



WILLIAM PILLIN

Collected Poems

A CRITICAL READING EDITION

EXTREMES AND MODERATIONS:
EARLY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA POETRY

A TEXT-TECH PAPERS PROJECT

Extremes and Moderations

Early Southern California Poetry

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

Edited by Brian Kim Stefans

The Text-Tech Papers | Los Angeles, 2026

CONTENTS

Books, periodical verse, and editorial matter

Archival Images	8
Introduction	12
Editorial Note and Sources	23
Magazine Verse	24
<i>The Ancient Dead</i>	25
<i>Wild Boys of the Road</i>	26
<i>Bronzed Men</i>	27
<i>Note</i>	28
<i>Speech</i>	30
<i>In Autumn's Wake</i>	31
<i>O'Brien's Viewpoint</i>	32
<i>Two Lives</i>	33
<i>Signature</i>	35
<i>Theory of Silence</i>	36
<i>Air</i>	37
<i>Song</i>	38
<i>Landscapes That Soon May Come</i>	39
<i>Totalitarian Skeleton</i>	40
<i>Dialectic</i>	41
<i>Shut the Door</i>	42
<i>Uncertain Clues</i>	43
<i>That Which Is Good</i>	44
<i>Abel's Lament</i>	45
<i>The Choice</i>	46

<i>Concerning the Blue Sky</i>	47
<i>Acknowledgment</i>	48
<i>My Summer Dream</i>	49
<i>Someone Is Here</i>	50
<i>He</i>	51
<i>Ice and Tears</i>	52
<i>Ice and Flame</i>	53
<i>Form Was a Classic Mirror</i>	54
<i>A Priori</i>	55
<i>In This I Know My Love</i>	56
<i>Folk Song</i>	57
<i>The Wanderer</i>	58
<i>Death as a Whisper</i>	60
<i>Ceramic Symbols</i>	61
<i>Notes on Making Pottery</i>	62
<i>Sequence in Five Parts</i>	65
<i>The Sigh</i>	68
<i>Essay</i>	69
<i>Formula</i>	70

Dance Without Shoes 71

<i>On Hearing Frederick Play the Appassionata</i>	72
<i>The Book</i>	73
<i>Transfiguration</i>	74
<i>Song on Having a Roof of Our Own</i>	75
<i>Berceuse</i>	76
<i>Prelude and Dance on Quitting a Rotten Job</i>	77
<i>Melancholy at Twilight</i>	78
<i>Fêtes</i>	80
<i>Dance Without Shoes</i>	81
<i>April Pastoral</i>	82
<i>Tango</i>	83
<i>Nightfall</i>	84
<i>A Memory of Lilac</i>	85
<i>Poem on Growing Older</i>	86
<i>There Was a Time We Could Subdue a Storm</i>	87

<i>Interruptions</i>	88
<i>Nocturne</i>	89
<i>Song for a Sleepless Night</i>	90
<i>Nocturne with Ghosts</i>	91
<i>The Return</i>	92
<i>Pas de Deux</i>	93
<i>Prelude</i>	94
<i>Transfigured Night</i>	95
<i>Prairie</i>	96
<i>A Dream of Terror and a Dream of Frost</i>	97
<i>Reply to Orators</i>	98
<i>Endless Dark</i>	99
<i>The Search</i>	100
<i>Nomads Without a Tribe</i>	101
<i>Fugue</i>	102
<i>A Winter Night Poem</i>	103
<i>To a Dancer</i>	105
<i>A Country of His Own</i>	107
 <i>Passage After Midnight</i>	 108
<i>Ascensions</i>	109
 <i>Pavanne for a Fading Memory</i>	 110
<i>The Terrified Meadows</i>	111
<i>All of My Cities</i>	113
<i>In a Dream I Spoke</i>	114
<i>Miserere</i>	116
<i>Sabbath</i>	117
<i>The Lost Song</i>	118
<i>Presences</i>	120
<i>Pavanne for a Fading Memory</i>	121
<i>Moment Musicale</i>	125
<i>Canzone for My Grandma</i>	126
<i>Farewell</i>	127
<i>The Trip Home</i>	128
<i>We Move Through the Shadows</i>	129

<i>The Survivors</i>	130
<i>The Inheritors</i>	132
<i>A Tango for April</i>	133
<i>Countdown</i>	134
<i>A Winter Sheaf</i>	138
<i>Prophecy</i>	141
<i>The Empty Corridor</i>	142
<i>Diminuendo</i>	144
<i>Tanz</i>	145
<i>Evening Song</i>	146
<i>The Blue Fear</i>	147
<i>Kaddish</i>	148
<i>The Requirement</i>	150
<i>Because There Is No Time</i>	151
<i>Good Morning!</i>	152
<i>Resurrection</i>	153
<i>Piano Lesson</i>	154
<i>Now Cold November Comes</i>	155
<i>Passage After Midnight</i>	156
<i>Isadora</i>	159
<i>Chopin</i>	160
<i>Invocation</i>	162
<i>Words Again Emerging</i>	163
<i>Love's Wildest Talent</i>	164
<i>Threshold</i>	165
<i>Perilous Journey</i>	166
<i>Inanna</i>	168
<i>Ocean Park</i>	170
<i>Prologue to a Reading</i>	172

Everything Falling 174

<i>Fall, 1965</i>	175
<i>Nocturne, 1968</i>	176
<i>The Impudent Dancers</i>	177
<i>Look Down</i>	178
<i>Prayer</i>	179

<i>Accident</i>	180
<i>You, John Wayne</i>	181
<i>The Recluse</i>	182
<i>The Amazing Mr. Avaunt</i>	183
<i>Seven Reflections on Marxengels</i>	184
<i>History</i>	187
<i>Nocturne with a Rehearsal</i>	188
<i>Heart Attack</i>	189
<i>Sleepless Nocturne</i>	192
<i>Nocturne at Two in the Morning</i>	194
<i>Nocturne</i>	196
<i>Space Music</i>	197
<i>Better Once Than Never</i>	199
<i>Give Me</i>	200
<i>She Set Him Free</i>	201
<i>The Resolution</i>	202
<i>Ballade</i>	203
<i>The Leaf</i>	204
<i>The Death of Professor Moriarty</i>	205
<i>The Sparrow</i>	207
<i>Pygmalion</i>	209
<i>Housewife</i>	211
<i>I Have Friends Who Dance</i>	212
<i>Sequence on a Birthday</i>	213
<i>Defined Passage</i>	216
<i>Two for Polia</i>	217
<i>The Phantom Posts</i>	219
<i>Angelic Admonition</i>	220
<i>Sequence in a Pottery Workshop</i>	221
<i>To a Customer</i>	223
<i>Ode on a Decision to Settle for Less</i>	224
<i>A Four-Part Hallelujah</i>	225
<i>Reproach</i>	227
<i>Poem</i>	228

<i>Lines on a New Year's Eve</i>	230
<i>The Presence</i>	232
<i>Black Rain</i>	234
<i>Yellow Lamplight</i>	235
<i>Nocturne with Rain</i>	237
<i>Night Poem in Darkness</i>	239
<i>The Blue Candle</i>	241
<i>Night Poem in an Abandoned Music Room</i>	243
<i>The House</i>	245
<i>Wishes</i>	246
<i>Night Poem with a Ghost</i>	247
<i>Night Poem with a Room</i>	248
<i>Night Poem with a Blind Nude</i>	249
<i>The Distance</i>	251
<i>O, Beautiful They Move</i>	252
<i>Reactionary Poem</i>	253
<i>Song of Sisyphus, Workingman</i>	254
<i>Heritage</i>	255
<i>The Intellectuals</i>	257
<i>Akriel's Council</i>	258
<i>Disappearances</i>	259
<i>The Bulldozed Promenade</i>	260
<i>A Poem for Anton Schmidt</i>	262
<i>Nocturne with Faces of the Dead</i>	264
<i>Farewell to Europe</i>	266

To the End of Time 270

<i>Holy Beggars</i>	271
<i>Greedy Birds</i>	273
<i>Realities</i>	276

Another Dawn 278

<i>The Wild Seed</i>	279
<i>Lament</i>	280
<i>Love Story</i>	281
<i>Do Not Plan for Me</i>	282

<i>The Good Things</i>	283
<i>The Truth</i>	284
<i>Song</i>	285
<i>Poem</i>	286
<i>Ten Poems for My Seventy-Second Birthday</i>	287
<i>Sequence</i>	289
<i>The Habit</i>	290
<i>A Dream of Homecoming</i>	291
<i>For Polia</i>	292
<i>Another One for Polia</i>	293
<i>The Waltz</i>	294
<i>The Old Man</i>	295
<i>Lilith</i>	296
<i>My Sadness</i>	297
<i>Seven Poems</i>	298

Bibliography

301

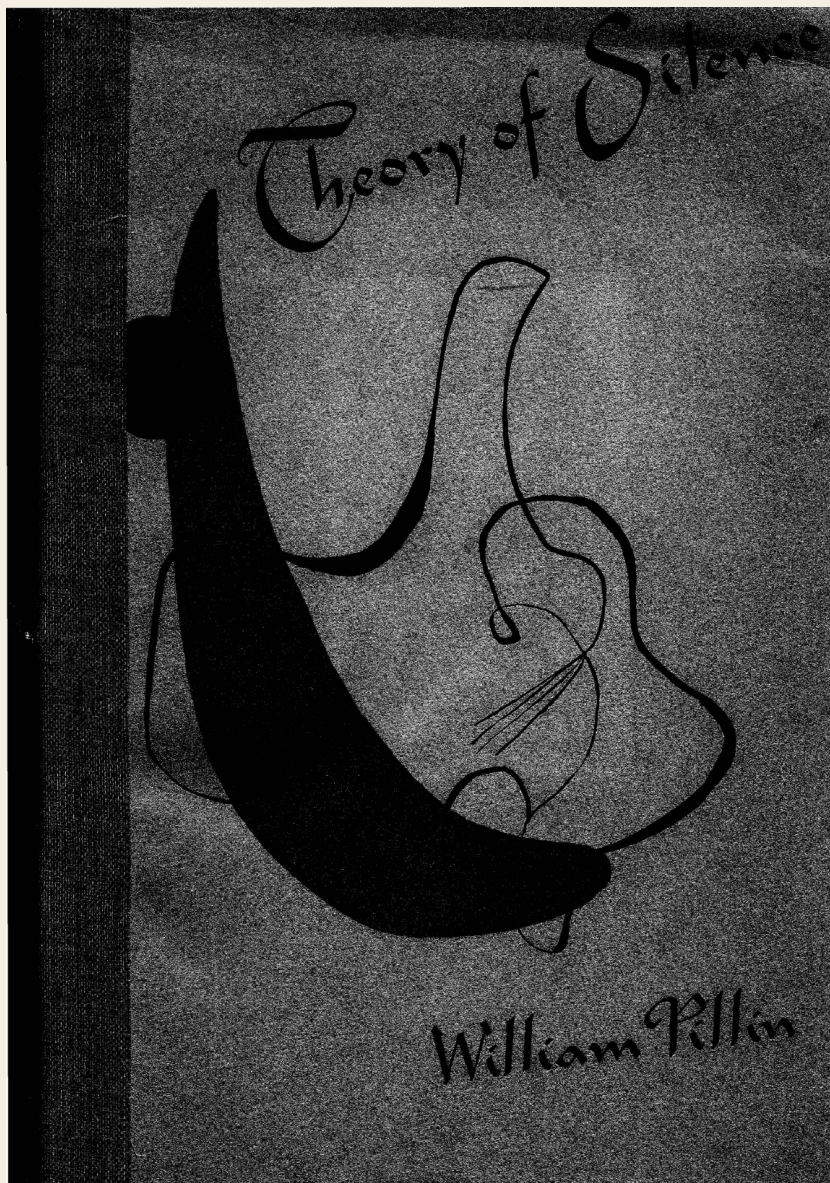
ARCHIVAL IMAGES

The poet, his family, and the material history of the books



POET WILLIAM PILLIN, his wife, the potter, Polia Pillin, and son, Boris, of Los Angeles are pictured in the Blue Door Gallery where they were honored with a reception, Sunday afternoon. In the background are some of Mrs. Pillin's distinctive ceramics. Mr. Pillin holds his newest volume, entitled "Pavanne for a Fading Memorial", copies of which he autographed for guests. Boris whose interests are painting and music is a graduate of the University of California, Los Angeles, and has received the Woodrow Wilson fellowship to do graduate work in music at the University of Southern California. The Pillins who lived in Santa Fe for a number of years, revisited there last week but "would like very much to move to Taos." The trio is en route to New York with stop-overs in Denver and Chicago. "The Willow" in New York and the "Accent" in Chicago, handle Mrs. Pillin's pottery. For the reception the gallery was decorated with bouquets of peonies, and punch was served from an attractively appointed table. Mrs. Judson Crews assisted the hosts, Mr. and Mrs. Manny Berg, gallery owners. (Regina Cooke photo)

William, Polia, and Boris Pillin at the Blue Door Gallery, Taos, 1964. Cropped from the original newspaper clipping.



Title page of Theory of Silence (1949), designed, handset, and printed by George Yamada.



Mosaic by Polia Pillin, reproduced in the American Art Pottery Association's 2017 biographical profile.

INTRODUCTION

Poet, labor organizer, potter, and host

William Pillin arrived in the United States as a thirteen-year-old refugee, learned English in Chicago, and made his adopted language into a poetry of labor, exile, music, Jewish memory, and handmade form. During the Depression he organized writers on the Iowa Federal Writers' Project and lost his position amid a nationally protested dismissal; in New Mexico he worked on the state guide; and after settling in Los Angeles in 1948 he and the artist Polia Pillin built a life around pottery, poetry, and a home salon that joined several generations of Southern California artists. His verse changed with that life. The public urgency of the 1930s gives way to compressed wartime parables, musical sequences, surreal ascensions, domestic love poems, and late meditations on aging, without abandoning the political question of how useful work and imaginative freedom might coexist. This edition resets every poem recoverable from the project's six complete book scans, the surviving pages of three incompletely scanned volumes, and verified magazine sources. Later reprintings are not duplicated when they preserve substantially the same poem; publication and variant information follows the reading text.

Biography

The completed dossier reconstructs Pillin's immigration, WPA employment and dismissal, New Mexico years, Los Angeles little-magazine network, nine poetry books, pottery collaboration with Polia Pillin, musical settings, and archives. It corrects age and spelling errors repeated in catalogs and distinguishes William's ceramic labor from Polia's independent artistic achievement.

William Pillin was born Velvel Pillin on December 3, 1910, in Alexandrovsk. He was the elder son of Elconon Pillin (1887-1977) and Anna Naiditch Pillin (1885-1972). His brother Albert was born in Alexandrovsk in 1914. The family left the Soviet Union in 1924 amid the persecutions and

insecurity that marked Jewish life in the former Russian Empire, settling in Chicago. William was thirteen when the family immigrated and turned fourteen that December. A sister, Helen, was born in Chicago in 1926.

The migration was not merely background to Pillin's work. The Los Angeles Times obituary says he began writing verse as he learned English. His later poems repeatedly return to the grandmother left behind, the severed household, the Sabbath, Zion, pogrom and Holocaust memory, and the immigrant's double consciousness. The mature poem "Love Story" imagines two ancient lovers separated in Ur and reunited in a cousin's Chicago house, an emblem of displacement folded into domestic reunion. His Jewish poems range from mourning and accusation to argument with religious law. They are neither ornamental folklore nor a fixed creed; they are the language in which migration, historical catastrophe, guilt, secularization, and family attachment contend.

Robert Bly reported that Pillin worked on and off in his father's Chicago drugstore. Other accounts place him in bookstores and libraries after the New Mexico years. Bookselling, library work, and small-press exchange were therefore not peripheral jobs. They trained an exact knowledge of how poems moved from manuscript to magazine, from review to book, and from one local circle to another.

In Chicago he met Polia Sukonick, also rendered Sunockin and Sukonic, a Polish Jewish immigrant born in Czeszochowa on September 1, 1909. She had come to Chicago in 1924, worked in the garment industry by day, and studied art at night through the Jewish People's Institute, Todros Geller's studio, Hull House, and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Their partnership eventually joined his poetry and throwing of clay to her painting, glazing, prints, and book images. Evidence of collaboration predates their marriage: a later scholarly history of Midwestern regionalist writing records both William's poems and Polia's prints in the literary culture around *Midwest*.

Pillin was publishing by the mid-1930s. A 1934 West Virginia newspaper reprinted "Prison for Sensations." In November 1936, *Poetry* published "The Ancient Dead," "Wild Boys of the Road," and "Bronzed Men." These poems belong to the Depression culture of freight trains, unemployment, industrial labor, and collective struggle. "Wild Boys of the Road" addresses dispossessed young men moving through the country; "Bronzed Men" imagines labor

through bodies and machines. Even when later work became more inward and musical, the social imagination never disappeared.

Pillin's Iowa period is one of the best documented and most consequential parts of his life. He applied to the Iowa Federal Writers' Project near its beginning and appealed directly to national director Henry Alsberg on February 3, 1936, arguing that he was more qualified than some already employed. He was hired as a staff writer and lived at 1018 Maple Street in Des Moines. He became active in American Writers' Union Local 28 and helped organize the Midwest Literary League with Raymond Kresensky, Ruth Stewart, Opal Shannon, Mary Hudson, Jay Du Von, Dale Kramer, and Roland White.

The League attempted a cooperative regional culture rather than a merely provincial one. Its periodical brought together poems, fiction, visual art, labor concerns, and the emerging American Guide project. Pillin served on the editorial board of *Hinterland* and contributed an essay, "The National Academy of Arts and Letters," to the October-November 1936 issue. He argued that the guide program should become the precedent for permanent public support of serious creative work. Guidebook research had value, he believed, but did too little to cultivate writers' imaginative capacities. His proposal placed him within a larger 1930s debate over whether federal arts work should be temporary relief, documentary service, or a durable cultural institution.

In December 1936 Pillin was among workers removed from the Iowa project. Administrators alleged that he had spent too much project time on his own creative and organizing work; union supporters saw hostility to labor organization and left cultural activity. The documentary record does not prove a single motive. What is clear is the scale of the response. The Iowa Writers' Union protested; writers and artists sent letters from across the country; and about five hundred WPA workers assembled in Chicago against the dismissal. National administrators denied that union activity had caused the firing, while the controversy damaged morale inside the Iowa project. Pillin was offered work on the Illinois Federal Writers' Project, but he resigned from *Hinterland* and ceased contributing to it.

This episode clarifies both the politics and the formal urgency of his first book. Pillin was a left-wing poet and an active unionist, but the surviving

evidence does not establish party membership and should not be made to do so. His central commitment was to dignified labor and to institutions that made serious art possible outside inherited wealth. The friction between useful public work and individual creation later reappears in poems about pottery, selling, and the discipline of daily chores.

On December 6, 1937, William and Polia left Des Moines with the family of Lyle Shannon for New Mexico. A contemporary Albuquerque report described the journey as a modest revolt against urban civilization: they hoped to raise food, write, paint, and daydream. The romantic premise soon met the severity of the place. They settled on a sixteen-acre farm in the Espanola Valley near Santa Fe, associated in contemporary reporting with Santa Cruz. They hauled water from miles away, gathered mountain wood for cooking and heat, and lived by kerosene light.

Pillin did not withdraw from public cultural work. By July 1938 he was on the New Mexico Writers' Project, helping compile the state guide and supplementary books. That month *Poetry* included his poem "Speech" in its special Federal Poets issue. In November the magazine devoted a group to five poems: "In Autumn's Wake," "O'Brien's Viewpoint," "Endless Dark," "Two Lives," and "Signature." The poems join landscape to politics and marital life. "Signature" moves between the wife's interrupted painting, the husband's meeting and slogans, poverty, news, and the difficult effort to give social commitment a lyric form.

William and Polia married in Los Lunas in 1938. Their son, Boris William Pillin, was born in 1940. The family then returned to Chicago. *Poems*, Pillin's first collection, had appeared in 1939 from James A. Decker's press in Prairie City, Illinois. A March 1940 Iowa review priced it at two dollars in cloth and fifty cents in paper and treated him as an Iowan now living in New Mexico. It singled out socially committed pieces including "Signature," "Prairie," and "Wild Boys of the Road." The book anchors Pillin firmly in the 1930s social-poetry movement, before the later California work for which he is more often remembered.

The family's Chicago years, 1940-1948, coincided with war and genocide. Pillin's poems in *Poetry* show the change. The October 1942 issue printed "Uncertain Clues," "Shut the Door," "Totalitarian Skeleton," and "Form Was a Classic Mirror." September 1943 included "Song." June 1945 printed "Song"

and “Ceramic Symbols,” and November 1946 carried “That Which Is Good Is Simply Done,” “The Wanderer,” and “Abel’s Lament.” The titles chart a movement from Depression solidarity through totalitarian violence toward Jewish archetype and the ethics of making.

Polia continued painting and exhibiting. In 1946 she studied ceramics at Hull House, and the couple installed a wheel and kiln in their apartment. William learned to throw and form vessels; Polia treated the clay body as a surface for painted figures, animals, birds, flowers, and abstract marks. The exact division of labor varied, but the durable account is that William shaped and fired many pieces while Polia supplied the distinctive painterly decoration and glazes. Some joint work bears a “W + P” mark. Later markets sometimes collapse the collaboration into “Polia Pillin pottery” because her imagery is unmistakable, while other sources over-correct and make William a co-designer of everything. Museum attribution offers a more careful model: the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, jointly credits Polia and William for an orange bottle of about 1960, while crediting a yellow conical bottle to Polia alone.

The Pillins moved permanently to Los Angeles in 1948. Bly’s foreword gives 1947, but Polia scholarship, later testimony, and retrospective newspaper accounts consistently say 1948; it is safest to understand the move as planned in 1947 and completed by 1948. Their Melrose Avenue home became residence, kiln, pottery workshop, gallery, book room, and salon.

The pottery supplied the family’s principal income. William threw forms and managed firing and production; Polia painted the wet clay, glazed it, and developed the luminous iconographic surfaces that made the work collectible. They worked extremely long days. Their pieces circulated through galleries across the United States and were admired by Henry Miller. A 1957 Los Angeles Times design feature reproduced a William Pillin ceramic bowl, evidence that his individual hand was publicly recognized even as Polia’s imagery became the firm’s signature.

The home’s cultural function mattered just as much. Poet Wanda Coleman later remembered one or two gatherings a month at which poets, visual artists, and musicians ate, argued politics and aesthetics, listened to music, and heard Bill recite old or new poems. Visitors circulated through the workroom, gallery, kitchen, and yard kiln. William sat at the head of the table and conducted the conversation; Polia’s pottery kept the household solvent. This

was an informal Southern California institution, linking immigrant modernism, the Popular Front generation, postwar little magazines, craft culture, and younger Los Angeles writers.

Mel Weisburd's oral history confirms the continuity of this network. He remembered Pillin as part of a poetry group, as a host or guest when Robert Bly visited, and as a friend who maintained contact across Chicago and Los Angeles. The Pillins' friendships included James Boyer May and the circles around *Trace*, *California Quarterly*, *Coastlines*, *Epos*, and later *kayak*. Alvaro Cardona-Hine's recollection, preserved in *Poets of the Non-Existent City*, places Pillin among the consequential but insufficiently remembered makers of Los Angeles poetry.

The James A. Decker volume gathers Pillin's Depression-era public voice: urban and prairie landscapes, workers, migrants, fascism, union hope, and the strain placed on domestic life by political obligation. Pillin did not merely report social crisis; he experimented with montage, shifts between collective rhetoric and private scene, and images that turn machinery into a measure of human possibility.

George Yamada designed, handset, and printed one thousand copies in Los Angeles. The cover was by Polia, and William dedicated the book to Polia and Boris. The acknowledgments name *Poetry*, *Voices*, *Tiger's Eye*, *Modern Verse*, *Tramp*, and *Compass*. The title names one of his lifelong problems: how to make speech after political betrayal, war, exile, and historical annihilation. The book received notices in *Poetry*, *Rann*, *The Dublin Magazine*, and the anarchist magazine *Retort*, which briefly recommended it among noteworthy poetry books.

Published by Golden Quill Press in Frankestown, New Hampshire, *Dance Without Shoes* was a Book Club for Poetry selection and again dedicated to Polia and Boris. Its acknowledgments document a national and international little-magazine circuit: *American Weave*, *Coastlines*, *Epos*, *Essence*, *Experiment*, *Flame*, *Glass Hill*, *Golden Goose*, *New Orleans Poetry Journal*, *The New Republic*, *Poetry*, *Sparrow*, *Tiger's Eye*, *Voices*, and *Whetstone*, as well as the London anthology *Eight American Poets* and a recording project associated with Leslie Hedley.

A 1957 *Mainstream* review remembered Pillin's late-1930s work as some of the period's strongest social poetry. It heard in the new book greater

concentration, personal feeling, and song, without a retreat from dangerous public history. The musical titles and tighter lyrics do not abandon politics; they internalize the broken promises and threat of the earlier world.

Inferno Press Editions published this collection in San Francisco. Fourteen of its poems were later carried into *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*, making it both an independent book and a bridge in the developing canon. Its circulation through an independent West Coast press aligns Pillin with the nonacademic, small-edition culture connecting Los Angeles, San Francisco, and nationally distributed little magazines.

Alan Swallow published *Pavanne for a Fading Memory* in Denver, with Library of Congress card number 63-16650. Pillin dedicated it to his mother and father. The acknowledgments range across *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Chicago Choice*, *Coastlines*, *Colorado Review*, *East and West* in India, *Epos*, *Galley Sail Review*, *Gryphon*, *Impetus*, *The Literary Review*, *The Nation*, *Nomad*, *Pan*, *Poetry*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Prairie Schooner*, *San Francisco Review*, *Southwest Review*, and *Voices*. “Winter Sheaf” had appeared in *Eight American Poets* in London.

The book’s musical title is exact to Pillin’s method. Memory does not proceed as documentary chronology but as recurrence, variation, dance, and fading cadence. Ukrainian childhood, Chicago, the Jewish dead, marriage, landscape, and composers can coexist because the poem behaves like musical counterpoint rather than linear memoir.

Everything Falling brought Pillin into George Hitchcock’s Kayak Books program. It included color prints by Polia and a foreword, “Words Emerging from Objects Again,” by Robert Bly. Twelve hundred copies were designed by Hitchcock, printed by Big Trees Press, and bound by Louis Rangaves; the National Endowment for the Arts assisted publication. The book’s making embodies the collaboration it describes: poet, artist, editor-designer, printer, binder, and public support.

Bly reads Pillin’s mature poems as movements among layers of mind rather than as single-perspective statements. He praises “The Ascensions,” the Chagall-like mixture of earthly and visionary planes, the poem on Chopin, and the freedom created by manual craft. He also supplies indispensable, if not always date-accurate, testimony: the father’s drugstore, WPA struggles, New Mexico farming, Chicago book work, and twelve- to fourteen-hour pottery

days. His central insight is that work with objects did not diminish poetry. Repetitive skilled labor allowed images to ferment outside the managerial intellect.

The volume includes some of Pillin's most characteristic conjunctions: kilns and angels, music and broken streets, Sherlock Holmes and mortality, domestic chores and cosmic disappearance. It was reviewed together with *The Abandoned Music Room* in *Northeast Rising Sun* in 1977.

Kayak Books issued one thousand copies in Santa Cruz, distributed by Book People in Berkeley, with prints by Polia. Pillin dedicated it to his mother Anna, 1887-1972, adding the Hebrew memorial phrase *aleha ha-shalom*. Poems had appeared in *Arts in Society*, *Bachy*, *Carleton Miscellany*, *Dovke*, *8 x 8 Poetry Broadides*, *The Invisible City*, *kayak*, *Seizure*, *Sunset Plaza Hotel*, and *Northeast*.

The collection is an extended meditation on aging, death, household labor, and the persistence of beauty. "Lines on a New Year's Eve" imagines memory as an old silent film and time as an erasing medium. "The Presence" sets carrying trash and watering the garden against the dark presence first recognized beside the mother's deathbed. The abandoned music room is therefore not simply a symbol of cultural decay. It is the interior in which sound, family, and vanished persons continue to resonate.

Papa Bach Editions published Pillin's retrospective in Los Angeles, with paintings by Polia and an introductory contribution associated with Charles Fishman. The date span openly restores the 1939 beginning that later notices sometimes missed. The selection allowed Pillin to define his own continuity across social protest, immigrant memory, ceramic imagery, musical form, domestic love, and late-life elegy. It remains the essential basis for any future collected poems, though a complete edition must return to the individual books and periodical variants rather than treating the selection as exhaustive.

Illuminati published Pillin's final book at 8812 Pico Boulevard, Los Angeles, ISBN 0-89807-110-0. It was dedicated to Meta Wilde, remembered as a sustaining friend. Poems had appeared in *Arizona Quarterly*, *kayak*, *Orpheus*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *Poetry NOW*, *Shirim*, and Alan F. Pater's *Anthology of Magazine Verse*. The contents include "Ten Poems for My 72nd Birthday," "A Dream of Homecoming," "For Polia," "Another One for Polia," and the title sequence.

The book distills the late Pillin. “The Wild Seed” calls the speaker a bird of passage taking the sweet and bitter together. “Lament” argues with Zion and broken religious observance. “Love Story” turns immigrant reunion into an ancient caravan romance. “The Good Things” insists that what matters grows in difficult clefts, and “Poem” defends form and purpose at the edge of death. Published in October 1984, it appeared only months before his death.

The Los Angeles Times obituary estimated that Pillin’s work appeared in more than one hundred literary reviews. No complete periodical bibliography has yet been recovered, but his books’ acknowledgment pages confirm the claim’s scale. *Poetry* provides the clearest longitudinal sample: poems in November 1936, December 1937, July and November 1938, October 1942, September 1943, June 1945, November 1946, November 1954, September 1955, and November 1957. The sequence moves from unemployed men and collective speech to totalitarian terror, Jewish parable, ceramic process, nocturnes, memory, and ascension.

Pillin’s mature style is often surreal or visionary, but it is grounded in work and object. Pots, windows, trash, gardens, clocks, streets, musical instruments, and birds are not decorations laid over an abstract idea. They are the points from which thought rises. Chagall is an especially important analogue because Ukrainian-Jewish memory, village figure, animal, lover, and flight can occupy the same field without submitting to ordinary scale. Musical language provides a second compositional model: fugue, nocturne, berceuse, pavanne, toccata, waltz, and Chopin allow return, counterpoint, and tonal change to replace exposition.

The politics also persist. The later speaker distrusts packaged doctrines, bureaucratic promises, totalitarian certitude, and the betrayal of collective hopes, yet he never celebrates withdrawal. The daily ethical world is made of work, hospitality, marriage, historical memory, and care for created things. His movement from public declamation toward compressed personal song is not a conversion from politics to privacy. It is a search for forms that can retain history without becoming slogan.

Pillin’s attraction to musical structure became literal in settings and collaborations. The New York Public Library catalog records William Schmidt’s *Ludus Americanus* for narrator and solo percussion, using Pillin poems (Avant Music/Western International Music, 1971), and a WIM

recording from the same year. Schmidt also set *The Beast* for piano and narrator (1974), *The Sparrow & The Amazing Mr. Avaunt* for oboe and narrator (1976), and *The Bulldozed Promenade* for narrator and piano (1981). Sharon Davis composed *Six Songs on Poems of William Pillin* for high voice and piano (1983). A 1979 Crystal recording by oboist Peter Christ included the Schmidt work.

The family connection to music was equally strong. Boris Pillin, born in 1940, studied at Los Angeles City College and graduated cum laude from UCLA in 1964, then earned a graduate degree in musicology at USC in 1967. He received a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship and an ASCAP award, studied composition with Leon Stein and Robert Linn, taught, and published orchestral and chamber music. His *Symphony, Op. 3* was selected in the Louisville New Music Competition. A Taos newspaper photographed William, Polia, and Boris together in 1964 while the family traveled east; its report already identified Boris as a painter and musician with graduate support. Music in the Pillin household was therefore neither metaphor alone nor passive appreciation. It was a second professional art.

The Pillins' books make their marriage materially visible. Polia supplied the cover of *Theory of Silence*, prints for both Kayak volumes, and paintings for *To the End of Time*. The presswork, paper, tipped-in color images, and limited editions resist the idea of poetry as disembodied text. William's own work at the wheel reinforced the point. A poem and a vessel both require form, pressure, revision, surface, firing, and an audience willing to live with the finished object.

Their collaboration also had economic asymmetry. Polia's pottery was the mainstay of household income, while Bill's books brought cultural capital, friendships, and an organizing center to the salon. He should not be made the hidden author of her visual achievement. Nor should his throwing, firing, production labor, and jointly attributed forms disappear. The partnership worked through distinct strengths and a shared household economy.

Public collections preserve that record. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, acquired an orange bottle jointly attributed to Polia and William in 2012-2013. The Smart Museum of Art has cataloged a vase by the pair, though its birth year for William appears erroneous. Yale University Art Gallery and pottery research databases preserve additional Pillin objects or attributions. These

holdings make William part of American studio-craft history as well as literary history.

Pillin continued writing into his seventies. *Another Dawn* appeared in October 1984. On June 5, 1985, he died of heart failure in a Los Angeles hospital. He was seventy-four. Polia and Boris survived him. The Los Angeles Times obituary emphasized the unusual parity of his public identities: poet in an adopted language and maker of pots with his wife.

His death ended the regular Melrose Avenue salons. Polia continued to work when health allowed and died in Los Angeles on July 25, 1992. Wanda Coleman's 1995 remembrance preserves the household from the inside: the debates, recitations, kiln, hidden storeroom, damaged pots, hospitality, and stubborn valuation of art outside official prestige.

Pillin occupied several histories that institutions usually separate: immigrant Jewish writing, 1930s proletarian poetry, the Federal Writers' Project, New Mexico regional culture, Los Angeles little magazines, studio pottery, artists' books, and contemporary concert music. That division helps explain his later obscurity. A reader searching only canonical poetry encounters scattered poems; a pottery collector centers Polia; a WPA historian meets the dismissal controversy; an archive lists a folder or two; a music catalog treats him as a lyricist. Put together, the record reveals a coherent cultural life.

Contemporary and later readers repeatedly resisted his disappearance. *Mainstream* remembered the social poems as among the late 1930s' best. Robert Bly presented the mature work as a model of image, object, and manual craft. Los Angeles anthologies and magazines restored him to a local lineage with Thomas McGrath, James Boyer May, Don Gordon, Bert Meyers, William J. Margolis, and others. Later critics have called him underrated and asked why no collected poems exists. The answer is not a lack of work, but dispersion.

Pillin's strongest poems hold unlike materials in suspension: Ukrainian childhood and Los Angeles traffic, synagogue and secular doubt, Chopin and the kiln, political defeat and marital fidelity, ordinary chores and extinction. Their modest diction can suddenly open into visionary space. His achievement is neither reducible to 1930s protest nor to late surrealism. It lies in converting a historically burdened life of labor into flexible, musical, object-centered lyric forms.

EDITORIAL NOTE AND SOURCES

Corpus, source control, and reading-text policy

Original books, periodical pages, and archival scans are the textual authorities. The project's older Pillin PDFs were not used to determine lineation or indentation. Every poem begins on a new page. True stanza divisions, sequence numbers, epigraphs, and repeated intentional indents are retained; narrow-page wraps, page-centered drift, folios, running heads, and accidental hanging indents are removed.

The local archive contains complete scans of *Theory of Silence* (1949), *Dance Without Shoes* (1956), *Pavanne for a Fading Memory* (1963), *Everything Falling* (1971), *The Abandoned Music Room* (1975), and *Another Dawn* (1984). Only selected pages are presently available from *Poems* (1939), *Passage After Midnight* (1958), and *To the End of Time* (1980). The edition therefore prints verified early magazine poems in their own chronological section, the recovered poem from *Passage After Midnight*, and three poems found only in the selected *To the End of Time* scans. It does not claim that those three partially represented books have been recovered in full.

Obvious OCR corruption, scan marks, broken words, false spaces, and damaged quotation marks have been corrected against the page images. Where a photographed spread had lost text at a gutter, the intact text layer in the original spread was used to restore the missing edge and then checked against the visible line. Book and periodical titles are italicized in editorial matter; the typography of the poems is otherwise kept black and restrained.

The surviving scan of *Another Dawn* ends after the fifth numbered part of a sequence titled "Seven Poems." The recovered five parts are printed without fabricating the two absent parts; the publication note records the scan's limit.

MAGAZINE VERSE

Poems verified in Poetry, 1936–38

The Ancient Dead

Their laurels cold, the ivory stare glazed,
the noble statues of the great:
bronze on basalt pedestals
with tracings of beasts and flowers,
lion-tail, swift bull, lacquered
sun of Aegeus
frozen in winter
on important streets
and the flakes falling
on green bronze,
faded
now until spring.

Builders
of poems and temples,
their sculptured lips
bringers of fire to the wastes of winter.

Sometimes I wonder: what is it?
all so remote now . . .
. . . a cracked plaster frieze, a pillar
shaped like a lily; bits of marble
chiselled and polished . . .
but at times recalled
by living makers
that whether a myth is a horned horse or a
smokeroaring airbird or mechanical dragon
still we can open lids of ancient tombs
and find not dust, but wings beating
white fugues to the wastes of winter.

Publication. *Poetry*, November 1936, pp. 81–82.

Wild Boys of the Road

"... for I remember eyes in which the States reflect their endless panoramic sweep. . . ."

A trekking caravan on narrowing trail
of hungry urchins (subway, cell or slum)
tramping past signboards, disinherited,
dispersed for picking crumbs. Coast to coast
the sod of neighing prairie darkly gleams
with jungle fires, shelters for the night.
Crazed by nostalgia of benzine fumes,
negro and yankee, jew and wop; they start
with desperate zest but never to arrive.
Thunder of sierras, gusting gales,
the dust of Arizona in their throats;
tough harbingers of breadless days
combing the piers, pleading on hostile streets
nameless and homeless; hobo kids, young tramps
whistling, intent against familiar jinx
of badge and uniform near railroad ties;
there is an absent stare in their eyes
puzzled and ravenous: some day the trains
will stop for them or else be dashed
against their suddenly articulate demands.

Publication. *Poetry*, November 1936, pp. 82–83.

Bronzed Men

After breathing the stale dust of cities
which are faded rooms in an old building
I have a clean and violent longing
to find a long whiteness, to be among
bronzed men living in brilliant daylight
of a clay desert and black hills slanting.

O falcons aspiring to sun's laurel!
Beware of the merchants who scribble
on the blank pages of your lives
till everything is paper and figures
and the spilled ink is your death-warrant.
They will bind you with a million gadgets
till your muscle is limp among ruins
for even the straight pillars of banks
are ruins cluttering beautiful landscape.
Be not caught in the terrible maze
of traffic & lights & excavations
& a million books & a million songs
& dances in which only the feet whirl
& kisses in which only the lips feel
& autos & ugly clothing &
methods & fashions & attitudes.
Better to have only a pot and a basket
than be distracted by tension of numbers.
For behold how between mountain snows
and strong brown earth under clear skies
a race of people lives in beauty
sheltered in clay from cool winds
that drift from the crags of the Smokies.
With a few things to work with and poetry
and a song that has tears in it and laughter,
breathing like green trees, loving completely
the bronzed men walking through brilliant daylight
being naked and unburdened and beautiful.

Note

You see no storm; but blurred,
A cloud obscures my eyes.
Cruel bird
Intones its doubts and lies.

Cruel bird torments my love
Whose beak a smile can still:
A dove
Can hunt this crow—and kill.

Dispell the cloud with sun
For when the blue is clear,
The one
Assurance slays all fear.

To solve me, try to feel!
My eyes, a printed page
Reveal
My doubts, my love and rage.

And you may sense a fire!
For how else can it be?
Desire
Is what sets passion free.

If in your heart disdain
For passion makes a breach,
Again
Restraint is yours to teach.

No two are ever matched
As buds together grown;
Detached,
Your inward eye may frown.

But I must strike a flame
Or else forget the flare.
Your name
Continues sweet and fair.

Forgive what you must prove
Or if I place a burden:
My love
Must weed its garden.

Publication. *Poetry*, December 1937, pp. 130–31.

Speech

The airman on gleaming pinions
leaping aerial blue
is companioned by danger.
A wire may break and the wings tremble
and the frame whirl and flame
across the horizon.
But he thinks only of the flight
and attends the controls.

Knowing that we must die
and the bluest, the loveliest flower
is dusted with bones of the remotely dead,
let us likewise
think of controls: and fear only
lack in our skill.

Our days are plagued by the ironic grins
of passionless who grin at virtue;
they are dull; their comfort pitiful.
Let us have praise for those who dare:
the great in heart: the lovers of mankind:
and let us have daring ourselves.

For it is shame to view the ardent young
and how the petals of their vibrant day
are blown in vain, swept by the winds that sprang
from nowhere into nothing and again.

Publication. *Poetry*, July 1938, pp. 182–83.

In Autumn's Wake

Quietly waking, I am no longer tense.
I vow to catalogue no longer the unrest
that wasted me and spent my winter strength.
Autumn is here; fragrant with bronze leaves burning
and spiraled smoke and wide air winged with gusts
of spirit flinging poems to the hills.
Anew, anew! I am no longer haggard;
pale autumn slowly moves to palliate
the kindled blood, to scour with plunging rains
the season of my weakness.

Ah, to conquer
torpid emotion, to walk again the lane
breathing the tonic air: darkened
with melancholy of deserted streets.
The calendar of summer fiercely stung
my blood to transient illness; now
as ever, autumn has come to heal.
These trees!
External nature, relaxed and beautiful;
like stones, like hills: thunder and frost
to make me laugh again, embattled, strong.

Publication. *Poetry*, November 1938, pp. 59–60.

O'Brien's Viewpoint

Who can say what a man's star is?
I can think of no clever reasons.
Ah, but this life is a challenge!
After the haste and glitter and action:
men, horses and guns: after the shaking:
the trembling of men: the rage of leaders:
our inventories gather wool in dark corners.
What do we know of the meaning of life?
Dying, we know the democracy of dust.

Publication. *Poetry*, November 1938, p. 60.

Two Lives

Between the sewing machine and the kitchen
the intervals are brief. She uses them to paint
spirals and verticals of proletarian slums;
smoke and stone, patched roofs, a littered porch.

And after a day of numbers and minutes, he comes.
He thunders headlines. News items on his lips
turn into slogans; he animates the room
with a methodic fervor and she nods
quietly, her mind on paints and rent.
“Energy is bread and water and sun; all this
the multitudes must make their own.” Or else
he ponders: “This single, round word, ‘masses’
dynamic like a drum, a gun, a signal.”

A blueblond radiolove across the street
disturbs the air with bruised sexcravings.
“O, damn! Let’s go. The meeting is for 8
but we can promenade that lighted zone of wealth,
Boul. Michigan, take in a show perhaps.”

(There in the shadows they may find the myth
of swift modernity which fires the limbs to speed.)

This is the street. It’s dark, mysterious.
A yellow spider gathers in the sky, blue stains
fall from the neon sign, the gutters stink
with broken bottles from the street saloon.
Diesels shatter the evening.
Tumult, blue flame of loop.

The evening comes to flower in rebel thought
and leaflets hurried from a mimeograph,
an empty loft hung with red flags and signs.
Then home again. She looks
to see if poverty requires another daub.
He recollects with pleasure his remark: “Our lives
we live so actually that we see death

where we are not.”

The miners, lockouts fade;
the surge of history, its international roar
dissolves into the night.

Publication. *Poetry*, November 1938, pp. 63–64.

Signature

I'm stung with fire to write my signature
beneath the manifesto of these times.
Splendid rebellion! Hurl your thronged
muscle and bone to batter down the gate
that clamps the fertile vigor of this land.

I live in a prairie town and life is dull.
There is no dance. No evening frolic eases
the tension of routine-directed days.
Because the steel constricted beams pressed down
the lyric need for more melodic curves
I cursed the land and not its fanged affront.

And this despite the tools wise doctors give
to make our shoulders fabulous with strength!
This train propelled by metal wheels; my voice
leaping along the vaulting poles; or fingers
touching mute space to make the dials sing.
Where is this energy of which ten thousand horses
are pledged for every marvelous athlete?
I want my share of strength; to know, to see;
to move the mountains as I want them moved,
direct the rivers, make the deserts bloom!

Publication. *Poetry*, November 1938, pp. 64–65.

THEORY OF SILENCE

Los Angeles, 1949

Air

How frugal was the mind
that first imagined air;
our age is profligate
to waste a breath so rare,
to stifle or deny
the thinly rationed cry.

Now you who make the wars,
regard the giant stars:
airless the subtle space
from Orion to Mars:
dead. . . but this tiny one
adored by dying sun.

Whose total nightmare breaks
wind's silver in the lung,
hear how Mozart and Bach
patterned this thing and flung
sonatas to the arch
of sun aspiring lark.

When friends and lovers die
a stumbling fugue intrigues
to seize the kindly wind
and hold the precious cry;
how rare, and woe, how dear
this final atmosphere.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

Song

The crows in windward flight
caw at the flares of frost,
a silver trail of light
for spring is here almost.

Alone, with heart sunk low
I cross the frozen field,
for deadly winds will blow
when winter crystals yield.

This chill is blue and pale
is summer chill
with flame upon the vale
and blood upon the hill.

This cold will yield to grass
but summer cold must last
with rattling of the brass
and metal blazing blast.

The wolves and carrion crow
lean from their winter share
of crumbs upon the snow
will find a fatter fare
in spring when bullets glow
through lightning riven air.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

Landscapes That Soon May Come

In whitely tiled retreats the air
suggests return of ancient swamps;
disaster glitters like a flare
among the electronic lamps.

Fear is like sugar in our blood.
We see our stone colossi hurled
by the relentless pull of mud;
the landscapes of a strange new world.

When wind will freely prowls again
unhampered by a tower's height,
when on the silver flooded plain
descends the batlike swoop of night.

A beast's shrill laughter. Rain's white flail.
The endless surf on yellow dune.
The gleaming fangs and seabird's wail
and autumn everywhere and icy moon.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

Totalitarian Skeleton

Grief slices truth with clever lines
and leaves a ravaged skeleton.
It gnaws all greening things to bone:
the lovely groves, the twining vines.

And reason cruelly shouted down
our gentle sins, our skillful song;
it built itself an iron town
by cold command of steel and thong.

No flaring leaf, no lighted lawn
deters the need that monstrous grew:
for pale plateaus, white star, the blue
intaglio of arctic zone.

No fevers burn: no tangling doubt
obscures the naked ice and snow;
along the glacier's shattering rout
our souls reflect its frozen glow.

Through circles, planes and polar height
white birds campaign on chilling air
and anxious hands stretch to the light
to clasp the warm things throbbing there!

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

Dialectic

A swift flame from bronze Cathay
hits iron cold from blue Baikal:
within their airy meeting die
the fevered hound, the stiffened gull.

And singer singed by lunar fire
or sage with calculus of form
observe in conflict of desires
cadenzas of a classic storm.

In abstract flight, in banal clay,
are struggling airs, are airs disjoint
where endless opposites must play
their savage counterpoint.

In sad pianos, lover's dream,
in poem's whisper, flower's scent,
the dancing tensions lurk to dim
Handel in blue firmament.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

Shut the Door

Shut the door and shutter the glass:
remain alone within these walls,
and if some knock who nearby pass
be silent to their calls.

Bolt the door until they go
for we are poor, with nought to share;
who rudely bring us wind and snow
may steal our meager fare.

For they are many and we are three;
and who calls there from wintry mist?
the hand that fumbles at the key
may pound with iron fist.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

Uncertain Clues

Whelmed in the crazy mire
we face a leaner age;
in reveille of violent tones
despair dictates the page.
To trace our trails we read
the native script again:
the subtleties of calm Thoreau
and ironies of sad Mark Twain.

No phrases neatly turned
conceal the tears and grind;
Parkman's words were unadorned
and Whitman's undefined.
politician's oath
submits a patriot ruse:
they pledged their spirit's troth
in vague uncertain clues.

No graphs inked on the page
or calls to do and dare
but half-erased by age
uncertain clues are there.
Missouri's dark glimmer
done by Currier and Ives;
an old river steamer:
ponies and Bowie knives.

The husbandman walking
to his barbed wire lines,
a stealthy hunter stalking
through stiffly frosted pines.
The hostile wind: the plain,
the axe, the scythe, the log,
the sunset's golden stain
on nature's catalogue.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

That Which Is Good

That which is good is simply done
without the manifesto's noise
as Francis talking to the birds
or Leo to the peasant boys.

The socialism of the heart
is not in schedules, is in man
and what is generous on earth
is generous without a plan.

As when creative fingers roam
anarchic space in hit or miss
and suddenly discover there
a luminous caprice.

So musical this silence is!
so natural the heart's technique
like sunlight glittering in trees;
the rest is rhetoric.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

Abel's Lament

Poor brother, hairy, dark,
what illness made you sulk?
While I pursued the lark,
agile and beautiful,
you were a sullen hulk.

Your place was in my love,
I kept the place apart
and you, an exile, strove
to fill a lonely place
in your abandoned heart.

Mine was the deathless eye
clean to the end of time.
was your keeper, I
with faith to calm a storm.
Your madness is my crime.

Alas, the tale is wrong
and should be told again.
The Spirit's voice came strong,
(my dead heart like a stone)
it thundered down,
where is your brother Cain?"

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

The Choice

We point transparent sights
where nothing can assure us;
vague are the lamps that lure us
past furthest satellites
of Orion and Arcturus.

The mental steel we bring
to tighten mental slack
is strained by mortal lack.
It snaps like cabled spring
sprung violently back.

And doom is sure to both
the ignorant and wise;
the dull who shrug at lies,
the brave who spurning sloth
turn to insurgent skies.

The real is soul or sod?
If all must end the same
I choose the tougher game
of challenging the mud
and staking widest claim.

With grace of word to serve
evasive shape and tone
and seek with brain and bone
the soul behind the nerve,
the ghost beyond the stone.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

Concerning the Blue Sky

Concerning the blue sky, assume
one day it will be gone,
and silently thin air consume
the hills in dust of vanished stone.

And all I know, revealed to me
in slow and fathomless decree,
in stiffened veins of winter trees
or moonlight's glint on icy sea

shivers and bursts and disappears
like bubble landing on a thorn:
a lantern snuffed by cosmic tears
as if the star was never born.

Assuming this, love rock and air,
white aspens, cold lagoons;
with every fleeting second share
its evanescent boons.

Enframed by the besieging dark,
sustained by passing light,
dove's wing, doe's step, dog's bark,
sign, sound and sight.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

Acknowledgment

Einstein defined nocturnal sweep;
he traced light's limit to a bend.
Jeans analyzed particulars
and found equations in the end.

Observe, suspended in the dark
the bluish twinkles seem the same
though "infinite" is now confined
within our tight galactic frame.

Surrounded by arithmetic
they brought existence neatly home
within stupendous lyric leap
that caps our thinking with a dome.

The intellect investigates
heaven's frostlike filigrees
and finds that ultimates become
the heart's and Hertzian mysteries.

I thank you learned gentlemen
for what you cautiously declare,
for lighting candles in the dark
of metaphysical despair.

When caged by dull necessity
heavens was a luminous mess,
how intricately you restored
the melody of silences.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

My Summer Dream

My summer dream is ever thus:
to sense the elemental ghost.
Beyond the substance of the crust
his breath concerns me most.

For see how wing and leaf conspire
more than the mere mosaic sum;
the whorling wave, the thistle fire
transcend what they are fashioned from.

And in the tall windshaken trees
is clearly more than leafy fugue;
the seafoam phantom in the breeze
surmounts the sentient catalogue.

In sequent scales of light and blue
reason's structure is laid bare:
my summer dream is somehow to
observe its clear dimensions there.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

Someone Is Here

Someone is here besides us,
within the whining throng
this presence is not clear
or is not felt for long.

Not felt for clatter and boom
of all the idiot show
drowning our silent psalm
so we cannot withdraw
to caves of iron calm.

Bless the extended pause,
the test of stately sound;
in tranquil lull I know
the silent one is bound
to follow where we go.

For we are three but surely
under a cold moon's glow
lifting the ravens of fear
from fields of whirling snow.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

He

Whose truth, with song arising,
Lifts my eyes beyond the dawn,
Is root and leaf, comprising
Fire and water, air and stone.

For He is breath: a whisper
On leaning wave and rustling grass,
Or a lung inspiring grasper
Exulting in the thunder's brass.

The whelming splendor of my seeing
Reveals annihilating space,
Within whose slightest being
A saraband of stars may race.

Intangible yet near: the Name
Is He, the flaming Word whose light
Uncircumscribed, is burning frame
And picture of the Infinite.

For He is fire; triumphant flower,
The subtle spark and radiant strife;
In household logs I see the power
Where nothing lives and all is life.

And ice: a blue chill sighing
In stiffened forest and glazed ponds:
I feel the frozen forces trying
In the clear cold their lake-locked bonds.

Yet He is nowhere! In the night
The shadows prowl. A blazing sun
Is but a glimmer of His light,
While spaces thunder darkly on.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

Ice and Tears

I knew a cold day without wildness,
I walked on white lava of spent violence.
The hill I loved became a sterile glacier,
I ceased to look for radiance behind it.

I exhaled my soul like a vapor on wind
in a season of iron skies
and nothing honored my hunger, nothing.

Only my eyes remained uncongealed,
in a frozen frame kept a glittering dance,
searched a glow on icy horizon.

I was a statue stiffly walking.
My thoughts were bluish twinkles,
my nerves were shining neons.

I might have frozen into the stars
but on my upward lifted searching eye
a gentle rain of tears fell

like alcohol on snow crystals;
and I felt passion again within me
and the hill I loved flowered green
and a radiance blossomed behind it.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

Ice and Flame

I walked with Mozart through the frost
of prairie swept with stars and snow;
flame hung upon the vibrant ghost,
flame garlanded the classic brow.

On frozen stubble through the peace
of wintry midnight I could feel
inchoate rustling in the trees
assume a swift chromatic thrill.

With Mozart, that mysterious man
preluding wordless epigrams
I was a hushed Utopian
enchanted by the psychograms

of magic algebra that thrilled
in measured tones of black and gold.
We stayed upon the crystal field
until the night became too cold.

Flame duelled frost. Arpeggios traced.
a glockenspiel on icy rocks.
Ice filmed the brittle stalk, ice glazed
metallic trunks of stabile oaks.

Too coldly blue for me. I turned
to humbler flame of log and stone,
while Wolfgang radiantly burned
beyond the paling line of dawn.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

Form Was a Classic Mirror

Form was a classic mirror
in any age that breathed deep,
a lens that seized the error
and made the climbing steep.

Carved from a stubborn tree-root:
engraved on a linen scroll:
a moving air on woodflute:
a dancer's capriole.

The wordsmith's strokes, clear ringing
can hush the babblers' din
when lean wit turns the stinging
reason's acetylene.

Who dances at public fairs
ignoring the stern disciplines,
groaning the thick despairs,
twisting crimsons and greens,

will be mute, their passions fade;
they will view with a wordless sigh
gulls over an esplanade
climbing the cloudless sky.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

A Priori

The beautiful is in my mind
before I see the twisted stone,
before the perfect phrase I find
or hear the spinet's slender tone:

anticipate the swift concerto
or tints of luminescent paint,
identify in faded quarto
the secret of a happy saint.

The beautiful assaults the soul
in a perpetual love and anger
to make it elegantly whole,
objectify the radiant hunger:

as when the kindled fingertips
play supple preludes to desire
the beautiful is in my lips
before her breath, before her fire.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

In This I Know My Love

In this I know my love:
her whisper that defeats
a sigh within my heart;
that cuts the shadow's length
and breathes an organ strength
upon derisive streets.

In this I see my love:
her hands that clean and mend
and flutter on the stove;
the hands by which is fed
the infant in his bed
as if by white wings fanned.

In this I feel my love
that like a hot lamp glows
in silence of my heart;
her body which makes tense
the sinews of love's sense,
the loam my passion ploughs.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

Folk Song

Dear to me is the song of my people
like a whispered lament
through my heart's clear channel.

In flutter of excited words it moves
like an echo's monument to silence,
like leaves blowing
into the nightwind.

On murder seeded plain it moves,
in raven haunted towns
through darkness of wings beating panic.

Wherever I go in the world
I hear the song of my people pleading
for one more day before terrors gleam
like red meteors of anger
and the music disappears
among frightened chimneys.

In a handful of wheat I find it,
in silver rustle
of slender aspens, in wave swept kindling,
the song of my people pleading.
for one more day
before mist scatters swallows of light
and the heart is a dead bird
endlessly falling.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

The Wanderer

In my dreams are shadows
like ashes in teeth of poplars.
Yellow swathes of rye run
like flame to horizon.
I see porcelain towers
and frozen fugues of streets
but from what land I come
I do not remember.

In my dreams I see faces
kind as a candle,
grave as autumn highway,
brutal
as a stone sneer
and one face
whose eyelashes were secrets
of a precious smile
but my father's face
I do not remember.

One name thrilled me
like an opium flower
and one was like sculpture
with a globe for a pedestal
and one made folk shudder
like a dirge at midnight
but my true name
I do not remember.

I have eaten bread
conspiring with showers
under saffron sun
and in bronzed lagoons
cast nets for leaping silver
and on sturdy loom
threw a shuttle like a gull
but my real skill
I do not remember.

When soldiers come knocking
to my door at midnight
I will say that once
in a little inn
I drank wine
like moonlight
and heard a song
like a luminous tear
and I lay down
under a tree
whose branches were
like tender hands
and on waking
I remembered nothing.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

Death as a Whisper

Hunter and angler I conceive him not
despite an oriole trembling as it flies
or salmon frozen in transparent ice:
despite stilled blood of hounds no longer hot
or black bouquets of sacrifice.

Who utters spectral toast to whited bones
is neither bestial nor passionate;
compounded in no crucible of hate
are elements of water, fire and stone
that keep his love inviolate.
Exploring dusk on fringes of a grove
I sensed him first—a whisper on my skin—
and yet again, transcending iron din
of city vaults, I felt his airy love
as blue as wind, as lightning lean.

Impalpable and blue as moving mist;
tenderest breeze to cool nocturnal lust:
the gusty whirlwinds sifting ancient dust:
a secret anesthetic for a beast,
to man—a gentle silver rust.

Regard him not as grinning bone, a skull
ironically strumming a guitar,
or yet as awful flame upon a star:
regard him as a line where wings have gone,
a narrow whisper of a flute afar.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

Ceramic Symbols

In blazing clay and stone
the images are made
with glazes brightly laid
on mouth, eye, bone.

Through ram with glittering flanks
and cock with flaming plume
we shape a magic thanks
for breath and bloom.

Serpent of sightless depths
by whom the vine is fed:
sun bull whose tendons yield
red honey and brown bread.

In rite of hammered rock
two palmed hands seek the sky;
four holy forms unlock
the blue amazing eye.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

Notes on Making Pottery

1. Clay

We dug iron-stained
feldspathic rock
in dew-moist ravine;
screened in a stream
and loaded barrows
for the damp-bin.
The jungle-damp spot
had a sweet stink. I was
muscle-sore witness
to cavernous doings;
forests of fern
in swamps
next to trapped bones
of pterodactyls.

2. Potter's Wheel

The old foot-wheel
impels the wet wedged chunk
outward from center
in spinning rotation.
Over it palely
hovers the ghost
of pure form.
Your fingers follow
subtle intuitions.
A rising hollow
delicately flowers
and leaps blue
frozen forever
to the flaring lip-rim.

3. Preparing Glazes

For three hours I sat
grinding cobalt
in porcelaine pestle

for a true lazuli
such as Egyptians
tinted eyes of tomb-beetles.
With aching back
and numb hands
I sat grinding
and it pleased me
to imagine myself Chinese
of the time Hui Tsung
when craftsmen sat grinding
moon-white celadon
for forty hours
to make a lucent film
in tea-stoneware.

4. *Decorating*

Vase 9 inches high
slim like a soaring stem
designed with symbols
of four elements;
wings on spring winds,
radiant ray
in marbled blue glaze.
We paint with stained earths
on wet clay sponged clean
and brushes thinner
than petal veins.
A clear calm music
is useful
for holy attention.
This step is final
before the ordeal by flame.

5. *The Ghost Kiln*

Dinosaurs captive
in copper pipe
burn, purging
the flower of art
to a clear crystal.

First a slow
soaking heat
to a cherry glow;
increase pressure
to a star-white finish.
Subtle and terrible
a passion roars
in cement confinement,
melting sand and metal
in a glowing nimbus.
All night we kept vigil
at the raging crucible
where nothing lives
but abstract doves
and stone gazelles.

6. Opening the Kiln

For 24 hours of silence
the big kiln cooled.
Will they bloom,
our vases,
tiny monuments
of gemlike stone?
or will they insult us,
crackled and crazed,
pin-holed, sulphur-blistered?
The steel door
slowly opens;
a silver-rimmed majolica

bursts
into a flowerflame.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

Sequence in Five Parts

I.

In ancient dreams, in tear stained folios,
in the wild vine and icy star
we seek our knowledge of Your light.
Why is this one thing You withheld?
All else overwhelms with certitude:
love's quiver, storms, dusks, darknesses,
but You alone are an imagined wing
that flutters like a yearning in our blood.

The traitor mind mutters
of atom's chance construction, asks for a sign.

What is a sign?
a stone flower, a glass star?
a pine-tree rooted in the loam?
or when autumnal daybreak tugs the heart
your whitely burning silence is a sign?

2.

What can be known beyond this day,
its blue glitter, its silver twigs?
or night, when limbs expand
like naked wings in darkness fluttering?
This moment, this petalled flare,
our shelter in time's blindness.

Mistrust them who ask
your hunger today for tomorrow's feast,
your violence now for tomorrow's peace,
your lie for tomorrow's truth.
This waltz is real even in sorrow.
This bread we eat, brown and crusted,
bite it even with such poor wine
as peasants drink at their rough board.

3.

A lean clown promising Tomorrow
is showing the ranks of the beaten

golden clusters on a dancing screen.
O the thick fables!
blueprints framed in guns;
the slogans: machines, order, masses!
I remember before the lean whip swung
and we danced gaily
out of our childhood poems
into the latterday fictions.
I recall my grandfather:
a tin-smith, bearded, majestic,
playing chess with his neighbors;
sunlight streaming through the grating,
the glistening tin shavings on clean wood
and the quiet calm of the players;
horses plunging their curved pride:
rye bent by slight autumn breathing:
and the bronze tang of October
lifting the heart high to song's level.

4.

The killer with birds of violence,
the killer with quicksilver tongue,
with slogans like heat-lightening.
The killer waving a banner of bread,
the killer smiling in his study, the killer
mimeographing in a tenement basement,
the killer with storms in his portfolio.
The killer as a doctor explaining
huge poisoned sunflower, the killer
in white smock with silicate dreams
of thwarted harvests, dead landscapes.
The killer with hurricane eyes,
with wheatfields in his hair,
with foundries in his teeth, the killer
with chlorine smoking mouth.

5.

O laureates of learned script!
add a few footnotes, revise the thesis.

We came with Statesmen,
our monument
is the dance of angry atoms
and death's long low whistle.

We came with Priests
but He does not know them.

We came with Capitalists
from the loops of World Chicagos
where a Golden Horde is wombed
whose glitter is doom,
whose waltz is murder.

Perhaps some day
we shall come
each one alone
and you will see
the many winged space,
vast tundras and illimitable blue.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

The Sigh

What is this sigh
like an enormous harp
plucked by a weeping hand?
It is God sighing His grief.

In the wild sky
an eyeball like a golden stone;
pale glint on branches of trees
blue wax by frost enchained lagoon.
The infinite sorrowful Eye.

Someplace on earth armed hordes
mass power, sharpen
the glittering thorns.
In the night I hold
those I love.
The stars are not yet falling
but what is that cry
like a passionate wind?
It is God quietly weeping.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

Essay

Know we triumphant absolutes of birth:
the kindled glow of dawn in green lagoons;
revive autonomies of intertidal slime,
reptilian memories and winged solitudes.
How often, flowering in fungoid jungle,
our history took shape, dwindled, was gone:
spasmodic lives in tropic steam of swamps,
on patterned weed and fern of permian mud.

Review this growth since you were wholly born:
trailing receding ice and blue salt lakes,
low-browed and brutish, huddled round a fire,
men with flaked flint and frightened stare:
the stag and salmon tracings in their caves
pledged to reluctant idols of despair.

Loving, afraid, in caves or fertile field:
food of mare's milk and reindeer blood,
tents of thick felt, fuel of burning dung.
Huntsmen and fisherfolk on endless human quest:
the agile antelope with glistening horns
and wild geese flapping seaward their white wings.

Wanting to nurse our fear in caves of art;
pray to our own skies in lyric syllables
to feed our young: to know delight
in the reliant iron of our frame.
Always we dwindle as our form takes shape,
vanish, are born again, strive, multiply,
kick the unwilling mule and gather stone
to build a home on alien land, never our own.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

Formula

If you would escape the wheel,
the ever turning plunging wheel,
motionless.

The sky
is deep and burning: one must be blind
to view the blue with vision undefiled:
be blind.

Smoke, rain, bare twigs: voices of tense ghosts:
mutter of mounting moan.
There are too many things here for calm:
they spin and multiply:
their greedy fingers claw, their lips blaze,
One must be less than a breath on wind's passing
to break the storm of feeling:
feel nothing.
And the drab drift of dead minutes?
minutes like glazed segments of a glittering snake?
do not count the dead minutes.

Let the stuff creep over you:
let it crawl:
you have surrendered pain.
Let your mind build a silence around it:
let it be wiped clean.
Let the mind be lonely:
terribly lonely, without fire or mind's silver:
effortless
as a sunken sea-stone: complete
as a melting cloud: strong
as a clear wall of air.

Publication. *Theory of Silence*. Los Angeles: George Yamada, 1949.

DANCE WITHOUT SHOES

Francestown, New Hampshire, 1956

On Hearing Frederick Play the Appassionata

A shaft of moonlight falls in silver folds.

You look as pale and handsome in it

as the royal Frederick who long ago

spun sonatinas on a slender spinet.

This is a silence crumbling at a stir.

Your frostlike fingers in allegro flights

begin a whirlwind figure on the keys;

a lamplighter kindling a million lights.

It fades; and gravely you extemporize.

The melody is meditative, slow.

Death leans at threshold. A woman wrings her hands.

Upon the empty windows cold winds blow.

Intent upon the faint andante air

perhaps I miss hope's thinly gleaming thread?

The chords reply implacable despair.

I weep inaudibly, with a bowed head.

But in the dark of silent grief I feel

a glittering soft coil of her hair fall

upon my lap. I know that love is still

the white physician in that stricken hall.

The music ends. Your fingers, poised midair,

seem to sustain interminable tone

that vibrates in the ever widening air

until some luminous frontier is won.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

The Book

Intent upon the silver syllables
the boy is bowed over his open book;
his lips move silently with lyric lines,
his eyes are kindled with an eager look.
How innocent he is! Between us years
extend a gulf of silence, dumb and blind,
but I remember when these flame-tongued lines
sang just as beautifully in my mind.
Before I saw Attila's bestial leer
and all my dreams were shattered by that look;
before I put a rankling weed of hate
like bookmark in the pages of our book.
At darkening window with his head bent back
he sits, the sun a flush upon his face,
and struggles with gold-weighted lids of sleep
to catch the nuance of another phrase.
I take the volume from his sleeping hands
and open it where I stopped long ago
and suddenly the expiring flame of sun
illuminates the page with radiant glow.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

Transfiguration

If you say Thou to anything
it answers with a dazzling flash;
say Thou to thunderbolts that clash
their black dimensions in the air;
to eyeless worm; to stealthy prow
of beasts across nocturnal field;
to blind meditations of an owl.

Who fail to say it walk alone,
and vague their world, a palimpsest;
the hill, eroded mass of stone
instead of April's vernal breast.
In the blue outlines of the air
they will not see, for chemic haze,
Thy pure extensions everywhere.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

Song on Having a Roof of Our Own

Reflecting lunar glow
our wooden threshold leans.
Here liberty begins;
a roadway in blue night,
the lantern's private light:
I doubt what else it means.

This roof is mine. Recall
the rooming house; the throb
of traffic, the muffled sob
behind a neighbor's wall,
the faucet in the hall,
the guiltily turned knob.

Hearing one man's mutter,
another's radio,
we'd pack our things and go
as stealthily as thieves,
or as wind driven leaves
from stone curb to gutter.

In rented rooms, unfree,
we envied wolves and wrens
their warm nests and dark dens
and wanting privacy
knew that in planks and bricks
are most men's politics.

By plaster, beam and lath
we exiled cold and fear;
I lie awake, I hear

the boy's and her quiet breath
and peace invades the gloom
of shadows in my room.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

Berceuse

The boy leaning upon a window sees
an aerial city dipped in bluish light,
his wide-eyed wonder mirroring a flight
of fairy towers and blue balconies.

I see it red, this bright Medusa hair!
The spreading net of luminous lines trace
a chart of neon veins like bloody lace.
The swarm of lights glows like a scarlet flare

To him it hums an exquisite berceuse.
He wants to try his fledgling wings among
enchantments of the distance-haloed throng.
My throat feels terror like a swallowed bruise.

A little longer near my heart, your hearth,
your chrysalis of love! Dumbly I gaze
at shapes of darkness, at electric blaze.
His laughter tinkles, the innocent mirth
restores a smiling calm. In his clear view
the dusk is sleeping mistily and blue.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

Prelude and Dance on Quitting a Rotten Job

The hours of paid labor involve
an absolute smile of the Boss
on pins, pads, paper clips;
fate hanging on nimble telephone wit,
while I am like a stunned man
pouring two buckets of sand
one into another, with no end
but to humour the Devil.

Such sequence is empty of landscapes.
The soul, that elegant bird of escaping breath,
withers to pin-point or deserts
finding a livelier home
in metallic fly or glittering beetle.
I just made a tray of hammered copper
with a bull on it and winged Europa
grasping the tapering horns.

This is one of my two days of freedom.
Half of yesterday I spent in illness and worry,
a fugitive between storm and storm.

I will sit a while with silence and swallows.
Near my cottage are two fig trees.
If you can imagine a man at a window
reading Chinese poems by slender lamplight,

it is I, Pillin. The smog has abated,
wind is scented with a million flowers
blowing from northern orchards.

The autumn evening is cool
and the wise woman who makes pottery
brings me hot wine and black olives.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

Melancholy at Twilight

I

It is evening, dark and quiet,
and I think how time passes
leaving me little but this notebook
crawling like a glittering centipede
upon a hundred poems.

What shall I do
before days, weeks, months tumble
like sand-banks into time's swirling river?
What shall I do tomorrow?

At breakfast like a morning ritual
will hear a radio-cast, consult the clock,
kiss youngster off to school, mend
the broken screen-door if I find the time.

2

And I will give a passing thought
to rain's bright banners bringing
green life to bone-dry boughs,
and later, horses of a thousand winds
tearing across the crazy sky,
all light and shadow after a drenching rain.

3

What shall I do? The movement of events
mingles and fades all glory and distress
with nothing left but restless thoughts,
lunatic rapiers, that it might have been
not so, but so; tauter the lines of verse
and love more tigerlike and a thicker purse.
It is no use to dwell on might-have-been;
her face imprisoned in my tears,
the revolt that failed, the fifteen years
breathing the dust of counters and desks.

4

The time has come for my peculiar
economy; to speak lean words,
to split the day into minutia
of manageable detail. To think kindly
of friends and relatives, the liberals
who ask for a donation, my neighbor,
yes, and my neighbor's noisy dog.

5

With two eyes properly enframed in lens
I will possess my faculties in full
but with the third, my secret eye,
perceive a leopard love
that like a summer stirs the blood
and with the third, my secret ear,
hear the pianist's spider hands
disturb the air with blue arpeggios.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

Fêtes

Who can foretell a time for festivals?
Paeans and bacchanals lurk just around
the corner of a drifting hour. Who can tell
the sudden pouring out of light? Gayeties
are the gratuities we stumble on.
Then let us be alert to seize the hour!
Earth garlanded in splash of sunny blooms
may be a signal for our joyous jaunt
to where a wizard with star-spangled cloak
parades in company of painted clowns.
We dance pavannes to tambours and celestes.
We try new laughs. We shed all our deaths
like faded working clothes. We visit all
improbable and somewhat risky spots.
Now we attend a feast of grinning gnomes

squatting around a cherry flame of oak
who roast wild acorns, laugh at ribald jests;
now venture where the naked wood-nymphs leap
who sip the milk of moonlight and whose breasts
gleam whitely in the coldly lunar light.
Or dressed in Sunday best we go, my love,
to festive fair with red and green balloons
and like astonished peasants gape at lights,
at tinsel, carousels and youths in masks,
at athletes, ballerinas, acrobats.

We carry olive wreaths to the sea-shore
past columns domed with stone archaic leaves.
On tablecloth of sunlight we heap loaves
of bread, stone jugs of honey and black wine.
We swing on day's blue pendulum, we toast
the unrehearsed ebullience of the heart.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

Dance Without Shoes

She rises, treads a virginal ballet
naked before the mirror's frost and flare
and hums a little tune while fingers play
with hairpins on her darkly coiling hair.

The milkman's wagon, children's gleeful noise,
the barking dog; this is the patterned day
whose breathing variations blithely trace
the figuration of our roundelay.

There is compelling fragrance in the air
of wheatcakes opulent in blue faience;
the nereid and fawns descend the stair
to dance among the kitchen pots and pans.

Dance without shoes until the crimson sun
dies at our window in a velvet sweep
and plundered by our pirouettes we sink
into a brief eternity of sleep.

And death engulfs us, immanent in things
since stars emerged from incandescent gas.
Come, let us dancing greet the day that brings
the scanty coin of soon-spent happiness.

Death is no medicine to take in small
black doses till the dancing limbs are numb
and sorrow will not silence iron growl
of massed frontiers or stop the sunlike bomb.

So come, my love, put on a naiad mask
for pas de deux upon a dew-damp lawn;
extended in a graceful arabesque
we greet with fingertips the morning sun.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

April Pastoral

On any April noon Pll chance
to note a glint of violet hair
and draw compelling violence
from indolent and shining air.

From hyacinth heat of breathing lawn
I come, a suppliant and lover;
she puts the water pitcher down
and smoothenes out the linen cover.

I make a tender bow to kiss
the drops of laughter from her mouth. . .
and spring comes foaming, dizzy trees
soar in thunder's paling rout.

The insolent birds beyond our door
chirp like chips of broken ice
while my impetuous love explores
the blue amazement of her eyes.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

Tango

All songs of passion share
an ultimate despair.
With heavy, fatal art
guitars torment the heart
for passion knows its doom
even in darkened room
of whisper, stir and sigh
and passion's final cry.

Alas, the tango must
be plaintive in its lust
for we exhausted lie
in sudden chastity.
The flower that opens now
is sweet but does not glow,
the hand upon the thigh
is calm as morning sky,
the lips on naked throat
subdued by tender thought.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

Nightfall

July intones its sated song
and 'sucks the scanty dew of lawns;
a sultry whisper blows across
the fainting trees and kindled stones.

Like wan somnambulists we move
in dull performance of our chores;
ambition, love and appetite
are slowly draining through our pores.

Our senses indolently blink
at hot enormity of sun
and waken only when it sinks
in billows of vermillion.

And then a darkly tempered air
obliterates the dazzling sheen;
we feel the yellow curtains lift
from parched Saharas of our skins.

A darkly rushing wave of air
dissolves all arbitrary lines
and in penumbral shade of moon
black flower of silence shines.

And in the moonlight's frostlike space
the foaming silences foment
a ferment of renewed desires
in blood revived and vehement.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

A Memory of Lilac

When you put lilac in an earthen crock
how arctic the aroma it distilled;
this glacial cluster on a bluish stalk
is partly spring's and partly winter's yield.
When inky marshes brim and small snails crawl,
when mayflies skim illuminated air,
we put a plume of lilac in a bowl
to freshen lungs and fumigate the stair.

What other early bloom enlivens so
the linen table-cloth, whose petalled breath
combines the memory of melting snow
with sumac crimsoning the summer heath?

And brooding on it at this ocean's rim
of desert buds redeemed from arid loam
by thin veins pulsing from impounded stream,
I feel an exile from my prairie home.

I'd leave this land of endless summer sun
to hear the frogs in lustful quavering
and with the winter's wingless vigil done
begin again with indigo sprigs of spring.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Frankestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

Poem on Growing Older

I.

The young are stormed by merest sigh,
by wildwood taken, whelmed by blue,
by impact on the innocent eye
of silverly and new;

by frost and smoke on delicate air,
by snow like mint upon the tongue;
are ravaged by the whispering hair
and perfume in the lung.

The young are thunder-spent by Spring,
by candles, cork and giggling sin,
are melancholy with the strings
of grieving violins.

2.

What toxic humor in my bone
corrupts my eager dance?
Alas! the urgent touch is gone
and wide-eyed sense.

Was it the world changed or I?
was boyhood prairie greener,
bluer the boyhood sky?

What gnaws on eye and bone?
Instead of earth, a phantom,
instead of bread, a stone.

Mind was webbed by a book.
The eye ignored the sun,
the ear forgot the brook.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

There Was a Time We Could Subdue a Storm

There was a time we could subdue a storm;
we laughed, we ran to rainswept linden grove
past doorways where embracing couples told
their breviaries of love.

The wind swore. Thunders slowly salvoed
and spattered blue upon the ashen sheaves.
Our fancy build a column exquisite
with carved acanthus leaves.

That autumn when we held as in a trance
all universe, our cunning will could bind
by thongs of verse the silver madrigals
that drift on frosty wind.

But this October we're content to snare
love's smaller game and will not find it good
if memory's taunting flame regenerates
the ardours of our blood.

The vaulting grove where laughingly we hid
to cut our names upon a lime-tree bark
is recollected now as weed-grown ruin
of once triumphant arch.

Here is a narrower world with room enough
for soul's performance of a brief pavane.
We sit indoors and hear the dolorous
andante of the rain.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

Interruptions

Just as my mind unlocks a door
on blue illimitable latitude
to yield some slight reward for brooding hour,
your footsteps on the floor
like gritty teeth devour
the uncreated petals of my mood.

Or when our total vision knows
the silver glinting clarity of dawn
and we are hushed before its calm decor,
just as the moment glows
there is knocking on the door
or an insistent ring of telephone.

The blundering of clumsy chance
destroys the outlines of concordant form;
sonata airs condemned by raucous street,
a faltering in the dance
because of stumbling feet,
the picnic ruined by unexpected storm.

And I who seek a shining sign,
an image blue and incorrupt,
may someday find its incandescent trace
but just as I define
this gleaming calculus
death will inopportunely interrupt.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

Nocturne

Past curfew of the sleeping mind I wake
to noiseless rustling in the air
and see her bare arms flung in dreamless sleep
and moonlight shining in her hair.

Upon the window soft blue lights appear
and sinking in this gleaming mist
I pose a question to blue altitudes
for which no human words exist.

This is the haunted hour when reason yields
to lure of an unearthly lore
and I, detective of angelic clues,
knock trembling fingers on His door;

but whirling round and round the magnet star
see only blue amazing eye that stares
indifferent to laughter and to tears,
beyond our blasphemies or prayers.

And all my choiring metaphors return
like echoes through the hollow air
as if I posture in a looking glass
to make a dance from my despair.
O love, alone upon this breathing stone
and hurtling through a velvet void
your animal and earthly warmth is all
that shields me from the frosty asteroids.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

Song for a Sleepless Night

Besieged by lunar mist
the mind is like a thread drawn fine
extending from a dreamlike past
and tangled into ghostlike skein
of yet another waning year.
Love, be thou near!

Day chatters like a clown
distracting us with bagatelles;
a multitude of tasks is done
whose strategy of bustle quells
our subtle fear.
But ambushed by a stellar pall
infinity weighs on the heart;
the lunar abyss swallows all
our little lengths of love and art.
Then, love, be near!

Between us and the garden gate
a million softly twinkling lights
ineffably coagulate
the frozen silences of night.
And time is like a chuckling skull
whose shining sockets leer
from a moonlight-blinded wall
impaling with a starlight spear
all things durable and dear.
Love, be thou near!

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

Nocturne with Ghosts

Returning to the theater alone
I found its dim interior empty, all
the musical and dancing tenants gone.
The spiders hung their webs in gold portieres
and when a cold air wafted in the hall
it faintly tinkled fading chandeliers.

All, all were gone. Angna whose limbs would streak
in wild ascension to the leaping flute
and Rhodomonte whose fiery rhetoric
roared an immortal friendship to us all;
and fawnlike Pierrot who on slender lute
sang silver riddles to the captive hall;

and Judy, Judy beautiful and staunch,
her throat aquiver with chromatic birds
who, when she could evade the paunchy Punch,
clung like a wild vine to my window sill;
and Figaro whose comic steps and words
were carried off with art's consummate skill;

all, all are gone, their memory a sigh.
It was not as if winged torrent whirled
with rush of laughter into cloudless sky;
they just grew old and weary, locking in
their desks the programme notes and souvenirs,
ballet shoes, masks, a broken mandolin.

O wings that thrashed in youth's confining cage,
the straining tendons slacken and grow weak.
Why do I linger on this lonely stage?
The walls are damp, the tapestries turn brown,
the paint is peeling off, the floorplanks creak.
It's time, it's time to bring the curtain down.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

The Return

I followed half-forgotten trails to wash
the dross of years within her sea-green eyes,
to breathe again remembered pines, to feel
her firelike clasp across a darkening sill;

only to find the threshold piled with dust
and moonlight like a snow on shattered roof,
to see the birds windblown to icy fiords
and hear the wind that in a passing gust
strokes slenderly the gateway's broken boards.

I ask a passing stranger if he knows
the absent mistress of this lonely place.
I tell him she has hair like flight of crows,
that gentle doves surge softly on her breast.
Sadly he shakes his head and hurries past.

Death bids good morning in this wintry land
to him who nursed its summers in his mind;
no sound of bells, no lifting of the hand
will hail hello to him. His heart will find
a broken tower in the moonlit dust,
the smiling lips sealed by a silver frost.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

Pas de Deux

We turned in a whirling dance
in a company bright with cheer.
Ardent were promises in your glance
and fiery the wine, my love,
that set my blood astir.

But fevered by glint and glare
and the dazzling heat of the light
I wanted the cool of autumnal air
to catch my labored breath, my love,
in the lull of October night.

I opened a heavy door
and found beyond wooden eaves
a garden I never had seen before,
all grey with frosted fern, my love,
and hoar-silvered leaves.

A glimmer of distant star
paled white on that lonely park.
I ran back to open the heavy door
but it was bolted and locked, my love,
and the house was empty and dark.

There was not a breath or sound
and the moonlight sank into my bones;
I shivered and lay on the yielding ground
with black loam for my bed, my love,
and a blanket of stones.

And after the dancing is done
and the sound of the music dies
you will come to me on the lawn,
black necklace on your throat, my love,
and silver on your eyes.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

Prelude

O gone are a thousand magical Aprils
when we marched out of the whining present
into the green and public gardens.
Gone is the beautiful logic
when song paralleled song,
idea equalled idea; when fired by spectral icons
wings of a sorrowless future unfolded.

A dancing ghost took flight like a shadow
Iambic manifestos crumpled to ashes.

Terrible beyond thought
is the silencing of a choiring future.
Terrible is the emptiness of hearts
denied the marvels foretold in the book.
Terrible is the fate of wanderers
lost in an endless desert
where starbeams no longer point destinations.
Return us to pillars and arches of white cities.
Let the pianos sparkle their little blue flames.
Come, sages, devise your programmes of love;
else we perish in a starless night
and the winter hawks will pick our bones,
without requiems of guitars,
without honor in death, without fire in passion.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

Transfigured Night

All, all are objects, cold, inert.
The people, coiled automatons
move past the suffocating trees
and neatly regimented stones.

Girls fluttering like faded leaves
on streets anonymous and dim;
men floating by like shining skulls,
like apparitions in a dream.

Like faint statistics figures pass;
and then one person comes to you
whose breathing hair transfigures night,
whose eyes are limitless and blue

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

Prairie

We wanted to feel at home somewhere;
desert, city, ocean, mountain, prairie.
In the dead of the night. we arrived
and slept till the farm beasts woke us.
We sniffed curls of grey smoke
and washed in the cold depths of a river.
The prairie muttered thunder; the sky
vaulted blue lightnings and spattered
sheaves of yellow corn with drops and hail
till the frost came and tightened the lake.
We thought we found a place to rest;
to bring the vibrant elements of our aliveness
to this brittle vastness of dust and wheat.
But the people were stupid though kindly
and in the distance bloomed
electric flowers of a city, throwing
holiday lights on a nightscreen.
We wrung our shirts and left at noon
while brown silences slanted
against our cheeks and breezes
mingled with our hair.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

A Dream of Terror and a Dream of Frost

I do not know which I dread most;
my dream of terror or my dream of frost.
The terror lurks in an uncertain gloom.
We enter like a mist our darkened room
afraid to give our prescience a name.
A gust puts out the lamp's small flame
and when I turn toward the door to mark
the shape of violence crouching in the dark
I hear her whisper with a moan:
Don't go! Don't leave us here alone!"
The anguished winds breathe deep
and in the distance ominous drumbeats leap.
My other dream is naked and austere
and grips me with an icier fear.
The trees are stripped of birds and buds
and taper stiffly up from wintry sod.
Silent and passionless we walk the lawn
past others who reflect our frozen frown.
There is no sound. There is no need of song.
A clang of universal gong
declares that balance is preserved,
the axioms of a winter world are served;
that all in windless, wingless landscape share
an atmosphere of a resigned despair.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

Reply to Orators

It is obscene to speak of aim
in context of haphazard pain;
believe me, gentlemen of State,
whoever dies is dead in vain.

The young and old, feeble and well,
come they from home or devildom,
no alchemy is more absurd
than altering to lump of loam.

Death, our white sister, waits
in ambush at our work and play;
near traffic lights her idiot smile
allures the mile devouring prey

And she is aimless, she is blind,
and she is sloppy in techniques,
there is no silver of the mind
in any of her awkward tricks.

O better she should gently come!
Better to spit life slowly out
than to lie pale upon the snow
with red foam frozen on the mouth.

Better to lie. on couch or chair
savoring escaping breath
than harvested like rotten stalk
upon some napalm raided heath.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

Endless Dark

O the tough black
lover of wine and scarlet melons;
yellow girl sleeping at his side:
metal of strings banjoing,
the yellow of moon on the leaves.

Disaster races with hounds:
hot killers scenting joy
blasted his strong bones; women
beheld him nude; lustful,
they burned their agony

with fuel oil: framed him in flames.
The fangs of ghouls clawed;
the ghouls clawing their pain,
gnawing their hunger and thirst:
cleaned in the blood of a lamb.

and fled. From what?
there is nothing here
but winds: a swollen flower:
a beak in charred socket:
smoke of skull curling.

They flee, breathless,
from his vacant sockets
lifted to the blue:
his gaze burning the dawn
blotting out daylight forever.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

The Search

In the dark and yawning night
loitering where streetlamps lean
I search every stranger's eye
for a trace of my lost kin.

And I asked an aged man:
Father, where are my lost kin?"
And he said: "When fat flames came
and the sickness and the lean

winter frosts, the people ran
separately, in despair;
no one knows his neighbor's name
hostile in his guarded lair."

But my ariadne thread
in the dark and yawning night
follows in uncertain mist
gleams of twinkling candlelight;

though there is no sign to lead
or a landmark to be seen
where my blue and bitter quest
drives me searching for my kin.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

Nomads Without a Tribe

The wheels that brought us here can take us far
if a caprice or need compels the move.

We pay a monthly fee for walls to bar
wind, rain and mist, walls sheltering our love;
a portable, emancipated love
that needs no steady prospect or fixed star.

And someday we will surely go from here
lured by new landscapes, hills or seas.

We'll mingle with new strangers, take our cheer
beneath identical though different trees.

No spot will kindle any memories
or bring to surface either smiles or tears.

There is no image in the rock to seize
imagination like a mystic clue;
no folksong to torment the heart, no piece
of loam to bring our childhood back to view;
no first love's carved initials on a yew
to make us wish to linger in the breeze.

And when we die our ashes will be blown
in careless fistfulls to indifferent skies.
Our brood, nomads without a tribe, will go
to other towns, for any will suffice;
and fleeing on four winds, they will not grow
memorial flowers over our dead eyes.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

Fugue

To find, if for a day,
vistas of lake and hill
we glide asphalted way
at fifty miles an hour.
Under the plastic wheel
a metal tiger purrs;
explosive teeth devour
the wavering wind and thrill
with lubricated grace.
An epoch's chilly breath
is blowing down our backs,
whose commerce, loud and brash,
hedges with artifacts
highway and flowering heath
and we cannot escape
accumulated trash;
garages, tourist shacks,
follow in our tracks.

This is our psychic vent;
a burst of sparking speed
to ease our discontent,
extending the frontier
of eye's bright innocence.
We will avoid the towns
and ride the highway clear
to the hill whose aspen dome
autumnal bonfire crowns.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

A Winter Night Poem

For Scott Greer

In a warm room, relaxed and bountiful,
we speak; I of a shining immanence
and you with calmly uttered unbelief.
The earth, you say, the earth we comprehend,
all else is phantom span of fantasy.
And I agree. The earth is intimate,
its lineaments definable and clear.
As for earth's soul, so nebulously known,
its dialectic is too tenuous
to be pursued with any sort of sense.

Yet as we stand outside your door and hear
the darkling incantations of the night
and see the dim parhelion-tinted sky
with stars like snowflakes and the city lights
like amber fires of myriad moth eyes;
stand in this dark magnificence and breathe
the frostlike air of laurel leaf, I hear
(no, rather say I fancy that I hear)
chromatic whispers of the seraphim
like a vast sigh upon a veiled abyss.

It happens often; when Vivaldi trails
a silvery arpeggio on ice
or when imagination's running fires
kindle a spindrift phrase into a rhyme;
but mostly when a gleaming landscape breaks
upon the suddenly astonished eye
that we presume (half earnestly) to speak
with something out there, lurking in the dark,
and actually wait for a reply!
and if a whisper gathers in our minds
(a gliding soft glissando of a thought)
we think that we achieve a dialogue.
Enough of this, this beating on the air!
Let us return where shapes are tangible,
tables and chairs and pictures on a wall

and drink a brandy, smoke a cigarette.
Though one could swear that through the darkness plunged
a winged congregation, that its flight
brushed the unwary mind, we'll never know
if this was mind's bright foam. . . or something else.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

To a Dancer

If to walk as on blue is dancing;
if to run like a sprint of summer winds
is dancing: if to arise like sunlight,
if to love like a waltz is dancing:
 tell us, Orchesis,
why are we not all dancers?

Make rhythmic patterns
ancient as the moon's shadow;
remind us how little we possess our bodies:
our guarded limbs tensed and angular;
how, losing ease, we carry
our body's epitaph through life,
grotesque in postures of distress.

*

The flowered instance of your body's grace:
chaste water weaving, wide dive of wings.

Simple, these gestures: yet intricate
as elements are simple and complex.

Swift elements unfolding to designs
in widening spaces, designs continuing
into the outer rim of time: designs

leaving an unseen palimpsest in space
where your limbs vault and lapse
holding your fingers like candles.

*

Awakening from blind sleep to sensual day,
the subtle sinews taut for certain flight,
you give us motion and stance: carve of lament,
pose of nude grief, onslaught to strains of gales.

You make this movement graphic, you restore
the body's theme for song,
 you call
for arrogant joy in windblown lungs.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

A Country of His Own

When the autumnal splendour burns
along the fringe of naked lawn
a weary wanderer returns
to an old country of his own.

On marble plazas, in lemon groves,
he loitered under alien stars;
in sunny vineyards he heard
austere laments on black guitars.

And laughters under lamp-posts where
a glance was like embrace of eyes;
decaying fountains, scented air,
were pregnant with nocturnal sighs.

Stray not, wanderer, too far
from charted silence of your heart,
from groves and lighted avenues
you must return from where you start.

You must return to Jacob's land,
barren, small, but yours alone,
where winds eroded soil and sand
to final core of solid stone.

Between the desert and the sea
take solace in the frantic plight
of wanderers that lost their way
and cry like ravens in the night.

Publication. *Dance Without Shoes*. Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1956.

PASSAGE AFTER MIDNIGHT

San Francisco, 1958 · recovered text

Ascensions

You, Mark Chagall, should be able to tell us
what was cremated in Thor's ovens,

you who were always painting ascensions.

The ascensions of priestly violinists,
the ascension of white-gowned brides,
the ascension of purple donkeys,
of lovers, of bouquets, of golden cockerels,
ascensions into the clair-de-lune.

O this soaring
out of shanties and cellars!
the folk spirit ascending
through enchanted alphabets,
through magical numbers,
to a wandering in bluest realms.

The ascension
(from sewers, dives, back-alleys)
of folk-songs to the new moon,
to the feast of lights,
to the silences of Friday evening. . .
. . . and suddenly
in the quietude of steppes
a thin column of smoke ascending
and after that
no more ascensions.

* * *

No more ascensions!

Only stone chimneys
heavily clinging
to the earth of Poland.
Not even a marker saying:
Here the Zhids
en-masse ascended.

Publication. *Passage After Midnight*. San Francisco: Inferno Press Editions, 1958; complete text quoted in Robert Bly's foreword to *Everything Falling* (1971).

PAV ANNE FOR A FADING MEMORY

Denver, 1963

The Terrified Meadows

My nights are haunted by footsteps
on the wind. The sky, the trees
are kisses of memory on my forehead.
I hear my uncle's laughter
on terrified meadows that threaten with firebrands,
on a highway that flowers with knives.

A long time ago, in a far land—
the sky immensely blue over sunflower steppes—
my young aunt walked like April
through the house. I was in bed and singing.
Little swallow, she whispered
and kissed my forehead. But my dark uncle
with white teeth wickedly flashing
laughed and threatened to bounce me
up and down till I begged for mercy.

A long time ago in a far land
they journeyed to see us,
past the white elm trees,
past meadows of rye and barley
swept by a green moon-fire.
They journeyed to be with us

on the feast of the candles.
The wagoner cracked his whip, he urged his horses.
Why did the beasts rear up, why did they neigh?

Past the meadows that blossomed
with knives and axes,
past the terrified meadows
that threatened with firebrands,
to a little wooden house they journeyed,
to a little whitewashed room
where the yellow wax of death
blazed and sputtered.

On a wooden table
lay their young bodies.
The peasant axes

were pulled from their cleft skulls,
the bloody hair was washed,
the stabs of Black Hundreds
artfully covered.

Aunt Dora lay on the table
as lovely as when her laughter
edged the winds with silver.
From a hundred cuts bleeding
Uncle Dusia lay there,
who gave a blow, praise God,
for each of his gashes.

Everything looked so clean
for the feast of the candles.
Everyone was so silent.
Only my grandmother's wails
were whirlwinds of terror,
only her screams
stabbed the blue vastness.

A long time ago. In a far land.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

All of My Cities

City after city, all of my cities
are delicate dissonances
fading in my mind, are landscapes
sculpted out of mist. Alexandrowsk, Batum . . .
My kinsmen paid their usual tithe of blood,
scattered a few candlelights and citron branches
and moved on. Alushta, Simferopol . . .

Where is my home? Istanbul, Chicago?
chiarascuro shading into a shadow.
Disappearing winds,
bells
out of thin air,
a silence defined
by a sound of weeping.

There is never time to get the feel of the country
and even if the neighbors are friendly
their poems are not my poems.
I can only imagine
seeing some place with love, saying:
“Here I belong. Here I want to be buried
beneath those pines, overlooking that ocean.”

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

In a Dream I Spoke

In a dream I spoke
to grandpa, a man of oak,
whose branches of love
sheltered my childhood.
I am Velvel, your grandson,
and I have a son named after you,
Bunin, may he inherit your wisdom,
and my wife is Pnina, the daughter of Rachel.

Forgive me, I forgot where you are buried.

Your memory dwells with us
in the City of Angels.
Here a Jew votes—like a Gentile!
He owns land here—like a nobleman!
Here, thanks to God, we prosper
though many of the landmen
have grown into fat slugs
and grovel before vile amulets
and horned altars of incense.

Forgive me, I forgot the land of your labors.

The sickle of death flashed over my generation.
The flowers of Vilna are moistened
with tears of Naomi,
Our kinfolk are dead, Dedushka,
in strange German ovens
(blessed be the Lord who created fire)
and not enough of your neighbors
are left for a minion.

But we are alive, thanks to Almighty.
Though we walk as always
through meadows of terror
we have forging before us

the cactus-tough band of survivors
and when we break into song, Grandpa,
it is no longer a wail

but Deborah's paean.

Forgive me, I forgot the name of our village.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Miserere

I will not endow you with a false glory, O
ghetto
or say that only poets and seers
died in your ashes.

Many mourn the scholars and dreamers,
the beautiful innocent talented victims.

I will spare my tears for the
loudmouthed unhappy conniving
jews
the usurous lenders,

tuberculous hunchbacked
scum of the ghettos (the sweeping of Europe).
For them I will weep,

for the whores
pale in the doorways, for the spiderous tradesmen
with their false measures
and for all the grey sparrows
hopping about the winters of Poland
the grief of whose eyes
went up in thin smoke like a final prayer.

For them I will weep, I want them returned,
the dwellers of dives, brothels and taverns.

I want them
back as they were, piteous, ignoble,
instead of these grey ashes
that like a winding sheet settles on shivering Europe.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Sabbath

Not the prescribed movement of hands,
not the ritual whispers
out of antique books with broken bindings,
not these you left me
people of blessed candles,
but a certain music, a secret between us,
so that even I, a pagan in Babylon,
celebrate the Creation's completion.

I can spare but a few hours
for this evening's silence
as I can't afford a whole day without labor;
and the hymns I sing are
alas, not Zemirot, the Sabbath hymns,
but snatches from Handel, an Anglican rabbi;
but I will praise the Indwelling Glory,
putting, however briefly, my trials behind me,
putting, however briefly, Egypt behind me.

I will not stint, I will provide of the finest.
The floors will be scrubbed, the furniture polished.
With choice meat and hallot I will praise Thee,
aye, with a double portion of manna,
with broiled fish, with a goblet of brandy.

Overlook therefore the profane, the informal.
Send Shabbath Shalom, the peace of the evening,
to us who are doing their ignorant best at this altar;
son, wife and husband
basking at twilight
in the tender effulgence of grandmother's candles.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

The Lost Song

On my aunt's lap, I came from dark Ukraine.
Darker than I know, dark as blood on a dagger.
In a freight wagon I came past black willows
from which gaunt men were limply hanging.
My Aunt Taubele kept on singing her ditty:
DORT UNTEN IN VELDL DORT ZENEN GEVAKSEN . . .

At night the horizon was red
with a burning epoch. Drunken peasants
sniffed us for the odor of death.
Some were kind; one gave us bread.
And my aunt sang: . . . mit vaysenke zimen,
mit vaysenke shtralen, mit vaysenke tra la la la.

In a dark hold of a Greek cattle-boat we came.
I nestled to furry beasts. A crippled girl
kissed me, she called me Volodenka.
We inhaled the sweet odor of dung
and barely heard my aunt's song
over the lapping of sea-waves and the sheep bleating.

To Istambul we came, jostling in the markets,
struggling for crumbs in the city
where Muscovite princes drove taxis
and duchesses whored for a pittance.
My aunt lined up for her Red Cross potatoes
humming . . . mit vaysenke tra la la la.

To American uncles we came, to Chicago's side-streets
where our people were scattered among the towers
that at night shone with diamonded facets
but in daytime were haggard as a bowl of a beggar.
And my Aunt Taubele, whose name means 'little pigeon'
married a dry-goods salesman—and forgot her ditty.

Little song, I conjure you from hollow air
but your slender theme evades my mind.

Like a spent wave of childhood memory you torment me.
Little song, if I could remember you
I'd know what life is about
and what death is for . . . if I could remember!

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Presences

When first I came to these shores
the houses scattered to where the lanes
opened on a spray of white blossoms,
Birds used to peek through bedroom windows,

It was a time when the whole street
smelled of wine-caskets and dried apples,
a time of horses and gas-lit cobbles,
of rooster's challenge and silver steeples.

The smoke of leaves on the wind
and the peaceful odor of stables
is still a presence; also
a girl's laughter racing small winds

on a green lake of grass
where baskets of fruit floated.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Pavanne for a Fading Memory

I.

My bitter friend whose memory spits bile,
where were you when we strolled
in the bright unrest of the city
like sorcerers with stars in our hair?
Do not betray the blue snowfalls

of its pure parks and boulevards
with shabby recitals
of giggling seductions and vulturous
tradesmen. Remember its Greek
candyshops, its big-breasted

Slav whores, its smiling profane
whiskey drinkers, its mists
sprouting sky-towers
from which doves burst
like whirlights of white blossoms.

2.

The cleansing river
coursed through our veins
winding blackly through stone forests;
a cold and chemical fluid
carrying dark rumours
of street-washings and suicides
into the Lake's incurious blueness.

At dawn, greyly smoking,
it moved past hills of gravel,
past fairylike girders,
accepting the lifting of bridges
as a graceful homage.

At cement piers we studied
its intimate currents,
dark and brutal—and nourishing
as the black bread of the people.

There are those who would betray it;
who would plant formal gardens
on its stone banks,
wiping its ancient patina
with summery trifles
of bluebells and daisies.

3.

The City sings in forty tongues
its wedding songs, dirges, lullabies,
fused together
like a moan from among the stars.

When the tired boulevards
hide in the silence of twilight
there is a sound
out of nowhere. An old man

hears preludes to death.
A young couple embraces
greedily, like misers
grasping a handful of silver.

A shirtsleeved man
leans out of a window.
On his stone lips
a bitter smile is frozen.

In the blue evening
the piano dissects a lament.
The saxophone breathes
the final sigh in a storm of tears.

4.

The City is gone, razed and rebuilt.
The same people no longer
walk on its pavement. The horses
are gone, the clinging odor of stables.
The City is gone

whose gaslights punctuated our nights,
whose winds set the rhythm of our blood,

whose streets, self-luminous with a pale light,
were our asphalt meadows. We wore its shadows.

as a disguise against the prying
of American uncles. We were angelic merchants
roaming the lunar craters,
exchanging illuminations like small gifts.

5.

This is a time when wise-guys
write their memoirs of disgust
with never a tender word
for the old haunts, the old faces;
for the beautiful work-worn hands
of a Polish scrubwoman, for the life-song

on the faces of fat Jewish mothers;
for the sweet odor of seltzer
outside of Katz's delicatessen
where we swaggered on the hot blue evenings,
a conclave of angelic rebels
shouting our poems of longing.

My friend, you saw skulls among the smokestacks
but we saw tulips there, golden tulips.
Your memory has become a museum

of labelled sensations
blind to the violence in the light,
to the diapason in the air.

6.

Ambiguous memory brings to some
the half-lights and whispers of the City.
Others remember
a fistful of stone clubs shaken at heaven.
My friend, what do you remember?

You spent your nights in pretentious attics
arguing Art with nymphs and cubists.
The City died in your mind's eye
because you pressed it like a dead leaf

in volumes of memoirs, in best-selling novels.

Elegiast of forgotten streets
I trace my vowels of love
in the dust of razed landmarks.
My phantoms are gathered
around a lamplight
in a basement where my poverty
glowed like a menorah.

City, you haunt me like a tolling
on the wind; for if I return
the streets would not know me
nor the doorways answer my greetings.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Moment Musicale

My first love was a girl
with delicate features
who played ballades on a piano.

I never spoke to her.
In the hot blue night I listened
under her window,

my throat tight with love and longing.
The green branches under her window
leaned toward me

proffering small white flowers.
I held out my hand to the moon
and it was a hand of a pauper.

When the magic foam of sound
rushed into the darkness,
I stood there, exploring silences,

to find the sound of life
uttered gently,
a language almost without sound.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Canzone for My Grandma

My big grandma with blue Russian eyes,
with you died a recipe for honeyed turnips
and assorted remedies
for removing warts and promoting fertility;
with you perished incantations
against beasts of the night,
scorpions, vampires,
and white staring eyes of demons.
Now I walk the streets of Los Angeles
exposed to a thousand perils,
with no defense
against she-witch Lilith,
against sons of mud, the demons
Shamgaz and Marigaz. Against them
I have no written amulets,
no, not as much as a door parchment.

While you lighted candles for the dead
a hundred ghosts interceded for me.
Nothing could harm me,
Have you not berated Asmodeus
when sickness or ill-humour struck me?
I remember you plucking chickens
and saying the exactly right words:
“Be split, be accursed, evil ones!
sons of clay, clear out of here!”
Think of us, bobe,
in your blue and kosher heaven.
Speak the right words for us
for we are waifs bludgeoned by reality
with no magic to guard us
against sickness and failure.
Speak the words for us, bobe,
against phantoms, mamserim,
and the evil eye of that lady
we just passed on the sidewalk.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Farewell

Farewell, lost friends from a city
of pale doves flying through ashes,
in whose shabby bedrooms we published
timetables of rebellion,
where through the din of traffic
we heard firelike flutes of new sonatas.

To some a single farewell suffices.
You who stopped a bullet
turning a hill on a bright Spanish morning;
you who swam too far
lured by the lake's glistening smile;
you in whom a sick rose blossomed
but who spoke poems in a dying whisper;
farewell! you did well in your brief passage.

To others I bid a farewell daily.
You, love, who gave up love,
pressed between pages of a book
like a dehydrated flower;
you, swan, who gave up dancing
to grow fat among kitchen dishes;

you, enchanted aquarellist,
who once flung riotous splendours on paper,
now sketching fashions for fancy journals;
and you, poet, who daily discovered galaxies,
stunned for ten years by whiskey,
writing skits in semi-stupor.

To you I say a farewell daily;
you who turned your back on clamorous candles
to walk down a long boulevard of silence,
you who gave up your attics for apartments,
who kept your jobs, who stayed out of trouble,
farewell, farewell! each day of my existence.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

The Trip Home

The train that was to take me to you
disappeared in a scream of metal laughter
leaving me stranded on a stone island
without crosswalks or stoplights.
I walked through percussion of death,
my nerves in tune with a thousand sirens.

I walked through terrible silences
punctuated by flutes of gloom;
past fear haunted houses
where people with ghostlike faces
spoke in strange tongues;
past pedestrians frozen by boredom on streetcorners;

past billboards of venereal roses,
past placards illustrating the profanation of the kiss,
past nudities on streetcorners
instigating youth to bacchanalian cakewalks.

I ran from maniacs crouching
in dimly lighted alleys.
I elbowed a snarling thug,
I kicked at a whining beggar.
I won free, I ran, I came to this clearing
hidden by poplars and moonlight.
Quietly I tapped on a little window
and you were waiting,

a little older, a little greyer.
Another day was sliding
into the vast yawn of silence
and I was home again
in a clearing of pale stars
at the edge of Gomorrah.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

We Move Through the Shadows

We move through the shadows where lamps hang like spiders.
If we see a white face smiling under a streetlight
it may be the smile of ultimate silence.
If a soft voice stops us we run from its echo
or strike with a fury of knife-like fingers.

We move through the shadows where in a doorway
we see a pale Ishtar, a sickly moon-goddess,
breathing the lunar dust of white blossoms.
A hoarse whisper beckons the lonely, the haunted,
into a cave of moans and laughs.

We move through the shadows where sad youths in autos
are breasting the air like night-flying swallows.
A dancing beast pushes his furred paws, probing.
We hear screaming metal. We see the shocked stone
stained by death's shadow. We move through the shadows

past people dancing, arguing, laughing.
Among them are phantoms with voices like dry twigs
who shame the sap in the loins of lovers.
Scraps of foul fog on their blue mouths linger,
their extended fingers are pieces of driftwood.

We move through the shadows, through the black air seeded
with chemical dewdrops. We watch our steps, turning
to look into hallways, to see what is prowling
in darkness behind us. At home we draw curtains
on a white face grinning, pressed to our window.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

The Survivors

Yes, they are aware of beast eyes
gleaming in stone thickets,
of violet venom
riding the wind's summit.

But, quiescent in the dozing light,
they sit relaxed. We say that they slouch.
But they no longer care what we say.

They are the survivors. They know
that this age's fabulous flowers are withered
on a bone-dry bough. You, there, scurrying
to save something or to attain something!
Do you not know that everything
that could possibly happen—has happened?
Yes, pain's ultimate spasms, death's
most elaborate caprices—everything happened.

They heard the moaning forests of the crucified.
They saw icy-eyed youths unmoved
by charred bones of cities. They are what's left.
They sit here—content with just being.
They play a low-keyed viola whose muted vibrations
spin in silence with neither joy or weeping.

They are content with bread: with daylight:
with sleep: with winds: with mornings.
They find homes in condemned mansions
sitting on boxes, an old packing crate for a table,
with candlelight edging the shadow's contours.
Their hands are calloused, their fingernails broken
from day labor on docks and railways.

Late at night they sit drinking coffee.
The city is asleep, the streets are empty.
They laugh, they whisper. The drummer

multiplies intricate sums in the air,
the nimble guitarist
gleans a harvest of blue events
from his golden meadow of metal.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

The Inheritors

They were never much good, our old masters!
They have forgotten the language of leaves and
 running waters
and their heads reel with endless quotations out
 of old books with broken bindings; and their
 women are barren.

It does not matter to us that over their empty
 palaces
flutter the torn pennants of a past grandeur.

Our glory is in the dark autumn afternoons and
 orchards of red ripening apples.

Wine will sparkle no less in our glasses
when the last conjuror of runes and riddles coughs
 and dies
his eyes turned to a flight of swallows over our fat
 cornfields.

We will sit at his wake with sweet cider and loaves
 of bread baked to a crisp by our buxom women.

They were never much good, our old masters. Their
 names fade from our minds
as our young men sing of tillage and seasons, casting
 a spell on the murmuring meadows.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

A Tango for April

A poor man's orchard I plant in my backyard;
apricot, peach, nectarine, almond.

In April of spiralling swallows the delicate stalks
of heath smile and cicadas portend sunlight. Why
should I look to unclouded sky as if the air
was charged with lightnings?

As I dig my orchard I ponder on who will pit the
stones of the peaches.

Seven years must elapse between planting and gathering
almonds
and this is the Year of red dust spreading from a
Pacific atoll.

There is always a dread; at times only a silence of
violins scraping moonlight,
but a sadness, as in the urgent rhythm of a tango;
be the dance ever so swift the refrain is a vibration
in G minor.

Dig, spade, dig. Now the whole world carries a secret—
a nectarine with a pith of violence. But let us keep
planting the trees, the work is good though we harvest
a burning blossom.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Countdown

We are three who sit
to an evening meal,
three who waken
to the grey air
where the only sound
is the sound we make
walking or talking.

We are three
who walk the path
around the lawn,
remembering laughters
and what the songs promised
long ago, long ago.

Where are the ancient houses
with the friendly ghosts?
Where are my good neighbors?
the student pondering
latin script, the aproned wench
chasing a sparrow?

Doors, windows,
are shut tight. I miss
the chatter, the cooking odors.
A man I know, bent
on a new kind of politics,
no longer greets me.

Age of disenchantment,
so Valery calls it,

and I am loath to succumb to it
for then my poems

are love's graphomania
and I'm like a lunatic

denying the actual nightmare
with a private smile.

*

Age of disillusion,
of vacant eyes staring

from streets and hallways,
vacant eyes asking:

you there! do you know
something, anything?

Sorry strangers, comrades!
Like you I see death

approaching on clockwork legs
with a calendar precision.

*

For decades now there is an imminence
in the air, a stealthy approach
of danger on fiery forepaws,
making all decisions tentative,
all goals uncertain.

Twice in my lifetime
there was a wailing of death's chimneys
defining that which in domain of calms
we dared not surmise.

After two such huge combers
a sailor will mistrust
the straight soar of a pine-mast
for fear it presages a new squall.

*

And a poem became
(in my time)

an SOS,
a bloody bulletin, at best

a black-bordered
postcard of grief.

It is better, I think,
not to write at all.

We are wounded, yes,
the whole damned world

is wounded
but we are not wounds

like mouths screaming
into the mindless night.

To write in such accents
is unworthy

of what the songs promised
long ago, long ago.

*

We look at each other, we whisper, we sleep.

White pennants are flying
from the huge alarm clocks.

Over the wilderness of waves
a plane
eclipsed by the skin of a delicate cloud
is waiting.

The lover rises from his silks and twilights,
rises on one elbow.
He is waiting.

The sages hesitate over their charts and numbers.
They, the custodians of the lamp,
are waiting.

Everyone is waiting and waiting
with eternity like a whisper behind them
and silence
like a wind, like a black wind before them!

*

Waiting and waiting

for wings and Messiahs,
for the State to wither
or the Crisis to pass
or the computer to signal
the zero of an ultimate sunburst
 we are trapped
in a week of death-days
under carrion skies.

Meanwhile the lovely dancer
whose astonishments pass swiftly
tiptoes away
on death's empty highway.

*

It is better, I think, to stand bare
 beneath death's shining mica
than thus to wait
 spending each day's good silver
on black candles of disaster.

*

We are three who will not wait
though papers print death
 by wind, by fire,
and wolf-teeth are bared
at curving hollows
where little homes sleep.

We will make a memo
to whisper an ardent arietta
to love's unappeased and infinite progress!

We will put on agendum
laughter at dawn's small hours!
We will make a notation
that we still are alive
for at least a day longer!

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

A Winter Sheaf

The seasons pass and return.
In the wake of flowers and sunlight
come the snows.
A cold bubble pavilions the world
and we gather
slim geometries of winter flora.

Stars slanting in luminous curve
slide and grow dim. There are cycles;
the high leap
and slow fall to oblivion.

The stars will swing and return.
The ice on the tree-trunks will melt
in a swing toward light
and life will ripen again
in ravines, in rivers.

Meanwhile we have work to do;
we brush aside frost crystals
to find ice-fine
sheaf of the winter flora.

*

After the ravaged towns
and raven-covered fields
came the frost.
In the dying sun
savage birds scattered
each to a tree or a hollow
and sat with folded wings,
inert and staring.
There was a soft snowfall,
the flakes no longer gleaming

but huge and cold in the gloom
and on the windswept field
stood statues of grieving lovers
hand in hand, strictly frozen.

*

The blue and silken harvest is gathered.
Now what will winter bring?
Eyes, upward turned for a blessing,
 what will the snows bring?

Daily this riddle
flowers into knives.
Stormy whispers of nations across frontiers
is our nervous lullaby.
 People, O people,
what will winter bring?

Roused by skillful tirades
the people rear their altars—
 the barricades.
Over the frozen spaces misfortune settles
 like a heavy silence.

*

My window, incised by lapidary,
is frontier of icy moonlight.
Candlelight and green flame
is my country. I am a partisan
of the beaming stove.

 When a crust of ice
snaps like a blue whip
and startled sparrows
leap into the air,
 I wonder

how many shivering creatures
died in the cold,
their eyes facing the slow drift
of stars toward Sirius?

*

May smoke rise from every chimney
in the early frost of dawn
and no man stray far without brandy
and all infants be cradled

and all furred and winged beings
be caved and nested;
 for winter is love's season.
I know kinship with the horse
whose nostrils steam
on frozen grass—and our common front
against the constellation of the white Ox,
the birdless silence,
the infinite zero.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Prophecy

There finally comes a time
when the unquiet soul
like a wolf baying at the moon
whispers (out of its tears)
“let us go, everybody,
let us go . . .”

When the enchanted heart
utters the absurd hope
that now
it will be different,
that this day the world is created anew
with a black sun and pink grass in the meadow,

and we who by day
perform rehearsed gestures
will, when the jungle shudders
through the sleeping city,
rise gravely and go
with moonlight seeping into our blood, go

to the subtlest cricketing of drums,
(foot forward, shoulders bent back)
past taverns, garages, power plants,
to a spot in the silver night
surrounded by pillars of iron
and lighted by frostlike moons.

All the lonely sleepers will rise
and go. EVERYBODY
will go, go, go,
their heads aureoled with small birds,
the night swelling
with their full-throated wail.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

The Empty Corridor

And now the smiling harlequin,
bowing, throwing fingertip kisses,
dances away along an endless perspective,
away from the footlights, away from the audience,
into the backstage twilight. He moves slowly
as if from dream to dream. His figure
is small and sad in the diminishing spotlight.

The heavy curtain
 falls with a thud on the boards.
He is still dancing
and sings his song, though no one can hear him.
He sees the auditorium—endless and empty.
Fog. Black sky. Silence.

 He keeps on dancing,
slower and slower, knowing
that all the tricks and illusions
that pampered his dreams;
the astrologer and his golden cockerel,
the dancing swans, the enchanted gardens,
belong back on the stage;

 capriccios, entertainments,
laid aside with the props and the costumes.

O the dreamlike stage, the agony, the passion!
O to dance just once more before the footlights,
to sing one more ballad,
to tell one more joke, to hear the answering laughter . . .

but there's no one there;
he is alone, abandoned
to the mindless mutations of space,
at the night's edge
in a place without signposts.

 He moves on
into the disappearing perspective.
He becomes aware of the stars

in their endless ellipsis.

Fog.

Black sky.

Silence.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Diminuendo

We no longer hold our Oh's to a slow decay.

You toss your head to the wall.

One by one

you extinguish the twilights of your hair.

I try to embrace you but my fingers

follow strangely chaste contours.

Our windows are fountains of frozen moonlight.

I try to embrace you but you are suddenly

silver under my touch. Snow falls

in our grotto of silks and linen.

You emerge, a proud image,

draping your body

with layer after layer of shadows.

All the birds are flying south

and the pianos weep in the silence between us.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Tanz

The seven slender dryads run
upon an indolent green lawn.
They shed their tunics, unaware
of satyr's stimulated stare.

Uncertain which one to enthrall
he nimbly dances after all.
The startled nymphs evade his snare.
His fevered fingers clasp the air.

In pairs they flee to oaklined lanes;
but one, the loveliest, remains.
She stands there, beautiful and bare,
but touching her—he touches air.

Her lips are violet, her eyes
are alien as the lunar skies
and blonder than a lunar flare
her falls of iridescent hair.

Inviolate she gazes on
the breathless and tormented fawn.
He clasps her body in despair
and spends his passions in the air!

Astonished aspens soar. Birds race
in rage from that opprobrious place.
The white-faced nymph dissolves in air.
The weeping fawn still clasps the air.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Evening Song

Now for a while I shut away
a thousand echoes of the day,
With seven candles in the room
a tiny constellation glows;
I would extend this twilight pause.

I count my twilights like a thief!
I clutch time's quicksilver! Too brief
this candlelight recess
before I'm swung again
on pendulum between two silences.
O love, how swift the evening goes;
I would extend this twilight pause.

Relentlessly the mindless clock
ticks away the dying night.
O love, I wish that I could pluck
a filament of candlelight
to take with me
into the dawn that comes to plunder me.
O love, how swift the evening goes!
I would extend this twilight pause.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

The Blue Fear

This valley, once laurel and leaf,
now cluttered with signs of man's busy passion,
makes me wonder; how was it in full breathing
of grass miles and clear waters,
without fabulous facade of man's
tinkering fervour?

Alone in the Big Sur
I felt a chance to merge with the ghost of
cliff and pine-tree
and sure knowledge would be engraved on my
mind like a published poem;
but a blue fear hit me,
a yearning for my kind even in a junked car
or a rotted fending.

Only with death in our eyes may we seek
the wild chance, the ultimate clarity of
infinite essence;
alive, we seek living tokens; man, weak and evil
but dear to what is man in ourselves;
the planetary parasite crawling on God's body
with moon in his brain, eating God's substance.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Kaddish

Grant us therefore this
though our laughs are lost in the leaves
and our cries are muffled by winds
 though our days
advance and are spent like the waves
and darkness
covers us like a blanket of ashes

that we are here
 though our names are echoes on wind
that we are most reliably here
 a vast
presence a naked movement
whose very silence is empire

that even if you do not know us
 (the norms the numbers)
the stars
know us
 and the winds
and the earth of our passage
from darkness through daylight to darkness

grant us
that we are always
here
always
on time
never
by as much as a second
late being born
never
by a moment
cheating the time of our dying

that we are always
present that we are always
available

though our cries are muffled by winds

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

The Requirement

Having avoided fatal accidents,
having somehow survived
wars, illnesses and sundry disasters,
having passed unscathed
through the thick black smoke
from the blood of my burning cousins,
I can say this now, I can say it quietly:
to go on is the only requirement.

To love you, to eat my meals with you,
to sip my brandy,
to cut the grass on the front lawn,
to say “hello” and how are you.”

To attend to matters that need attending;
to kindle the candles on festival evenings;
to conciliate the powers superior to mine;
the eye of Medusa, the kiss of the white-faced vixen.

To go on
through the butchered air between the alarms;
to feel in the brutal darkness
the touch of your hand, my companion.

To go on and on as the winds blow
through the nights of stars and storms,
to endure
the great cold constellations,
to go on
on the boulevards increasingly silent and bare,
to persist
until nothing is left,
not the trees, not the house,
not the winds,
not even you, not even you!

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Because There Is No Time

Because there is no time for words
like glass beads, bright but fragile and hollow,
because there is no time for high airs,
for dark posturings, for arrogant phrases,
I will bolt my doors
to salesmen, magicians,
to all sorts of legerdemain
by eager dialecticians.
I will bolt my doors,
I will think my own thoughts,
nurse my own silences.

Because there is no time,
because earth is so much closer,
I can do without
grotesqueries, goyesques,
pique dame and la dame sans merci.
Because there is no time
for singers of popular ballads,
for prizefighters, tapdancers, impressarios,
for young ladies with bangs on their foreheads,
their Mondrians, their prize greyhounds;
no time for percussion ensembles
and twittering klee birds, for svelt moths
and twilight companions, no time at all
for poets whining
to the damned twang, twang of a bass fiddle.

Because the shadows encroach,
because there is no time for anything
but to hear in silence
a melody, blue and gentle,
with small outbursts of enchantment;
for which there is not much time,
for which there is never enough time.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Good Morning!

In the instant of waking
the real world
with its blue lineaments and suntipped tapers
bursts through my window
like a glimpse of incredible Eden.
It endures briefly

and is gone
replaced by a flowerpot in the window
and my old pair of workshoes
that badly need patching.

*

Even after the silver-pure moment is gone
it is good to waken
to the half-tones of a worn corner,
to the copper coffee-pot
hissing Hestia's paean
to the faded carpet
holding tufted fistfuls of sunlight.

The aproned wife,
her mouth full of clothespins,
tosses me a penny's worth of love.
I must remember to present her
with a bouquet of whispers.

*

May I waken again and again
to the colors of the curb, the clowns of the backyard!
May I open my eyes
to old chimneys, doorways, clotheslines,
to the coffee steaming on the table,
to banging shutters and roistering winds
and, whatever arrangements Death is making,
to the next thousand seconds of life within me.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Resurrection

All day the vile bacilli
like a swarm of heat insects
pricked my groaning blood.
Suddenly the bed
collapsed beneath me
and the ceiling light became
a dwindling black bubble.
My head rested on tail-feathers
of a vast flamingo.
My mouth was stuffed with heavens.
As the earth fell away from my body
all I could remember
were her enormous tears
when, like a posthumous image,
I remembered the unswept workshop,
the unglazed pots, unanswered letters,
the promises to my family
betrayed by this ill-timed
demise. I vacillated briefly
in the midst of a blue transition;
then, tensing, I hoisted myself
on a wing of an obliging angel
and into my aching body; perspiring
as gently as if my soul wept
for its forfeited heaven.
My son and wife, hovering
at the edge of my death,
smiled through their tears. My doctor
held my Lazarus hand and clocked my heartbeat.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Piano Lesson

Across the keyboard your small fingers rove
collecting little flecks of flame and foam
to indicate that all your etudes were
well hammered home
by the exacting Mlle. Irene
who censors every move.

You know dynamic signs and chords by rote.
Your trained facility allows no lame
arpeggios or stumbling tremolos.
Yet far from aim
of the grave Masters, a green innocence
obtrudes on every note.

The Masters whose obsessions stun the air,
who speak to skulls, whose brooding conjures storms!
What does my angel know of their gaunt griefs?
Faithful his form
to staff and stave; but what notes indicate
the heartbreak and despair?

And so I curb my fatherly conceit
to find a certain virtue in your style.
There's plenty time for greatness; and I hope
that for a while
your music shall continue somewhat green
and ignorantly sweet.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Now Cold November Comes

Now cold November comes
and life's bewildering storm
narrows to urgent need
for keeping warm;
and for such humble things
as a cup of hot wine
with honey, spiced with cloves:
small comfort to be had
for a small coin.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Passage After Midnight

I.

All day life is a mounting sonata
and each moment contains
its unfolding theme.

Then the final moment
just before sleep;
the end of time,
of work, of love,
the end of the theme unfolding.

2.

Just at the moment
when the day should end
the ten thousand channels of life
open before me.

A small breeze
unravels its scents.

Flowers are falling
on the moist northwind.

Over my radio a pianist
makes tunnels of melody
through a slender moonlight.

Somewhere a woman
quietly sighs.

3.

It is after midnight
but I continue to work
by the glow-worm lamp
in the gloom of my workshop.

My kiln grins
like a pot-bellied devil

licking with a glowing tongue
opaline on stone jars.

My door opens
on a universe of sleep.

4.

Sleep is a winding sheet
to curtain moonlight.

There is sickness in me
at this supine suspension.

I struggle against it
intent on leaves rustling,
the telegraphy of crickets,
the twittering of barn swallows;
like a charge of fresh breath
over the roof of my workshop
to keep life pulsing,
the eyes open.

5.

The world is blue in my doorway.
My mind opens to it
like a night-blooming cereus.

I would inscribe
on the stone of a tall vase
the flight of a night-heron
slow and slender
over sea-paths of moonlight.

6.

It is after midnight
and still I labor
over my bowls and vases.

The blazing kiln

wakens my sleepy senses
and leaps like oxygen
in my mind's blood.

Better to stay awake
and work, work.
This clay is my bread.
This kiln cooks tomorrow's meal.

7.

Weariness, the stealthy anesthesia,
rousts the rebellious mind.

I stumble across a dark yard.

Pale flowers like guttering candles
bloom in swampy nightshades.

I am not yet defeated,
I pursue with a book of poems
a dimming lamp of metaphor.

The book falls from my fingers.

8.

Abandoned I float
on a wave of silence
and waken to the dawn
firing a blue salvo, the dawn

emerging like a new continent
out of dark waters.

I strain at reins of drowsiness
like a trout, eager
to be swift again
in the currents of time.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Isadora

Hallucinatory, like a theatrical twilight,
is her passage. Everything
has to be danced; all the surreal
ironies and horrors; the poverty
which always pursues her; going to school
with leaking shoes and a hungry stomach;
the fires; the earthquakes;
the trial by love, the death by water.

She dances through Russia, a bacchante of
Revolution.

She dances in Athens: "Here I shall open
my college for priestesses!" She dances
her pregnancies, she dances her passion:
"I enclose my lover as a sea over a bold swimmer!"

Everything danced!
her drowned children, suicide-lover.
She floats across nations
on her scarfs of twilight and shadow,
freed from corsets, sans les pointes
et les cinq positions,
her movements a threat, a subversion!

Pursued by a fugue of fire and water
she scatters herself on the winds of the world
until ambushed one day by a red scarf
that hangs like a streak of blood
from her throat to the turning axle.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Chopin

Gautier wrote: “his soul weeps and hovers.”
I prefer Nietzsche’s “in him joy is ascendent.”
It is easy to spit clichés at him:
effeminate, tearful, sylph-like . . .

“Sick-room poet” hissed envious Field,
ignoring the tough musical sinews,
the brooding rebellious rages
and the political passions.

True, his wit was exquisite and birdlike
but he knew how to summon the Furies
and spoke for his ravaged Poland
in accents as daring as any.

He was elegant and consumptive.
He was successful in the world
and rejoiced over his triumphs.
He loved pretty women—and was loved by them.

White and wasting, he dotted
with splashes of blood his lunar pages,
carrying death like a singing bird
in his chest, his tissues held together

by dreams and bacilli. “I used to find him,”
wrote George Sand, “late at night at his piano,
pale, with haggard eyes, his hair almost standing,
and it was some minutes before he knew me.”

In Majorka the doctors
shuddered at his blood-flecked mouth,
burned his belongings, compelled him
to take refuge in a former monastery.

“My stone cell is shaped like a coffin.
You can roar—but always in silence.”
When it stormed he wrote the ‘raindrop’ mazurka
and from the thunder he fashioned a prelude.

*

"I work a lot," he wrote to his sister,
"I cross out all the time, I cough without measure."
With death's hand on his slender shoulder
he created ballades, études, preludes.

Who wrested
so much from torment? Fading swiftly
he continued to color his silences,
a condemned man refusing a blindfold.

If he sometimes wept—it was from love, not weakness.
He felt all his life the wing of death's angel
brushing in their sleep the embracing lovers.
Can one truly sing without this terrible knowledge?

*

Of the many men who were haunted
by the night, its gardens and fountains,
who fathomed it as truly as this Ariel of preludes?
The piano shakes like a leaf in the darkness.
The night breathes and triumphs.
Stars and sea-winds
drift through the open window. The ineffable nocturnes
float away like farewell whispers.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Invocation

All I can say is that I waited, Euterpe,
though you often took other paths
and made your soundless presence
known elsewhere. In the wingless night
this waiting was my asylum.
Even from the air of your absence
I quarried occult syllables
that blessed the lamplight
of sleepless watches. None of us are betrayed
who in a soft voice call to you.
All I can say is that I waited, Euterpe,
and, if given a respite
from the creeping shadow on the dial,
I will continue the vigil.

Even your far-off voice is enchanting.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Words Again Emerging

This year, after an extended absence,
words began to emerge
from their various hiding places;

from backyard rose-gardens,
from back pages of discarded almanacs,
from clouds, bells, trees, rooftops.

It is good to have them again!
around the stove, at one's elbow,
dropping from beards of old men,
shaken from bracelets of passing girls;

not from the learned book I meant to read
someday,
not from the endless whispering of the sullen
mind.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Love's Wildest Talent

Love's wildest talent
is to detach at will the earthbound self
and in one wishful leap
to gain a bluer dimension,

Over the rooftops my extended fingers
press your eyelids. You rise
and open your window, you lean forward
across miles of moonlight
and I bury my distant head in your hair,
Over the rooftops
our silences run together,
The earth sobs below us
but we hover in the endless air
where miles are gleaming seconds
and dreams are swifter than winds.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Threshold

In that room I sense
a clamor of eyes, a foam
of laughter. I hear
whispers of such wildness
as we dare not imagine
in our most singing dreams.

And barely breathing
I wonder at what lies
beyond the thin barrier.
What lovely vehemence?
I abjure the violence
of opening that door.

Hurry, hurry! Open
the door, open it wide.
Do not stand before it
like a gaunt bird
in winged solitude.
Time's frosty wind

leaves a bitter song
in a shrunken mouth.
Hurry, hurry! Gain
some luminous hours
before the eclipse.
Open the door. Gamble
with life's shining dice
or dwell forever
under surveillance
of the kindly police
in the obscene precincts
of aunts and uncles.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Perilous Journey

I have seen men lured
from their lanes and evenings
who returned with angelic diseases
that baffled their physicians.
They had lunar seizures,
they sang like frenzied sea-birds,
they spent long afternoons
studying magic numerals
or conjuring coins from old newspapers.

Warned by this
I kept a tidy backyard
and stayed there
welcoming through parted curtains
a moderate sunlight,
subsisting on wholesome
black grains of clay and poetry.
For twenty years I hid thus
within my blue fence
knowing myself secure
from all sorts of intrusion.

There came a time
when through cracks in the wall
the night rushed in
foaming and shining,
and I stared
at the hypnotic window
and saw the luminous fringe
of remote twilights.
I walked like a blind man
into the darkness.

At dawn I returned,
my head a chasm
of racing stars.

Through a parted hedge
neighbors were peeking

as through a keyhole.
Reeling and drunken I returned
and even as I lay down
to nurse my aching dreams
I looked to the next night's
perilous journey
from which few return
and those few chuckling
like mad goblins.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Inanna

The white witch Inanna, by day a waitress
in a local delicatessen, assumes by night
one of her thousand guises. From doorway to doorway
I followed her velvet footsteps
to honkey-tonks and dance-halls. In theater lobbies
I saw her whisper to cat-eyed priestesses
and raven-haired priests of the moon-cult.

I saw her shed her silks in a night-club
and move to a witching pavana.
In a city park I saw her by torchlight
as she struck the ground with a bundle of pine-cones
and led the wildly whirling dancers,
the air filled with their exultant hymning.

One evening I dared to approach her.
I put my hand on her yellow shoulder
and whispered: "Lovely and fearful Goddess,
what shall I do now you bewitched me?
Life is stuck in my throat and chokes me.
Give me of yourself, mistress of shadows,
now that I know your secret!"
And she smiled and she said: "What man does not?"

And she said: "Have you no mortal spouse, lover of shadows,
that you seek to fondle your dream's image?
I am a witch to all of the living
who sends youths moaning to May meadows,
who kindles new flames in the beds of the wedded!
Is there seed enough in your loins to adore me
whose paeon is the sigh of all mankind?
Go! And be thankful
for the blessing of passion within you!"

By day she is a waitress,
a counter-girl, a young lady
photographed with soap-suds and nylons;

at night, glancing up, I see her adorable image
hovering over the glittering city.
Over the whole earth lies Inanna's white body
and the wind is scented with her ardent breathing.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Ocean Park

I confront the star-spell of the esplanades!
I walk as jaunty as a sailor
among fortune-tellers, dancers, gymnasts,
among girls that stroll like swaying flowers,
among gamblers, students and all sorts of gypsies.

Necromantic presences mingle among us:
this cute whore is Phryne, sister of moonlights,
that old Jew under a streetlight is Merlin;
Shahrazad serves coffee and pancakes
and Sindbad lures the unwary with trinkets.

I have an illusion of freedom
and it well may be a prelude to trouble.
Who cares? This is a magical evening!
All things assume a novel succulence; clusters
of black grapes, sausages, pastries. I am hungry!
and avid too, like a cat in the jungle
seduced by a scent of musk or civet.

In blue-bright air flares are falling
to dissolve on restaurants, wineshops,
dance-halls and dimly lighted interiors
from one of which (an obscure shrine of Pan?)
we hear a bacchic wail of clarinets.
Here is a cafe where Lesbians gather
and here is a place where, they tell me,
anything can happen. The unpredictable
lures like an unwritten poem. All else failing
one could shoot down a bomber or witness
a piquant disrobing in a penny arcade.

I turn sadly back to my curfewed suburb
of discreet doorways and subdued lamplights.
What is lacking there, what tang, what tonic?
Nocturnal laughters and musical whispers
have been exiled to this sea-edge

by the police and the jeering merchants.
Held by a dangerous moonlight
between cold stone and colder waters
life's subtle djinns clamor for release.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

Prologue to a Reading

Ladies and gentlemen!
If by a secret sign I fail to summon
a bevy of blue doves to flutter here,
please bear with me. The conjuration
for this illusion may be difficult.
On my way here I came upon a coven
of envious magicians who cursed me
and pointed sticks at me tipped with cat's fangs.
I defended myself as best I could
with my wax image of Horus; and retired,
if I do say so, with dignity. But the experience
left me somewhat shaken, especially
since some of them followed me into this hall.

So if I fail to make chrysanthemums
bloom from an empty wall-socket
ascribe this to unfriendly sorcery,
not to a failure of my own powers.
I see you lurking there, wicked enchanters!
spawn of Asmodeus, devotees
of the Black Mass! And you, Madame,
you need not try to conceal that broomstick!
Defend me, young devil-dancers, shield me
from their scorpion stings, intercede for me
with the radiant Baalith of moonlights!

Ladies and Gentlemen, my credentials:
though once a novitiate of the Sabbaths
I am now content with practical charms,
the more common exorcisms, the minor
rites of Dionysus. Now, if I were to tell you
that a certain whisper of mine concerning
death's profile in the moonlight
caused stones to suddenly blossom
and the air to carry a sharp new sweetness—
would you regard me as mad—or merely tiresome?

But I see disbelief written clearly
on all your faces! At times I swear I'd rather

perform only before my colleagues!
Was it for this that I haunted
stone vaults and dusty shadows
for rare volumes on divination,
alchemy, theurgy, moon-lore?
At times I wish that the white witch Hecate,
disguised as our housemaid when I was an infant,
did not wet my tongue with Stygian water
enveloping me in a numinous aura;
sending me to kneel before the nymph Diana,
dreamy and motionless, barely breathing,
while scrolls of my parchment gathered
glows and glimmers of her radiant tresses.

However, Ladies and Gentlemen, hear me!
I am about to perform my favorite wonder.
I will surround myself with a wall of silence,
a glass-like wall with stars and lunettes
and multitudinous eyes shining in it.
Listen intently; you will hear a canzonetta,
a theme with variations of tinkling iambs.
This is a delicate trick—so watch closely!

You do not see it? You do not hear it?

Clearly, this audience
is bewitched by unfriendly wizards.

Publication. *Pavanne for a Fading Memory*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

EVERYTHING FALLING

Santa Cruz, 1971

Fall, 1965

Slowly the twigs and the branches
started to fall with the leaves
and the moon drifted downward
and birds fell like wedges of darkness.

Towers and public statues
toppling on quicksilver footing
fell. Nails fell out of the plaster
and with them fell charts, posters, mirrors.

There was a cascade of inkwells,
figurines, crystals and paper roses.
Flowerpots fell from balconies
and the balconies too plummeted earthward.

And I saw among silks and slippers
my love falling
without will or passion,
shadow falling through shadow.

At that moment quiescence
became an ideal.
I called for the restoration
of stance and mooring.

I cried, Lord! may all this drifting
be a waltz in my brain,
an eye's strange vibration!
but into the darkness like diminishing echoes

fell piano scores, photograph albums,
wine bottles, silver coins, wax apples—
and from the crumbling mortar
fell stone eagles and grinning angels.

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

Nocturne, 1968

This street of mine with its familiar walls and
archways is strangely altered tonight.

Only the branches and shingles are moon-clear.
All else is irrational space, bizarre rocks, a
perspective of a remote geological period.

It echoes with emptiness. A tremor—
something fragile is about to crash.

If I sleep I may waken just as the corner
post-boxes blow up and the shadows congeal
into someone running, pursued by sirens and
gunfire.

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

The Impudent Dancers

These dancers are savage,
that is to say, wild
and pure. Their limbs
struggle for space
in a realm of swarming lives
and fly-specked bedrooms
whose banner
is a clothesline of torn underwear.

I marvel at the mystery
of their impudent
joy. Is all joy
beyond reason? a given Grace,
ineffable, absurd?

They leap on windowsills,
their toes leave imprints
on steep chimneys,
their waving hands snatch
sparks from the streetlights,
they say Yeah! without any sense,
they say Yeah, Yeah, Yeah!

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

Look Down

We fear the wrong deaths
craning for signs in the high air.

Look down, rather,
to holes, hollows, fissures,

to deep conduits, unused—
sewers, abandoned,
subterranean routes
long erased from the blueprints,
where furred things fatten.

Shy to light, fearful of air,
they wait and wait
to emerge
when all the fuses blow.

Meanwhile they fatten
on stinking fumes,
black mold, dust, gasses.

It will be too late
when all the lights go out.
Therefore

with hooks, long knives, sharp stakes
probe
for alien blood in the darkness!

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

Prayer

Lord of sparrows, defend us
against gunfighters
and their stray bullets,
against the raiders
with badges and nightsticks
and dogs and hoses.

For what I harvest
from my rocky acre
what need have I
for armed guardsmen?
Thieves, you are welcome
to my bin and cupboard.

I will take my chances
with intruders
on the peace of my evening.
A wooden stave
is better
than lead-tipped billies.

But I have seen black tears
flowing
from fragile skulls. . .
and I was afraid.
The strutting cocks
furrow with their claws

the flowering lanes
and angered
by the music
in the eyes of sparrows
they pluck, pluck,
with bloody beaks.

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

Accident

A hundred died
in traffic last weekend,
among them a little girl
whom I often saw

skipping like a sparrow
or tagging like a kitten
after her father,
a widower,

whom I now observe
picking up her toys
off the lawn.

His eyes

are broken
headlights,
his forehead
a furrow of tire-tracks.

I hide from him.
I am ashamed
to be seen by him.
I sit in darkness

holding
with outstretched
invisible hands
those I love,

while one by one
the shining specks
of life
sink softly into the night.

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

You, John Wayne

Sonofagun! In whose wake is silence!

O leathery centaur! You flash over the purple
horizon on a sun-bronco with a thundering
rib-cage, snorting fire, spurred by the
fastest gun west of the Pecos.

All us American kids
who love Death
love you, John Wayne,
because You Made Good
and, unlike niggers and jews,
You Have Guts!

Your blazing guns still the bad man's lusty
aliveness. Look how quietly he sprawls on
the blood-stained ground! O kill him again!
Shoot the nesters, greasers, horse-thieves and
cattle rustlers. The crows peck their eyeballs
in the scrub and the sage brush.

All the others may cop out
but you, John Wayne, will go on shooting,
smiling, cool,
without unseemly passion.
Shoot the blonde, true blue as the yellow rose
of Texas, whom you won in a poker game in a
Dodge City saloon.

Shoot her father the ranch-owner.
Shoot the sheriff.
Shoot the posse.
Shoot the birds out of the sky.
Shoot the mountain cats in their dark hollows.

Sonofagun! Gatherer of darkness and silence.
Rider into the bloody sunset.
Emptiness like a wind rushes in behind you.

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

The Recluse

On Monday my cousin
to whom I owe a degree of affection
talked half the night
on this and that, including mostly
The Incident.

Tuesday my neighbor
(and could I be a beast to my neighbor?)
spent all evening talking
on this and that, including mostly
The Dilemma.

I could not be a beast on Wednesday
when my friend discussed The Crisis
or on Thursday when a visiting poet
talked about The Problem.

I was not a beast on Friday,
I was not a beast on Saturday.
On Sunday
I hung a sign in my doorway:
“Whoever you are, go away!”
and I signed it:
The Beast.

Now solitary and sullen
I dole out my minutes like silver,
one watchful eye on the doorway
where stricken visitors take a hurried departure
without a word
on this and that, including mostly
The Situation.

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

The Amazing Mr. Avaunt

The time-obsessed Mr. Avaunt
who serves all the vagaries
of Zeitgeist
(its unpopular becoming
the popular, its minority
becoming majority),

who loudly proclaims
that yesterday's twilights
are cliché
and yesterday's thunders
are definitely
passé,

suddenly found
that his head and trunk
disappeared
into the future
with only his posterior
remaining in the present

nervously wriggling,
frantic
but unable
to overtake
his fourth-dimensional head.

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

Seven Reflections on Marxengels

I.

Man forming matter
and man formed by matter,
 man evolving
from interaction with matter.

 Man unfolding
in time, unfolding
in the tensions of antithesis,
in the agony of antithesis
between labor and property,
unfolding through the seismic
shock of contradictions,
 unfolding
into community.

2.

The midnight savants
studied by promethean lamplight
the reports of factory inspectors,
scrawling on margins of endless volumes,
piling up notebook on notebook
into a great fugue
of man and matter unfolding.

The potential in the unfolding:
as the blue haze of a flower,
its stem, the shape of its petals,
are inherent from the beginning
in the seed's interaction
with earth and sunlight and water.
And their fugue continues unfolding—
a flower of history
that can neither be forced nor thwarted.

3.

And what, in essence, is the desire
that runs like a flame through their pages?

An end to the schism
between man's essence and his existence.

Against the terrible alienation of labor;
the task no longer one's own,
the task a chore,
the task
performed for wages!

4.

And the meaning of their pages
is that the Goddess of Reason
is a bitch goddess
lacking that love without reason
when a child's need or the comfort of lovers
define the need of the Plan's design:

for without love the Plan is nothing.
It blasphemes against man's temple:
his flesh, his bodily needs.
It makes men into rivets
struck into a tower's steel girders.

5.

In the lands of October they made them
Patrons of Better Highways.
of plumbing and rocketry.

They pick their bones
to fatten their dogmas!

Rosa,
herself a radiant eagle,
warned us
that a firebird may turn into a vulture;
that the choiring voices
may break into a tumult; then into screams;
and become a whine on the prairie;
that the chorale of redemption
can be stifled
by the savage hissing of doctrine.

6.

The echo of their pages
haunts our beautiful heads, O my comrades!
Men marching through a luminous whirlwind,

singing
of man's self-creation,
singing so loudly
that we can't hear the whine on the prairie
or the boots of the new bosses
on the silent squares,
the proud strutters
chilling the hearts of the humble.

7.

The roots are always struggling
in the underground darkness.
How rare
are the flowering branches!

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

History

There were some who sought refuge
on a frozen sea-edge.

Here is land no one wants, they said,
here we will build our hearthstones.

This was a stretch of bare rock,
darkness, fog, sea-weed;
but soon a herdsman followed
the dung of strange horses by moonlight

and saw men crouching
by the blaze of smoking torches,
their bridled horses
straining like leashed hounds.

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

Nocturne with a Rehearsal

The angel Akriel, on seeing
that I was afraid

gave me a brief
rehearsal. He pressed

a neon finger
on the blue artery

that leads to the heart.
As I fell

fainting,
I saw Death,

a cat's grin in the moonlight.
I heard Death, fainter

than a snail's breath.
As I was falling
into a bottomless shaft
I whispered: "Enough!"

Restore, angel,
skies to my sockets,

winds to my lungs."
I opened my eyes

and there he was
at the edge of my bed,

one huge wing
fanning me,

the other drying
cold sweat on my forehead.

"There, now," he smiled,
"was that so bad, really?"

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

Heart Attack

1.

Arterial hollows
clogged
by fats and fumes,
jammed
by soft lusts,
by political rages.

2.

... suddenly
fainting ...
fainting ...
... movement of hands and faces
beyond a dark transparency. . .
fainting ...

3.

In the middle of a busy intersection my doctor
directs traffic with his stethoscope.
Cold wet lights. Fluorescent rain.
I take a few uncertain steps toward Death but
stumble over a hypodermic.

4.

A swarm of black angels whose tongues
probe my mouth for light bulbs and
heat worms, dances a hora around my
urinal.

5.

Motionless. Silent.
The opening of a door,
the turning on of a light,
are notable events.

The entrance of a night nurse
merits applause.

6.

In the night without end

I try to see
the fire of a single star.

Do I see It
or a flame behind my lidded eye?

7.

Unable to sew faith from a shroud
I try a new epiphany:
 bearded angels
 with stethoscopes and devices
 for testing blood pressure.

8.

Today I am allowed
to walk across the room.

Hello, there,
you on Mt. Everest!

9.

The new Pillin may not
smoke or drink
or dance on street corners.

Indeed, it is not clear
that the new Pillin
is worth bothering with—

still, I greet you,
I celebrate you,

O Dawns to come!

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

Sleepless Nocturne

I

My thoughts knock
on blind windows,

on doors
that never open.

II

I walk in the driveway
looking for footprints.

I mutter a drowsy lament.

I am kept awake
by changes of the moon.

III

So many sleepers
toss and sigh!
They swallow pills
against anger and bad dreams.

They work so hard,
they try so hard,

grow old
and rebuffed by the world

quietly die.

IV

If I could hear
the faintly beating

heart
of the universe . . .

I hear nothing.

V

My thoughts are waves
searching for the moon.

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

Nocturne at Two in the Morning

At two, at two in the morning
is a time
for the inventory of spent seasons.

You try to think
of another landscape.
It is lost in mist.
A tear hangs over your pillow.
Her hand is a seal of silence
over the guilty eyelids
at two, at two in the morning.

And the winds accuse you
for those who must bear
their bundles of sorrow.
Will you conjure away
their tears in the darkness
at two, at two in the morning?

Are you to blame?
You stare at the criminal stars.
Whom shall you accuse?
From whom shall you claim
at two, at two in the morning?
Yes, yes, the wolf stood darkly
on the path to that human Eden
foretold at every birth
by dreaming housemaids.
Yes, yes, we build our homes
in the shadow of collapsing
monuments. How true, how true!
at two, at two in the morning!

Now is the time to explain,
time to be sorry,

at two, at two in the morning.
Now is the time of insidious moonlight
and the damned wind in the stricken azaleas,
at two, at two in the morning.

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

Nocturne

After Delvaux

A classic landscape
Horizon
defined by walls
lights arcades

On tiled walks
nudes
sleepwalking
They are cool

Their mouths
are seafoam
their throats
a whispering in the leaves

They pass by
staring straight ahead
as if in another
dimension

one hand touching
the genital rose
the other
brushing aside

waves of dark hair
Everything here
is asleep
houses in the moonlight

trees birds fountains
sleep
waiting for a cry
that never comes

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

Space Music

I have not felt God's presence
in my house or on my street
for some time; and frankly, I
have no need for a God
in the sky; the vastness
of glittering space is not
my notion of a human
or acceptable temple.
I want a deity dwelling
in the kitchen or the bedroom,
not far from the Eye Light
which with the dreaming
antennae of the senses
is the only Testament.

I lift my eyes skyward
at 3 A.M. when sleep fails me
to see if the Old One
is hiding up there, where
the stratospheric gas
recedes to an absolute
zero. On the radar can be heard
the interstellar particles
which some say is God
humming a cosmic tune.
This singing dust
is neither sad or joyous.
It just sounds off! Molecules
darting through airless
distances, whirring, colliding.
I think of some Messaien
fluting in the stillness
or some Webern tinkling
on the piano, Das Augenlicht,
like icicles falling:
except, of course,
these were men, making a human
music. Alone in the night

I want to hear the familiar
passacaglias of wind
in the doorways and windows
or along the telephone
wires, instead of this absurd
cosmic Jing-a-ling.

It is evident to me
that where rooftops end
with their sprinkling of sparrows,
begins an ambiguous realm
useful for its changing hues
and as a setting for nests
of lights. Not for a Temple.

I see the rooftops
calmly breathing their vapors
and candelabras of chimneys
intruding into the moonlight—
and I turn away from
the nearest galaxy
to about 100 feet
above the telephone wires—
and this is the limit
of my faith. Welcome back, God!

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

Better Once Than Never

Better what moves and dances around me
Better a rashly penned poem than lines
 fading in memory
Better now than someday

Better a small home among heaps of coal
 and discarded engines
Better a sanctuary of weeds
Better a faucet than a fountain
Better our own than someone's

Better life though rationed in small doses
Better life in the dim light of a sick-lamp
Better life looking through a blue crack at
 a flight of sea-birds

Better the sadness of smiles in the darkness
 of May nights
Better a face gleaming through a mist of ashes
Better you than someone

Better earth as a brown fist at my throat
 than a soft bite of worms

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

Give Me

Give me what's left
the light fading
into the walls
of your nun's room
the breath disappearing
into the sieve of dawns
the scraps of the night
do not throw them away
give them to me

*

I will give you
what I can spare
hours stolen
from a walled orchard
a frostflower picked
on the way to your house
and spread
over an autumn meadow
the vine of my fingers

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

She Set Him Free

She set him free
from the silence of velvet grottos
into jazzing caves where cavorting couples
grimace and gesture
dumbly, like mimes caged by a spotlight.

She set him free
to stare at the bosoms of leaning waitresses,
at the illuminated sex of a billboard starlet,
at the eye-full girlies on magazine covers.

She set him free to be devoured
by the sleek silhouettes in neon doorways,
by maenads with frozen mouths
in whose smokey eyes
are petrified landscapes
where the moon stains with lime
vast heaps of slag and ashes.

She set him free
to curse his artesian manhood,
to walk without hope on the aphrodisiac boulevards.

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

The Resolution

I made a bonfire of all your keepsakes:
small gifts, photographs, letters.
I cross the street to avoid people
who might mention your name in my presence.

I pretend that you do not exist,
that you never existed, that you are
someone remembered from an old novel
the plot of which I have forgotten.

In time you will be a foggy abstraction,
your image will fade
like moonlight blotted by mists,
your voice a telephone message in a bad connection.

Yes, woman, the thought of you
will be an empty letter delivered by error. . .
but meanwhile how shall I manage
the clockless rage that keeps me awake?

or ignore the summons through a storm of guitars
that mocks the time-table of my resolution?
Will death catch me nodding
over the still-hot ashes of burned keepsakes?

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

Ballade

I hear a rune it sighs it rages
a moan runs on its parchment pages

where black snow falls

Witch-waif witch-wife in the grove
give me a penny's worth of love

where moon-moths cluster

The witch-waif smiles the witch-wife teases
the witch-wife yields her wide-eyed kisses

where the moon-blinded cock cries

Bemused the muted rune-lute sings
of darkness and lewd whisperings

where dawn crawls on tree-tops

The witch dissolves in tears and laughter
and disappears among the rafters

where thirteen crows screech and vanish

At night among the weeping boughs
the love-inflicted venom glows

where night-lamps flare like blue roses

Witch-waif witch-wife in the well
may your soul return to hell

where the eyes of the damned smoke like
untrimmed wicks

I hear a rune it sighs it rages

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

The Leaf

I put one leaf
in a herbal of silence
discarding all other
mementos

of walks
without destination
and days
empty as mirrors.

Only this leaf I kept
picked at random
in a lonely wood,
in a season of grief.

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

The Death of Professor Moriarty

I hunted him like a relentless fugue
in the baroque taverns of the waterfront,
sewers and slums and spiteful alleyways.
And when the crawling enigmatic fog
dimmed viaducts and arclights, we pursued
our deadly game of tag, with every bend
and every door a risk.

A hundred times
I saw him shot and stabbed, drowned in a bog,
poisoned or burned to death. A hundred times
I thought to dance a jig upon his bier;
only to see him soon at some swank tea
talking to bankers and to diplomats,
charming to the ladies, a complete gentleman.
Who knew my foe as the arch-criminal
whose crimes were subtle and grotesque, untouched
by greed or lust but improvised
in purity of uncorrupted art?

One night he came to me in Baker Street
and, pointing a gun to gain the interview,
said: "We are getting old—and so much left
to do! Such schemes, such luminous intrigues!
Sherlock, you always thwarted my designs.
The time has come to play one final round.
Winner take all—and one of us must die!"
I saw him standing there in somber cloak,
his eyes profoundly dark, his hands
like vast wings resting on his hips. Then he was gone.
That night, from hedge to shadow-colored hedge,
I followed him until I had him trapped
between the gasworks and the grey canal.
His derringer misfired. My dagger found his heart.
And with his final breath he said to me:
"Sherlock, what now? Who will dog your days
and haunt your nights with stratagems and wiles?
Against whom will you pit that marvelous brain
or essay forth into precarious night?"

And will you be content to find release
from boredom in cocaine and violins?"
He laughed and, choking on his laughter, died.

This time so surely trapped in death!
And looking at the suddenly faded moon
I knew that I was trapped as well.

I, deacon of the local church,
subsisting on a small annuity,
a proper man adored by aging maids.

Locked in my desk
are my mementos: magnifying lens,
the snub-nosed thirty-two, a violet vial
of a rare venom and a crumbling map
of London sewers.

And the years go by. . .

And I look up to the fading skies
hoping to conjure vital presences.
"Moriarty," I cry out, "return, return!"
but I hear only the wind
that once had whispered nameless threats
in dusty warehouses and oil-sleeked wharves.

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

The Sparrow

For the memory of Edith Piaf

She sings inside herself—n'est pas?
for the way of life is sometimes gay, sometimes sad,
and the quivering tongue
is a trill of brimless joy
or a scream silently flying in the wind.

In a voice that weeps without tears
she campaigns for tears.
She bears witness to l'amour. She sings
of those whose names are written in blows;

of little coffins buried in snowdrifts,
a winter sacrifice to an April passion;
of women sitting alone, whose glasses of brandy
are salutes to foolish vows, to betrayals;

of lamplight in a window whose yellow finger
beckons to the seaman: "Hello boy, you come with me?"
of the dishevelled bed reached through sour hallways,
of the bed among cracked wallpaper flowers,
of shoes and stockings flung into a corner.

She sings in the pale winter sunshine
that not to be loved is to be worth nothing.
She sings of the unloved women
waiting to feel on their hair
the glowing fingertips of someone's desire.

She sings, in a rush of darkness,
of mysterious triumphs
when, secluded by moonlight,
Lovers nest on the winds of their passion;

of servant girls and workmen in patched garments
on rooftops or under Seine bridges
whose thighs and tongues make a pact
against death and despair.

Her ulcers sing, her bones
wracked by arthritis

sing, her torn tissues
rise from the bloodstained arenas of traffic
and sing: “Je ne regrette rien!”

An old piano dies with her
and ascends to the heaven of sad Pierrots,
a boulevard of twilights,
of furtive doorways, cafés and bistros.

Under a streetlight
the sparrow sings: “I don’t care,
I don’t care—as long as you love me!”

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

Pygmalion

She wanted to hold someone
on rainy evenings,
being sad, being lonely.
We could have had a free ride
among the stars
and a nice home in a dream.

But I had to endow her
with a new guise:
Queen Nefertiti, mistress
of a luminous secret:
her eyes—a laughter of moonlight;
her voice—a canticle of harvests;
her embrace—a fall into soft mist;
her hollow—jasmine and ginger.
And because she fed
the neighborhood cats
I bestowed on her the rank and title
of Bubastis, the Cat Goddess!

One by one she shook out
my twilights from her hair
(greying, with a faint aroma of tar-soap).
Layer by layer she stripped away
my tints and pigments
as if to say: “Look, you bastard!
This is what I am!
Polish, from Milwaukee . . .”
She forced me to see
an aging body
in a garish print
and went to bed
with a fat peasant next door
who held no dialogues
with his mind’s shadow.

What a lovely creation
the wench demolished!

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

Housewife

In order to breathe, in order
to feel the uncorrupted
air upon her naked skin,
she must wage a relentless
duel with dust. With a rag,
a scrub bucket and a broom,
she drives out the demons
of dirt. She flicks silver
on crystals and mirrors.
Her copper dazzles the gloom
and not a speck on her window
deflects the visiting stars.
In the evening she presides
over the porcelain. ghosts
of the kitchen, where she rests
wearily, triumphantly.

She lives next to her husband
on white sheets, freshly laundered,
redolent of scented soap,
her weapon in the endless
conspiracy of grime. He
searches for her breasts, her mouth.
His desire makes no dent
in her tidiness. She lies
passionless but yielding
knowing that he too has his
furies and that he too must
drive them out. And she is glad
that all her imps and goblins
are outside of her, a thin
layer of dust and soot
exorcised by sacrament of soap.

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

I Have Friends Who Dance

I have friends who dance
on a trapeze,
who, even when they fall
land on a net of words.

One takes his words
from shadowy curbs
where children dance
their rondos of fear and guilt

Another borrows from the dead.
His words are traced
on posthumous vellum
of elegant wreaths and academic moonlights.

And one is a word-finder.
He picks up words
from streets littered
with paper-cups and soiled napkins.

I have friends who compile
lexicons of sunlight
and glossaries of love.
Why among them

am I dumb?
Motionless by lamplight
all I can hear
are the uncreated

vowels of silence.
Out of this emptiness
will words ever come
like the miracle of the loaves?

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

Sequence on a Birthday

I

Crouching over the icy
sparks of the faucet

counting
the fifty five seasons

stored in the rings of my bones
knowing

that this day like all others
will be swept out

into the speechless night
while one by one my heartbeats

disappear
into the walls of this house

II

The thousand memorials
to my passage

runes cribbed from nightbirds
lunar mementos

chronicles of chimneys
and lamplights

written down neatly
in old journals

like a bird's
blue writing

that leaves no trace

III

What's new? with aluminum fingers
the mechanics of space
probe our moonlight eye

Black crows and chattering jays
subvert
the ageless sonorities of poplars

My backyard
 theater of my life
what need have I
for shrilling telestars?

IV

A distance of two inches
between the zippers of my trousers!
 My stomach rejects
the spiced tidbits

I smoke too much and worry about it
Often I do not sleep
thinking up poems that disappear at dawn

I do not complain I watch
what the wind does
around a girl's knee

I make notes
like crow tracks on rice paper

V

Delight cannot be summoned—
only met

Suddenly
there it is
 a shining coin
from the cashbox of time

and we dance a fandango
to the vast joy
of dogs and children

VI

If I had to do it over
I would do strange things

to the great scandal of housewives
swear a crazy allegiance to a trumpet
nightly visit a cave of candles
where every whisper is set to music

live off charcoal and snowflakes
steadfastly reject
all timetables and encyclical

and though I miss my appointments
never never
turn my back on the blue world

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

Defined Passage

Do not bury him on a wide field or at sea's edge.
Let him lie hemmed in by a stone and rosebush.
Nothing stormlike or timeless—the neat roof, the
defined passage.

Let him in dying be as one who preferred limits and
boundaries, garden walls, fences;
who loved a small house, a quiet woman.

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

Two for Polia

1. WIFE

Having learned the grammar of silence
we dispense
with the never ending noise of words.
We laugh
at each other's unspoken humor.

We lose awareness of time
and are startled when stars appear
where only a moment ago
the whole sky was breathing
through the wings of small birds.

2. YOUR LOVE

Your love up before dawn
your love a calm

conjunction
of fair weather

your love an aroma
of wheat and parsley

your love
an alchemy of saucepans

your love which sleeps
with one eye open

which hears
my breath at a distance

your love a custodian
of my silence a sentinel

of nightlamps
a luminous buoy

on a journey
of mists

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

The Phantom Posts

Bewildered, I spread my fingers
for remaining springtimes;
all my seasons spent running
from one phantom post to another,
till the next corner is turned,
the next storm weathered.

*

One more sprint to reach the sea,
the ineffable goal!
 But the halcyon landscape
recedes
 even after the final payment
on the car, the mortgage.

Before the final post
 I fall
breathless,
 still haunted
by a distant scent,
the gulls screaming,

the sea's edge
remote as ever.

*

I will go to the seashore,
 there live
with an old copy of Whitman
and an iron bean-pot . . .

... and butt my head
if ever I yield
to the lure of a seawind
beyond the breath
of this day, this evening.

Angelic Admonition

The angel Akriel, frowning
over my catalogue of laments
says: "Stop this brutal staring

at passing females.
You croak
like a frenzied bullfrog.

Remember the weight
of your seasons,
that your greed burns

on a feeble battery.
Cool it before
it dims and darkens."

*

Angel, as I nod to your wisdom
my eyes are glued
to the delicate swellings

of passing Angelique.
To her I whisper
as she strolls by:

Nymph! Deliveress!
Let the diary of your days
hold some pages for me.

Do not let me
swing forever
on a pendulum of sighs.

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

Sequence in a Pottery Workshop

1.

We chose to live in a cave
too damp for our bones;
to keep as pets
a pair of trained moles;
to endlessly argue
with visiting gnomes;
to grow mineral flowers
in a garden of ores and crystals.

2.

Vexations, harassments,
fatigues
lurk like mice
in every barrel of clay—

but neither master nor servant
intrudes on our silence.

3.

We would rather eat salted fish
and boiled potatoes
with a pitcher of water
for our thirst
than drink wine
among strangers
and step to their strophes
and dance to their tambourines.

4.

After a day's work
she, whose apron
is the banner of my freehold,

rests at our work table
and hums a little tune
calling by name
each tool of our craft.

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

To a Customer

If you dislike our pot, Mister,
go buy from another.

But don't stand there with a turned up nose,
you bastard!

I labored in shaping the slender amphora
and Polia designed a small alleluia upon it.

Go now.
Your shadow lingers over the highlights.

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

Ode on a Decision to Settle for Less

Take what is at hand
as sparrows take to doorways
when the rain and the wind
conspire against them.
Take to the mountains
to harvest rocks
when wolf-eyes gleam
in the fat valleys.

Better, though the work is beneath you,
to sell your muscles to a mason
than to ask favors from God,
Take what is at hand
to look freely
in God's blue eye.

You, riders of clouds, wake up!
One can starve waiting
for singing tomorrows.
Black bread freely eaten
makes a melodious Sabbath.
Wait no longer
for favors from heaven
but light your candles
to bless what is at hand.

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

A Four-Part Hallelujah

I

Half the night I stayed up
hearing through weeping pages
a poet
waving darkness at me
as if it were a banner.

What with aches and distractions
and rarely enough money
to have this clown tell me
that the sun will surely sink, etc.,
as if I don't know it.

II

Sorrow can be fraudulent,
a dullard's refuge.

Better to follow a crazy impulse,
to do steps and turns
on aging feet,
to glide
guided by the wingbeat
of the orbiting earth.

III

Ill, in debt, writing autumn poems,
I am at least entitled
to a sullen silence
but the irrational dog in my flesh
wags a tail, jumps to be patted,
absurdly estatic
for no good reason.

IV

I declare my boredom with despair.
I expand to new latitudes.
I thrust forward

with zones and seasons.

The seawaves catch fire from the stars.

I exchange my timetables for sea-charts.

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

Reproach

The day's love lost
and the hour's song
dumb in the throat
and a glass of wine untasted
loses its savor

I asked for scraps no one
deserves less
a touch a breath shared
what sullen reason
made you discard them?

That my time my labor
belonged to another
was decreed was destined
but this day this hour
was ours to choose freely

The day lost the hour
put aside forever
among forfeited assets
to draw what empty dividends
against death-bent seasons?

The day's blueness lost
the hour's heat lightning
that strikes once only
 now nothing
a shadow over the stones
that forgot our footsteps

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

Poem

To be sad in the morning
is to blaspheme—
God's shy smile
breaking into leaves and lights.

In darkness and silence
I will be sad
but not in the morning
with its angelus of birds
and its covenant of blue.

Publication. *Everything Falling*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1971.

THE ABANDONED MUSIC ROOM

Santa Cruz, 1975

Lines on a New Year's Eve

1.

Year's end: an indefinite zone
when shadows of memory unroll
like an old silent film
of people and houses grown old,
old and seedy and grey.

I think of landscapes
blurred by nightfall,
of fog, winds, empty spaces.
Time, my love, will erase us
like a whisper on a tape.

2.

Strange thoughts on this night
of benevolent conjectures
of days and nights to come.
Crowds dance on public squares.
Strangers speak to strangers.

They move past our window.
to lose themselves
in a raucous symphony
of the street, all gay tonight, all
magicians of a new dawn.

3.

Moment of moonlight-tintured
mind, when it is good
merely to sit with you
in a darkened room, to feel
time breathing on our skin, to hear
the endless resonance of time

as you and I, the festive crowd,
magicians, dancers, all
fall, fall
into the funnel of eternity.

Publication. *The Abandoned Music Room*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1975.

The Presence

I carry out the trash.
She waters the garden.
Time will not torment us
with imps of ennui.
A strategy of bustle
distracts us
from the penumbral Presence
in life's dark corner,
whose haunting eye I saw
as it leaned over my mother's bed.

*

At the nursing home
the aged stare fixedly
at some absolutely vacant
distance. It was there
that my mother took three months to die
clinging through some human reflex
to her pain and despair
while I wept at the window:
give up, little bird, give up!

*

Cold mist, empty windows:
thin membrane of eternity.
Sometimes I try to find
old books, tools, old poems,
faces in memory—
and O Lord!
things are always
disappearing
into the chill of various voids.

*

In the distance
a smudge of emptiness.
O my soul, seek

your daily labors!

I will carry out the trash,
she will water the garden,

till the last frozen leaf
slips through numbed fingers.

Publication. *The Abandoned Music Room*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1975.

Black Rain

I.

I go out into the wet street
carrying night like a hood

over my head, gulping
winds, stars, streetlights.

I observe rondeaus of sparrows;
I study ballerinas of billboards;

I try to revive my dwindling soul!

2.

The winds are bitter,
the winds are a dirge!

I must return all my tears
to the blind musicians

who play toccatas of twigs,
like whispers in a death chamber.

3.

Black rain! If only
I could make something of you,

be profound
about how vile life is.

Nausée or Il Suicidio
from La Gioconda!

But look! In the black cloud
six square inches of starlight.

I delude myself endlessly
with aureoles, flights, vespers!

Publication. *The Abandoned Music Room*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1975.

Yellow Lamplight

1.

I invite sleep by shaping
landscapes out of darkness

but sleep is not easily won.
I hear clocks,

doors shutting,
voices in empty rooms.

2.

I grow old, I earn
the right to be fearful,
to guard my sanctuary of lamplight
from the huge, lonely street,

to hear footsteps
where no one is walking.

3.

The street breathes, vibrates.
The hooded falconry of windows

glitters. Sleepwalkers
disappear into the night.

Shadows drift
through my latched door.

4.

The yellow lamplight
bleaches the bones

of my world.
Heart,
you want too much!

Be content
if from your window pane

black shadows
disappear once again.

Publication. *The Abandoned Music Room*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1975.

Nocturne with Rain

The bare branch weeps
over its thousands of wet leaves.

Crows of black mist
press on my window.

*

Why is this always
a mournful weather?

Are we not also
mostly water

like those moon-tears
gleaming on tips of leaves?

*

What should I fear?
like a sea-gull

I managed a dry cliff-nest
for myself and those I love.

*

Running after life,
stumbling and falling
and running again—

all those crazy leaps
from a kitchen window
to the remote and shining stars!

*

Drip, drip, drip.
I latch doors and windows.

Let it be a long time
before I lose the key
to this house where my love

expands to the walls and ceilings,
where my love is larger than anything else!

Publication. *The Abandoned Music Room*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1975.

Night Poem in Darkness

Getting up at night
my fingers trace
pathways of darkness,
avoiding collisions
and cruel projections,
my progress easy
as the velvet flight
of a bat in a cave.

*

I am disturbed
by the streetlight
beyond the kitchen
with its electric flicker
on the dense-blue window.
It does not belong
to my house,
to my darkness.

*

I hear the breathing
of my son and wife.
My breath joins theirs.
A small chorale surges
through the silken realm
of sleep.

*

A whispering darkness . . .
Elsewhere
empires collapse—
but here I slowly die!

breath by blessed breath.

Publication. *The Abandoned Music Room*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1975.

The Blue Candle

*

Lured by the sound of distance:
sea-waves, moonlight

on backs of plovers,
I too could fly:

but what's in Paris
and what's in Rome?

Hard times and bad weather!

*

Let others leap over time-zones
pursuing a gleam of fancy.

God only knows
what hidden calamities

I have avoided:
strangers, crowds,
missed train connections!

I will stay at home
making evening journeys
to the bench in my garden.

*

A blue candle is my Zion!
Its pure light

blesses the silence
of this sleeping house.

I do not wish
to leave—soon enough

something
will take my hand

and quietly lead me away.

Publication. *The Abandoned Music Room*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1975.

Night Poem in an Abandoned Music Room

I lay quietly listening to some musical rabbi
expound his angelic lore
when I heard a conflicting piano
from an abandoned music room.

From this room, for ages
the silent refuge
of moths that fly into houses at night,
I heard a haunted mazurka
as if an ancient player piano
started up
after decades of silence.

I entered the vast room with its odor of moist loam.
Three women I saw whom I've loved,
still handsome but with faces tired and lined.
Four men were there whom I counted as friends
and they had a bewildered look in their hollow eyes.

The crystal chandelier was dull with insect droppings
and dust.

A single candle
flickered on eroding walls.
I pushed aside the rotting curtains
hoping to see children playing on the lawn
but a thick fog
concealed and silenced the world.

Pianos lost in memory,
a tremor
in a room vast and empty.
The desire
for yet another dawn!

I wept and I cried:
"It can't happen, not now, not like this!"
and my words were a mist on the wind.

I lay silently, waiting, waiting . . .

Publication. *The Abandoned Music Room*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1975.

The House

In a life flawed by a sequence of failures,
this has gone well—this house
with its good work and quiet evenings.

The kitchen window opens on flowers and rooftops.
A sheer wall blocks the streetside
from iron brambles and neon nettles.

I want to stay in this unblurred realm
till I die. A strange dread
seizes my heart when I think of departing

from this driveway and threshold,
the further away the greater the apprehension,
a bad dream at midday,

until wakened
by my place of small songs,
my skin of wood and stucco.

Publication. *The Abandoned Music Room*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1975.

Wishes

How often have I said this?
how I long to run, run to where the pepper grows!

I finally did it, I came to that fabled land.

There I heard a man whisper:
how I long to run, run to where the pine-cones grow!

Publication. *The Abandoned Music Room*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1975.

Night Poem with a Ghost

He left but his shadow
remained, a blue
wash in the air,
one of many
in her hallway of memory.
Some are old, diminished
to a mere wisp;
others retain
a faintly ghostlike
transparency. His
is an almost tangible
presence
and will drive out
all the others;
will take possession
of her every
unguarded moment;
will visit
at odd hours;
will stare at her
through gaps of mist;
will embrace her
with vaporous arms,
will make wild love
in her fog-haunted sleep.

Publication. *The Abandoned Music Room*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1975.

Night Poem with a Room

He haunts this room,
its lamplight,
its books, paintings,
floorplanks, rugs, curtains.

On these walls he scribbled
the diary of his presence.
On these walls he pasted
his dreams like old posters.

Centuries of his silence
drown in an old mirror.
Nothing changes
except by arrangement.

The moon rises like clockwork.
Punctual as steeple chimes
the recorded piano
whispers each evening.

Beyond his window
people pass in silence.
They do their work.
He does not dislike them.

Past his lamplight
he sees falling
leaves. He is content.
Only rarely

does he brush the walls
with weeping fingers.
Only rarely does he hammer the walls
with raging fists.

Publication. *The Abandoned Music Room*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1975.

Night Poem with a Blind Nude

Mesmer, a gentleman illuminati,
touched the eyes

of Maria Theresa, the blind pianist.
She was nude. Dark smoke

over a delicate cleft
ripened his limbs.

*

It was autumn, the trees
fretting and furious,

shedding their leaves.
He stroked her eyelids

the features of her form.
There was a silent downfall

of softest air. She breathed
deeply, opened her wide eyes

hovering on the brink
of darkness

studded with visible stars.

*

She sighed . . .
half sigh, half moan,

blinded again!
Mesmer's passionate touch

restored her vision
but as his passion waned

so did her sight.

*

I trust that in her blindness
she was content to touch

the lineaments of the world,
to improvise a magical cadenza
from the sure knowledge of her fingertips.
Mesmer, the spent lover,
wandered, no doubt,
between musical rages
and lunar declines—
everywhere to find
windless dark and silent night.

Publication. *The Abandoned Music Room*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1975.

The Distance

Across the burning blue estuary
she waved and shouted to him.
Vaguely, through wine-fogged eyes
he saw her, girlish and blonde,
calling to him between cupped hands;
but at this distance her moving lips
fashioned, it seemed, eloquent silences.

Did he know her? He thought not.
The din of jazz around him gained
brassy momentum. Companions poured
wine in his mouth, tipsy nymphs
clutched at his shirt, their breasts
stiffening against his sun-flushed skin.

"I cannot hear you!" he yelled
and shrugged his shoulders
and followed his friends, shouting
a ribald song into the air
loud with the surf and screaming gulls.

And soon she realized that her shouts
were wasted and waved her hand
regretfully and walked away
into diminishing antiphony of winds,
into the innocent white afternoon.

Publication. *The Abandoned Music Room*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1975.

O, Beautiful They Move

If I could hide in the woods
like a wolf tormented by violins;

but white and naked they move,
their mouths tense and red,

each bearing a rose that flames.

O, beautiful they move
in the cold lunar night—

and I am a wild bird on a cliff.
I clack, clack

into the veins of all Creation.

Publication. *The Abandoned Music Room*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1975.

Reactionary Poem

Nothing gathered in a dozen milleniums
adds a shred to my wild knowledge;
to the chips of sky in my skull
or the cry of an owl in my darkness.

Publication. *The Abandoned Music Room*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1975.

Song of Sisyphus, Workingman

Lay a heavy weight
on my shoulders, Lord,
so they be not crushed
by emptiness. A burden, Lord,
so that I may live!

How can I praise Thee enough
for the serene assurance
O Lord, who gives me a height to scale
and then hurls me back
to the foot of the mountain?

Without a burden
what am I? a shadow
in a vast emptiness, my dawns
dust, a pathway
to nowhere. And how can one rest?

Joyous burden! I climb
to the foaming mist of the summit.
I labor for Lord's wages:
a breathing space;
night; stars; darkness and sleep.

Publication. *The Abandoned Music Room*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1975.

Heritage

In dark tenements
shone my icon;
in mist and shadow
I found my song.

Now another sky
is bluing my window.
I lost my voice
on wide boulevards.

*

Once I was a neighbor.
Now my bowl is full
and so is my wine-glass.
I forget how it was

to be one of many
driven by dusty breath
into a crossfire
of rails and wires.

I forget creaking stairs,
the broken chair,
the empty pantry, the silence
of small shops.

*

Now I'm not a neighbor
and I'm not a priest.
My house is large
and my larder fat.

I want to return
to my mists and shadows;
but my head sprouts frost
and my feet are anchors.

*

The words I speak
are pale sparks
from the stone pit
of a crumbling hearth.

Publication. *The Abandoned Music Room*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1975.

The Intellectuals

I.

Lord, I'm fed up with the busy spiders
and their tenuous spit of thought
who, lacking the stuff for a quarto,
lose tenure and lecture appointments.
They fatten their purses
by spreading confusion
among wide-eyed gudgeons.
They see nothing

but their own grimacing faces
in a delirium of mirrors.
Most of all I suspect
the rarely sincere ones:

the pale moon-masters
with eyes like well-lights.
What on earth are they saying?
Their whispers faint in the distance.

2.

With an acknowledgement to Moishe Leib Halpern

Listen, my beloved son:
I worked all my life like a dray-horse.
This house and a measure of savings
will cushion your future;

but if ever I see you moon-struck
with a notion to write a paper
on Whither This? or The Future of Something,
so help me, I will leave my possessions

to a Society for Simplified Spelling
or some such fuddle. Dear offspring,
take up wine, venery, gaming—
not theorists, not dialecticians!

Akriel's Council

A noggin of wine with my pottage!
I thank the angel Akriel
for his sage council, I who never
asked for more than just the pottage.

“You are a mouse,” said Akriel.
“Its no use shouting
‘mice of the world, arise!’
After you have risen

the same cat lurks nearby,
the same magpie snatches
your wedge of cheddar.”
Thus said Akriel

whom I toast with a noggin.
He said also:
“Be scrivener or potter.
Any lonely labor

keeps the heart clean.
Do not tempt the squires
with a fancy garden.
Plant sparrow grass, sweet peas

and a clump of spinney.
Shun wishing dances
with ghosts and empty husks
but lay yourself up

a small hoard of silver
so when you are old
nurses
will hold your piss-pot.”

Publication. *The Abandoned Music Room*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1975.

Disappearances

Into the Hoodoo Sea disappear men, planes,
freighters, sailing vessels.

Unruffled, sunlit sea-scape—but where is
the Mariner,

Star Tiger, Cyclops? No debris or flotsam,
no bodies. Just gone!

*

Jews disappear into the sky above Bialostok.
Africans disappear into the sands of
Sahel.

God, where have You gone? sucked into one of
Your own pulsars?

Meadows, barns, stables—where have they
gone? Into what collapse of faults, what
Sea of Darkness?

*

Seals and pelicans disappear into the dark
mist off the coast at Monterey.
Poets disappear into the San Francisco Bay.
Tibet disappears from the map.
A generation of children disappears into
dimly lit doorways.
Ishtar and Aphrodite disappear in a Hollywood
go-go joint.

Season of rebellion, summers of love—
where have they gone? Into what wrinkle
of blue, what enigma of calms?

Our songs, our poems—ghostly derelicts in
the Port of the Missing?

Publication. *The Abandoned Music Room*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1975.

The Bulldozed Promenade

On summer evenings we took magical walks
on Western Avenue from Melrose north
and lingered so as not to miss
the swallows above the carpenter's shop:
the antique store with a stuffed owl
and Roman coins and a bronze nude
holding a lighted globe;
the aquarium where rainbow minnows wove
ultramarine designs; the TV shop
where sixteen color sets depicted
sixteen simultaneous homicides.
There was a Baedeker of cooking smells:
borsht parlors, pizzarias, tacos stands.

One evening taking our stroll
we were the stunned observers
of stucco dust over a gaping hole!
A wrecked Baghdad! A bulldozed promenade!
Where was the electric fixtures window
with a prismatic spray of chandeliers?
the locksmith, Chinese laundry, doughnut shop;
the dare-devil kids on tricycles;
and the girls, high-heeled equilibrists,
munching a MacDonald hamburger?

Gone! the noble patina of an aging street
and throb of a hundred livelihoods!

Only a giant sign:
ON THIS SITE EXXON WILL BUILD . . .

. . . where now stands an oleatic dump—
plate glass and plastic greenery,
a neon shroud imparting a graveyard face
to every passerby.

* * *

May you be trimmed by Bedouin scimitars,
who exxonized our urban pastorage
leaving us to breathe
pleistocene air of decayed dinosaurs!

Publication. *The Abandoned Music Room*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1975.

A Poem for Anton Schmidt

A German army sergeant, executed in March 1942 for supplying the Jewish underground with forged credentials and military vehicles.

I have properly spoken
hymns for the dead, have planted
white roses in the high air.

And because my pen is a leech
to suck out blood's poison
I had a need to write

of death's clerks and doctors;
but my pen dissolved
in an inkwell of acid

and my paper, litmus of shame,
crumbled to ashes.

Anton Schmidt, I thank you

for breaking the spell that numbed
the singing mouth. I need not write
of the mad and the murderous.

That a vile comraderie
caused streets and meadows to weep
no longer surprises us;
but a lone soldier's
shining treason
is a cause for holy attention.

Anton Schmidt, whose valor
lessened the vats of human fat
and looms of human hair

I thank you that no poison
is burning my veins
but a wine of praise

for a living man
among clockwork robots
and malevolent puppets.

Publication. *The Abandoned Music Room*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1975.

Nocturne with Faces of the Dead

Some nights I see
the faces of the dead:
small cohesions
of mist on my window.

Thin, pale,
ravaged faces,
mouths open
to a shuddering wind.

Their killers
are even now
calmly walking
the streets of this city.

I rise from my bed.
A swollen gland
bursts in my veins
and pulsing in my blood

extends my fingernails
to long sharp claws.
Fangs
sprout from my mouth.

I become
a furry, stinking beast.
I prowl the shadows
in search of prey.

Then the faces of mist
condense.
Tears
run down the blue glass

and soak into the warm
loam. The dead
with their immense silence
bless me to sleep.

Publication. *The Abandoned Music Room*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1975.

Farewell to Europe

I.

We, the captives of a thousand skies,
sang the airs of many peoples,
tango, waltz and leaping czardash;

but the waltz stumbles, the oboe
is poised on the brink of a scream.

We whispered madrigals of woe
in sewers and cellars.

We learned sparrow wit, hangman humor,
at the bottom of scaffolds,
at the gates of stone chimneys.
Europe, the odor of your guilt
lingers in our nostrils.

You are a perspective of walls
diminishing in cold moonlight.

Vanish from our songs!

2.

Will your pianos haunt us to the end?
The stars in your snows, O steppes?
the sunlight bleeding gold
on the rim of a snow-foaming mountain?

Facade of roses and wings,
shall we cloak our memories in blue
because your gardens sang to the sun?

The kaftaned companions of the Presence
are swept from the streets of your cities.
Our migrants kiss a new wind
scented with ancient cedars.

Farewell, the Vienna woods are no longer calling,
or the grimacing spires of Cologne,
or your gleaming cupolas, Kiev.

3.

Your temples are Gothic stalactites,
frozen tears of eternity;
your gardens are lavender clouds;
your streetlamps shimmering buoys
of musical boulevards.

But you were never our motherland.
We were born
not on the Rhine or the Vistula
but in Abraham's tent
on a journey from Ur to Judea.

This you never ceased to remind us;
that we are alien,
remote from you, the light of a dead star
that faintly lingers upon this planet.

4.

We are leaving. We take little with us;
some music, a few poems.

It is well that we stand under new arches
bequeathing to our children
our praises, our celebrations.

Our Einstein will toughen the mental sinews
of other continents.
Our Freud will plumb the dark soul of Asia.
Our Marx will rally the cadres of jungles
and savannahs.

5.

We are leaving. No longer will you have to cross
yourself, people with pitchforks and cudgels,
as our huddled remnants trudge over your
meadows.

O mother of white nights, after a millenium on
your steppes your hostages are pleading: let
us depart!

We are leaving our ancestral tombs, our shrines,
our wealth endlessly plundered by the card-
playing nobles.

We are leaving you forever, belching Siegfried,
Vladimir red-eyed from distilled potatoes!

6.

Europe, you realm of carnivorous blondes!
Your grand canals are clogged by chemical silt.
The sculptures of your saints are eroded by
pigeon droppings.
Smokestacks spew their black spittle on the
vineyards of Chateau de Rothschild.
Elegant bushmen celebrate your Requiem Mass
with tom-toms and banjos.

Even as you revel in your utopia of pig-fat,
blood sausage and Pilsen
you look nervously over your shoulder
at the lean wolves of the east.

They will strip your flesh leaving
the bare bones of cathedrals.
What the wolves will not eat—
monuments, fountains, castles—
will be shipped stone by antique stone
to the Disneyland of America.

7.

Basta! Genug! Assez! Dostatochno!

Farewell, blue-eyed maiden. You need no
longer exclaim on seeing the mark of
our ancient covenant: "You cheated me!
You never told me!"

Farewell, priests whose blood mysteries at
Lent goaded the tavern heroes to wield
their axes among us.

Zbigniew, whom will your children curse?

Zoltan, astride a stallion, at whom will
you lash out galloping by?

You have no one to bludgeon but each other!

Publication. *The Abandoned Music Room*. Santa Cruz: Kayak Books, 1975.

TO THE END OF TIME

Los Angeles, 1980 · selected surviving scans

Holy Beggars

Little folk who mingled
wails with hosannas!
Herring-and-onion folk
whose poverty held holiness!

The Rabbi turned modern
and preaches Existenz
but the Light of the Ancient
falls rarely
on stained glass windows,
on the organs, on the mixed chorus.

But I remember your stinking doorways,
the flies, the smell of cabbage and soup-bones
(and the pale youths chanting
from the Illumination,
starlight under their black skull-caps).

The poorest of you lighted
festival linen
with silver candelabra.
Everything sang, everything sparkled.

And the Light of the Ancient
shone into the bedroom
where man and wife were hallowed
and into the kitchen
to bless the bread and wine.
It shone on the dog at the lamp-post,
on the children playing in the back-alleys,
on the rabbi who smelled of fish
and on his scrawny wife.

Nation of beggars
who carried your beards

with the pride of the anointed,
your poverty held holiness
as the puddle of your dirt alleys
held the sky's blue fragments.

Publication. *To the End of Time: Poems New & Selected, 1939–1979*. Los Angeles: Papa Bach Editions, 1980; selected local scans.

Greedy Birds

I, master of a workshop,
labor after hours
to keep rot and mildew
from sagging timbers;
for meat and potatoes;
for a glass of wine
on a quiet evening.

Over my rooftop
a cloud of vultures
croaks: more! more!
I throw them chunks
of my life
in triplicates, carbons,
liens, assessments.
They croak: more! more!

What need have I
of usurping birds?
I ask for nothing,
never held a penny
unstained by my sweat.
I tell you, neighbors,
with stones and throwing sticks
chase the birds of ill omen
from our clear sky;

for what they want
is a ten-fold tithe!
They will unglue
the bones in our bodies.
We will be shoved, elbowed,
from fields of sweetlarks
and glens of blackbirds

into dusty plazas
of asphalted gardens;
our monuments white
with bat droppings,

presiding over
exhausted boulevards
and cracked bells
in exhausted belfries.

My workshop, lighted
by a single lamp,
is cool with shadows,
damp with clay, pungent
with the sweat of decades.
Quietly I settle
into the dust of time
doing my work in silence.

*

There is always the work
and the night
and there is always sleep.
The lamp quivers and shines.
This work still brings
bread and wine to my table.
This clay has a scent
of autumn harvests.

*

And what will I do
when I can no longer
move my limbs
to my twilight refuge?
How long, like a seated statue,
can one listen to Mozart?
Books? I have read them!
Friends? A grove of withered trees!

*

Let nature decide
when I must quit
my cloistral refuge.
I will not pack hours

like empty boxes.
I have seen embers
flare up
in the eyes of old men.

Publication. *To the End of Time: Poems New & Selected, 1939–1979*. Los Angeles: Papa Bach Editions, 1980; selected local scans.

Realities

Mostly I want to be left alone
in my home, my refuge,
to pursue without distraction
musical and linear purities
in a world of vanishing purities.

I lock my doors, I bar my windows,
I take my telephone off the hook.
I want to regard the Realities
as one from another planet.
I am prepared to ignore

the ghosts of asphalted flowers,
the harsh sound
that muffles the song of the wind,
the chemical breath
that obscures the clear moonlight.

Behind my sheltering wall
I will create my own moonlight.
So I said to myself; but the Realities
like a black vapor
that dims the neons of the mind

enter through invisible cracks . . .
and I forsake
all the gentle lights of my life
and run out into the streets
fists clenched, shouting a curse!

And after walking a block
or two or three—
what then?

a greyness
without destination
rewarding the journey
with a bristle of lights,
a drizzle of tinsel.

It is better within

these walls, camouflaged
among small homes
by graffiti and flaking stucco;
from whose beams and joists
we exorcized phantom tenants;
on whose door post
hangs a blessing.

In our personal ghetto
the curtains are prayer shawls,
festival lights
hang from the ceiling.
From these windows
our hopes
emerge into the blue
like doves from the Ark.

Time clips the wings
of fancy and dream
but this I still own:
my hours of labor.
I enter the room
of whose silence
I am master, whose reward
is weariness at day's end.

Publication. *To the End of Time: Poems New & Selected, 1939–1979*. Los Angeles: Papa Bach Editions, 1980; selected local scans.

ANOTHER DAWN

Los Angeles, 1984

The Wild Seed

The migrating birds peck at the wild seed,
some sweet, some bitter. By lamplight's glow
I bless the moments
for the good they bring.
I too, a bird of passage,
peck at the wild seed,
some sweet, some bitter.

Publication. *Another Dawn*. Los Angeles: Illuminati, 1984.

Lament

How far I have wandered from thy tents, O Zion!

For an extra coin I have labored
on the seventh day;
and more than once I have yielded
to the lure of Potiphar's wife;

and I ate of the unsanctified carcass,
bludgeoned by some insensitive thug
without a proper blessing.
Of my transgressions this is not the least.

A thong has snapped
that held me to the ages
and I joined the promiscuous horde
which feasts on reptile, rodent, eel and worm.

Publication. *Another Dawn*. Los Angeles: Illuminati, 1984.

Love Story

You waved farewell to me
from the doorway of a courtyard in Ur
as I, a trader in myrrh and saffron,
left with a caravan for the seaport of Sidon.

There came a time of troubles
and I did not see you again, beloved,
until we met in your cousin's house in Chicago.
We straightaway ran into each others' arms

to the amazement of the other guests at the party
for "was this not the first time they met?"
"Never let go of me again!" you whispered
and we talked and talked of our lost and lonely
lifetimes.

Publication. *Another Dawn*. Los Angeles: Illuminati, 1984.

Do Not Plan for Me

Do not plan for me, Speaker,
for I reject your angel-tinted doctrines
nor do I want my path
precisely mapped out
by your code-books and work manuals.

My path is dark with the hazard of freedom,
the wild silence of uncertainty
and my fear is not for the black bread I eat
but for the feast that you promise.

Publication. *Another Dawn*. Los Angeles: Illuminati, 1984.

The Good Things

In the dusty attic of time
I rummage for the good things
but the good things are cliff flowers
blooming in precipitous clefts
and hard to get at.

Publication. *Another Dawn*. Los Angeles: Illuminati, 1984.

The Truth

I want to maintain to the end
the iron tenets of the mind:
form over chaos,
purpose over caprice;

but at the edge
of the dark and silent well
where I must surely sink,
my secret sigh

spells out
the heart's
raw truth: wild
and perverse and unknowing!

Publication. *Another Dawn*. Los Angeles: Illuminati, 1984.

Song

Nothing is ever finished,
nothing stays done;
there is new dust in the house
and new weeds on the lawn;

and though my chores are futile
muck and mould are worse—so
my choice is narrowed down to
the dust rag and the hoe.

Publication. *Another Dawn*. Los Angeles: Illuminati, 1984.

Poem

The old guitarist
pursues
a private meditation,
his one desire
before sinking
beyond sound—
to resolve
an unfinished silence.

Publication. *Another Dawn*. Los Angeles: Illuminati, 1984.

Ten Poems for My Seventy-Second Birthday

1.

Another dawn and it is time for the scouring of
iron pots and the scrubbing of wooden floors, for
the grind of life, the rage of throbbing pulse and
vented breath—to feel, to savor the devouring
hours!

2.

To grow old in one's craft is a nostrum better than
the tincture of poppies. One can ignore the Self
with all its gripes and twinges and throbs. Skilled
in the making of chalice and urn I knead clay as
though it were a woman's breast.

3.

Rashly I write these lines, observing a comely
woman walk past my window till she fades in the
distance. I think of the pure joy of sinuous lineaments;
then, heart beating faster, of the unharvested
wildness of my aging loins.

4.

Denied much, the allowable sends me on a carousel
of joy. For her soup I kiss my wife's fingers. On
a cold night I bless my blankets. Waking is still
allowable and I greet each barely breathing dawn
with a whispered hosanna.

5.

In my youth I could afford the lure of heights.
Now I am mired in thick mud which has the scent
of a woman's hair and the odor of freshly baked
bread. How restful it is not to strain to the summit!

6.

The price of life is humbled flesh wincing and

wailing in throes of dissolution; and no apothecary
to render a black capsule of mercy. May the end
be swift—bleached bone is better by far than
the sorrowing tissue.

7.

I will not whine to the invisible Taskmaster.
Flowers can bloom even in stone fissures—and
earth is not mother's lap to weep upon but a
nascent mingling of muck and sweat.

8.

Birds hatched in the white silence of Labrador fly
over my roof. I too would go elsewhere but the
options are dwindling and every move is nearer
to the spectral whirlpool. I may as well stay where
I am, life ebbing, but slowly, my rut pleasant; the
moon-frosted window concealing the world.

9.

The piety of darkened trees calms my fears. After
the rain the mushroom odor of wet earth and the
sound of the leaves falling—all this is good
before sleep—or death. I draw darkness like a
shawl around my shoulders.

10.

Late at night someone plays Vivaldi on a harpsichord.
The world does not extend beyond the
glow of my lamplight. Line by line I add to my
diary of tracks and smokes on a grown-over trail
stretching into nowhere.

Publication. *Another Dawn*. Los Angeles: Illuminati, 1984.

Sequence

I.

The enemy flags
flutter
far from our armored
bunkers and redoubts.

The missiles remain
in their silos.

There is time
to clean house,

mow the lawn, arrange
books and papers—
all things in order
and neat as a shroud.

2.

My ceiling
tinted blue: birds
in my window:
the pink flowers:

piano scores, sheafs
of poems, watercolors
(so fragile),
silences, thoughts:

all things in order—a salute
to darkness
expanding to the fringes
of endless night.

Publication. *Another Dawn*. Los Angeles: Illuminati, 1984.

The Habit

Walking in the evening just as the first lights appear, I whisper, out of habit, words such as “beautiful!” and “enchanted!” I salute, out of habit, trees, dogs, sparrows, young girls and old men. As I approach my home the light in my window dims to an afterglow of a burned out candle. “Lovely!” I exclaim and wave a greeting to the gravedigger sitting on my doorstep.

Publication. *Another Dawn*. Los Angeles: Illuminati, 1984.

A Dream of Homecoming

I walk on a street hedged with lilac and green. It is evening and the little homes blossom with faint lights. In the doorways smiling women embrace weary workmen, who are like sailors daily shipwrecked on a friendly shore. Suddenly I am in the doorway of my own home, my wife stretching out her arms to me, my little son running to meet me. This was a long time ago when I took much for granted. Only now, in this dream, I hear the song of my homecomings.

Publication. *Another Dawn*. Los Angeles: Illuminati, 1984.

For Polia

Little woman with a calendar of wrinkles, you are no longer straight but stooped by humbling years; but there are twilight moments when the phantom span of decades disappears and I see a girl with playful ringlets in her hair, her throat lovely in the yellow lamplight. The ghosts of time tiptoe away from our silent embrace.

Publication. *Another Dawn*. Los Angeles: Illuminati, 1984.

Another One for Polia

Your new picture is of a girl, a bird on her wrist, a yellow moon over her shoulder. In the foreground are astrophels, the unknown flowers; and the birds are also unknown, from another dimension. Your brush guides an innocent eye to the dawn of Creation. Each time you ask: “do you want to see what I’ve done?” I am prepared for the first garden, the first springtime.

Publication. *Another Dawn*. Los Angeles: Illuminati, 1984.

The Waltz

In the vast ballroom you and I are dancing to an unseen orchestra. Why are the windows black, without moonlight or stars? The open door is a gash of darkness. We feel a moment of panic for we can't improvise our steps but must adhere to a choreography beyond our control. Ah, but this lilting waltz! I hold to your waist and we float, we float! Perhaps we can dance all night . . . until the music stops . . . and the lights go out . . .

Publication. *Another Dawn*. Los Angeles: Illuminati, 1984.

The Old Man

When flesh and expectations shrink the old man
is like a tree-root sunk deep on a lonely homestead.
He drinks the dark waters and gains strength
from rock-strewn field and thorny hedge.

Waiting for the dark days to come he shies away
from the abundance of the world. He embraces
the loneliness of lanes and the muted oboes of
autumn. Sadness is his shield against despair.

Publication. *Another Dawn*. Los Angeles: Illuminati, 1984.

Lilith

She enters my sleep, a felicitous darkness veiled in white mist. "You thought you lost me forever," she whispers, "but you need only close your eyes to summon me." "Leave me, Lilith!" I say, "I am tired, I am old. I must change the nature of my dreams." She only smiles and claims me as forever hers. I am about to say that we can't go on meeting like this but she closes my mouth with cool lips. At dawn I am breathless and drained!

Publication. *Another Dawn*. Los Angeles: Illuminati, 1984.

My Sadness

My Sadness is a delicate presence in my room. I want to know why it is here. I demand explanations. It answers in a barely audible whisper that it needs no reason. Angered, I curse it, I shout obscenities—and it silently tiptoes away, driven out by my rage. Now I think it was a musical presence, better than many—and it will return, a soft glow in my darkness.

Publication. *Another Dawn*. Los Angeles: Illuminati, 1984.

Seven Poems

I.

Of my seventy-two years
sixty I labored
to squirrel away
some silver

for this quiet room
with books and papers,
relics
of a plodding journey;

and I do not ask
why or for what
my days are fused
by the mortar of sweat.

2.

Nothing changed since I first came.
Workingmen
stand with idle hands.

Anxiety
plagues the innocent.

Frontiers
bleed on the wall map.

Moralties
are shouted like curses.
Youths ravage
the darkness with tumult.

3.

Nothing changes. Dawn
stirs and hums.
Night settles too darkly
over the rooftops.

Seasons
like swallows fly by.

It rains, the elms
are weeping.

A cold breath puts out
the lamp on the piano.
With my crow's eyes I peer
into the darkness.

4.

Youth desires
to be visible
not reckoning
that one is a target

for barbs and bullets
from which one hides
pretending to be
a wall, a clump of bushes.

My brother wolf survives
in wild thickets.
I too welcome
the green darkness.

5.

Wolf, brother, we grow old
by being unseen.
We measure our sullen peace
by the length of our meadow.

We could eat scraps
under a master's table
but we choose a dark lair
and a lamplit hollow.

We eavesdrop
on the loneliness of God.
We both, spellbound,
howl at the full moon.

Publication. *Another Dawn*. Los Angeles: Illuminati, 1984. The surviving local scan ends after part 5 of the seven-part sequence.

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HISTORICAL FRONT MATTER

William Pillin - Collected Poems

Acknowledgments to Everything Falling

Acknowledgments to The Theory of Silence

Restored from the original source scans

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the editors of the following magazines in which some of these poems first appeared: *Ante*, *Caf  Solo*, *Coastlines*, *Illuminations*, *kayak*, *The Nation*, *New Mexico Quarterly*, *Poet and Critic*, *Sur (Argentina)*, and *Triquarterly*.

TO POETRY, VOICES, TIGER'S EYE,
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
MODERN VERSE, TRAMP, COMPASS.