

POETRY LOS ANGELES

I

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New poetry from Los Angeles, representing work heard during the past year at public readings of Poetry Los Angeles, chosen by the authors and arranged by the editors, James Boyer May, Thomas McGrath, and Peter Yates. The poems, as grouped here, do not represent any predetermined thesis or posture. The editors accept no responsibility for the manner or content of any poems but their own. Poetry Los Angeles was founded to help poets engross their work by reading it aloud. This book is an extension of the same mutual self-interest. A poet is one who in company thinks alone and offers his experience as a poem.

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POETRY LOS ANGELES

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To Mae Babitz,
who first brought us together.

ASPECTS

I Water

How lakes resemble standing up
And pines a labyrinth of prone

Finally the fear
Falls like a star
To be wished upon.

Thru water, water is a
Stubborn dream,
An infant walking by a fountain,
Milk of a landscape of stone.

By the bridge one sees possibilities
And one is not disturbed.
Forever the lakes of trees rot in the clouds
And fester with birds
And one has not pity left
But the compassion of nearness.

From city to city there are only rivers.

II Music

Fate that is mine the music shades,
An exquisite husky elm.
I rise from being in the sound
Of sainted apparitions.
Enchanted clouds vanish invisible suns,
Corona without light
But meaning well.

And I surround the fragrant porch
With angels from a classic wood.
Transparent statues shine
In far indulgence.

The genuflections of the wind
Remembering the infinite
Of all beginning.

Repeat again, repeat the agony
Of true excuses.

A tree heavy in evening
An evening not available

Excess of sacred sense
Spain where we do not dwell.

III Night

Shadow where the song
Is like itself
Into which a lake may sink
And be remembered.

Shadow where all my privileges wait
A discreet distance like a lewd image,
Shall I refuse to sleep
Amongst kinsmen?

Shall I refuse to walk
After the sensuous shepherd?
Morning is a vision without shelter
Morning of an inexorable charm.

I have exacted what the night exacts
A lit dream, exalted silence.
Mine is the vow without sanctions
And without myself.

With what flowers the mystery colors
My stupidity.
I am not even humble.
For I am sleep.

IV Man

There is finally the rain
In its sheltering time
All things cease in want.

Only a man is different
Who is what he is not.

If you would save him, you must not despair.
He is in earnest with all his selves.

Accompanied by a sky
Correct with destiny.

And we pretend to understand
Why the angel should be afraid
And why the messenger should stammer.

Country-clad itinerant
Have you a road of your own?
You pass by cities
As one obsessed
By a journey.

You are manifestly lonely
On the road always a road
No matter what.

What if one day the excursion end?
Will the domain of your freedom
Extend even to death?

V The Soul

Who imagines that he lives
Imagines he becomes.

An image in a startled glass
Raising its doubled fist.

Tell me, oh frenzy,
What windows break?
Existence, you may not assault.

Anger is a tendency to bloom.

The antique vigor of a kiss.
The ancient house of a new birth.

Sometimes a longing is strong
To want perfection.

Where space its lucid shaft
Idiosyncrasy of light
Makes permanent the dark,
Where love seraphic asks
Am I not my own self?
Or am I not even yet?

Meaning to love forever
I must first become immortal.

Around the angels fountains gleamed
A lucid light of law.
For order was their harmony,
A grace of being so.

Rest in the raptures of the soul
Was like a journey of the whole.
Nowhere to go.

Leave me severe in morning pure.
The sensual adore God.

Lyric Mother, let love go.
After the dream of heaven
Only may heaven be.

The matter of fact blue
Of imponderable skies

This ever letting go
Of beauty and of God.

I

From what source will come
Sharp words to savour the life
Of this bare moment?

Facing the warm stove
Window of sun at my back,
Waiting to begin.

Shared experience
Is not to be counted on.
Separateness is.

In such brevity
The musical worth of sounds
May be lost or torn.

The face of a word
Bears only one expression
In this, my language.

But ambivalence,
The naked mode of all life
Flashes in the eye.

Nothingness lonely
Can be, can be drowned in, drowned
In five syllables.

On paper pages
Spiral wheeling nebulae
Carry me along.

In a diagram
The nucleus of an atom
Pierces my bland skin.

Drugs may tranquilize,
A cup of tea enliven —
I am neither one.

But outside the self
One ant cleans up the debris
Of a dead cricket.

Why must this be said?
How can it be understood?
At times I almost . . .

II

To write more haiku
May not add to my prestige
But the form seems right:

The haiku gives me
Permission to ask questions
Apostrophize birds,

Record the weather,
Celebrate other creatures
And the growth of plants.

'Haikai is simply
What is happening in this place,
At this moment.'

Or so Basho said
When reproached by his teacher
For neglecting Zen.

Basho quoted then
A haiku he had written —
A rather strange one:

'A Rose of Sharon
Growing by the roadside;
The horse has eaten it.'

The master exclaimed:
'Is there such a deep meaning
In haikai also?'

III

Materialist
Inspired — or even forlorn —
May become Buddhist.

An intuition
Of microcosm implies
Plenitude of awe.

Even a casual
Enumeration of stars
Blinds like a lash.

Decision can be,
After much baffled searching,
Accept acceptance.

In either world view
Living creatures must endure
Desolate transience.

To forego the hope
Of acquiring true wisdom
Is discouraging.

Nobody believes
Truth can be trapped by reading
Pages and pages.

To strive, and then leap!
To the secret of all things!
An attractive choice.

Ten difficulties,
At least ten, separate me
From revelation.

First: meditation
Produces, not awareness
But more poetry.

Identifying
With each living thing may be
Merely aesthetic.

Also, step by step
Balancing on each action,
Each thought, is painful.

Involuntary
State of poverty is not
The same as a vow.

Eating little food
To avoid gaining more weight —
Asceticism?

As for attachment:
Thousands of frail spider webs
Broken, then mended.

Arrow's directness
Is deflected, thwarted
By duality.

The mirror reflects
Today's self, and not that face
Before I was born.

How does one practise
Such exquisite precepts
In the stolid West?

No one can help me.
The path is obscured by weeds,
All of them fragrant.

THE HAWK AND THE LIZARD

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

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

The lizard has no doubts
but is the solid faith of the stone
from which he follows the sun diurnally.
Such golden navigation suffices him,
each quick swallow of his throat
recording adulation.
Held by the great hypnotic eye,
the lizard feels the sun's direction
toward him, always toward him.
And if his tail falls off, there will be another,
another endlessly, till the sun falls too.

But in the night the hawk returns
(the intellectual night
when heaven is a cold, black slab)
and there, above, still darkly strives,
his desperate wings beat at the moon,
attack again the ages' invisible prey.

Belief exceeding belief.

THAT GIRL WHO FOLLOWS ME

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

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

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

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

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

' IOWA, KANSAS, NEBRASKA '

Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska,
all combustible country
under a tortured sky.
Nothing ever happens here
except loneliness;
wheatfields squirming in the sun,
the plains dry as biscuits.

Yet the people grow.

In the Oklahoma air
oil is prince of blossoms;
Texas is the Kingdom.

Fortune's richest man
plays croquet in Dallas.
He is seventy,
afraid of centipedes,
hesitates at watery places,
for a gypsy slipped him once
the dark blue ace of drowning,
never kissed a woman
(nor a man either),
likes to ride his zebra
several times each morning
round his private race-track,
bought the Lone Star his third
year collecting our planet,
later added forty-
seven others: stars, white,
plays croquet in Dallas
at four o'clock in starlight.

Yet, somehow, the people grow.

LAKE REVISITED

It is a perfect autumn:
the water moves the curlbrown leaves to life
and we are again together in the sum
of many scars of weather,
in the same boat on the duckloud lake,
your husband and my wife
mere leaves lazily turning in our wake.

I speak as if I loved you once:
that was a lie we shared.
And when you said you loved me,
it was only the pain of your body
caught by its own sensual bait.
I remember now your former presence:
a breath within my breath: a silence.
Our love is late.
This drifting indolent mood
reflects the lovers' gaze we'd never dared,
and we know the way the water moves is good.

POEM FOR CHILDHOOD

By the coast of the sea of glittering hair
we walked the nighttime tide on stilts
hearing the talk of birds
on the waves far below us:
quicksilver cries shooting through air
to show us
the world is swift as slippery tears.
But now what do they say? I don't know.
I haven't heard from Crazy Horse in years.

My child's brain agape with wonder —
aquarium of darting thoughts —
swallowed all it saw and heard;
the world those days was joy enough to plunder.
But it tightened, grew small as tears
(so quickly I didn't even know).
I haven't heard from Crazy Horse in years.

The green heroic soldier died,
his tunic chipped and bayonet broken;
the gallant fortress finally tore
in the middle of a war;
the ambulance ride
stopped at the spot
where the fourth wheel
vanished beneath a cot.
(My baby's pants are always wet,
and that is real,
and her game of grins and tears).
Custer's last word was spoken
on my Big Horn rug a World War Two ago.
And I haven't heard from Crazy Horse in years.

A PROPHECY

(After Lermontov)

A year will come — for Russia, a dark year —
When the crown so long worn by the czars will fall;
The crowd will lose its former love for them,
And many will be fed on blood and death.
Then innocent young children and young wives
Will not be guarded by the trampled laws;
And Plague from stinking bodies of the dead
Will roam the streets of mourning villages,
And Hunger's teeth will tear at this poor land,
And reddening skies will make the rivers red.
On that day will appear a powerful man.
And you will know him, and will understand
Why in his grasp he holds a blade of steel.
And woe to you! Your weeping and your groans
Will only make him laugh. And everything
About him will be frightening and dark,
Like his black cloak, beneath his towering brow.

THE SAIL

(After Lemontov)

A lone sail makes a patch of whiteness
Against the blue mist on the sea.
What is he seeking in far places?
What has he put behind, to flee?

The waves leap up, the wind is whistling,
The mast is laboring, and creaks.
It isn't happiness he flees from,
Alas! not happiness he seeks.

Below, the sparkling bright blue water;
Above, the sun, golden and round.
But he, rebellious, seeks the tempest,
As though in tempests peace were found!

SONNET FOR ANNE

Somewhere beyond all music was that place
I travelled to: the way led through strange lands
Where words were noisy rattles in the hands
Of shrunken, bearded babes; where Mother's face
Flowered and died and bloomed again; where fires
Of fear swept through the tangled past, and all
My loves came running wildly, to fall
Dead in the clearings of black-stumped desires.
I came at last to that place where Before
And After meet and merge into those things
That even music cannot say. Dark wings
Eclipsed the sun; dark, lonely was the shore
Of your deep fragrance, wherein every sound
Was stilled, and all my dark-eyed girls lay drowned.

THE MOORING LINE

(After Paul Fort)

Why try to patch up the affair?
Is loving worthwhile after all?
The mooring line's broken, my dear.
Was it you that was tugging too hard?

Was it me? Was it God? Was it somebody else? Well,
It's broken, and who's to blame no one can tell.

Love goes into so many hearts,
It's a line passed to so many ships,
And it's wound around so many bits,
Whose fault is it if the line parts?

There are too many lovers on earth all heaving away at one sin.
Is it really the fault of love if the rope is worn so thin?

Why try to patch up the affair?
Is loving worthwhile after all?
The mooring line's broken, my dear.
And it's you that was tugging too hard.

A FEDERAL POET

Beloit Poetry Journal
Spring, 1985

(Composed upon learning of the existence of an organization
calling itself the Federal Poets)

I'm stuck. My images are all cartoons:
Churchill and his cigar; the French premier's
Romanesque nose; the smirks and solemn sneers
On the faces of Congressional buffoons.
Or when (frustrated journalist) I'm moved
To fantasy, I prophesy the year
Of Armageddon, and profess to hear
The stirring of the next bombs in the womb.
And so it goes. Good God! I'd rather be
A pure Romantic, quite unfederalized —
Old Wordsworth, watching (from some pleasant lee)
The sun go down between a milkmaid's thighs;
Or Baudelaire, seeing in his dark Ennui,
Reflections of his own hypnotic eyes.

A BIOLOGIST LOOKS AT THE CIVIL SERVICE

This curious growth, labelled a noxious weed
By every politician,
Is actually part plant, part pedigreed
Academician.

And though at times they scarcely seem alive,
These very much neglected
And misused florae and/or faunae thrive
Where least expected.

In fact, it has been claimed they'll live forever.
But most experts incline
Towards the French view: they sometimes die, but never
Never resign.

ENVOI

For best results, spray with Security,
Promise higher positions,
And keep in humid, crowded places, free
Of Inquisitions.

Guy Daniels

CLEANING WOMAN

Kneeling to no one she lights the empty lengths
of cooling halls that all doors open on —
the used up passion of abandoned places —
nightly: till her labor break through to daylight.

Kind now, she gilds each tarnished grace
to an impersonal perfection that glows.
Turns to compartments in their singular needs.
Over the magic lamps she hunts to brightness.

‘ But (roaring of seashell) she hollows out a room
and finds the shirtsleeves of a night’s madness,
finds the unappropriated mirrors of a dream,
the lost manifestoes in the numbing light
of countless closets, and finally the paintings
cursing with no one in the empty room.’

But sick in a frond of lightbulbs explaining
a hallway, she will go home and there will find
the perfect order waiting on her doormat,
in the simple living that admits only one angel:
The small personal radiance of her desires
amidst the impersonal huge throats of her labor.

THE TROUBLE WITH THE TIMES

Although the wood never laments
soaking in the wounds of varnished bars, judging
the broken bread full of static like a radio,
or judging those holding in the moon-alleys the cracked tennis ball,
wondering where the motion went,
or those poor souls that cry at the sight of chains —
the world caught between commercials leaves the night ajar,
and the rose of blowing sheets is never dead.
Therefore the horse perpetually winds a tunnel for a violin,
and the bones on melting snow find fires;
and a light oiled in winter’s wound up siderial lexicon
proves that the tautologies of tides are never useless.

And that hawk is not a mobile
(at night, as in proof, the moon cracks its cheap plaster)
He hovers over the always-cellophane fox-fields.
Oh, all is clear but blurred gold
and the country is only a barn, a talking tree,
a face of catcher's masks under strong wind
where no fox weeps for our Chanticleers
and the wanderer, sick with radios, has gone staring
off through the old valleys.

WHITE SANDS CINERAMA

On lines of purest sundial
the smoke, like morning of Samson,
pushes bomb and reality away.
A suture of wind to the smoke
and all that's left is
Scarecrow Cactus,
sole propagation of questioning man.

The sidewinder understanding,
weaves a wonder in the sand;
a lizard's tongue blows
a stringy sibilant
to the wind's mandolin,
and the copper foxes
are pierced again
by the metal light,
yet somehow are immortal in their element.

But where are the dips in the road
that operated on my stomach last year?
And where are they,
the bandaged bankers
with their frozen beards?

Now, only the harsh sound of cracked corn
over the cold stones of ornamental order.
Only the little mornings with the moon,
acicular sunsets,
the hoarse, the speechless birds.

FOR THE MAN FROM MARS

The Capitol was the armpit of the nation.
The elected man nothing but a noun.
Thieves were stock-piled. A child matured
In the presence of cockadoodling from the Left
Or decrepit whining from the Right.
Congress was a prevalence of phlegm.

The city was the senior fissure
But in the environs it was worse:
The towns were pimples; grudges were mayors;
Everywhere, men pregnant with blotters.
Streaked courts; armed sentiments;
All, all in thankless rapport.

And what of the World? Europe had a broken neck.
Flunkies scraped her monuments. Asia's thoughts boiled water.
Spain enlarged her oars. And on a bone of gratitude England chewed
And chewed. A plague of unfrocked calendars: Israel;
And France: a prostrate nickname whose little crutch was Paris.
South America: stench. Malicious sunsets in Japan.
And in the 'boot': rankled hearts serving wrinkled fruit.

In the year of nineteen fifty four
The world had a hump on its back.

There is no one man, gift-wrapped, we can run after for directions.
There is no one man who can give our pretexts a blood test.
There is no one man who can connect the wires of wisdom.
And not one who can sew up the holes in our doors.

Go sick a dog on love, deal out derangement's playing cards,
Play, play with the drastic winds of your well-groomed bombs
Masses, Whores, (when have you *not* been kept?) Presidents,
Arch-Pimps, and purveyors of deaths in small pieces;
Those of you with a fence round your genitals
And those of you with outspoken thighs, prurient and hard;
Celebrate your sore; manacle delight; oust honesty;
History at last has taken your temperature:
Shall strew you — with a high moral purpose —
In fractions over the breastworks of the earth.

ON FRIDAY AND ON MONDAY

Shine lemon moon
On the overt harp
Of her Friday foot,
And on the Sunday part,
The lowest part, because it's practised miles
Posting the loveliest rationales.

Shine lemon moon
On the rhetoric vehicle
That rode on the mailman;
For hours my hackle
Was raised, grazing in her letter.
Who's neutral? Not I from the treble
I hear, declaring, scribble, beloved, I'm better.

Sail lemon moon.
The exquisite news
Is postmarked Noon
In the Monday mail,
That her favorite shoes
Remain lost in my room.

A SKETCH

Love was a polar pose, a starched
Pause, a way of being fed
Intravenously; masseurs took liberties;
The night was anybody's door.

At twenty, nation's ping-pong
Made him angry; in a rain of rites
He blasted world and wetnursed beard;
Sly, he'd raise a flag of mirth.

He found, to copulate
With printed matter would
Save him; and wrote. An age
Dismounted from its infancy.

Sending mouth airmail,
Listening to the weather purr,
He was, at last, able to sense
That the world had deserved him
And grew red-faced and hummed.

He grew tenderer
Wearing the night round his thighs.

Seventy, he sat in a smile's museum,
Pathetic, the only mature cloud
In the world. And died
Writing with a yawn's pencil, in a park,
Giving alms to the weather.

AT A PARTY

Comes in neighing, pitching his smile
Like a horseshoe through the room.

I'm here, he said, upholstered, and for sale;
And with that assertion misreads the entire
posture of the evening.
He did the same last year while voyaging:
Would autograph his underwear and sell it underdecks.
But the ocean's not so simple as to bear him
for no fee — he paid a toll:
In the cabin was a sergeant, who fisted him, I hear.
Since that time — I'd heard — he'll touch no
possible till sure.
— Before, there wasn't a negative he wouldn't disarm,
he was so confident.

I loathe him when he's in his war-canoe
Ballyhooing over rug and chair
Hello, hello; I wish he'd take that
Portable disposition of his away;
Or be a sentinel and guard his eyes,
And not be such a plaque hung up for any man to read.

It's the treble, not the bass of this disease
that bothers me.
But then I've had too much to drink;
Better let grin, that old draft horse,
Pull my heavy rage out, giddeap, to that tennis court,
Whose balls possess more gender than that idiot can own.

GONE

Hands, sweaty; bags, warm; spittle, drying.
The grilled screendoor gives way to the hound.
On the loose boards an exchange of time with the
 old dawdler
With the cracked eye-shade. For you and friend a
 glass of feeling;
And pocketing what he puts in your hand.
The tracks thrum. It rains; and you see a black
 puff
That floats down like an aria and off, far off,
Someone running; and then, like a warrant for your
 arrest:
The train.

The shoelace-come-loose and the trunk intrude at the
 last . . .
The witlessness of a blank reply easing the hands
 away.
Then the eye, barefooted, runs . . . flutters around the
 tall upraised arm,
Alights on the twig of a smile until the face,
Bolting glances like a food, swings away and is gone.

LETTER TO AN IMAGINARY FRIEND

(for *Alice*)

IV

1.

The immortal girls, the summer manifestoes
Startle the buzzard in the corpse-bearing tree.

Explosion of daisies in the stricken field.
The lilac is lifting its lavender toward Arcturus . . .

Noon's incandescence, autonomy of night
Cracked open throttles on my resurrection bone
My moon-steered master, midnight fisherman
Bound for the Indies . . .

Coiffeur of dream, oh bright improbable gold!
The blonde-haired women, crowned as with surplus light,
Curls crisp as lettuce on their bellies porch
And slick and secret when the armpit yawns,
Hair! dimension of heat!

Lit by subliminal suns

That shrink their dresses half way up their thighs
It ripens outward.

Furry as a peach

It licks the hand that hungers at the knee;
And where the back and buttocks sweetly mate
Like queenly empires joined in natural peace
(Equation of the palm! O sweet division!)
Glints like shot silk. And where the pubis thrusts
Into my world to light me into dark
Is stiff and secret as a buried fence
Or bristles friendly as a welcome mat.

Yes: and those soft brunettes, their eyes like caves
Their third eye winking in the knowing dark!
O ox-eyed honeys with the wine dark hair,
Branches of midnight where all moon long and climbed
Punching our tickets on the train toward dawn —
How black your hair!

Belly of smoky wheat,

Buttocks of solid water, legs like a slow dream —

O, as to a citizen of Jupiter's moons
Your soft enormous breasts, over the bare horizon,
Loom, golden and dusky rose, tremendous planets
Pendulous . . .
Iris toward the nipple and the nipples pink, veiny
Shot with faint blue . . .
And your eyes, O magnificent black-haired women!
Invincibly glazed or wet as a pool-side stone,
Heavy with sleep; and your mouths wide and elastic
And your lips, thickened with heat, which your tongue keeps wetting!
Ah, woman with your ass as thick as a pillow,
With your thighs like deadfalls and the black nest of your sex
Like a midnight hungry quicksand where I drown!
Drown and am born. Upborne! Resurrected!
Startling the buzzard on my shoulder tree.
— I've come through your black pass many's the sunny night!

And the brown-haired women, slim, with their lenten graces,
Or short and thickset and busy as a bear,
Their knees dimpled and their hips slung like a hammock,
Their bellies snug to my gut as a flesh muff;
And the red-heads, electric, with their buttermilk skin,
And the tickle inside the knee, and their burning bush,
With its wise unsleeping bird, more dark than their eyebrows —
Bucking like goats, quicker than minks, randy
As the wild strawberry roan: Sunfishing by moonlight
They have ridden me into a stall where I sleep standing up.

2.

Sweet Jesus at morning! the queenly women of our youth!
The monumental creatures of our summer lust!
Sweet fantastic creatures, as full of juice as plums,
Pneumatic and backless as a functional dream —
Where are ye now?
Where were ye then, indeed?

Walking three-legged in the sexual haze,
Drifting toward the Lion on the bosomy hills of summer
In the hunting light, the marmareal bulge of the moon
I wooed them barebacked in the saddling heat.
First was Inez, her face a looney fiction,
Her bottom like concrete and her wrestling arms;

Fay with her breasts as hard as hand-grenades
(Whose father's shot gun dozed behind the door);
Barefooted Rose, found in the bottom lands
(We layed the flax as flat as forty horses,
The blue bells showering); Amy with her long hair
Drawn in mock modesty between long legs;
And Sandy with her car, who would be driving and do it;
And June who would roll you as in a barrel down hill
(The Gaelic torture); Gin with her snapping trap,
The heliotropic quim: locked in till daybreak;
Literary Esther, who could fox your copy,
And the double Gladys, one blonde, one black.

O great Kingdom of Fuck! And myself: plenipotentiary!
Under the dog star's blaze, in the high rooms of the moonlight,
In the doze and balance of the wide noon,
I hung my pennant from the top of the windy mast
Blue peter, sailing the want-not seas of the summers.
And under the coupling of the wheeling night
Muffled in flesh and clamped to the sweaty pelt
Of Blanche or Betty, threshing the green baroque
Stacks of the long hay — the burrs stuck in our crotch,
The dust thick in our throats so we sneezed in spasm —
Or flat on the floor, on the back seat of a car,
On a groaning trestle table in the Methodist Church basement,
And far in the fields, and high in the hills, and hot
And quick in the roaring cars: by the bridge, by the river,
In Troop Nine's dank log cabin where the Cheyenne flows:
By light, by dark, up on the roof, in the cellar,
In the rattling belfry where the bats complained,
Or backed against trees, or against the squealing fences,
Or belly to belly with no place to lie down
In the light of the dreaming moon.

3.

Dog watch and silence.

In the high school yard, the dust
Settles; of vanished cars, the vast nocturnal migrations.
Under the moon
Paler than flowers the condoms gleam on the lawn.
Delicate, blue
Fragrance of lilac drifts in the night air, purer,
Sweeter than moonlight.

The lilac points to Arcturus.
Points down the street to my Grandfather's clapboard house
To the gimcrack mouldering porch where a beehive sleeps in the wall,
Toward his Irish keening.
' Ay-you, Tom. Avoid the occasion of sin.
You're a quick hand with a book. Pick up an education
And don't run about be the night!

Boy, its a wide
Road runs down to hell and its clear coasting
And the skids are greased for the poor. Boy, be learning! '
And up to bed, past the squeaking third step, bearing
Through the whispering grandfather dust, in the bellowing night
of my sex
My little learning (Gladys and Daisy) bearing
The golden apple of my discontent.

4.
The dust settles. Settles like time. The years
Swing round my head like birds.
It is fall, now, evening,
The long and lonesome season.
The car bumps on the wagon road. In the lights
The dust is thick. The cattle hump and shuffle.
The smell of the autumn river in the cold night air
Is wild and alien.

Out of the river pasture,
Out of the gone summer we drive the cattle.
They plod the road, blind in the carlights' dazzle,
Docile enough. The car bumps and complains.
Wally is driving. The car crawls in low gear
And the dash-light gleams in the hair of my littlest brother.
' Where will you go? ' he says. ' Is it far to the town
Where they keep the college? '
He is five years old, maybe seven.
' What will you learn to know? '

I know it is warm in the car. The night stiffens
With black frost but the car is warm.
What shall we learn
In the cold? In the cold country where the books are burning?
Across the classroom of the north forty
My father professes his love and labor.

In the black field, burnt now, where the flax
Small breakers ran, the Wobblies' footprint is buried.
A cold moon hangs in the trees.
'I hate September,' says Wally. 'The damn blank lonesome fields —
What will you learn anyway?'
And Jack says, sleepy, leaning his furry head
Into my side:
'Is it far? Is it long?'

5.

And returned then, up the coulee hills from the river
Later than gopher light, with the colder and older moon
Riding my back like a buzzard.

Past the squeaking third
Step on the grandfather stair, past the dusty
Belfry and Daisy caught in the lilac,
Past barns where the country wenches were singing like
cardinal sins —

And do they sing in the dust still?

Do their bones
Sing in the golden dust in the stallion summers?

O small girls with your wide knowledge, you lead me
Into the continent of guilt and forgiving, where love is.
Thru the small gate of your sex I go into my kingdom.
Teachers of men! O hot, great-hearted women
The world turns still on the axis of your thighs!

THE SHOUT WHICH PRECEDES

Not the scorned, crying angrily after —
not the beaten, less-trying, who whimper . . .
but, more ruthless than jaegers whose nurture
must be gained from tail-tortured amercements
on all preyers less fierce in flown meanings,

 SCREAMING out passionate wailings —
 double in pained abreactions —
 choking in blood-sobs from triumphs —

these are the knowers!

 These are the holders

of what life everlasting: their pinions
dilate-purple with power for presently
seizing on venerated presents!

As for lust, as for game, as for living —
in the chase, in the plot, in the longing,

 Strength holds the mustering answer.

No vain weakling-browed simper's disturbing
to those surging engorged by flight's passion.

They can miss even fellow impressions —
their successes, their intimate winnings:

 Joyfulness paired with mad pillage
of their each sad ambition's soared-after death.

OF SAGE AND RUINED TEMPLE

My youth, my never-lasting youth! —
dreamed the hoary brother to the plinth;

 he plead beneath his ghost-now column,
crumbled, unerect, gone bloodless as
the mating stone, dry-cold, denies the worm . . .

Restore, restore! O, try what replica!

 — never can a root be born . . . and always,
always must ripe soil re-clasp the rock.

What ages unto ages passed down man
his penile menacer to daily death!

What eons to be prickled by what suns,
before an earth has cooled to mold the roughage
for entablatures so manly held and writ upon?

LEITMOTIF

Out of the salt past, into the sung past —
grew coral islets, formed in the billows . . .
Seeds flown there too, feathering white into green . . .
Men did not sack then pale guano for learned-land grievings;
sole unreprieve where new soil knit from compost,
 snowed by grey birds of creation . . .
Soughing, contrasting, and blue-moving sea,
 storming when storming, but never
 to lash red disruption . . .
All life — past then or out of —
 took flight or swam.

NOTE ON THE TENSION OF THE UNTENSE

Not sharp, not vague —
but plain-shaped shadowed there —
the outline of the great
expectant show . . . the image, bound
with fond synopses how
could stage-effect each scene
portended in one argument . . .
a line of rendering
translatable to dialogue
and gestures, there immediate,
for smell- and touch-imaginings
across some blue-green footlights
in a hall of radial red reality.

Here-present time is not
immediate . . . the shadow's moralized
and yet untypified. We find we have
a chorus with no principals.
Or principal's the self, the NEXT
 and closed role for whom
we seek a flaming relevance
to what *particular* performance
might, this moment, instrument great prescience.

THE DISSIMULATING LUNATIC

whose realm is ever present, spaced in careful
careless pause upon his whimsical desires so
dreamed, unmet . . . He wills to not-will his
discovery of fantasy, through testing
whether these are servants on his vast estate — nor
trying if one ordering of change
can move a wall or lop one tree or budge one post.

His happiness relies on self-controlling
vision, holding back command, while reveling in
sanctuaried thoughts of genius,
his own; for ALL could disappear, *supposing*
only that he'd stop his measured pacing bounds of
measureless domains and speak hoarse word
to cause split earth to gobble up his hates.

AND KEEP THIS CHRISTMAS ALL THE YEAR

There *are* known ways of rendering
without obeisance: trees
are worshipped, burned, and built upon
and other-with and nailed erect
for Jesus, canted by
false brittle balls of glory, up-
right on their crucifixes, bleeding not
one single man's salvation, posted, post-
ered for an oversoul — a Jungian myth
mistold? — which feels how life has al-
so worshipped life by murdering it
in multi-forms. If man could smite
the source, he'd blot the sun.
Then — agony enough, in ending all?

Well-contemplate significance
of cocktails sipped before a withering tree —
how least of these is not forgiven. Flank
no thieves — this Christ, itself, was stolen from
some first-snowed slope, while olives for
martinis had their seeds replaced by pearls

of onions, knowledgeable, unwittingly
here soaked by alcohol which pickles brains
alive on shoulders of these jolly folk
who carol homely reminiscences
of dear old Nell . . . Noel . . . so knelling pun-
ingly with ghastly laughter, maudlin talk
confessing no salvations shared.

They realize their tortured torturing plights,
with tears like pine-tree needles falling where
their gutless gifts to human genitals
lie scattered. Offerings upon wronged hope
of future lives they might inseminate.

Oh, come — let us be joyful! Merrily,
come ring new year's ensuing orgies soon,
at last well-daring strip our bodies to
adore what all this flummery's disguised!
We'll pray to *being*, sing for virile selves'
creative acts, halt crucifixions now
before dread formulae to blot out suns!
Oh, leave green trees to grow, erecting facts
and not dead symbols! Nailing Christs **WAS NOT**
the meaning of this holiday — but life!

and those possessing spring in them
can sing without wassail — they hold
exhibits holier than Eucharist,
high means of giving thanks by exercise
of what was meant by Him whose parables
were later falsely exegeticised
to mumble over corpses — death-in-birth
equated by a pagan tree. **BUT HE,**

LEFT DEAD, HAS LIVED ENTIRE! Leave off
reprisals, murdering denials of

the flesh — behold,
the Living God
is of us! We are One!

PICTURE FRAMING

My fingers feed in the fields of wood.

I sand pine, walnut, bass,
and sweat to raise their grain.

Paints, powder and brush
are the seasons of my trade.

At the end of the day
I drive home
the proud cattle of my hands.

ONCE, IN AUTUMN

Once, in autumn, I saw the sun
pause in the wrinkles of a tree
like passion on an old man's face.
My father, armed with shears, came out
and trimmed the little shrubs to death.

And always, in a wild backyard
my father fell into his flesh.
Those blind galoshes struck the earth;
and tough as trucks, his hands ran loose
killing the plants they couldn't name.

A lawn — or passion — if ignored
may rise around a house like fire.
Son, my father said, Fight back
the garden with its big green hips.
I fought a beast of leaves instead.

But, with a scowl, my iron dad
cut down the grass to a proper flame.
He said: Too many flowers. And then
(though with a hose I'd been their stem)
my scowling conscience cut them off.

RAINY DAY

Outside, nothing moves; only the rain
nailing the house up like a coffin.

Remember, in childhood, when it rained?
Then, the whole world sailed down the alley:
leaves, paper, old shoes, the buildings,
everything like a circus going to sea.

Now, the rain, the iron rain, with its little keys
is closing all the doors . . .

and I think we're all dead. See how the sky
sits like a tombstone on the roofs.

BECAUSE THERE'S SO MUCH SPEED

Because there's so much speed
without any place to go,
and naked, blind as light,
we rush from stone to stone
and bump against the world,

I like the silly snail:
wrapped in its wooden fog
it crawls across my yard;
and where it goes, it paints
the ground with useless roads.

Day and night, in its world,
leaves fall without a sound;
and flowers become suns
that bugs like little planets
in a green astronomy
go round and round and round.

love turns, sausage-souled, a sprig of vertigo,
in slidingdoor faces and bongo cravats, on
thy belly is as a heap of malt, thy
spine specifications of clavichord spittoons,
fingernail plectrums down the lizzardlyring lacquerlooms,
the stock-quotations antiphonal to a lads magic phallolamp
rubbed at the epitaphal turnstile,
love the foreign-correspondents accreditation,
parenthetical paradise,
the veiled cripple hobbling on thermometer crutches
to interlocking directorates of scalar mistresses,
I am a very testicle of young finance, thy
breasts are as my twin expense-accounts, thy
neck as of the Waldorf Towers, thy
navel as of a rough diamond
mined by a South African
Black and withheld from
the Market, thy
thighs are as of near-East oil
coveted by Stereoslav and Jazzamer, thy
rumps as of the rocket-launching
platforms of the
diplomats, love

is the preferred dividend,
the very homewrecker of the Communist State
Comrades, I confess I loved,
Gentlemen, the Small Business of Love cannot be tolerated in our
Industrial Reflex,
THE SEXUAL CONGRESS MUST BE ADJOURNED,
love turns, sausage-souled, a sprig of vertigo,
under the cartographers crotch, at the foot of the analytic
couch stood upright as at the American Wake,
Death to Love! the littleboy revolutionaries shrill at the barricades,
Death to Love! the conservatives pass the memomasturbators among themselves,
Death to Love! for there are animals in my mind
 buying and selling feel-estate
 converting fingertips to sequins
 replacing nymphs with lymphs
 haggling over bearded bombs
 charging admission to my catacombs
 full of mens low earnings
 out of pity turning the wheel for the ox
 out of pity working for God he's SUCH a child
 out of pity hauling up the bottoms of perspectives
as the mist rises from the earth it is the cold sweat of the men of

low earnings crying
Life to Love turning,
sausage-souled, a sprig of vertigo,
the decalcomania of light torn from blind martyrdom,
the labor-leader calculating where shall the agony of my men be best
applied,
the board-chairman calculating how shall the agony of my anus be least
affected by the pinnacle,
the despot calculating how the agony of an uprooted population can be
rooted in agony once again:
tell us how many kilowatt-hours are there in love;
how much slag and how many coupons
initial capital investment?
communal property?

GIVE ME A BREAKDOWN ON

republican love
democratic love
marxist love
catholic love
mass love
upperclass love

DIDDLECLASS LOVE

in the countries with a helicopter in every heart,
an electro-oestrous engineer for every five-year cycle,
a cabinet-crisis for colonial harems,
a caste of untouchables for the very CHUNKSHEER of passion
these are the very cossacks riding pogroms of love is the
kike, the
nigger, the

love is the

paleolithic clown, the
fagpicker, the
murderer rising on his beast, the
bacillus wearing a black bandbody round its
evacuole, the

air of the horse begging that its eye be pumped into a gunmuzzle
I LOVE YOU for the sugar cast up by the salt of the sea,
for the dumb spigot of the sun dealing the unparalleled torture
of slowly-dripping lightdrops onto the hunchbacked black skull,
for the money printed on liberty,
for the crossed swords of the genitals as the newlywed powers giggle
through,
for the clothespin ICBMs nipping off the ducts,

for Jesus Christ slaking his thirst at the Strontium 90 waters

A COUNTER-THEME

1.

The real gone moment
comes again and again
crazily, dancingly.

If we must die
let it be tomorrow
or the day after tomorrow.
Today we soar like wild swans,
blind to what compels our flight,
feeling only
the amplitude and glitter of the world
* * *

Half the night I stayed up
hearing through weeping pages
a poet with death in his eyes
waving darkness at me
as if it was 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;

and to whom I say
that even on this haunted planet
the real gone moment
comes again and again
crazily, dancingly.

2.

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 ultimate sunburst

we are trapped
in a week of death-days
under carrion skies
where no flowers bloom
and the birds are silent.

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

O, wait no longer!
Make a memo to whisper an ardent arietta
to love's unappeased and infinite progress,
put on agendum
laughter in dawn's small hours,
make a notation
that we still are alive for at least a day longer!

3.
There comes a time
when the enchanted heart
utters the absurd hope
that this day the world is created anew,
that 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 the burning rhythm of streetlights.

Everybody

will, go, go, go,
their heads aureoled with small birds,
the night swelling
with their full-throated wail.

AUBADE

Life, be fresh with daybreak!
Though papers print death
 by wind, by fire,
and wolf teeth are bared
at curving hollows
where little homes sleep,
may I wake, my storms scattered
on lovely landscape of her body,
and wonder at life's small matters
that continue forever.

 Light jostles
sea-waves, ghosts cough
in trees, the twig
drunk with raindrops
 snaps, falls
to junkyard of dead leaves;

all these will last
beyond the moment of being
as the wind of flutes persists
past the bright hoard of sound.

TWO JEWISH POEMS

1.
The rabbi noted: it is worse to violate
your neighbor's place beneath the blue
than to sin against the Holy One. For God
is where you are, in field or home.
His address known
your moral litigation can be solved
by a contrite and an absolving sigh.
But if your neighbor move away
how will you find him? To what teeming street,
what far-away and unfamiliar shore
will you address regrets?
And you will carry all your years
the memory of someone's downcast eyes
and grievance unredeemed. Somewhere will walk
a murdered man, your knife between his ribs.

2.

Take what is at hand
as sparrows take to doorways
when rain whips oak-leaves.
Take to the lonely hills
to gather silences
when wolf-eyes gleam
in the green valley.

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, rider of clouds, wake up!
You can starve waiting
for singing tomorrows.
Black bread freely eaten
makes a calm melodious Sabbath.
Wait no longer for tinselled
mitsvas from heaven
but light your candles
to bless what is at hand.

ROCOCO SUMMER

After split skies and tardy thunder, rain
Recalled the children in their pinafores
To porches tense with sportsmen. Bores
Peddled the myth of Vicksburg once again.
Grant himself, bribed with a fine cigar,
Sinister, taciturn, sick with his cancer,
Snatched from a silver tray the cabled answer,
Read he would die, smiled, headed for the bar.
The sky protested. Mallets clicked dismay.
Beneath wet elms the darkey waiters served
Tall, minted juleps. Sudden horsemen swerved,
Missing a child, reining another way.
The sun returned . . . Oh, what is left to tell?
No pen stabs reputation. From the lawn,
Duly escorted, not without a yawn,
Women moved gravely toward the dinner bell.

JACK OF DIAMONDS

Be nimble, Jill. The legends in your purse
Drug me for slumber like the autumn rose
That stings and pricks us both while budding out.
Each boy invades your cavern with a shout:
Each fails, but still assumes the martial pose
When garments scatter and your guardians curse.

A subtle moth predicted such pale freight.
Paired silver wings abetted me, then fled
Beneath a fog of blankets. Your harsh lips
Urged greater speed, more pain than comes from whips.
Clouds festered in the weird glow from your bed.
Mist soiled the windows. Storms unlocked the gates.

We drowned in satin, favored by no star.
The captious waves that groomed me for your stud
Must steer you landward in a greener smock
And wind be quick to bind you on this rock
Before the dragon that will suck your blood
Consumes at last the kindling that you are.

THE BEACHCOMBERS

When Circe, whose sly tongue was thick from wine,
Begged cleaner sheets in which to vend stale wares,
Ulysses thrashed her. Wanton by design,
He followed steep and labyrinthine stairs
No dolphin ever trod before it died
Downward to ageing nymphs at coral fairs,
Met drunken Neptune, who broke wind and cried
For mortgaged realms, spent vigor, fallen hairs.
While sailors jounced fat wenches on their laps,
Ulysses puzzled over magic squares.
The weather, omens, mutes in Phrygian caps;
All hands divided into agile pairs.
Heedless and blithe, clad only in loud socks,
They sweated, grunted, worked on equal shares
The silt of pleasure through one narrow box:
Night squandered darkness, but the coin was theirs.
High tide drew baths for cooling fevered lips.
The ocean growled in subterranean lairs.
As cardboard gulls christened the bankrupt ships,
Kelp bound delirious wretches to strict chairs.

DIARY OF A HEAVY MAN

In any house his problem was at poise:
Noise in the hall, a sly fetch by the door
Where night had ripened out like cheese to sight.
With him, that slow retard was very slight.
Regard him with pale diffidence; no more.
He quite deserves the envy of slim boys.

A wretch who suffers from such yeasty nerves
In east or west strait-laced across the waste
Of what was good or better or the best,
Believe me, he has understood the test
And with that Roman wight moves double-faced
Against the household people whom he serves.

He simpers with that privilege of the bold;
Gold in his fist, the sun of every coin
Reflects the temper which his tongue protects
(One never knows whose victim will be next),
Shines on the blade that carves your tenderloin:
A rib, a rack, a limb grown quickly cold.

Withdraw to safety, then, you who withstand
Raw sound, the failure of his passage south;
Mouth of the wind, a wing — or anything.
Conclude, come to repose, to this hope cling
Like man to a rope. Put sweets in your mouth.
Limp, weary band, from the heavy man's land.

A CLASSIC JOURNEY

I played the jokester in those Syrian days,
Dawdling along the shoe-shaped vestibules
Where frantic shoppers with decaying eyes
Rebuked my feet. I boxed with natives twice:
The hairy Greeks and marbled Portuguese
Outlawed my Mediterranean dreams
To grottoed isles of sacerdotal blue.
The bones I dug are fossiled into fame:
Antipater, the vetch-nosed Ptolemy,
Or Heraklita soaking from her pores
The merchant dye that proved her dignity.
A dark-eyed Spartan changed my coins to deeds:
She wore her shield of diffidence to bed
But yoked us with a chaste propinquity
As regents in the dynasty of sleep.
Wars parted us. My safer years racked up
Like saucers for Athenian coffee shops
When I was tourist at the ruins of love.
Now memory clicks within the shuttered dark
Of winter in this northern latitude.

WEST

Wyoming is a green and rampant space,
Thanks to the Mormon stint that made it so.
In California grow prodigious grapes.
The Puget fishes quarrel in their nets.
Nevada is a whistle in the wind
Below guilt's finger-pointing Idaho
Hugged by the bear, Montana, and the Snake,
A frantic river fencing Oregon.
Recall the snow-stocked ranches of the Ute.
The pine cone mesas of New Mexico,
The penitents at Denver, coughing blood,
Beaten by whips of red and acrid dust.
The hiker, standing by the Judas tree,
Will pick and choose his Buicks as they pass,
And where the silver dollars bounce like hail
The hennaed dealers spread their dental wares.
While dry conformity had many sons,
The census-taker never came this far
To mark the groves and derricks with his pins.
Your oranges shall fatten on extremes
Larger than legend, yeasty as the sea
Foaming green flattery upon the beach
Of malted milk and cactus real estate
Where tinted post-cards serve as dividends
For squaws and yogis anxious to invest
In Christian Science or a pension plan.
Appease your hunger with the obvious:
The travel-folder missions, Santa Fe,
The tourist boiling in his oil of speed
And Iowa, retired to Hollywood,
For these are totem to your history
Defined by breakers at the Golden Gate.
Pacific is the nickname for the quest,
Gain its red eye and thirst its parching tongue.
Now is too soon to measure such a vast
Oasis in Mohaves of your hope
Where all mirages lead to Panamint,
To fat white haunches of the Mother Lode,
Plateaus of folly, gulches of neglect,
The gin and tonic waves at Malibu.

THE WEATHERCOCK

Wind shakes me
I am weak and spent
With every argument.
I doubt and hang
A breath disturbs me.
Sinewless and vain
The harsh and soft are one to me
Zephyr or gale, I turn my face to it.

North wind and south have whispered
And I go with each.
The dulcet evidence of bloom and spring
Or the cold reason of on-circling storm
Both have convinced me, and I yearn with them
Yearn as the smoke drift or the lifted leaves.

Yet I proportion my stance to the breeze.
Wind shall not take me
Though he shriek and bite
Frighten all other birds to leeward shade
Blow down the pigeons from the cooing lofts
Sail the hawk back downwind and send
Laborious eagles panting to their rocks.

I have set my claw
Deep in the roof's pinnacle,
There to hold
While solid objects knock about —
Each broadside thing —
Stiff in this hub to turn and, keen,
Broach to the wind a practiced waywarding.

Though the barn totters
And hay flies
And the wood is pierced by pebbles;
Till the ties of the timbers skew
With the beams ajar
And the shingles scatter
And the great roof falls

I crow though none may hear.
In the vast spinning world, I still point true.
I fly here.

THE BEAR

(From Grimm brothers)

Rose Red :

We have once more caught
This old humbug, sister.
Here he lies in his shaggy coat
Snug by our cordial fire,
Claiming to be a prince, or a lost Christian in disguise.
There are things of the chrysalis — the butterfly,
Plots that must be hatched, deeds long in doing,
But this is thorough bear, rumped and earthen.

Snow White :

Remember, sister, other miracles :
The pellet seed, bursting to root and leaf,
The hard green bud to rose,
The thought newborn
That pecks at the skull like a rousing chick.
Great things from small,
The pearl from the ooze,
And the radiant soul
Rapt from its prison in a broken spell.

Rose Red :

Snakes drop their skins, but remain serpents still,
And the moth, long harbored in its chrysalis
Flies as a birthright to distorting flame.
Leaves spurt from seed, but only for the season.
No one has charted the sea-track of souls.
Bears sleep in winter caves and wake up bears.

The Bear :

The forest offers honey, hollow logs
Streams fraught with fishes,
Berries on the hills.
Yet here I ponder.
I am no common bear, for I have visions.

I dreamed I was a prince;
I walked in halls
Brilliant with torches.
Underneath this pelt
I feel the hardness of the golden mail.
Can such dissatisfaction offer proof
I am enmeshed in spells too fine to ravel?

Snow White and Rose Red, divert your clumsy wooer.
Some day we meet the dwarf and force the answer.

A SUMMER WALK

Love, the harsh fields declaim
Unchanging chaos where we walk tonight.
Cut in the stubbled hay the scent
Waits where it lies dissoluble in air
Spicing the season, calling the name.
It is the summer — pomegranate, heat, haze,
After acacia, wind, pine, fire, rain —
Come in its order, earth circle and sun,
Round the hem of a robe, pine, pomegranate, pine.
The oat seed perfect closes the leaf;
The warm air, raising the summer scent,
Lifts like a letter on the cooler wind.
Grasp the torn page, the preface, lest it be
Rosetta of the structure, unity,
The title, author, centerstone, or key.

I feel the dark wherein I shall not fear —
No dark of sense, nor light, nor warmth of hand,
Only a stillness that I shall not hear.
The residual spirit, naked, wakes again
Into a flame, a fire, a light, a world,
An abstract energy of mind on mind.
Ah, wombs that gave them life, can you decree
The spirits haunting immortality?

I once was young enough to dream and know
I was immortal since I wished it so.
But where the I who dreamed? The mirror frames
An aspect stranger to the face it wore,
Mortality grown constant as a chain,
Binding as water that is gone and flows.

From untouched outlands at the mountain's rim
The dove recalls us with a mellow cry;
The summer morning shimmers off to lose
Its sheer beginning in the ragged sky.
I see the curve of earth whereon is wound
The ever-present present, sanguine, loud,
The shade of oaks stretching across the ground.
The summer presses on us when we walk
Through fields called fields, whatever else they be,
And we imprisoned in a hedge of years
Look for a province and a dynasty.

IN THE DOOR THAT OPENS

In the door that opens
upon the garden of the great
house,

She sits
Bare feet
To the sun.

Her long hair
Is a cascade of time
Down her back and
About her shoulders —

It pours itself
Upon the canvas
Of my infinity.

I HAVE JUST CROSSED THE MISSISSIPPI

I have just crossed the Mississippi.
In the distance,
The dome of the capitol
Shines,
And seems to float
Over the fields of corn.
Somewhere above
The moon is a pale visage.
Soon it will be dark
And the moon will be bright.
Soon I will arrive home
To my Mother,
In the city of my birth.
Soon I will arrive home,
To be born no more.

YOU ARE MY DAYS' GREAT GAIN

Stealthily
In the acquiescent forest
 depth,
I come upon you,
Stark and
Tremulous as a bird.

Stealthily I move upon you —
I gather you in, and
Gently bound with white
And silken cords,
I carry you hostage
To the city of my love.
You are my days' great gain —
I am exultant.

I mount the stairway
Of my ardent desire,
The priests in the temple
 of my desire, are

Tall —
Dark, and
Richly robed.
They are incisive
In the execution
Of their office —
They understand the need
And the purpose well —
They await my step —
They await the delivery
Of my days' great gain.
They await that full-bodied
 moment,
When they each and every one
Will take their due of you,
As I lay you at their feet.
For you are my offering
On the altar of sacrifice —
You are my days' great gain,
In giving.

Have you listened
to the first half of the 20th Century
speaking of fabled heroes
from empty head pieces
disguised and covered under
fields of mustard?
Have you watched
fifty beautiful years
glamorizing front page copy
fingerpainting progress
and smiling into history books?
Have you touched
the dull fears of your life
into shocks of awareness
that make you wonder how and why
you feel like hiding under flowers?
Or have you seen yourself
in the first half of the 20th Century
pulling a shade to open a music box
that makes it so good
to keep on smiling
you could sleep that lullaby
forever?

This day
dry as seeds waiting
for the blackbird
fly
hanging on the wire high
high above the world
sick as sun without
fire without air without sky
hanging on the wire
high
high above the day
the blackbird is dry
as seeds waiting.

Come into this small quiet moment
and share with me a skylight of space
and a circle of time
around our closeness —
and our hands touch
and our faces touch
and we smile in the focus
of an instant.

april hearted frogs leap high
between the eyes of time
in that fraction of a
love-lash burning
moment of a tear
gone laughing
dancing down
the cheek
of a
kiss

WHEN I GO DOWN TO THAT SLEEP

When I go down to that sleep
It is to the marrowed villages that I go
Where the tail-bone sinks in the bush
And the marsh is shallow with fish.

I am hung like a possum from a limb
And nothing will harm me now,
The hunters are flat on the meadow
As they go down to their sleep.

My wife has moved a face-length
And has fallen from my arms
Into the bottom of her gravity
When she turns down to sleep.

Our baby drops deeper than us all,
To the bed of nutrient visions
And the simple remembrance of creation,
Where sleep first began.

Outside of houses like ours,
Power is wide awake,
Or the guards are playing cards.
Somewhere as the sun breaks

Pilots rub the sleep from their eyes
And fly above the darkened earth
In Alaskan and Siberian skies
And drop the bombs of nightmare.

And we are sound asleep
Drifting on the earth like wreckage,
As if our parts were laid on tables
Like books with open pages.

Let power read through the night,
Before they turn the light out:
Let them read our sleep,
Then turn down into their own.

Now you stir the lovely waves
That split the sun on me.
We lug ourselves from sleep
And love and fly away.

THE INTEGRATION OF FAILURE

1.

I am Lawrence, and by that name,
A *Lawrencian* system.
Somewhere in the stars I am known by
The center of my power in all its shapes,
And all the handsome characters of my ego.
See how the world gives in to me,
Inch by inch. It is lovely to be so free
Even in lapsing from my own principles.
Men have surrendered to me, or resigned
Themselves to oblivion. They are insipid
Scarecrows with all their fears.
Bankrupt and exhausted by my wit, surrendering
Their laughter and their admiration.
The truth is my lyricism,
But I can forge the truth
From each lie as well.
I am one of those undetermined
Infinite individuals.

2.

There is an excess of time to corrupt;
There are any number of conspiracies,
I am Lawrence and the name is bacteria.
I am the raw infected will; even the
Sun conspires to my putrefaction;
But man, but man is guilt,
And from that guilt men will make a man;
Not an image as Lawrence is;
But something real and unconscious as a fool
Something helpless and corrupt
Someone tame who bays at the moon.

3.

Now the stars are out, but I will not look.
I have not seen them in ten years.
It is dishonest to see them again,
Like a lover one has once rejected,
The stars are dangerous at my age.

There are vessels bound for troubled seas;
I have not bothered, though my courage aches to be born.
Who has filled my vacancy? Is he braver
Than I might have been? Am I Lawrence
To dream of what I might have been?

There are beautiful women, each a life
Of desire. Ten or so in each city;
There is even a nation of my children
To be born. There is my absolute
Immortality. But I am anchored deep
In my shallow sea. I will never travel.

And there are causes, but these are split and confounded;
Thank God, I cannot take the blame for these,
They were lost before my time. And there were
Enterprises whose imagination died with greed.
My dreams are sold for profit.

And there are the names of flowers,
Now dead in my weeds in my garden
That I have never learned. In all
This rubbish, I have the taste of greatness.
I am Lawrence of the feeble dream.

4.

And at that deep dark corner, at the
Very end of my rope, in that absolute
Rejection, Lawrence leaves me
And my name goes out. There is upheaval
And indigestion. Each contraction expels
Me further from that cozy world
As I am born again in a world I never claimed,
I am awakened by the landscape of my birth;
Goodbye Lawrence, do not worry,
I'm not dead.

Awakened by the murmuring landscape,
The paths relax in an afternoon spring.
The wind stirs the leaves of my pine,
And my neighbor's Eucalyptus.
There is a sense of being here
The conscious landscape of my birth.
And time is here where I've been busy,
And the brunette claim of my wife's smile,
Like the trellis filling with the growth
Of our marriage, is wordless, but full
Of my real name. Here, on this property,
Are the victories of my sinewy reach,
And here in my arms, my daughter asleep,
All this time, in my garden, on my knee.

LATER THAN THERE IS NO NEVER NO

Later,
When you no longer wanted it;
Later, they said, save it
For later.
Soon,
But it could never be too soon.
Nor too early, only
Too late.

Too,
They said,
Too easy is too early for two; later
Will be soon enough.
Later
Is for non-profit ideas but now
Is for now.
Now is for things you
Need to need. Later is non-realistic
Now; later
Is for later, they said.

HOMAGE TO A GIRL NAMED CUPCAKE

First remembered as the imagined mistress
They dreamed that you stayed awake nights
To earn your livelihood by sleeping.
And you were born too late to be
Absolutely apropos, Baby,
Squeezed from the cooling Twenties
Until they could no longer lie about your age;
Leftover from something out of F. Scott Fitzgerald
Long after the last copy
Was called back.

Yet, I never saw your name among the uninvited then.
The face is gone; your crazy dialogue is something come to us
Just off the boat, wildly wet, and orchestrated
With laughs, screams, squeals too soprano for contemporary sex.
Now, only your classified smile holds solvent
Among the debits; and that, even,
Stripped of its built-in hysteria,
No longer's piped indiscriminately to collective mankind.

Who, how, retains the embarrassed hearts
Of the long, unlicensed line to the right?
The weary eyes that came to rest upon your hot slopes
Are merely migratory game,
Quacking flatly
In functional drawing-rooms
Over the state of the union;
And the promise once fraudulently drawn down
Deep inside your ermine —
The squish of your voice that made every wife old and tough
With protective invention —
Are the sounds of some cupie-doll, come unwound.

The wives? They're small and older now,
Saved by the belle
Finally tolled. It was they who hazarded
That your popularized bosoms
Were mere pincushions
For the underprivileged —
Dismissed as an architectural exaggeration
Or disallowed
As objects for the fumbling-of; promising
That any man willing to be unsprung against you
Was undeserving of rebuke.

You were nobody but Cupcake,
The woman with a thousand moving parts,
High heels, poodles, roadsters and a phone number.
And while our anxiety greyed into apathy
Some other world moved past your shaded afternoons
With a honk and a wave.

SUCCESS STORY FROM AN ECONOMIC ENGINEER

I took my ABC
1 2 3 for advanced aberrendophilia
At M.I.T.
Specializing in
Compressed Expanders, with 4-way pulsifiers
(Dynaformed on the logical principle
That torque was tantamount) and
As for belt-driven universals in cancelling phases
Everything already had gone over to
Rotogenetics; now
Employing the theory of cellular disintegration
I was ready
For a theoretical centrifigation
Of opposed exemplyfiers —
Whereas
Old B.F. had never taken his M.S. and
Though a good man
Around instantaneous decibles
He'd never really gone beyond
Shock-insulated spacifiers, being willing
To coast among the Suspension People
With their low-hung sibernetics
And latent octograms, thus
When they asked me, had I had
Exploded harmonics with refurberating exemplification
I was able to say Yes
And moved up
From there
Into hypothetical X-23's with perpetuating
Detonations; I was ready, at last
For eradification.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA AS THE STATE OF THE UNION

Southwesterners
Who'd avoid clobbering doves on Sundays
Must forget remembering East
When an afternoon's wry glean was crossfiled with
Neo
Geo —
Political webbery; ~~their humbled sky sucks~~
From exhausted Buicks
Some mysterious chemistry. And sad old steel towers
Have their backs to the wall
Heads in the clouds; it is
~~Time for Life~~
~~And ultrasimplification.~~
~~To reduce thought down to its lower common denominator~~
The highest brains draw tall salaries.
The months pass through
Whistling sternly.
A splendid year for removing old promises
For exorcising promiscuity from the premises.
And ashore, in the absolute west
Birds on spindles
With sticks for beaks bleat
For tidal deposits of paper milk cartons.
Exclamatory gulls commute to work
In the city's playgrounds
And the tested Coast comes a land of e-flat alto saxes.
Still a great Cadillac country
Reverberating its echoes to the forgotten east
Where remain
Secret wetnesses
On posteriors and exteriors.
~~And there exist acrid stratas, and ochre afternoons~~
~~In Pasadena's washes,~~
And high tension wires, and Ford-owners
Who perforate beercans with .22's
Their radios running full volume, unattended
And falling onto the Sunday side of it all. Sunday?
The children nagging donkey-rides; the parents
Hurrying home for ~~factory-fresh clichés~~
~~And all~~
~~Promised always~~
~~The classified superiority of practically everything.~~

IF A MAN CANNOT BUILD A NEW HOUSE

(A Message to Kenneth Rexroth)

Where shall I hasten to evade
this dutiful burden, being as I am
what time, persistence, and rough weather shape me?
If I take to the sea,
many are there drowned and dead
whom sweet singers call by name,
and others irony.
Robbers are on land, and wars course
ravenously;
air is heavy with falling.
If all from responsibility are fled,
shaking their distraught heads wagging
against responsibility,
who will feed on cropped beards or summon
diviner voices by their barked calling?

If alone, disaffiliate, I believe that I evade
what I am, where I am,
uncommitted either to go or stay,
shall I escape where others cannot
or remain where no others remain?
Is nature for the solitary
without luxury?
Is not luxury the man's mark,
marble head, pillar of his temple?
If he abuse, does not luxury
luxuriate
in his decay?
I cannot within these shores be absent
from perilous luxury.

Saving the oceans do not swallow me
and robbers leave me possessed
and the constituency of the air is not
poisoned or tyrannized;
I cannot, myself,
myself I cannot evade.
Look! on the food-gathering shore, involute, a crabbed
specimen, heavily shouldering my ill-fitting
carapace or borrowed hut:
love nourished me, or I were not:
I set this against others' hatred.
Fugitive out of the waste and the mosaic
ploughed contours

passion houseled me, in commune;
the stone city is my attic past.
Tomorrow is for me today
in consequence of yesterday: unless
I build a new house above death,
invite mockers singing to my trees
and expect stools in my garden: unless
I am responsible in my presence.

If a man cannot build a new house,
anyone may despair.
That is my message.

THE LONELY MAN

looks out the window and sees anybody
smiling, everybody
happy; the lonely man
looks out his window, and it's nobody
nobody, nobody

The lonely man
looks out the window and sees anybody
like him, everybody
coming, going; the lonely man
looks out his window, and it's
anybody unlike him

Out of his window
the lonely man
sees everybody coming going
somebody, anybody;
the lonely man, that lonely man
looks out his window, and it's everybody safely
inside outside him

Everybody outside
anybody smiling
nobody needing
anybody inside; in a glass window
that lonely man
somebody smiling
happy, happy
looking right through him

FOR CHARLES IVES

If there is left, men's God, in the world one single man
to speak of you and be friend, too many words
cannot hide you or deny you for that man.

He will be like a history when it is lived,
not yet made faith, and in him you in him;
the greens of leaves, the blues of seas will be no more tangible,
no more real.

He will come up like spring; in winter men will live in memory of him;
and death shall be forgetting, even as some man has forgotten spring.

This God who inhabits word and works in men
and who is real in the person, real and final as the speech
of one who, feigning, cannot feign to feign;

This real enduring stout truth's counterchange:
Death does not affirm and will not fail
him in whom living is a page in being.

A CONCEIT FOR STRAVINSKY

Seldom do I consult the score
to tell in music where I've been.
I score it by the mind's relief,
which thus restoring reads belief,
and in believing hears, a score
of years, those facts that soar.

And fated though one be to see
occurrences' presented grief,
each interval by less or more
detaches from the parent mould
and winged of human thought is bold
to bring me where I wish to be.

For when such intervals combine,
defying gravity and grace,
to press accustom out of line,
spring thought where empty beauty was
and by decision imprint space,
then music's human and made fit to praise.

Some build by tooth, with tail and claw;
You by the eager breath and resonant law.

Tragedy is the soul's release
that by a stage climbs nearer peace;
but music, though a floor the less,
climbs higher and is yet no place.

St. Mark the briefest Gospel wrote,
with less of Passion than of note.
Five domes in Venice honor him:
Under each you have set a stage
for tragedy, purged of its rage,
five praises concerting one hymn.

They bless who hear, or hearing less
contort, because they cannot bless.
Print shrivels to a light, and they
as crackled shadows twist away.
We are more blessed who can restore
through years our taste of your full score.

A TWELVE-TONE STATEMENT OF POPULAR OPINION IN
REGARD TO ARNOLD SCHOENBERG AND HIS MUSIC

If it were not for that, we could love you
Like anything, anything it were; if not
For that we like, love you.

We're for it; we could love you
Like anything, not that, if love
Were like — if for that
Could anything: it, not you, we love not.

Anything, we're for it: you like it if that
We love not like that.
If anything could, you were for it: we
Could love you for that.

Not anything like it! We were, if anything.
That you love we could like it,
If for anything, that you like, love, love.

FROM MY WINDOW

the freshened lamps of the city
flicker below me. Rain
has washed the air clean.
The fabled city in the triangle
between mountains, city within
cities, flashes neon lights
against night. The branch
of the pine tree I do not own
lies across my windows. Nothing
that I see is mine. The tree
grows from my neighbor's garden.
I do not possess my wealth.
Mist steals my view.
A barren moon in the morning
will hang low over radiant hills.

*nothing
personal
in L.A.*

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