burned
you for it Bruno. This Venice
of the West was born a bastard

Misshapen in the womb out of
some old world whore of Commerce
by P. T. Barnum bred—when business
and the arts are mated,
money takes the Muse to bed

Bonds debentures title deeds wrapped up
in flags and sermons, stamped
with the Great Seal of the State;
the Laws and Statutes are his alphabet his
capital all upper case, cock o' the walk

Three gilded balls his ensign out of
Calvin Luther by the dark satanic
mills now white supreme, on every
dotted line his X has sealed
your doom—and mine—

He'll kill you for it again, Bruno,
the Xian Gentleman, his
AM FM TV movie image multiplied
is stinking up a continent—
the commercial more and more becomes the show.

The wind has changed, the dry Santana

hot breath of the desert; it's the Hyperion
sewer you smell: your Venice was no rose bed
open sewers and tanners vats the fish wives
haggling, sweat and fear, the smell that money makes.

The windows darken, only the street lights
and the torches now, our Venice sleeps;
Your eyes burn, Bruno, scanning the heavens,
vacant now; no angels hymn
the heavenly court, we are rational men;

Those are landing lights, a Constellation
blinking to a touchdown, that was not thunder
but a sonic boom, our safety
lies in speed, they tell us, death on wings
the enemy is crafty, never sleeps

And godless, cobalt is his brain
and poison gas, his heart burns liquid
hydrogen, his breath is solar flame
his fingers are a million secret spies
we are his image—sanctified.

The latest satellite arcs across
the sky, a star whose manger is
a launching pad, the child a robot cradled
in steel arms, his halo liquid fire
his brain an electronic brain;

Our wise men bring no frankincense
and myrrh, no visions wrung from love or pain
but only slide rules plots top secret
plans; we do not stone our prophets, Bruno,
we give them target dates.

Agnosco, ergo sum; we've come
full cycle. Cohesion, color, sounds
waves and radiations: *res extensa*.
Giordano Bruno chemically
changed by thermal action, Jesus

On the cross: a rearrangement
of the particles. Our men

of science will define the event:
a thermodynamically stable
configuration known as death.

Why has the music stopped? Look back,
the Procession fades away, a slow
dissolve; you stand alone; your
lidless eyes are indrawn lost
in contemplation like a foetal sleep

Where are the drums and trumpets?
I had thought to hear the papal legate
tead out your doom in bastard latin
hear a shout go up to heaven
with your flames. I should have known;

A dead God needs no crucified
to sanctify his name; no faith,
ergo, no auto da fe;
we have a choice of trivial martyrdoms:
if we must die for truth we die self-slain.

Your image fades and there is nothing now
only the blind window panes
of broken houses telephone poles
that lean against the moon cracked
pavements sinking into foul canals

I turn, retrace my steps to Windward
and the Ocean Front; the pigeons
of St. Marks Hotel are roosting in
the plaster niches, one lonely jukebox
whimpers from an open tavern door

“I love you baby, why do you treat me
so mean?” A single wino staggers
down the empty street, [cross
the beach and look out to sea. “Sophocles
long ago heard it on the Aegean”—here too

Many a truth-tormented Oedipus
has reached land’s end, walked in
for reasons Sophocles never dreamed

and made his last incestuous marriage with
the sea, as Bruno made his with the flame.

Homeward bound I stop for coffee at
the Greek's, scan the morning papers—
This night's. business may have meaning
for our time—a poem or a play? I have
work to do, I think (to paraphrase)

I shall not drown myself today.

Publication. From *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), pp. 2–10. Earlier published in *Coastlines* 21–22 (1964) and later in *Bastard Angel*.

The Impossibilists

Is it too much to ask—?

the unbroken animal experience
his godlike grace, rich
in his original odors, ecstasy
viewed as ultimate efficiency.

Consider the delicate slow

unfolding of a leaf
the growing edge
the involutions of a sea shell
trees, how they lean toward light.

Is it too much to ask—?

basic sensory breakthroughs
efflorescences
a tropism of needs
to natural ends.

Consider simple water

how it moves, airborne
or underground. I say
be fluid but unyielding,
in the end we shall not be denied.

Publication. From *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), p. 11.

Hill of the Whistling Tree

This land is struck with bigness for
A man's last outgoing; here the finback
Promontory dives from litmus mountains
Paper thin and flatter than my hand
In dust-gold sundown to the sea;
Fanged wave on broken rock, and high
On the windy hill a gnomy dwarf pine
Spastic in the chopping wind
Whistles wryly to himself. And I
Am thrall and seabound, fettered to a shape
And shadow of myself when young
To leave the sunloved lands behind,
The moonblessed pools, and follow where he led
To finback mountains and a sea-tooth wind.

Behind me lay the loved doomed houses
Comfortably kind, wherein my foot
Unbidden visited so many times,
My hand came uninvited to the board,
Yet rootless I had found no root;
Hunted down and cornered between night
And day, as fabled elephants go down
To some far undiscovered tryst
And bridal bed with death, and came
To land's end, horizons misted, lost
In dim tomorrows bright in the mind's eye

Moved by an excess of joy to sadness
And the sense of death, to this gnomy dwarf
And the hill of the whistling tree.

Moonset followed hard on sunset
And the night was kind, here it is dawn
That brings cold fear, and here he came
Who comes but once, and beckoning,
With hollow eye and grin. I would not
Take my death of him, for I had business
Far beyond his reckoning.
And ever since against the world's wind

Hunched, on stolen time, I stalk
The vision promised at the start,
The loved doomed houses cleansed, man humanized,
And fear to rest lest by mischance
I meet too soon the summons in his eyes
Who takes no heed of time or circumstance.

Publication. From *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), pp. 12–13.

Death of a Poet

For Dylan Thomas

Let's strike a mean and say his life
Was half as holy as a priest's. He told
His beads with rosaries of loves
And walked unfrocked among the saints
Dispensing blasphemous indulgences,
Elfin and with silver shod
A tousled head all fluttered with
The pollen of wild flowers, his spoor
The scent of unicorn, an antic God.

A wracking time to be alive in
Bruising as a shark's fin, catamount
And sly as any sidewinder to snake him
Unawares, rotten under any moon
And stinking in the sun for lack of love,
And yet he moved among them white
And winged shouting life against all death,
Unlearned in the art of dying,
Life-enthralled until his dying breath.

So young, so soon. Let's think of him
As one born swaddled in a winding sheet
His life a brief rehearsal for eternity,
As one who broke the barriers of sense
And suffered all thereafter that one must
Who goes with onagers and deathless birds

Up to that high stone seat where one dies,
Goes mad, or wakes from dreaming to come down
Word-wild, song-struck and with a poet's eyes,

Publication. From *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), pp. 14–15; previously published in *East-West* (Autumn 1956).

Mr. Metetinus in Quest of the Absolute

A sharpened pencil will suffice
 To penetrate the infinite,
 One need but contrive, he said,
 To put that fine a point on it.

As a child he collected paper match folders.
Resolved to build up to the last and final
 number, "What," he asked,
"Is the last, the very last and final number,
 mother?"
"Son, there is no last and final number,"
 mother said.
And young Metetinus wept.

Climbing mountains was a sport he loved.
Rainier, McKinley, Aconcagua—he stood
 one day upon the highest peak of Everest;
Alone, unwitnessed, unrecorded, peered
 into the heavens and
Found only snow. "Tis clear," he said, "the eye
 is insufficient to explore the sky."

Descending into Mendip mine he took a reading,
 calculated distance to dead center of
The globe, in meters, versts and furlongs,
 also rods and inches to
The final fraction. "Who can say," he reasoned,
 "where the answer lies?"

A line of exploration, he concluded
 most unlikely and perhaps unwise.

By a merchant in Tientsin he was shown a Chinese box
 fitted box within box to the tenth power
And how many powers beyond powers he never knew,
 for the crafty merchant held out the final box
And would part with it only at a price he could not pay,
 having left his wallet at the Metropole.
Returning with the stipulated sum, he lost his way
 and never found the shop again,

Having no map of the town and not knowing
the language of the people.

Toward the last he spoke little and slept much,
collecting toy elephants, smaller and smaller
And smaller, and wept to think that he would never
see the last minutest one of them,
Owing, he said, to his failing eyesight. And thus
he died,
Impaled, groping for a paper-knife without a blade,
which had no handle.

The mourners came, placing candles at his head
and feet. That night the house burned down,
Consuming Mr. Metetinus in toto; much to the dismay
of the mourners, the regret of the mortuary
accountant,
The cemetery committee, and the displeasure of
the Coroner's office of Providence, Rhode Island
Which does not believe in the total extinction of matter.

Publication. From *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), pp. 16–17; previously published in *The California Quarterly*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1954).

Last Act for a Play by Jean Paul Sartre

The Spielman:

Let no one be surprised. The last act
Always plays before an empty house
At three o'clock, that hour on which
No sun has ever shone. Who spoke?
Ah, it is you.

Sartre:

Yes, it is I.
I felt some dirty work was afoot
And hid in the wings to scotch it.
The play is ended. All that needed
To be said is said. You have
No role in this play. Indeed,
In reason and by all the rules,
You have no reality at all.

The Spielman:

Monsieur, you do me an injustice.
I have played a role in every play
Since the first goat plays.
As for my reality, take care
That you mind your own, lest by mischance
You lose it in a tricky syllogism.

Sartre:

I choose, therefore I am. I act,
Therefore I exist. Beyond the choice,
Beyond the act, there is nothing.

Echo:

Nothing... nothing....

Sartre:

Who spoke?

The Devil:

It is I.
Or, as the case may be, you.

Sartre:

The Devil always was a strict
Grammarian. In my play
It is your role to mimic virtue
And confuse the moral choice.
Beyond that you have no reality.

The Spielman:
Enough. Have done with your reality
And let the play proceed. This audience
Has no concern with reason or unreason.

Sartre:
This audience? An empty house—

The Spielman:
Precisely. Empty to all seeming,
Here are gathered all the ghosts
That men have conjured up and clothed
With brief and magical similitude
To man. Hamlet in his habit of
A prince, Don Quixote de la Mancha,
Orestes, worn thinner than a ghost
From all his villainous disinterments,
Job, still ripe with boils, despite
The pious glosses of redactors,
Caliban, with questions Shakespeare
Never thought to ask, and every wraith
That ever squirmed in buskin. Here
They come to watch the true and proper
Ending of the play.

Sartre:
Pure absurdity.
The play is what I choose to make it.
On stage or off, the free act is
The one reality. Even when
I let the dice decide.
And if I cheat a little, well,
That too is a choice.
I will admit
You have me at a disadvantage here.
Since it is you who makes the rules

The game is yours. I wash my hands of it.

The Spielman:

You cannot wash your hands of it;
That is your Angst.

The Devil:

Since that first choice in Paradise
There has been no other choice.

Sartre:

That choice was quite enough.
Not that I value reason overmuch,
But that first act of disobedience
Set me free to choose. Besides,
Thad the fruit of life already—
Small thanks for it, a bitter fruit
And rotten from the root.

The Devil:

A poisonous paradox.
You had the gift of choice before
You had the wit to choose; a gift,
I grant you, that you have no reason
To be grateful for. The dice were loaded.
One brought sickness, death, the other
Anguish. Such are the gifts of God.

Sartre:

I have no place in my hypothesis
For either gifts or grace. Still less

For God. And as for you, you were
His first priest and you'll be His last.
I made you and I made Him, now
I choose to slay you both. The Gods are dead.

The Spielman:

So let it be. Now that the last word
Has been said the play continues.
Here I set the stage: a garden,
In the midst thereof the Tree of Knowledge
And the Tree of Life. The scene enacts itself

Again, with certain changes in the cast
Due to circumstances beyond our control.

(Hilda enters, in the habit of a nun)

Hilda:

I saw God today.
I saw him walking in the garden here
As once at evening in the cool
Of paradise. Beneath his feet
The undenyng grass bowed gently
To His tread. He bade me speak
And I was not afraid.

Of all the trees
In Eden, why, I asked, was only one
Forbidden, the Tree of Knowledge, not
The Tree of Life? He answered—

Sartre:

Stop the play! If God must speak,

Let Him speak in His own voice,
In His own person.

The Spielman:

As monsieur well knows, it is an old
Convention of the stage, sanctioned
By long usage, to present
The Godhead as a Light, a Voice,
Never as a man.

Sartre:

A stupid custom.
One that has encouraged misquotation,
Cant, and every sort of quackery
Since the first shaman. Moreover
It is wretched dramaturgy.

The Devil:

As an old hand in the theatre, one who
Has never failed to answer to a call
Or missed a cue, I wish to add my own
Professional opinion in support

Of the playwright in this case.

The Spielman:

It is not in the province of my tole
To summon God against His will.

Sartre:

Do you presume to know His will?

The Devil:

 The God
Of a notoriously talkative race,
He, the most talkative of all the Gods,
Would not, I venture to assert,
Ignore an invitation—

(God enters)

God:

Who calls My Name?

The Devil:

 Your servant.

The Spielman:

 If it be Thy will?

Sartre:

Like any actor at the words, On stage!
I knew He'd do it, if only to display
His omnipresence. Well, shall we proceed?

The Spielman:

We'll pick up with the line, 'Of all
The trees—'

Hilda:

 Of all the trees
In Eden, why was only one forbidden,
The Tree of Knowledge, not the Tree of Life?

God:

Tam That I am, the Living God,
Creator of the world and all that live,
The Tree of Knowledge was not mine to give.

Sartre:

You might have known He'd speak
In rhymed pentameters. For one
Whose immortality is doctrinal,
He shows the grey infirmities
Of all too human aging.

The Devil:

He broods too much.
Nothing ages the immortal Gods
Like brooding. I attribute my
Perpetual youthfulness—

The Spielman:

A sly digression,
Just to fatten up your part.
This is a play of Good and Evil,
Means and Ends. Let there be no
Interpolations, please.

God:

No matter.
All my attributes are glosses and
Interpolations on a garbled text.
Omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent—
Words of meretricious praise addressed
To one who in their prayers and images

God: (continued)

Is man, his faults and virtues magnified.
Man gets the God that he deserves,

The Spielman:

Now for our second scene.
Reset the stage: in black and red,
The grass is parched with fire
As on a battlefield. Man humbled
Turns to God.

(Enter Goetz, in sackcloth)

Goetz:

Trapped between the lust for evil and
The anguished longing to do good,

Damned in the deepest hole of hell,
The paralyzed will, dead to devil and
To God alike, I raise these bloody hands
Not to curse or supplicate
But to protest until my dying breath.
Who was it damned my soul to choose?
Who was it planted in the midst of Eden
The Tree of Choice, the Tree of Death?

God:

I am the God of life and He is He
Whose visage none may look upon and live,
Whose word is fruit of the Forbidden Tree,
My kingdom is the world of man, His kingdom
Lies beyond... beyond....

Sartre:

A likely story. Drunk or sober,
Soldier or saint, my Goetz is not the one
To be put off by such a dodge.
Rewrite his lines to say: If life
Was all that You could offer man, then why
Did You forbid the fruit of knowledge?
Is animal innocence so sweet to bear?
It suffers pain, endures diseases,
Lives a life of fear, and dies
The victim of a thousand tortures.
The fruit of the Forbidden Tree
Brought anguish, it is true, but also
Freedom, choice, the power to act.

The Devil:

Thanks to me. Temptation was the goad
To freedom, choice, the first free act.
Have I not always been the friend of freedom?

Sartre:

I owe no thanks to either God or Devil.
Nor will I say the woman tempted me;
That is a coward's tale. Alone
I made my choice. A leap in the dark,
I'll grant you—

The Devil:

From the frying pan
Into the fire. From animal innocence
To guilty knowledge and the sense of sin.

The Spielman:

Enough. If I have let you both
Run on like this it is because
I too have a taste for paradox
And the neat turn of a phrase.
Back to our play. The scene
That follows is a charnel spot,
It might be Golgotha before
The crucifixion or
The valley of dry bones.

(Enter Heinrich the priest)

Heinrich:

I told him from the first he'd fail.
That no good done on earth by man
Is done save by the will of God.
Or evil either—though this I own
Is something that has tried my faith,
Often to the breaking point. And yet
It must be so, since nothing happens
That is not His will. And if it taxed
My understanding, well, what is
Man's understanding?—tainted from
The source by fruit of the Forbidden Tree.
Sound doctrine, founded in Thy word,
My Lord, and sanctioned by Your Holy Church,
My mother. I, her errant son, most sinful
Of all sinful men, implore Thee, Father,
If it be Thy will, to explicate
This point of doctrine.

God:

My son,
Theology has never been my forte.
Such words of mine as filtered somehow
Through the prophets should be proof

Of that. But this much I can tell you,
It was for love of man that I forbade
The Tree of Reason. The sentient being,
As I made him, knew no good or evil.
Reason made him only half a god,
And left him anguished, incomplete.
My heart is torn with pity, yet
No word of mine can give him more
Than brief assuagement. Only He
Whose Law resolves the Opposites
Can heal and make him whole again.

Heinrich:
What heresy is this!

Sartre:
A man-conditioned God
Just as I suspected. Man-made,
Man-limited. A puppet on a string.
His prophets are ventriloquists.

Heinrich:
A base deception has been practiced here.
A Manichean trick. I see it now,
The beard is false, the light around His head

Heinrich: (continued)
The work of Watt and Faraday. Science
At an atheist's Mass.

The Devil:
Blasphemy!
He who presumes to question God's
Reality impugns my own.
I'll take the Church's word for it
Before a renegade priest's. The Church
At least, has never questioned my
Existence.

Sartre:
The natural alignments
Reappear in heated controversy.
As for me, the paradox is plain:

Man makes his Gods, which is to say,
He is the God he makes himself.
Man is what he wills himself to be,
And pays with anguish for his dreadful
Freedom.

Goetz:

Why the anguish then?
From now on I am free from anguish, too.
If good is done for good's sake only,
Evil's done for evil's sake alone.
There, I've resolved your opposites.
If God exists, man is nothingness,
If man exists—

The Devil:

Why do you pause?

Goetz:

What if God, turned atheist, denies
The existence of man?

The Devil:

Precisely.
Man needs God and God needs man
To define and prove each to the other
His reality.

Sartre:

The serpent that devours himself.
And what is left? The Nothingness,
The God beyond the verb *to be*.

Goetz:

A God beyond a God who planted in
The soul of man the lust to question and
Withheld the answers, just beyond his reach—
How his laughter must have shook the skies!

God:

He of whom you speak, His kingdom lies
Beyond all weeping and all laughter;
The absolutes, beyond all either/ors.

My law is love, the law of life.
If man had been content with life alone
He'd be with me today in Paradise.

Heinrich:
Away with all conditioned gods.
I know no other God but One,
The Free Existent. My anguish is
Resolved by faith in Him, His grace,
And by the atonement on the Cross
Of Jesus Christ His only begotten Son.

Hilda:
I cannot say I understand his words
But in the deep silence of his eyes
I read a meaning beyond speech.
There man and God, finite and infinite
Are One. In the soul's black night
A hand that seeks my hand. I see
My Lord smiles.

God:
 Heaven is as near
As earth to such as these.

Sartre:
Heaven is as full of women
As a church.

The Devil:
 Then as now, the first
To sin and first to seek salvation.
They'll pray me into heaven yet.

Sartre:
Heaven forbid! and if heaven won't
The Church will. They need you as
They need the sense of guilt.

The Devil:
 Ah, guilt.
The thing that makes my labors light.
Man is his own best executioner.

Nothing will save him; neither faith,
Nor grace, nor act of will.
Like any beast he eats, and he is eaten.
Only the strong survive—to die.
Violence is the bane of life, and love
Its anodyne. God's medicine.
I would not forbid it. It was I
Who put the myrrh and wine into
The soldier's hand at Golgotha.

God:

No son of mine was ever more maligned.
Fire-bringer, wit, artificer, endowed
With every gift but one, compassion.
His sin was neither pride nor jealousy
But false compassion. Men shall be like gods,
He told his heart, and tempted man to eat
The Fruit of the Forbidden Tree. Unripe fruit.
Or was it that man was unready to
Receive it? Now, divided between god
And beast he's neither wholly slave

God: (continued)

Nor wholly free.... Children, I must take
My leave of you, these human garments chafe;
This human heart holds more than I can bear.
Forgive my immortality.

The Spielman:

Two billions and a half of heartbeats
Make a life. Man is alkali and acid both,
A protein precariously hung
Between two fires, the Heavise layer and
The central core. Geared to the breathing
Rhythms of the earth, man hunts a sea-dream
In the womb. In savage childhood
Seals the brother-bond with blood.

Prolepsis, analepsis. See this hand?
Here is in one unbroken protoplasmic
Chain, the claw of the first tarsier.
This is the hand that held the sword

Of Brennus. E cellula omnis cellula.
Here is the blood of Jesus and
The kiss that Judas gave.

The antelope follows the grass.
The lion follows the antelope.
Man is an angel with teeth and nails.

All flesh is one. Pray forgiveness of
The lordly steer; the pheasant
Flushed from cover to the dinner plate.

The Spielman: (continued)
And so our play ends unresolved. Waits on
New Gods yet to be. Or if in being, only
Half perceived; in realms where neither good
Nor evil, time nor timelessness
Have relevance, there to be resolved.
Let no man be cast down. It is
Man's destiny to outlive all his Gods.
No matter, he has all eternity.

The management has asked me to announce
The play that follows. Brought at great expense,
New sets, new costumes. Come and bring
 your friends.
The subject: Good and Evil, Means and Ends.

Publication. From *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), pp. 18–35. Awarded the *Arizona Quarterly* poetry prize for 1954 and first published there.

All Points Bulletin

Be on the lookout for J. Poindexter Budge
Born with a silver knife in his throat,
Fugitive from the land of lost cuff links
Ormolu teeth and one diamond eye.

Hitches up 300 horses to drive
To the corner liquor store.
Writes his name large in the loops
With neon J's and jet vapor flourishes.

Big as a swollen bedbug, loud as a sonic boom,
Carries a golden gat with one silver bullet.
Prepare to meet your broker, he says,
You never know from one minute to the next.

Brooklyn by three runs, Georgia Tech by a touchdown
Fleet Abbey in the seventh at Hialeah.
If you want to make something of it
Step outside and we'll settle this like gentlemen.

Surface tension keeps the Self snug
In a cul-de-sac of Miltown and Cutty Sark.
Lock all doors till the rat in the maze
Has one door left to the cheese—and the trap.

Bait it with his own words. That is the weakness
Of liars, they believe their own lies.
God is satisfied with one capital letter,
TIME and LIFE demand four.

Publication. From *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), p. 36.

Materia Poetica

I.

Psychoanalysis
Pursued by a tiger in his sleep
he turned himself into a horse turd
and woke up to find
he'd been eaten by sparrows.

2.

Success
Advice to a poet who would win prizes:
Step carefully around this ruin
and that rickety tower
lest you topple their gods.

3.

Quiz Program
For a billion dollars in cash
and a hatful of Purple Hearts
What is the moral equivalent
of a bayonet in the belly?

4.

Prescription
Said the old doctor to the young doctor:
There are three roads to success.
Per os, per rectum and per vagina.
Choose your orifice.

5.

Funeral of a Poet
Said the chief mourner to the gravedigger:
We don't suspect any foul play.
If he was murdered,
he was murdered by friends.

6.

Artist's Choice

Giotto drew a perfect circle,
freehand, with a brush.
When he finished he had two choices,
to sell it for a toilet seat,
or save it for a halo.

7.

Iconoclast

When the idol-maker lost faith in his gods
he put time-bombs in their bellies.
With the legacies from the pious dead
the priests built a new temple.

8.

Critic

When they came to take him away
he was measuring with a piece of string
the distance between the picture on the wall
and the picture in the mirror.

9.

Prophecy

When the knife was at his throat
the ram spoke to Abraham and Isaac:
Save a horn for Moses. He will need it
to proclaim liberty throughout the land
on the day of judgment.

10.

Trial Balance

Fra Luca Pacioli one day
met a young virgin in tears.
Balancing compassion against penance
he invented double entry bookkeeping.

11.

Divine Justice
When an ugly woman
is tried for adultery
God himself
grants a change of venue

12.

Theory of Value
Said the banker to the cannibal:
You will come to no good end;
The wise man does not devour his capital,
he makes it work for him.

13.

Theft
I do not wish to press the charges,
the girl said to the magistrate.
In Paradise the pear tree
still weeps for Augustine.

14.

Death of Li Po
Had I been drunk when it fell into the river
the bottle would have been empty
and I would not have had to dive for it,
starting that loony legend.

15.

Don Juan on Lovemaking
One piece of advice: Neither poetry nor song
can sustain indefinitely
a romance without money
or a love nest without toilet paper.

16.

Deodorant
Remember Antaeus.
One day we shall be conquered
by men who are not ashamed to weep
and women who are not afraid to sweat.

17.

Apocalypse
The world is coming to an end.
Newsprint is getting smaller every day
distances are fading
and sex isn't what it used to be.

Publication. From *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), pp. 47–51. Portions appeared in *The Paris Review*, no. 19 (Summer 1958).

Deposition of a Self-Confessed Failure

If we acquiesce in all things
 Do not be deceived
 It is because we despise you

I have made many mistakes in my life.

When the stranger in the tight green jacket
stood over my bed with a knife
I closed my eyes tightly
This must have offended him
for when I opened my eyes again
he had vanished
Thus did I forfeit many princely preferments.

Who would have guessed that the worm
I dug out of my belly on the point
of a breadknife
Was a token from the Emperor himself
making me an honorary Colonel
in his majesty's own Hussars
And a member of the Privy Council.

I was always against hangnails and paper napkins
thereby committing treason against the state
And numerous misdemeanors as set forth
in Latin footnotes in the indictment.

Now that I remember, it was not the nebula
of Andromeda that fell on my foot
But a glass paperweight I had carelessly
mislaid on the edge of my writing table.

The clown with the violet nose blew me a kiss
with dainty fingernails
My masculinity was insulted; but now I am moved
to repent, considering that if my contempt
had not slain him on the spot
He might have removed a string of sausages
from his pocket, and I should not now
be dying from hunger.

If I had not swallowed my gold watch
in a moment of absentmindedness
I might have gone on living forever,
much to the astonishment of my friends.

There was a time when I might have bought
the Pacific Ocean for a dollar
And boiled it down for salt, thus
becoming immensely rich
But that was on the day of the great eclipse
and I fell off the Matterhorn
breaking my glasses.

Publication. From *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), pp. 52–53.

I Was a Poet for the F.B.I.

Murder, suicide, mayhem. Wow! The stories I could tell. See my agent. Even before God was insulted at Yale I was at the U of I picking up spondees and trochees in the Co-op and counting the condoms in the boneyard on Monday morning.

I was Ed Hoover's man at YMCA College collecting free verse in the ladies' room and once, disguised as Oscar Wilde, in the men's toilet. Cash McCall is my co-pilot.

At the Green Mask, in the very shadow of the Tribune Tower—may I speak freely? the beard of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was burned in ritual orgy, hair by hair.

In Chicago I joined the Escalator Movement under the name of Gertrude Stein and nobody suspected anything. From a poet named Rexroth I learned about six different kinds of sex, all of them subversive.

In dives on Rush Street we lay on divans in mixed company and talked about modern art, waited on by naked African pygmies. We sat on the floor and read Edna St. Vincent Millay, aloud. I could name names and places.

On orders from Ezra Pound I infiltrated the Saturday Evening Post and planted excerpts from Edgar A. Guest. One night I broke into the Saturday Review and lopped off Literature from the masthead. Nobody noticed it.

Four times I escaped from behind curtains—iron bamboo, dimity and shower, and once I barely made it by way of a bedroom fire escape clad only in pajama tops. Danger is my business.

I found an atheist in a foxhole and reported him to General MacArthur. Twice I was shot down in missions over Union Square, Waldorf Cafeteria, Camp Nitgedieget and the League of American Penwomen. Arthur Godfrey is my co-pilot.

I joined the Brownian Movement before it split with the Fourth Dimensheviks. Big Jim Oppenheimer was its Party boss. I would tell you about my affair with Tillie Zilch but that's still classified.

I was there when they dubbed the Communist Manifesto into the movie of Charley's Aunt, and nipped the conspiracy to smuggle quotations from Karl Marx into the popcorn bags. Now they're plotting to foul up the rhymes in the singing commercials.

Ten grand buys my tale of horror at the Cotton Club when Louis Armstrong sang Eli Eli on secret orders from the Elders of Zion, and the borshtcapades in the Holland Tunnel with Mickey Katz on Walpurgisnacht. Commander Whitehead is my co-pilot.

Fer an extra grand I'll tell all I know about free verse, free love, free lunch, free wheeling and free pop at barbecues of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a Dadaist front controlled by Tristan Tzara and Ogden Nash.

Now, back in the free world, with my unexpurgated copy of Anne Morrow Lindbergh's *The Unicorn* and the complete files of the Soviet Ministry of Culture I am Poet in Residence at Time, Life and Fortune. Zsa Zsa Gabor is my co-pilot.

Publication. From *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), pp. 54–56. First published in *Liberation* 2 (November 1957) and subsequently reprinted in several West Coast periodicals.

The Day They Crowned a Warrior Priest and King

We might have known it from the start
That when they lamed a king to make a
Prophecy come true the clocks of all
The world would stop stone dead and never
Start again till someone perished on
A bloody cross. The corn lay withered in
The field that day, the crocus bled,
The well went dry. A woman lone beside
A lonely gate stared hollow-eyed while
Horsemen in a cloud of dust swept by
And passing strangers hid their eyes
Behind their cloaks. An angry sun
Went down into the sea to die.

We might have seen it in his changed ways
Moving as he moved that day from
Tent to temple, taller by a head
And strange, his men about him proud
Bronze-browed and cedar-straight with
Sea-bruised hands, while sullen, still,
Out of their presence moved the prophet to
His desert cave. And cities piled their
Stone on stone to make him strong.
Drank deep and dreamed of pillaged lands

Where drunken gods went staggering down
The streets. And thus it came to pass
That he who went with blood upon his hands
That day up to the high white place
Came down a sainted Satan horned and hoofed
With heel of iron and murder in his face.

Publication. From *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), pp. 62–63.

What Ever Became of Sally Ann?

I remember sapphire and coral.
In the farthest west the moon hangs
opal and fire, the vast vaginal
universe spins in the eye
the earthdream of her kind

Wherein she lies, pupating Venus,
watching the great thyrse of the world
revolve above the advertising signs
where eunuch seraphim in choirs
intone the glib commercials of the gods

And shimmering amid vine leaves
moves loveborne on slow feet
with lightning of the farthest star
the lion and the louse alike
with magic thunder mate

Above Chicago roofs a ritual dawn
horsehoofs on the cobbles, sawdust,
beer slops, factory whistles, drunks
caroling home under the fading gaslamps
Christmas holy morning—aye,

The century is young,
Archbishop Ussher's God emasculate
upon his throne, gilt by gold gelded,
peers over his rimless glasses keeping book
on galaxies and maidenheads.

I remember atolls of Manhattan
ribbed steel sprung coiled
towering stone on stone, sprung tight
wired to the live nerve quivering
hung between night and night

How many in her tumbled pillows
burned golden in that rainbow bed
mile deep, lost, hair sweat perfume
heart bled to the last white drop

and shiver of her trembling thighs

A greenling goddess in black mesh
nuzzled in a smell of apes
bruised oranges fermenting in the sun
the long afternoons of first love
gone rancid sweet—

“How small a part of time they share.”
I saw the grin go pale upon her lips.
“New York? New York is just
an old man’s paradise,” she said,
and passed out blotto on the bathroom
floor.

I remember flags, parades,
last words, a lifted hand.
She wept a little, made a vow,
broke it before morning—
Shepherd, we were young!

Trapped in the coiling years
Paris bound by way of Baltimore
Provincetown, New York, the spider
spins, the mirror cracks,
crow’s foot and the bloodshot eye.

The old banalities.
“I’m calling my ambassadors home
for consultation. Give my compliments
to all popes, premiers, presidents...”

And back once more
to Tooker Alley, Rush Street,
over the Water Tower a sullen rain fell.
Sunday afternoon they found her.
Chalk up one fake suicide

For love. Her name misspelled
in the morning papers. And I
am given to the eagle’s claw
a flight of mountains, horses
tearing in a shroud of fog

By Smolny out of Paris
barricades. "I threw myself
into the Movement. Hell,
what else was there to do?" she said.
O rebel girl, O rebel girl.

At thirty, stiff with fear
bride of a sexless lover,
bar stool Baptist bred
on chicken patties, peas
in paper cups—took her third in a row

And left him for a uniform,
rolled out every barrel
between San Diego and the border.
"All the wild wives in the U.S.A.
laid end to end—" she laughed,

While kamikazes screamed
out of Pacific skies to solve
a problem summed up in her life
amid the oil slicks and debris—
mission accomplished.

"I never did know when
to end the beguine," she said.
A hippy broad in milkless middle years
left stranded on a perpetual
Left Bank. "Anyone

Who wants the carcass can have it,"
softly now, with irony,
"the worms won't miss a thing."
Bruised, beaten, blue in the veins,
one kidney gone

A bargain counter life
with basement marked-down dreams.
"In Veterans Hospital they gave me the
keys
to the mental ward. I'm not afraid
of them," she said. "You know,

All they want is a little love.
Like this Chinese boy, he cries
all the time; he paints beautiful,
he paints and he cries, and I cry
with him. It helps.”

I remember this, one word now
deep as a bell, leaf-new, heart-round,
shaped to the ear’s shell, driven
in the wind’s palm, shockwaved
to the world’s report

Let it be counted to her voyaged hours
logged in every wind, pressed beyond
her powers, that in the last storm
and rattle choked down the engine
paid her anchor out and

Nailed to the mast went down
and never found that last foot of line
no ultimate rock to chain her anchor to,
one ten-thousandth part of love enough
to comfort or to save.

O nesting sun,
receive the flowering hand.
Bless the serpent
in the hollow eye.

Publication. From *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), pp. 64–69.

Lacklove in Limbo

For Conrad Aiken, remembering Senlin

Six o'clock. Lacklove stirs the coffee in his cup,
scans the morning paper, coughs: outside the car pool
waits: wipes his mouth and eyes the kitchen clock:
there have been mornings when the ten steps to the door
was more than all the bloody miles to Bataan:
sun-blind, staggers out and sinks into the naugahide:
the city spins: up Turnkey Pike, Iron Bar Junction,
Stonegut Highway, down the turn-off at the Richfield
sign
and bumper to bumper to the gate of U.S. Motors Ink.

I have not moved my bowel this morning, Lacklove says,
nor brushed my gums, nor groomed my hair, I'm unsafe,
not nice to be near, I should have braced my skin and
banished telltale grey: the aspects are not good today
for Libras, Mars is in the house of Kong and Tarzan
in the sign of Dracula: I must beware of left hand turns,
give no one in authority offense, consolidate
in one small easy payment all my installment debts,
Lacklove says, and clocks in on the stroke of seven.

I have seen such eyes in hooked fish, Lacklove thinks,
staring in the washbowl mirror at the coffee break:
the TV needs repairs, the garden hose wants mending,

Marge looks older than she should: lotions, creams,
shampoos,
nothing helps: had Alice in a dream last night,
woke to find Marge sleeping, unsuspecting: then the
dream
returned—trapped with Alice, in her accusing eyes:
Lacklove checks the latest baseball score, sips his java,
slips back into his slot on the assembly line.

The belt line moves, the fingers do their work:
where have they vanished all the years the years the
years?
the pain of thinking and the pain of trying not

to think: somewhere somehow something went astray:
a roadblock,
a detour: you follow where the arrow points, this one
to a dead-end street: As time goes by—that was
our theme song then: the payment on the house can
wait,
the car comes first: Alice moved like music in a dream:
the whistle blows: I must remember to bring Marge her
diet pills,

Lacklove says: and back to Turnkey Pike by way of
Stonegut Highway, Iron Bar Junction: talk of lay-offs
rumored: backache pains, sleeping pills: someone
turns the radio on: the Dodgers took it in the ninth:
crisis in Korea: save Berlin: beware of bad breath,
perspiration, razor scratch: prepare for fallout,
old age, pay your income tax: drive in to Honest John's
and get the car deal of the year: Lacklove lights
a cigarette, withdraws behind the smoke with in-turned
eyes.

As time goes by—the tune returns, a cracked soprano
heard through a closed door down some dingy hall
too late at night: too late: how many doors have closed,
how many might have beens in what far places,
nights of palm and sea, white island beaches, cities
distantly aglow, each light a promise pounding
in the loin, girls young and wet with the first white wine
of love, impatient for his foot upon the stair, Lacklove
dreams,
and wipes a moist hand across his mouth and eyes.

A quick embrace amid the kitchen smells, a kiss
for remembering the diet pills, and dinner talk:
the man repaired the TV set, for much too much:
the car is lubed but now the motor misses: meat
is up, and so is milk: the tax bill's due on Monday:
take-home pay goes just so far, the dough, they say,
is on the selling end: "I love you as I never loved
before..."
the kitchen radio sings: hell money isn't everything,

Marge says, we have each other: Lacklove pours a beer

For two: Drink up, he says, it's the low calorie kind:

Pabst's Blue Ribbon girl is easy to remember:

Alice was a lot like that, slim and sexy: lights
a cigarette, sinks down before the TV screen:
and all the lives he might have lived are lived for him:
crimes solved, wrongdoers slain, gorgeous sins committed,
good deeds done, injustices avenged, champagne,
success, top hat and tails, a moonlight serenade:
by courtesy of Zest and Angel toilet tissue,
all the girls he might have laid: now I can sleep:

And lies abed eyes open in the darkened room:
Marge nestles in his arm: pity is a kind of love:
who is to blame? some vast impersonal fraud for which
there is no name: the silence slays him like a fatal drug:
who are the men beside me in the speeding car?
enroute to what? who is the stranger at the wheel?
what are those lights ahead? the brakes have failed! too
late!

it's my turn at the wheel, Lacklove ponders as he shaves:
outside the car pool waits: it is another day.

Publication. From *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), pp. 70–73.

Jam Session for Poet and Hipster

Star in the east, star in the west

Wish that star was in my breast.

Music: (Lays down the beat)

Voice: Don't stand there by the door, man.

Baby bring this cat some juice.

Hipster: Joint is jumpin in a wailin jam,

Warming up a riff to a solid beat,

Lay it down cool, man, cool and neat.

Drum: (Completes the quatrain)

Poet: Bell in the tower, flag in the wind,

Gonna ride a rocket to the doll face moon,

Stand back, I say, let a man have room.

Drum: (Completes the quatrain)

Music: (Ad lib)

Voice: Get away from them drums, man,

You're buggin me.

Hipster: Found me a woman, the belle of Siam,

Groovin high and struttin on air,

Fire in her eye and smoke in her hair.

Drum: (Completes the quatrain)

Poet: Hang on the hour hand, hold back the time,

Hot lip, fire love, devil may care,

Sunset eyes and midnight hair.

Drum: (Completes the quatrain)

Music: (Ad lib)

Voice: You can't have this horn, man,

Just got it out of hock.

Hipster: Cop blew the whistle, took it on the lam,

State house, jail house, city hall square,

Start talkin sweet talk man, beware,

Drum: (Completes the quatrain)

Poet: Love is the law, man, sun and Stars,

Move with the rhythm, swing with the beat,

Heaven and earth in one, complete.

Drum: (Completes the quatrain)

Music: (Ad lib)

Publication. From *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), pp. 84–85.

How Jazz Was Born

Not on the velvet cushions
lace at the christening

Not with plumes and black horses
bells tolling muted brass

Cry at the birth
and rejoice at the death
 That's Scripture
 said the jazzman

He rambled and he gambled
but the butcher cut him down
 Pitting life against death
 at two bucks for the gig

Three perfect notes
high in the trumpet
torn from the ringing brass
a scream torn from a great wrong

The arm that pounds the drum
is a hammer—steel on steel
talking
 No second class aboa'd dis train
 no diffrence in de fare

And the trombone talking God
out of the burning mountain
through the lips of his prophet
red-eyed unshaven
smelling of dung and heaven

Storyville Basin Street
out of Jordan and Jim Crow
hymnal, brothel, tambo and bones
out of the talking drums
How deep are the roots?

Out of Leipzig and Florence
street musicians in rags

before Bach before Vivaldi

By New Orleans out of Memphis

St. Louis

Davenport

Chicago

And Leon Rappolo

with his beat-up clarinet

leaning against a telegraph pole

for hours through the night

blowing Weary Blues to the wires

strummed by the wind.

Publication. From *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), pp. 86–87.

A Funkie Blues for All Squares, Creeps and Cornballs

Their arms are knives, their fingers all nails.
When they try to make love they hurt each other.

When their lips close, smiling, it is
Like the maw of some poisonous flower closing.

They torture themselves with shame and pride,
With time clocks and unattainable ambitions.

They get so they believe their own hired liars.
They bug themselves with their own advertising
slogans.

They drag themselves over miles of broken glass
And stone themselves with false confessions.

They seem to be atoning everlastingly
For some nameless long-forgotten crime.

If I knew what it was they had done
I would talk to God about it.

I can't promise that I could get them off
But I'd feel duty bound to use my influence.

As it is, all I can do is feel sorry for them,
And for this they will never forgive me.

Publication. From *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), p. 88. The spelling “Funkie” follows the book.

End of the Line

End of the line! Remember when we were kids in
Chicago and the streetcar conductor shouted
All out! End of the line!

End of the line where the tracks ended in the country
grass kneehigh where the schoolbooks and the
sidewalks stopped and all the wide-eyed elving
things began

A small boy with a hot heart gone crazylegged at
sundown running to what imagined wonders
bubbling golden in the wrist

Division and Western on a ringtail night with caved
mysteries in the car barn where we found the
Phoenician Ashtoreth a chick named Sal

Spreadangled wild forbidden on the back seat of the
Milwaukee Avenue limited laid up for repairs,
earthquakes in the belly cyclones in the windpipe

And moongirls spiraled in through broken windows on
a red wind upside down and smoking with the
smell of bed

Diana on a roller coaster Venus on the Humboldt Park
lagoon Isis and Iphimedeia on the sand dunes
of Indiana behind the hot dog stand

Lights on the Chicago River home from the public library
with Dante and Homer crossing the Rush Street
bridge for a beer at the King's Palace

Cabala at the Green Masque where Clara Tice walked
coral and silver among the Douglas Park Laurencins
Barrelhouse blues on Clark Street

And all the ghosts of Gary and Haymarket gathered in
Bughouse Square and you John Loughman broken-
toothed and bloody from the company cop's nightstick down your gullet

Do you remember when you put on God's nightshirt

and Bertie Weber shook fig leaves and bananas from
the Eden tree on the Dill Pickle Stage

While we hunted the Ding an sich in Okomoto's basement
where the snark was stabled conjured poems out of
whiskey tits wet dreams and telephone books

Confounding Babbitts profs and boobs with Arp Chirico
Mondrian Redon while Pound Mephistophelian
piper piped and Mr. Eliot sang

His Liebestod at the grave of J. Alfred Prufrock knelt
down to pray fell in with the corpse and on the
third programme

He arose again from the dead ascended into heaven and
sitteth at the right hand of Henry Luce and from
thence he shall come to judge

John Henry Bix Bird Parker and the Fifth International
of Jazz drank bathtub gin and talked haut cuisine
over the dollar table d'hôte and fucked blue angels
in a Freudian funk

While the Great American Goof went whoring after Clara
Bow Dupont Ford AT & T and that great cocksman
of the Lord the Silent Cal

Vas you dere Charlie when King Tut danced with Madame
Mah Jong and Hero Lindbergh flew the lost Titanic
to the crossword puzzle land to find the missing
link?

Which was Coué when was General Dawes why was
Thomas Scopes? Ringtail roarers on the make for
a buck swinging from every flagpole—wanna buy a
duck?

And laughed with wormwood lips as we walked off rooftops and lived stung by
strange lusts loving strange
ways wounded dying jazz pot installment debts
abortions

No credits offered in this school no diploma no payroll

no pension Hegel in the men's toilet Shelley and
Keats in the clink Stravinsky in a back alley fleabag

Jam sessions at the Downbeat basement AWOL in the
public library CO on Sheridan Square Rush Street
North Beach broke busted triumphant and not a
thing to show for it

Thumbing a ride enroute to nowhere carrying no official
papers stamped with no visa far out and eyes staring
under the overturned jalopy the wheels still spinning

And lived. Hung up on Spenser Schopenhauer Bergson
Nietzsche hooked on Plato Kant McTaggart flipped
on Frazer cooled on Jung lost in the Waste Land

Enroute to nowhere with one extra pair of socks and a
pocket edition of Horace—who locked out whom
from the five buck room that night?

“Does it have to be you?” she moaned. “Why does it
always have to be you?” Walked out on Standard
Oil and Yardley's best on Stetson U.S. Steel—who
fired whom?

End of the line. And the great Bull of Bashan went
down throwing his rider crashing through the land
till the Lord smote him and delivered him into the
hand of the Great White Father

Poets on projects artists in the post office Karl Marx in
egg tempera dialectics in the grease paint strikes
petitions manifestoes

“We used to sneak up behind them and stick pins in
their behinds,” you said, “now we can come up in
front and fart in their faces.” Épater le bourgeois?
Crucify the bastards!

Throw them to the hairy chested one Caliban of the
big biceps crush them with Das Kapital bury them
under bound volumes of Blast and transition

How new were my masses how green was my bally how

ted the red square in blue jeans and guitar and there
was a word for everything

The ikons the ikons! from slogans to placards to flags
Madrid Vienna Rotterdam London Pearl Harbor
what is the color of murder?

How do you scan Hiroshima? Who was it led the great
good cause up a blind alley and clubbed it to death?
Stalin Churchill FDR you now or have you ever been

A Senator preacher president teacher robber liar killer
pander general thief? Are there any atom bombs
concealed on your person? Do you know an easy
way to make a buck?

End of the line yanked in the baiter baited. Wind out
of wind and death in every breath nightwanderers
all we walk the black street where the mile-high
windows burn in neon

Heavens black fire in the red heart caved and every
breath a shriek wine pill or needle singing in the vein
what do they seek? I tell you

None shall pass that way untouched. The ways are
many but the goal's the same, sweet flesh loveblessed
star on still water secret things

Yet simple as the way of love to love given hand in hand
or lips on ivory flute antiphonal the moon's white
drum I tell you none shall live

Save those who keep that tryst on singing feet and every
hair on fire man naked born reborn in naked love
and woman sacred lusty lewd all cunt and unashamed

O lovers yet to come wreathed round with lightning
brushed by the wings of angels rapt and wet with
charismatic rain.

Publication. From *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), pp. 89–94.

The Dreaming Hands

Walking high and moonwitched in
A season of long nights I saw him
Deep his eyes and wonderful
In motion and repose, his manner
Mild, and quiet power in his
Secret hands. I knew him then as
One out of an unremembered
Time returning still half hidden
Dreamed and on awaking only
Half believed and when he spoke his
Speech was as the speech of mountains
Breathing with the glacial seasons
Spaced eternities apart and
Pulsing with all winged things
The fleet and million-footed herds
And sea things moving oceans wide
His words were massive singing stones
His words were speaking megaliths.

Unshoe the foot unbind the heart
The mind that chains the sun and fetters
Mountain rivers to machines will
Know no rest or peace until it
Learns again the unremembered
Speech of earth and seed and rain
Star and serpent fire and flower
Speech of mountains and the wonder
Dreaming in those secret hands.

Publication. From *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), p. 95.

“Sing O Muse!”

I will not praise her
more than just enough
to satisfy tradition
The bitch is famous
for her fickleness

Yet if I praise her
it is not that I fear
her witch’s wrath—I do,
But dread far more
her chill indifference

Let no one boast
that he has given years
toil sweat and poverty
To her service
the choice is always hers

Who in a wink
embraces or betrays
gives or disdains to give
Gives to this one
what she promised that

Blake loved her well
died old—and mad; Rimbaud
gave his youth to her
And fled—to live
a lifelong living death

Vincent knew
her kiss is honey and gall
Gauguin pursued her
Died insensate
in a green-gold hell

Can I begrudge
the Mantuan his exile
Siqueiros his prison cell
Or envy Dylan

his fatal inch of fame?

Still I pursue her
though life has plucked my hair
and time has drawn my teeth
A fool of love
still stumbling in her train

Sing, she says,
until the worm takes wing
ring the tongueless bell
Laugh the gods down
from the empty sky

Unsalt the sea
give vision to the blind
heal the sick and bring me
Death's mortal snare
before I set you free

Free? for what?
a hollow echo answers
What! from rock to rock
And there is only
silence, emptiness

Invoke the Muse?
by incantation, wine,
narcosis, ritual, sex?
These may lead you
to her bolted door

No more. You stand there
waiting; take her by force?
by storm? by cunning?
By surprise?
by prayer and supplication?

Look behind you!
there is one who neither
begs nor woos—
Indifferent—
or flies—and she pursues

I tell my heart
be wise; remember
she's the hag of night
The queen, the serpent
she's the menstrual moon

And I have seen her
as the lecherous wench
half woman and half child
Her nails were needles
burning in the vein

Her eyes black pools
yawning for my fall
and fell as in a dream
Not even hoping
against hope to wake

Better the cup
the shipwrecked sailor drinks
with broken lips, and dies;
Why do I walk
the nights away between

This window
and this door? a stupid
business, I admit
Some day I'll chuck it
and to hell with it

And yet I fear
to chance it; who can say?
some day she may call
My name once more
and I will not be here!

Publication. From *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), pp. 96–99.

Duet for Jazz Horn and Eleusinian Lyre

I.

We dance plucked strings
like fiery pincers nip
the nerve-ends, fever them
from toe to fingertip

The clarinets reach out
articulate the living tissue
saxes moan
a wounded insolence, the drumbeat
echoes in the bone.

Somehow tonight, you say
we tap a deeper vein,
it may be something that
we dimly sense, they know—

2.

Before the sphinx, before the stylus,
fire descended in a bolt from heaven

In those days the wind spoke words
in whispers, with a tongue of wind

Beneath the speaking oaks we dreamed
all things were given us to know

Half moon, blue lotus, lore of fingernails
red calyx of the nether lips of love

The sacred union in the primal cave
the yoni and the lingam, earth and rain

The night a great black flower
burned cavernous with flame.

3.

Do we in this our dancing share
a vision that they saw?
with silken mask of irony
we mask our eyes against the gloom
we laugh the laugh goes bitter
on our lips with ribald song
we sing aloud
and weave this many colored song
to be our shroud.

Here no seed is sown with reverence
no vernal celebration marks
the newborn year,
the face is pale beneath
the gilded mask,
the painted mouth emits
a feeble and consumptive laugh.

4.

Before the sphinx, before the stylus,
fire descended in a bolt from heaven

Before the word was born we danced
our homage to the wreathing flame

Before the pictures in the primal cave
we danced the hieroglyph of meat and corn

The earth was love the earth was love
and all the living danced her praise

All that was needful to us then we knew
and held the wonder of it in our hand.

5.

In this our midnight of the soul
we see no phantoms that our fathers saw
but only him our science made
and did not think it strange his hand
was hairy and his feet were splayed.

Out of our sickness we create
these delicate monstrosities, a cat
with every hair-end curled, a death's-head
with a rose between his teeth,
the fantasies of prisoners in stir,
a mock psychosis or a Faxensyndrom,

How crazily the spotlight swings,
a dream of jungle twilight
drums diminish to a juju tempo,
breast to breast
and thigh to thigh, embrace—
and with the lion's pride,
the panther's grace?
procul o procul este, profani!

Outside on pavements wet with rain
the evening traffic sighs,
it may be even now in other worlds
new shapes of being disturb
the preternatural night,
while undersea the continents in slow
millennial respiration rise.

6.

In those nights the moon was low
and near; we bathed in moonlight,
in the greying sundown there was talk
of gentle things we sipped slow wine
from bells of crystal the stems
were very long... I think

the rhythm in the brain sets up
vibrations, deep where awe and wonder move,
translates emotion into motion, thought
into metaphor of gesture, object
and observer merge in one, performing
the creative act, mimetic picture
of the world we know, a universe
articulate, as when

The dinosaurs in ponderous, slow
and solemn measures once
danced out the drama of their life, so now
the monsters of the deep contend
in hieratic gesture; clouds enact
the choreography of storm; the fawn
leaps up, the eagle dips his wing
to greet the first immaculate hour of dawn.

The wind is witness of these things
and brings me echoes; words that speak
in deadly earnest like the sound of gongs
announcing executions this I know
the wind has visited these places like
the awful visitations of the ghosts
and left its mark on them walk softly,
all the world is sacred ground
where such things once have been.

Publication. From *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (1976), pp. 100–104.

EDITORIAL NOTE

Texts, variants, and sources

The copy-text for each poem is identified in its publication statement. When a poem from *Rainbow at Midnight* reappeared in the author-selected *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* with only punctuation or modest verbal changes, the later version is printed once and the earlier witness is recorded. The 1953 magazine version of *Rainbow at Midnight* is printed independently because its four-part design and extensive unique passages constitute a substantially different work.

Lineation, stanza divisions, italics, and clearly intentional inset lines follow the original scans. Line breaks caused only by a narrow source column have been rejoined. The edition does not reproduce hanging indents created by the source page measure. Ambiguous readings were checked visually against the originals.

The poems are arranged chronologically by their first publication or collection. Each book has its own section, and magazine verse not included in the books is separated into chronological sections. Publication notes identify the source after each poem.

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COLOPHON

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HISTORICAL FRONT MATTER

Lawrence Lipton - Collected Poems

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N.L.