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# A SALT OF SEASONS: WINTER SPRING SUM- MER FALL POEMS

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The poems in this book are fictional. Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used ficticiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

OCT-NOV (MICHIGAN MEMORY #4)

The bacon of the ankles crackles, and the sky  
Perks up birds this coldsnap morning—every  
Breath sheds a breath-effect, brief-bloomed steam-sheaf . . .  
Puddles huddle in frost. Past the barn the path

Shoots hill-pastures which rose to winter early  
And sun-shucked clouds blast-off from: migrants that fly  
South—mouths that wet-nurse icicles—hatch forth  
A form, a furious precision I sloughed

At birth, preferring life. And like the wind  
Can reduce anything to description—  
Running to finish my chores, beneath my scarf

I'll feel my chinbone seek my collarbone,  
As if the flesh has ceded and the skeleton  
Now must precipice itself against all warmth.

## OVERNIGHT FREEZE

Window-glints of ice glaze fast  
last night's tracks in the mudflats  
where animals passed: inch-niched  
skylights patch their pattered paths;  
but our chameleon's footprints—  
have they been paned with stained glass?

## OCTNOV

Stickum leaves fluttering down  
Pin unpin each path's compass

The season on our sleeve has shown  
Another course for us

## Intro Notes

Seasonal poems . . . ? There are anthologies of winter poems and other seasonal olios, so obviously they exist as a discrete genre.

I thought of including for example "Christmas at the Orphange" (which can be found in my Quatorzain collections) but is that poem really a winter piece? . . .

So what is a seasonal poem? Is it simply a "Nature" poem with time-circumscribed imagery; a presencing of phenomena whose meaning or verisimilitude has a built-in 3 month-limit? Is it "scenery and sentiment" as Eliot sneered the Georgians?

Think of the traditional haiku: beyond its syllabic requirements surely the most significant rule is that of the *kigo*, a word or phrase that indicates to the reader a season, thereby always situating its content within time, grounding even the most abstract thought in the grasp and glance of a human scale.

In any case, with my choices here I've tried to select poems in which the season and its attributes are intrinsic of the content, an essential condition of what I'm writing.

The order of the poems is indicated in the book's subtitle.

## NOVEMBERNEW

Scoldingly, the way a nurse  
waves a thermometer at a corpse,  
branches thrash above us.

I've read the instructions how  
a compass should always go  
consulted beneath a Maypole.

If space orientates with time alone,  
our position fixed by Newton  
may now be nearing Einstein.

Quickly I place a teakettle  
atop a dead volcano  
and learn to wait for its whistle.

North lost, the needle pierces my wrist.  
The mist is in the forest.  
Our sighs are in the farthest.

## OCTNOV AGAIN

The year's wrapping comes undone: foliage tied  
By sun-string cords is cut and cast aside

To present the godsend, the great last gifts  
Time donates to its ingrates, sad thankthrifs

Who throughout their dotage-dole still forget  
The parcelly-priceless rose of regret

Never stemmed them against one bestowed weed—  
(Why can't our greed grant instead of our need:

Each field and tree stripped packing, boneward bare,  
Was nowhere on our wish-list: we'd prefer

Ribbon-prinked paper/a crepe-plush pinkbow  
Glitzing forth their vulgar veneer: and now

Mocked by how little of its kitsch remains,  
We crave our carton, not what it contains.)

## WIDOW/WIDOWER'S WINTER

Outside, the snow is falling into its past . . .  
I do want this night to end.  
In the fireplace,  
a section of ash caves in.

The fall day you were buried,  
birds went over,  
south,  
thick enough to carry someone.

They took my gapes of breath.  
—Their fuel?  
We are together in some birds, who fail.

I didn't want to look down, to glimpse your grave,  
its heroic little mound  
like the peck of dirt we hope to eat in our life.

Note:

Line 14 comes from a phrase I remember my  
parents saying to me as a child when I dropped  
a piece of food on the floor: "Pick it up and brush  
it off—don't worry, you eat a peck of dirt in your  
life anyway." (Perhaps only poor families do this.)

## SAVE AS: SALVATION

Somewhere is the software to ID all  
 The snowflakes falling in this storm: but there  
 Ain't enough RAM crammed in my brain to call  
 Them forth by name, each crystal character  
 Putered and programmed, made to have a soul—  
 And even if I compelled the power  
 To inscribe them here as equals, in whole  
 Terms, I would not permit such an error.

*But which is which, cries Ms. Ubiquitous-Unique.  
 We're not formatted for whiteout. And when  
 The screen of your vision freezes in flurries  
 And the core of this word blizzard hurries  
 To melt again, to find itself again,  
 Won't mine be the sign these syllables seek?*

(FACE) (AUTUMN) (EN FACE) (to NSL)

I lay your face along my palm and make  
 To trace its shape there a profile  
 Then I see the lifeline heartline break  
 Overlengthened by one leaf's fall

The plow it rests on a horror now  
 In the distance an ogre pulls in vain  
 To open a nailed shut window  
 Whose reverberancy is thunder rain

Begins its rheumatization of  
 The world we shared so spare-much of that  
 This sans season's hands' veins portray our love

The no two alike are kissing yet  
 I lie down alone not knowing a tongue  
 Can taste every flavor but its own

## SALON POEM IN LEAFGRAVURE

Cemetery statuary  
ought to be deciduous: wings  
that fall from angels every  
year, with the cherubs losing  
their curls, the harps their strings—

Or imagine graveyards in autumn  
minus those high carved out figures:  
and not just the sculptures,  
but names, dates, epitaphs. Each tomb  
turned into a bare limb—

Each stone branch of the 'ceme-tree'  
would stand once more a slab  
the better to weather tragically  
another Dec-Jan-Feb.  
Come springtime gallery by gallery

etched letter-buds could open  
that blankest bark  
where new-limned numerals will mark  
those old lives' span  
and spranked up there above them

let crosses blossom,  
the tall crosses regain  
their nailed arms. Now all the chisel  
foliage should follow until the whole  
museum from within is risen.

## PILGRIMAGE

" . . . *the murky path of the male.*" —*Gottfried Benn*

Immured in the snowforest, at  
the center of that center-swirled  
absence, a hospital-bed waits:  
its white is linen's height,  
raised by the weight of daily flakes.

You approach this scene each evening,  
your footsteps stone the glaze—  
oh apathy, you surrender  
up to the ankles, knees.  
From stretched branches X-rays

sway forth a deeper self. It's  
faraway yet closer darker  
icicles drool, ripe to drop  
under your hand: their blitz  
would bury the path you thrash at.

Through a saberfanged crevasse,  
whacking a trail of snapped-off tusks,  
you'd plunge on to the wrong past,  
vast maze landscape like sculpture draped  
immaculate, endless.

Where hail fills high the prints behind  
and flurries flail the ways ahead,  
why try, how can you come by them

to break the pillowcase  
frost lace, to take that last,

most blanket sleep. Superstitious,  
afraid to infringe its surface,  
emptier everytime you climb  
in, what makes the covers crack  
and cake off over the rim—

Avalanche tucked, teddybear tight,  
you shiver. As ever the night-  
stand drifts open, to show  
a plate of burning grapes,  
a strangled bird's falsetto—

yawning prescriptions of dream.  
Ignore them, search for the cure  
which never seems so far as now  
here around you your eyelids thaw,  
sheer as bridal-veils that fall.

Is this where your parents strayed—  
and their parents, and theirs.  
Have they wandered the once upon  
this bed blizzard, spun warm,  
this bed whiter than all their kind.

Northerners, arctic, heretic,  
you inherit their scorn (their fear)  
of Southern deities such as

#### AFTER RILKE

As the year falls in autumn  
to repeat the tree's chaos  
again on the ground, to  
reiterate its meaningless

in a sequence called status:  
so dissimilar clouds already  
multiformulate themselves  
from previous contraband—

traffic of leaves redundant,  
instinct-migrant heaven: every  
day I rip from my nipples

a calendar's cleavage, I lie  
clinging to lays. Lord the  
summer was mostly waste.

## AUTUMNAL

The tree lowers its anchor  
 Of foliage, mooring the one  
 Life I forgot to not  
 Reincarnate.

Now from scenes of former harrow  
 Burst free, playing tag  
 With Yorick's skull.

Since barefoot beats childhood  
 In the race to be alone,  
 Brush departure from your path.

A leaf must fall to complete  
 Its stem's intent, but I wonder  
 If my branch meant to end in this  
 Sum of nothing equals one.

Ceres. Her grief (her grudge) against  
 her daughter-loss brought winter—ugh,

those Mother Goddesses!  
 They underlie, supposedly  
 ("Gaia" 's prior hierarchy)  
 our myths: their prelapsarian,  
 pure, panacean pantheon

ruled that Golden Age when Queens  
 honeycloned themselves and sat  
 throned on the spines of drones  
 eunuch-stricken to demonstrate  
 Woman's divine right: Her ancient

aegis status was gospel  
 back then, its testaments ripped  
 from nature—harmony—holism—  
 healthsynch: earth worshipped Earth,  
 that eco-, that matri-archal

matrix . . .: And some exclaim this  
 sweetest reign resumes when human  
 throats converge to roar organic  
 evoes for those primal  
 Paragons whose restoration

and full-unctuous salvation  
 one's urged to summon in syrup,  
 in slush tones said to heal  
 any cough, damn them, phlegm-hymned  
 womb zombies from hell. Who invokes

/you shall not harken unto/  
 /shall not beseech these regimen/  
 /you shall not bear wounds they could mend/  
 /real Aryan skin can not shield/  
 /one tongue that prays to them/

their old rollcall skeleton, chokes—  
 Spasms sprawl you, supine symptoms  
 unbleach every resolve to be  
 the bald hero, the Damocles  
 who head-first hung must butt

birth, time's trepanned exile.  
 Slough him, ban from these folds his caul,  
 skull-carved blond beyond reach—  
 false twin you feel the steel  
 breach, both constrained to suffer

more year-armor's vernal rupture—  
 When your mother died you cried curled  
 for days, fetus, you split the ribs  
 of childhood's crib. Uncaptured world:  
 nightly you cross its guard bars

(she's lost, her trespass trace gone cold)  
 bound still to that chill, that pall  
 fever no nurse hovers over  
 till mumped thermometers burst—  
 Always her tracks are smothered there

my face toward any sole, no longer  
 subferior to tanned specimans  
 of transcendized TV glory, riper

hunks who now sprawl shrivel  
 and hug the pavement while their  
 earlier cursed teencarnations bare

out to be me, me, the bove-boy—  
 So what if I'm the false, the dream  
 none can depend on or look to

for their vacuous autumn viewing,  
 foolishly believing those goldshed  
 scarlets are a sight extolled, a sign.

They ignore my sap hue, my true  
 expression of the void that lies  
 so splendid-blazed before their eyes.

glance. Virgil cites a myth that  
false dreams cling beneath each leaf,  
numberless: that's why the under

stays rare, unmarred by hectic—  
its unstained purity portrays  
a lottery win, a moviestar kiss.

Its perfection is a fantasy rays  
have not darkened to day. It stays  
asleep in its top-sheet of hope.

I love this unlived side of the leaf,  
it is in turn my life, pale-safe  
and fraught with no urge to wake,

to exert its own naif enough—  
my raw state resists sophistudy,  
(anterior antibody of beauty)

its rootless evil nice beneath  
the garish one's reign of dare and  
flare, he who exalts the warmth

on his skin, Mister surface, Herr  
hero. I am the lesser here, the low.  
Yes: but after the fall I will show

by a storm of frigid phantoms  
you roam mercurial among,  
pilgrims whose rigor you  
admire, fathers whom you,  
a male, failed to mourn of course.

For years those held-in tears froze  
mammoth this moan-shrine, fused this  
unknown heart, core, coronary  
you've grown toward. It creaks and carries  
down like a cloud your own death near.

When between squalls the sky clears,  
your lungs lay tablets before you—  
polar scrolls, vapor paper on which  
you will never scrawl Her names.  
Crystal ritual, zero quest.

Again you see each word you breathe  
erase its space, its air.  
Beneath their descent (their withdraw)  
what frail erratum shrouds, what sheet  
repeats that quietest flaw?

Note:

Epigraph: final phrase of the poem "Vor Einem Kornfeld"  
(as translated by Francis Golfing). Those familiar with  
Dr. Benn's symbology—not just in his poetry, but in his  
essays as well (particularly "Pallas")—will recognize some  
of the themes and conflicts here.

## WINTER REGRETS

The snow on my ladder's rungs  
seems to be stepping upward,  
returning to that cloud which hangs  
framed in the faded cardboard

of an old calendar landscape  
whose dust holds the days I desire  
to live in, fixing to climb up  
past that summer sun and hammer

the scene in whole. I didn't haul  
my ladder in and now it's too late—  
I turn from the window and stare

lost at a vista of August air  
tacked, half-peeled from the kitchen wall.  
All the undone chores must wait.

## POEM

As I walk into town I notice  
on the sidewalk the leaves have  
fallen mostly bright side down,

the colorful-wonderful side,  
i.e. the dying-decaying, hides  
below the still-greenish half

which hunches over as if  
to protect its fairer twin, to  
save the frail waste of loveliness

from our pending feet. This  
upward face is the obverse,  
the unloved: yet on the tree it

was obviously the underpart,  
untoasted by the sun, tree-slice  
half-done. If I step on one

it flattens and perhaps some  
of the color crumbles up through  
to dye the skyward-displayed

sheaf-shield, something bleeds  
into the drained mask it offers  
to the world's uncurious shoed

## OCTOBER

The leaves fall, but not far enough for me,  
 so I take one up to the top of my favorite highrise,  
 the one whose TV-transmitters watch farmers.  
 Out over the roof-edge I drop it, but my eye  
 swerves to the hemline of a nearby tourist.  
 I wonder if anyone will notice it. The wind  
 is certain to vacillate its journey;  
 a vacillation is a vagueness with intent,  
 and my leaf is light. —And has her camera  
 caught me in the act, prolonging it even further—  
 Her blouse blows but now I prefer most how  
 she caresses the camera, fondly, a personal  
 touch placed on what is after all a mere  
 automaton winking a robot eye . . . hmm, are mechanisms,  
 like, say, money, or credit-cards, are they  
 harder to put one's traits on than a flower  
 for instance, or an ear of corn . . . For example  
 I know someone who has a five-dollar-bill  
 taped up on their wall with the name "Frank  
 Sinatra" scribbled across it, an autograph,  
 according to them, but is writing (or forging)  
 your name on money or on a machine,—?!  
 does a signature make it more human, natural,  
 leafier somehow . . . hell, money is not a good  
 example, it's not mechanic, I'm sorry. Damn.  
 Back on the track: the leaf falls, the farmers  
 farm and the tourist films till her camera's  
 involuntary functions are exhausted . . .  
 we head back down. The elevator control-panel blinks  
 like a flightdeck or Star Tech or something,  
 then I notice buttons on her skirtfront—  
 I punch all the buttons on my shirtfront,  
 not knowing what direction that will get me,  
 yet suspecting that it too will not be far enough.

## (WINTERSHADE)

\*

The candle's blue fingers trace  
 a window skyline. Its ice  
 an archery of needles. I seek  
 the sign, the making known  
 to me of now. We live in a land  
 we can see to disappear.

\*

The wither-gathered wind  
 rivering through a grove  
 of non-leaved nouns: these are  
 the months one must cling hard  
 to his habits, that mean horde.

\*

Winter. We must lean closer now  
 to see in each other's eyes  
 the cleft of witness  
 gape itself to give.

\*

Closer. Closer. At times  
 we must even haven this  
 our place.

## SNOWS AND SNATCHES

Hurry while heaven's favorite  
paperweight descends to press  
the verses down that long to lift  
us off within their endless draft,  
away before that story ends.

Go bind in blind that white sheet-write  
or let its stray-sleet countercloud  
stay the fables that come to light  
unfastening their thrust on. There

are no drifts a man of it might  
survive unless he melts every less  
word that seams our pupilpane in  
streams dividing day's span with  
what its windownight withstands.

Now dawn strands his snows and  
snatches in fall from all he's lost  
unless that book once caught his  
page wedged in both its hands.

## SPACE

From the trees the leaves came down  
until we joined hands with a wand  
and that act enabled them  
somehow then to reach the ground

where they scuttered round our feet  
urging the latter to unite  
with a baton as if that act  
together with the hands can clasp

a dowsing-stick cut from the same  
branch from which we launched  
converging on gravity's purge-point

at which point we merged to remove  
all consonants from our star-maps.  
The infinite consists of vowels alone.

HARVEST

clouds which stand still  
to pose downward  
their event

in the church  
a cookie is wedged  
up the Virgin's plaster skirt

now days attend the sun  
and all the other futures  
before they crop our feasts and wither

the four points  
of a pitchfork  
become harder to define

eyes measuring to means  
the distance dust  
plants along the sill

chasing each other the children  
combine the wisdom  
of freckles and fire-engines

in the end we flow  
like thirst above stones  
like hunger above air

WINTER SUN

Full-stop, period, dot,  
erased at times by birds.

Or asterisk, whose footnote  
clouds our breath with words.

INTHREADABLE

each snowflake's  
a maze  
whose center  
no other flake can find  
the ways  
to enter

## WINTERSCAPE

If a lifetime of papercuts on one's tongue  
 Is one's name. The scar-fitted shirt, prepare it;  
 The seed-sandal, the wreckers' sex. Oh ego intercom.  
 Come, weigh my palms upon the scale of my hands.

Enter: a colonnade of conifers who vote  
 For death as the most economical  
 Sin. See a tuningfork has been to highnote  
 Their monotony jammed atop each tree—

Now amorously by groans, by psalms I grow.  
 Licking a moonfob fat, my egg-dyed navel  
 Eager to inherit what. Pane-thrust apertures;

Figures pearled in games of sculpture maybe;  
 Purer minutiae. Thistles? Thorn icicles  
 Drop by drop will knit it, Knott-slits in the snow.

## BEACHED

Thaw, summer, melt from pastel to pastille—  
 a fruit's sweetness warning the greatness of death  
 to back off: hornbeeps, skidmarks so new, so fresh.

Cars, go and surround each beach.  
 Where drowned armpits flower toward the word.  
 Where even the sun refuses to be an icon.

In my room stand two razorpoles. I rub  
 back and forth between them. I vacillate  
 love, hate: it's exhausting continually

wiping the spittle off your face,  
 though the spitting itself is of course  
 quite effortless. Simile for waves.

## HUMIDITY'S TONES

Four AM, nothing moving, no hurry,  
 dawn still has time to be choosy  
 selecting its pinks. But now a breeze  
 brushes across me—the way my skin  
 is cooled off by the evaporation  
 of sweat, this artistry, this system  
 sombers me: when I am blown from  
 the body of life will it be refreshed?  
 I dread the color of the answer Yes.

## FLAKE TAKES

Snow,  
 echo  
 of lightyears,  
 your time it appears  
 to reach the ground  
 is never now.

Like truth  
 the snowflakes peek  
 from behind a veil.

Sunset: the snowfall lacks  
 (altitude vs. attitude)  
 the hauteur  
 (condensation vs. condescension)  
 of the skyfall.

All this missive whitefold  
 is franked by a pattern  
 its own; stamped unique:  
 'Return to Sender'—?  
 No: *Deceased*.

[UNTITLED]

The snowman's luggage  
is always enroute.

[UNTITLED]

mirror smashed in a snowfall—  
the flakes will find each face  
like themselves to be unique  
as long as it remains lost  
in the blizzard of shards

VISION OF THE GODDESS IN A CITY SUMMER  
(to Carolyn Kizer)

And yet what if the sweat that breaks  
Even from Her feet as they pass  
Can never rain these pavements back  
To a mud- a milk-cud grass

Time that diamond instant dew dulls  
Is it quicker than them quote  
That strode presence those fading puddles  
Not in this goadless heat

Oh mirage oh haze of hydrants  
Go Isis-proud across crosswalks  
Leave brief seas without a halt

Till all my doubts dissolve at once  
And down I'll follow cowed to lick  
Your soleprints for my salt

## HAIKU

The sweat on my forehead  
shines brighter  
when it's in my eyes.

## SUMMER DAYS

a butterfly with a sandwich  
bite out of one wing flies away  
from the inhabitoads of our shadow  
or tries to

## THAWDROPS

Icicle:  
the long  
I's  
descending  
end in  
dot  
planet  
dot  
period  
dot  
splot  
dot  
puddle  
dot  
sun  
dot  
cycle  
dot  
I  
not  
I.

## FIRST WARM DAY

When the world belongs to toss-up.

Balloons whose footprints  
sting the air with soft occasion;  
clouds, whose streamers strain for  
the horizons denied them now  
by these new slow winds.

Even children relinquish the stoicism that  
kept us safe from the cold, even they  
succumb to a sudden cuddleness, weak  
as the first spindly crocus. Seneca  
is sent once more to silence.

Two plus two begins to crack before  
the picnic logic of Summer.

The reign of the same. Difference  
is banished here; outside and inside are  
made equal in temperament, doors  
left open declare armistice.

Winter's wars wane. Vintners verse their vines.

## APRIL AFTERNOON

From barberpoles the white  
could be stripped to bandage  
the bypassers' wounds.

Their clothing seems to consist  
of tickets brandished to the theater;  
every kiosk's counter is bare.

These shapes are assumed  
out of fidelity to the mask  
that covers them with less and less.

And yet there is always the danger  
of excess. Naked, the street  
might lie prey to a merchant's

deliberating broom: birds  
and categorical pushcarts might tie  
cherry stems to our eyelashes.

Spring imposes its pomp, its priorities.  
In the middle of this effortless palace  
an orgy takes off its socks.