"[Bill Knott's] poems are so naive that the question of their poetic quality hardly arises. . . . Mr. Knott practices a dead language."
—Denis Donoghue, New York Review of Books, May 7, 1970

[Bill Knott's poems are] typically mindless. . . . He produces only the prototaxis of idiocy. . . . Rumor has it that Knott's habit of giving his birth and terminal dates together originated when he realized he could no longer face the horror of a poetry reading he was scheduled to give."
—Charles Molesworth, Poetry Magazine, May 1972

"[Bill] Knott's work tends today to inspire strong dismissal. . . . [He's] been forced to self-publish some of his recent books. . . . [B]ad—not to mention offensively grotesque—poetry. . . . appalling . . . . maddening . . . . wildly uneven . . . adolescent, or obsessively repetitive . . . grotesqueries . . . . [His] language is like thick, old paint . . . his poems have a kind of prickly accrual that's less decorative than guarded or layered . . . emotionally distancing . . . . uncomfortable. Knott . . . is a willful . . . irritating . . . contrarian."
—Meghan O'Rourke, Poetry Magazine, Feb 2005

"[Bill Knott's books are] filled with venom. . . . Knott seems to hate himself . . . and he seems to hate his readers."
—Kirk Robinson, ACM (Another Chicago Magazine), date?

"[Bill Knott's work] consists almost entirely of pointless poems, that say disgusting things. . . . [His poetry is] tasteless . . . and brainless."
—Michael Heffernan, Midwest Quarterly, Summer 1973

"Knott is making capitol on poetic fashion, attempting belatedly to enter the canon of the Language poets by reviving the idiom of Ezra Pound. [His poetry] so successfully defies communicating anything that one wonders what [his publisher] had in mind. . . . Knott, it may be recalled, "killed" himself in the early 1960s."
—R. S. Gwynn, The Year in Poetry, DLB Yearbook 1989

"Bill Knott's poems are . . . rhetorical fluff . . . and fake."
—Ron Loewinsohn, TriQuarterly, Spring 1970

"Eccentric, uneven . . . poet Bill Knott is not [fit] to win prizes . . . [His work is] thorny . . . rebellious, avant-garde . . . ."
—Robert Pinsky, Washington Post.com, April 17, 2005

"[Bill Knott's poetry is] queerly adolescent . . . extremely weird. . . personal to the point of obscurity. . . his idiosyncrasy has grown formulaic, his obscure poems more obscure, his terse observations so terse they scoot by without leaving much of a dent in the reader. . . . There is a petulance at work [in his poetry]. . . . [H]is style has grown long in the tooth. . . . In fact, [at least one of his poems is] unethical."
—Marc Pietrzykowski, Contemporary Poetry Review (http://www.cprw.com/Pietrzykowski/beats.htm)

"Bill Knott's [poetry is the equivalent of] scrimshaw. . . . [It's] either self-consciously awkward or perhaps a little too slangily up-to-date."
—Stephen Burt, New York Times Book Review, November 21, 2004

"[Bill Knott is] incompetent . . ."
—Alicia Ostriker, Partisan Review (date? 1972?)

"Bill Knott . . . is so bad one can only groan in response."
—Peter Stitt, Georgia Review, Winter 1983

"Bill Knott [is] the crown prince of bad judgment."
—Ron Silliman, Silliman's Blog, June 26, 2007

"[Bill Knott is] a malignant clown."
—Christopher Ricks, The Massachusetts Review, Spring 1970

"Bill Knott should be beaten with a flail."
—Tomaz Salamun, Snow, 1973

(ACTING) POEMS

actors,
performers,
movies, theater, TV,
circus/carnival,
et al

BILL KNOTT

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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.

Intro Note

Poems about acting—

about performers of whatever sort—

or movies, TV, theater, circus/carnival et al.

Poems in which an act of public performance (real or imagined) is central.

Performance seems to pervade or control so many aspects of our life, private and public. How often we face an audience of all or one or none.

*

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The order of the poems is random, with a few obvious exceptions.

*

CIRCUS: AERIALISTS

Their soars restore our disbelief,
Yet trapezists leave us wanting more:
Can't we rip down those damn ladders
And all their other means of safe
Descent, ropes, wires, (cut the nets, too)—
Let's strand them all up there, ignore
Their arrogant screams for rescue.

Stay up there, we'd shout (or whisper).
Pretend you're one of those angel
Acts, bigtop happy, heaven's troupe—
Hang bright as nails on a tightrope
Tree, spread spangled arms and fly free
Caught in air, spotlit spaced, dangle
Dare: see sphere sights beyond our glare,

Dying soon to gawk for good. When
Finally from hunger or sleep one
By one you faint and plummet home
Your stiff poses against the ground,
Hoping your souls have remained
Aloft: but then like clowns we'll trip
Deliberately over the smashed up

Bodies you were always scorning
Skyward, forsaking all fallenness
To pass the massive eyes of envy,
And sprawled in dust of center ring
May take back our lack of sympathy
When once like shadows shown or less
You lowered yourselves among us.

FRAMEPOEM

First, make a 100 minute movie. Then take the 1 million 440 thousand frames, or stills: take each frame, blow it up, print it, put a frame around it, then take all 1 million 440 thousand pictures, hang them in a gallery, consecutively in a line so that the first frame of the movie is the first picture inside the door and the last, last: you get the idea. Then have the people who come in RUN past the 1 million 440 thousand pictures, so that in this way they become both spectator and projector.

EACH THOUGHT EMITS A CAST OF ITSELF

Every roll is a new role
And each shows its truest face
When Yorick's skull is tossed you'll
Reveal your final disguise

Bone against bone they spin
Exposed by a thrust of wrist-lace
Yet Hamlet stripped to his skin
Scolds the players' displays

Don't saw the air when you throw
Don't wince at seven eleven
Whatever odds you're down to now
Will zoom up zero soon

Act Five Scene Five waits
To quietus these words words words
Death itself is just one of the fates
Our dice are rolling towards

SONG TO CHER

you've got too many feathers
on what you're wearing
but you're just sharing what
you're carrying inside
to help you hide
our dying eyes

you've got too few letters
there in your name to show
but like every brevity you
help us live help us give
our day a little stay
before we go

there's too many young
boyfriends in your bio
but that's just jealous jive
and we all know oh
we were never old enough
to be the one you love

there's too much agelessness
in your face and every dress
you wear is less and less
but nothing can replace
what's barely there as
you stride on stage on high

(stanza break)

(all you one-name wonders
sing your numbers
everywhere
you've no discretion in your
expression of the air)

now there's too much cher in
spangled hanging there in
that fixture picture HER
our eyes have all died
our days have gone inside
to find out who you always were

HERITAGE

" . . . here thy generations endeth in accord."

I physically resemble my mother
And father and therefore must have been
Adopted, because on my TV screen
The role-children rarely share a feature
With either parent. The fact they're actors
And I'm not is what makes me misbegot—
Watch that matched world of monitors 2-shot
The mirror daily where I pray these stars

Come: cancel everyone of us whose names
And clans have sundered human unity—
Descend always among daughters or sons
To live still, beyond the Web's trivia games,
Till their faces cloned shape ours. Family.
From android to ape, we'll be Thy reruns.

CURTAIN UP

The last whirling dervish to drop
Beholds transfixed what those who stop
Dancing an instant prior can't:
His veil is pierced by orbs that grant

The properly-spiritual leer
A picture which should inspire fear.
They say the face of God, maybe—
In my case I would probably

Flashback to 1961
Where filmqueen Romy Schneider's gone
Down on co-star Alain Delon
To pose for my holy vision.

They're flung in bed with me between.
See us there: I am their screen.

MYSTERY MOVIE

The business rival, the jealous lover,
the distant heir: once I've guessed
who the murderer is, it's over before
it's over, like life. The detective will
continue to not see the obvious or
else pretend to lack the answers till
his hunch is confirmed: if he's Poirot
or so, he savors his superiority and
holds his gloat over the heads of all
the stupid others: the cast still looks
each suspicious close-up in the eye,
but my attention fades to patience.
Post-intrigue and somewhat bored I
settle back, awaiting the confirmation
of my solution. Then: each clue hangs
abacus-like on the bars I've placed
around it all, safe and cell, confident
the guilty one shall confess to prove
that even I must suffer exoneration
in the executions destined for those
who foresee the end, who linger here
complacent in our deductive wisdom,
reviewing the forensics, the shrewd
sleuth-insights that result in the death
of suspense, the loss of our audience
innocence. Now the soundtrack swells
to leitmotif its list of suspects, each of
whom could have done it if this world
were only perfect, equal in its sharing
of virtue or crime. Sherlocks who solve
the puzzle pre-climax are most to blame
perhaps: are we to show for this lack

of justice, we who jump the gun, who
deny the drawing out of the dilemma,
thrill of the withheld. The unknown.
We who rush too soon to the revelation.
We killjoys who slay its necessary delay.

RETURN (CINEMA)

Down every road that rounds us off with rain
I go though
of course precious
I have lost the way—

Corridors run through movies
to lead me onward to the onward place,
but every time I try

to keep track of that trackshot
I die in clumps beneath its rails.

See the days that drag me down with road.

You stars who shine from the door
of the projector, you holy detours,
where my threshold fails is home
to you. You rule each realm

I ache my grin into skeleton for.

I know your names
Will nickname my name some more.

TRYING TO KEEP THE DIALOGUE GOING

when my hand was cut off
I got worried
but then suddenly
from the shirtcuff flap

slips of paper began to appear
bearing printed lines
for me to speak
when the cues come

now the other actors pay
attention to me
and seem happy
when I respond to them

and so I'm wondering
if it worked this way
with the hand what
should be cut off next

NICOLE KIDMAN

Hates it when her husband Clark Gable
shows his cigars to the whores and grins:
his dimple is a temple full of drunks
who swear at a grease-spot on a saint,
the hushavoice high in their roaring.

It's doormat day at Hollywood Donuts.
The whisper of their hinges wastes my ears;
washed up higher we wait for its lapse.
Tactile, tangible, what else resists
the awakened world I suffer from.

The obsolescence of it is too shining
to blink a mote at unless the eye can
filter out the rest of this instinctual
alarm, my campfires insanely signalling
no end to its vigil. Of course the war

is over I tell her trembling snowpeakable
toes, the Oscar is yours for the height
if only, if only. Night surrenders to her
naked bike. I must steal the clothesline
to make the clothes fit me. Ride, ride, Nic,

take those sacred spoke-wheels veer
for Sunset Beach featuring Tom Cruise
on Serenity and Artifice: The Actor's
Choice. Rant-serenade in dream-demure
my foe-limbs chose this evening's attire.

But awe-while, like a manifesto tossed
into a zoo's mouth, I'm nude too. As if

it would do me any good. Please post
no bills on your tongue. The sky by torches
soars. No tongues allowed her wall says.

*

VANT

First, cover yourself with chameleons.

Then walk down the street.

The one who recognizes you as you is your enemy.

The one who recognizes you as Greta Garbo is your lover.

HOLLYWOOD NIGHTMARE

Soon to be a major mirage, my face—my face
never changes! To look each day in the mirror
is boring as going on location shoots
or signing autographs for my stable
of fans or being typecast in detective
roles. Sigh. Sometimes all I do is sit by my pool

and spazz out until my brain is a black pool
of emptiness, my eyes reruns: until my face
wears the neutral mask of aura a detective
affects. And when I am as blank as a mirror,
as dull, when I sprawl as snoozeful as a stable
full of saviors, I dream: I dream someone shoots

me and he becomes a celebrity. He shoots
me and he gets the house, the swimming pool,
the Andy Warhols, the Rolls, the Porsche, the stable,
the . . . the *lawn* he gets! Christ, it's like divorce. My face!
He gets my face too? He's like a fucking mirror
of me . . . ! Jesus, you'd think some goddam detective

would know it's not me: when I'm a detective
on screen I know who is who. The badguy shoots
the goodguy sometimes but when they hold a mirror
over the goodguy's lips you see a pool
of mist appear and then his pal the co-star's face
looks all relieved. Cut to the hospital: "Stable?"

the doctor smirks, "Yes: his condition is stable.
Of course, with the brainectomy his detective
days are history, uh hunh. His face? His face—
hell, our plastic-surgeon loves a challenge: shoots

these Before and After photos? Great stuff! . . . " The pool
of reporters from the Daily Sun Rhymes Mirror

yawns at the grinning doctor while in the mirror
above my white white bed I maintain a stable
noble absence; my non-being is a pool
of pure mystery—sheer puzzle any detective
would arrest the cursed creator of: I see shoots
of lilac and crocus come bursting from my face

when they nail the mirror on. Oh, no detective
show's as real, as stable, as *my* dream, which—look—shoots
nothing but closeups: face, pool, face, pool, face, pool, face.

VIDLOCK

These movies in common separate us
if we see them as real, as all that may
be salvaged by an image, the screen
blank so it can evolve toward some

higher form of media, a schism
between the eyes perhaps, whose
gap is carefully marginal with grief,
whose stubborn inborn hunger grips

like tolled-out hymns. Like old films.
And yet its website remains as secret
as a bridal veils' graveyard or any
facade acropolis can't penetrate.

Its made for TV trademark's a fad,
a name: one more fatal masquerade.

CASABLANK

The 2 dead moviestars I believed in
embrace, forcing their makeup to
become intimate as a possibility
of channelsurfing past ourselves

or anyone awaiting reunion (all lovers
share a past) while the absence of
their blackandwhite colorized eyes
presents an alternate first-person

which is not nominalist, which preserves
a soupcon of that neoplatonic
void felt by Nazis in the New World
where they've always resumed reign.

(And once history forgets to save fate
let it wait for its own feature; right, future?)

ROMY

Will I crawl beneath my hemline's tombs
to feel in shield with her, blessed sole
by all our subterfuge of sex has shared,
accordance that makes even the curtains
flutter a little less aimlessly in their
illusion of filmy Schneider, Romy spider I
must vent my sheath to be stalled in again;
how her forsaken handful of films are
forced to record our regimen, their words
a slow replacement of thoughts with
vowels, a slow effacement of her co-stars'
dialogue lost below the hurt of her heel,
her tread of line-readings, her face
issuing its bitten shape sheer above our
video lust to assuage the ground she
sunbathes on in Chabrol's *Dirty Hands*,
her tan eery and strapless but note how
the accolades are toppling, the toe-taps
are stepping up the staircase of the last
castle ruled forever by glances who
elude their complicity steeped in seats
tickets bring us to so briefly: so quickly
the endtitles entitle us to exit brushed
by regret we cannot linger in her aura
impetuous-throated, dusk-laden with
sighs most, a hushed singularity of
eyes marking the nose against the mouth,
inscribing the cheekbones on the lidbrow,
dashing the teeth to frozen steppes that
proclaim their princess is deep in dew:
with seep-pores fixation fanclubs galore
garbage from her amours it drops; far

her hair is solo photo, montage-reamed
limn it sinks into mink murmurs of air,
hooded in horror or instantcams or
sheersham clamor of the viewers who
read the marquee feeds that bleed the air
thoroughfare with film and fill culture
name-some wonders dear previews of
each star actor bends personally to hear
confided in constant groans and jeers
on every corner of near needs and trends
they leave us landed here with no amends
no way to leave the queue of this theater
whose opening night our day attends
but what is it it intends to grace us with
one glimpse of the briefest gift of gore
before it extends our ends and lends us
the token brochure for our future loss
of her we had hopes to depend on for
whatever projection of inner terror we
might atone the destined displacement of,
sincere exposure of slo-mo mouths
that moue and move desire one millimeter
closer to its itch-switch, its clicker, since
I can freeze the screen on her grope-gripped
lips, I can etch their gesture frame by frame
with long exhalations of my crotch area
where the remote control seems most at home
in that quare of generation, wombwarmth rooting
its phallic exteriorization of time's finger on
the TV-trigger tracing a linear content in that
c-groin, that piss-p, that cup we call lap, where
confident hands can grope up the buttons
to catch even the Olivier-est replay tapping
his ribcage for a nebulous savage while

aches of FX construct their tiers on colloseum
liontamers lacking cameras as elsewhere
focus the Empire examines each fingered
footprint led backward clones hop the gap
trapped in a pit only alliteration can free him from,
faux hero till a sulk her silk gaze roams over
the amazed consternation of the crowd, bored
background zooms, the thumbs-down
that comes on cue and slackens its mode
location daily salvation, fierce genitals surround
the atrium with aspects aversions apertures—
The apparatus is complete, is more than home
since Rome is Romy minus her wolf-son,
her fourteen-year-old boy lies impaled on
the spears of the fence the mansion railings
that guard her from us the fans who want to crush
her distance into dreams no limit: and yet
no exalted Presence alone can compensate
our lack of, ergo She must be sacrificed She
should suffer the immolation saints like us
are assigned to, madonna-mournful must
bear the cross the stats of the boxoffice in
a Chanel shift, a Dior drape, a Balmain bare
and parade Cinecitta to a traipse as hourly
her skins pass on a bus with ads for sequels
whose dread achieved empathies advocate
pain that strands its hands in applause and
then to go whole-whore it sights the hostile
sub glamor features expressed in nearer
nervedowns known as time: it spikes her son,
it kills her too age 43 OD heart attack svelte
no stuntdouble can mime end clutch self close
pinned young legend crumple bound to kiss
the sign we seek. Approaching the cinemapolis

from sea we see that in its skyline of stars
the tallest is hers: wink-tips this capital with
reign and rule, insane, pic-naked Empress
pale-annexed, porned-over by pore fingers
rupture suppurating gloved Vatican hands,
oh archived name demolishing the gone,
undressed in the interest of our purity's hell,
cat-of-no-lives but ours; and shifting if
she can that one: heel to her fate she falls.
1958, 20 years old, look, she lifts it all:
fame career life: scenes marks lines: runthrough
daily it mates no one but her and smirks at
first lover Alain Delon, her co-, her consort.

NIGHT AND THE NAKED

(to RN)

The filmfestival swept beyond us as we kissed
Oh roundrobin panel where we went goodbye
Since then the weight (savored) of noncoincidence
As if each lightningbolt were secretly aimed at

A matchstick but were we ever on target as that
Whenever we meet now in the bar part or the
Restaurant part or the video part or the disco
Part or the atrium of this night I fear our parts our

Roles I mean because what if we you and me
Were cast to closeup the scene the street the strobe
Stabs of rain frying our profiles for future ref

Literals straight off a wanted poster for Janus
Because or would we just stand there thunderfucked
Trying to remember our name ends in applause

TYPE-CAST

Of course I refused all roles until
they offered me the lead
in "The Co-Star Killer"

*

THE DAILY ROUNDS

I keep a TV monitor on my chest
so that all who approach me
can see themselves
and respond appropriately.

PERFORMANCE-ART PIECE

First she slides a banana up my ass
almost but not quite all the way in
then deftly with a knife she slices
the rindtip that extrudes and when

the pithsweet meatus shows its white
cusp like a pearl between the moue
of a romeo in a cameo says Right
Hold it Okay now squeeze real slow

as she squats and eats the ivory
flesh emerging and smearing fused
her red lispberries while the yellow

skin remains within me to be used
as a kind of condom for the dildo
she has to ram in and out artfully.

COCTEAU'S STARS IMPORTUNED

Cocteau's stars are bored by the love
of a sort of wince-animal,
who's failed throughout his life no less
to stretch a pimple into a profile.

Pipes ache to anchor in those teeth—
a sail, a horsestall, a fireplace
all beg to go backdrop, to gaze
agonized at your white spines.

Pruned against mirror, I imagine
laundering such muse, laving such sheets:
Oh simul-semen! kill this puny poem,

whose publication has been timed
to coincide with the release of
my latest film, *Fetish Sans Flesh*.

AFTER COCTEAU'S *ORPHEUS*

These bright glass shards we walk upon
reflect the past too slowly so we
must quicken our step to keep pace
and rush to meet the bloody footprints

that tablet-trace our progress across
the iced sperm of this idle span
called home past all of which we come
dampseconds after I kiss your sole.

Montage is shown the same, screen-first;
then, if struck by a vast unseen pin,
pray to lay down more veins that pour.

The spotless splinter of its tongue
creates no threshold from the toe-mold
this shattered mirror alone can enter.

OEDIPUS RIDDLED (heptasyllabics)

the course of his crime unfolds
each time at a blind crossroads
whose four legs forever show
less murderous ways to go
but every young man must opt
to stand his ground and stay stopped
so to prove unmoved he waits
daily till he demonstrates
to the empty thoroughfare
how brave how bold how strong there
beneath noon's knelled prophecies
bound to meet all enemies
on his own two feet alone
or has he halted hearing
the stepsound of his unknown
father's cane tap tap nearing

SUDDEN DEPARTURE

A sudden raisinstorm broke
Raisins falling everywhere pellmell.
The occasion uniqued my head, I thought
If this can happen raisins raining
Upon persons paining why I can leave anytime
Without feeling shame.

But, all the same,
Before taking off, some vestigial guilt or other
Made me at least get up
Before some public gathering or other
A departing oration:

Druthers, I am going now.
Druthers, I tried to love you
Though you always made me choose
Between you, you, and you. Oh my druthers,

Goodbye. I have my reasons.

Did he say RAISINS?
No: reasons.
Oh; I just wondered,
What with the weather and all.

CRAFT

lay the tragic mask
atop the comic mask

snip out the parts
where they don't match

then take this overlap
make a third mask

a superfluous mask
a mask of excess

a mask that is useless
that has no purpose

unless of course it is
the appropriate one

to be placed on both
your first and final face

PORNOPUNCHINELLO

I lack the pleasure to claim remorse
Is at my loins earning its pariah's name
From me who may have kissed a worm or worse
In my time aspiring to that acme shame

Unless shame is a sense of having shirked
Refused what love dangled just above me
All those tantalus chances for lust were jerked
Out of reach but not by fate's absurd pulley

My own hands gangling in the back somewhere
Supported those puppets' pulp character

Tame filmstars lame mimes where are your faces
Enduring still your enticements I turn
And twist until you've all lost your places
Prompter-perfect I but you you never learn

APPEARING NIGHTLY

Spotlit—assisted in mid
prestidigitation by the wind—
I wield a shishkebob of heads
whose tongues hang swaying,
saying what the wand wants.

I point out the birthmarks
of alias and conjure the plethora
that sugars our footprints
and dusts the sunset—
that ancestral-tao, that benefice

bane, that grim grass which
overgrows each reach, each
alms our road groped toward.
Here is the majesty and moss
of another grasp. Another loss.

Here is the world, exiled.
Its tidal stage-curtains close
or open, it grows or wanes,
its actors lose and gain
their personae per the moon.

GRANT PROPOSAL (Category: Performance Arts)

I want to go out each day at noon and stand
On top of our Capitol's highest highrise,
Where aircurrents stack, where storms restore themselves,
Where the crossroads of sky are swept by radar,

Up there, buffeted, stand, cupping in my hands
A gleam of gold-dust, a handful of gold-dust
Doled out to me each day by our State, by you
The modest mandarins of its Arts Council,

Trustees all, you whose grace I must stand for there
And being thus empowered begin to pour
The gold-dust back and forth, pour it in sifts from

Hand to hand until the wind has left my palms
Bare, please note that length of project will vary
Daily, at noon, and not one grain remains.

Note:
Line 2: Capitol with an 'o'—meaning "the citadel of government" (OED), its cloistered towers, atop the tallest of which the applicant desires to venture. Line 6: maybe "gleam" should be "flash"? I associate the former with earth, the latter, sky. "In the things that arise [buildings or structures of any sort], earth is present as the sheltering agent," Heidegger avers in 'The Origin of the Work of Art.' Hendecasyllabics, with a variant last line.

NO-ACT PLAY

I'm sitting alone in my rented room.

A door knocks at the door.

I don't answer.

It goes away.

Later I leave the room, and go to my
crummy job.

The door returns, and knocks again.

It is admitted.

ACTORS: THE DENOUEMENT

After each performance comes catharsis
as one more audience member is sewn
into the hem of the theater curtain;
some day it will sway too heavy to raise:

on that evening the play will not begin—
until such time our continual clamor
minds the same drama again and again,
less for its marquee-names than the encore

when one of us, us groundlings, us non-stars
gets knit into the huge velvet stagedrop—
a climax cheered, though we're still here to see

the final show, to witness what occurs
the night our hem-mates' weight puts a stop
to this farce. Will they be freed then? Will we?

OR NOT TO BE

Not Hamlet but his shadow
shows the clarity of performance—
see how brilliantly it holds its stance,
soliloquy bold and brando.

But then of course it is like all
such primadonnas, liable
to be much too much dependent upon
its prompter, the sun.

*

AUDIENCE

Murderous the fist
of their paws condemns
us all to die of applause:
for this circus minimus
even Coriolanus must
nurse and gnaw and showcase
his scars when the next
closeup comes.

THE END

Pain has petrified the threshold.
—Trakl

A threshold is everything that can be
seen in the space of the endurance of
our openness: thus at the conclusion
of *The Searchers* John Wayne is framed never

to return and forced to spur himself, to
escape always the outward-gazing-lust
of that thrust doorway toward the horizon
or so we guess because the door shuts and

cuts him off before he attains it: exit
is lost and we who had followed his flight
from the intimacy of this interior, we
must remain here minus our male-myth-ranger,

and must domestically cry for his exile
while the credits crawl across their reelsill.

GOING MY WAY

The one boy who died of polio
in our orphanage in the early
1950s was such an important
icon that even now I remember
his favorite movie since that's
what we do with the famous,
retain some anomalous fact
that quiets them in our mind.
We, I say, but was it everyone—
did all of us shed that kid: did
a thousand child incarcerates
replace his face-and-name with
an actor's mask and cast it as
star of the waste disease whose
cause was always doubt, germ
caught perhaps from local lakes
prohibited. Who thought of him
those summers we could not
swim until a vaccine came, too
late to amend lackwarm days,
to change our fate/our film to his.
That movie—"Going My Way"
featuring Bing Crosby as a young
priest, kindly, loveable, unreal—
Tommy, Jimmy, whatever he
was called, he probably knows
still by still now every camera
angle and closeup, every cut
we living are allowed to forget.

VAGUE CONSOLES

This vista often awarded John Ford his rest.
Myself, scenery has a lack of I (emphasis).
And haven't we killed all the Indians yet?
In a stagecoach—made of sagebrush, no doubt—,

I would gauche-out like a tumbleweed at a sockhop.
Yo, watch it roll across the old gym-floor, loboto
Basketball: then, toed by foetid teens, fall,
Slo-mo, as though some flair for the vague consoles—

Oh lips refusing their tongues' rights, bodies
Trying to put down the peaceful demands of
Their genitalia . . . yes everything looks better shot

Through John Wayne's hurt. The sky the way it mattes—
The desert. A lone rider, whose moral I await.
The crotches arranging themselves for death.

UNDERSTUDY (WAGNERIAN)

In my dream
I was the diva

I stood there
my flat chest flapping
breathless with
a scales nailed
to my nipples

mistakenly begging
everybody in
the audience
to pile all their tragedy
on one pan

comedy
on the other

SUMMER ACTION FEATURES

Can I kiss this cinema's utter pittedness.

Moviescreen, you hype of hygiene, I love
to see a face lace its venom with mine.

When the hero has far too many minotaur scars,
the creases in my palms turn over and nap.

Archimedes revised: if I sink far enough
into the film, the law of displacement
should bring to the surface my truest self.

Then the blow-ups come on cue. The ingenue
glows like the sky: we both gnaw raw halo.

God knows I know each bomb is a mobile
some sculptor has failed ineptly to keep aloft.

Even I am losing my innocent twitter balance,
though statistically I will die eating purse soup.

MERRY - NO - ROUND

The wooden horses
are tired of their courses

and plead from head to hoof
to be fed to a stove—

In leaping lunging flames
they'd rise again, flared manes

snapping like chains behind them.
The smoke would not blind them

as do these children's hands:
beyond our cruel commands

the fire will free them then
as once the artisan when

out of the tree they
were nagged to this neigh.

PERSONALLY

I saw this screenlegend guest on TV
promoting the need for everybody
inbetween plugs for their latest movie
to help out like with our ecology

small daily acts each of us personally
just little things we can do at home, one
example is don't let the water run
hey people! ya'know? when you brush your teeth?

Sometimes I remember that admonition,
sometimes after meals I'll grumble beneath
the bristles, under frothy gums and lips:

Hey filmstar! love your save-the-planet tips,—
and hey, look: my faucet's off, not on—see?—
the least you could do is come fuck me.

from STAGE PORTRAITS

*

the tragedian
holds an onion
up to his ear
hoping to hear
those teardrops
those sobstops
the audience
failed to evince

*

with breasts the size
of sacrificed piglets
the diva gets
her dues or dies

so even the footlights
soar upward in flights
bravura
to augment her aura

and each night we spark
our handdarks
together
to adore her

by now you must know
that the whole
show depends
on her demands

*

TO RIPLEY (*Alien 1-4*)

Always your face like a space
(Destination: beautiful) ship
Empties its mote of closeup trace
Down screens that blink blank blip

Somewhere between countdown
And coma time is a line
Where waking centuries often
Drained against that measure may find

All blood redshifts (direction: west)
Until film can clone one sun
With stars both whole and gone

Attending every sequel
We pray for an intent equal
To our interest

MOVIE-Q's

*

Ben Lyons was typically blunt
in *I Cover the Waterfront*—
his cute co-star Claudette Colbert
could have frenched it: 'Ze waterfront, I co-vair.'

*

Attack of the 50 Foot Woman
is not a film appeals to everyone—
but I, I like the way it feels, I guess,
to have a whole town look up my dress.

*

Although by gorgeous Gene Tierney
he was loved, and loved sincerely,
Richard Widmark proved pretty shitty.
The flick? *Night and the City*.

*

Those Incredibly Strange Creatures Who
Stopped Living and Became Mixed-up Zombies blew
my mind, man. Like wow! (—Was I crazy? Was I sick?
Maybe I shouldn't have watched it through that Thai-stick.)

*

Basic Instinct 2 avoids the great esthetic error of the first one
by not having any Moviestars appear but the sheer Sharon:
its other no-name actors fade to shadows in this Dantean
vision of the heavenly ("Eat me!") Stone alone up there on the screen.

*

I know Jack Nicholson played a cameo—
and Elton John played a song or so—
and Ann-Margaret played his mommy—
but *who* the hell else was in *Tommy*?

*

How many of you gazeekoids went yumyum
Watching that transmutated geek Jeff Goldblum
Rip off his own ear and eat it? *The Fly* was great!
(And if he'd unzipped his fly, ripped *that* off, and ate?)

*

Oh sight that might have made an atheist of God,
seeing the screenwriter-producer-star of *Panther Squad*
—Sybil Danning, auteur divine—opt to not go topless!
(Even John the Baptist 'd put it on his flop-list.)

*

Where Garbo got the great John Barrymore
To play the part of her perfect paramour,
Poor Joan Crawford was stuck with brother Lionel:
Life is c'est la vie at der *Grand Hotel.*

*

It's a crime shame that that scene where
Sean Penn tied his wife Madonna to a chair
and then put on her dress and licked her thighs
got like totally cut out of *Shanghai Surprise*.

COVER STORIES

Exchanging X's in the form of kisses,
Spies forbidden to know the codes they pass,
Each pretends for the moment these mysteries
Outweigh all allegiance they owe the past.

A space where fingertips cease to explore space,
A safehouse right for private armistice,
The flesh they bared betrays them both at last.
Dawn is distance in such askance allies.

As false passports must wear a true likeness,
These tradecraft made-in-bed IDs are not
The ones that will have to be borne once more

Come morning's normal enemy status
Which would have killed to foil the turncoat plot
They laid here, those traitors worth dying for.

Note:
Based of course on the generic love scene
in almost every spy opus I've ever seen.

CO-STARRING OSCAR WILDE AS MADAME SOSOSTRIS

White: white as a tablecloth that moonlights as a bride
For the unborn you—appeared—or a waterfall
Which leans against another waterfall (your hair).
My beeper slave of lost voices barked: *what?*

While the cup that knelt to summer burst; I tried
To garden the fireplace and farm the doormat
But proto-frog-photos of you grew inside me there,
Groping with bare hands of flood my gnarlgargoyle.

Deeper than my beeper you knew; sibyled guesses.
And yet . . . 'misery is proximity.' Oh
The seance was as far as possible tuxedoes.

Aftermath is a mouth. Speaks. Speaks? Yes, but less as
Flesh than what; yak mask for that old fop Apollo?
The god retrieves his gloves and, feigning to go, goes.

See note next page.

ENDLESS EVENING: MY LIFE AT IL VITTORIALE

For caught in those Aug-Sept hours what day can
Break this slang of glass whose illustration
Of flotsam sampling our poison's portion of calm
Lives long the lament we swore applause by.

With faster than flashbacks in a promo for
Memory to lie lymph along these hits of hope
And through each thought we just dawned on interrupt
Poses no soprano care counterfeit or water yet.

As though it alone the profile were wielded up
To shield the face against that bad vocable our own
Throws veils another pale divulge of oh mise en moon.

Musingly to see a bed on fire in a huge room
Otherwise empty while one at a time
White sheets float down from somewhere onto the flames.

Note:
Il Vittoriale, D'Annunzio's retirement estate.
Siempre Sera . . .

Note for this edition:
Wilde and D'Annunzio, two master playwrights whose lives
were often as theatrical as their works.

SEFFI'S BLUES

every year the same
they've forgot my name
I take some time away
and when I'm back in May
it's like I never was
all my former buzz
my résumé my respect
where's my endorsements
they treat me worse
than a fatality-show reject
didn't I have a series
didn't I star once
special guest appearance
Sharon Stone as Ceres
but looky here is
this my career this limbo
where'd it all go
I want my audition
I want my youtube hit on
but no it's always no
can't even get a video
or a pilot slot
or a Phil Spector shot
I used to be lah-de hot
now look at this wan
subterrene skin
this bone I'm in
god Dis I'm damned
Angelina can tan
but the sun won't bide
Brad Hades' bride
whitened-hide I stride

past the poppin'-rot-zi
it's me they can not see
I'm fade to the shades
I read the trades
I was Liz and Cher
but the Biz says where
so please don't tell
TMZ I'm back from hell
stale out of rehab
for a while until
I feel that heel-jab
fang again this Fall
that icky-phallic python
is waitin' to writhe-on
when my rerun begins
and my comeback ends
he'll fuck me Paris Hilton
and lay me Lethe Lohan
till I'm gone for rotten
a hasbeen-to-be
signed Persephone
PS don't 'lert the media
don't IM your TV
don't earth to Mom
she cursed the sitcom
I died on and I agree

(DESIRE) THREADBARE (DESIRES)

The light lay in shreds across the bed,
only your waking could make it whole;
resuming its costume of day, its role
that seems to overnight get ragged—

Fate latent as weights in theater
curtainhems, what soul is sewn here
to be rung down at last, divested
of these disguises. But if we are

bared by such cloth as cries in this
lament for the sun's fragility,
would I dare now to shake you astir—

to drape over you my own shadow, whose
myth-ex-machina remains all mine,
mine, and therefore torn from yours.

SCENARIO

I am in love of old with your voice
the one fading into its clones sighed,
the voice in love of old replied
a delayed sense of one attends me:
if actors learn each role with scissors
repeating its rip across the script—
I am in love of old but it is hard to
rehearse our parts when they occur
snipped along the dialogue's errata
yet love of old will show its face
that text of frequent halts our ways exalt;
they flood the stage to see the movie
memory dreams but what film will fill
or ford its depth though death is
imminent in love of old and wings
to kill those sky traceries that show
no stage can hold the shapes that cut
catty the paper where these apes appear
or keep its stills in sequence when
curtain-askance your eye I ascend.

PRISCILLA, or THE MARVELS OF ENGINEERING
(A Fatal Fable)

A "Swingles Only" Cruise to souths tour on the
S.S. Priscilla: parties, spurtive romances, confided
Antiperspirants, quickchange partners. Suddenly
3rd day poolside blank, sun
Ouch I meet up a daze dish somehow ain't
Crossed my eyes' equator yet: she preened
To have appeared out of that presumptuous
Nowhere our hoarse soggy captain's
Nailed in place on his compass: in all the swarmy sticky
Nightlong pairings off, secret lifeboat
Drill assignations, where did you come from
I offfered haven't laid uh eyes you behind musta been blind. Oh
I've been around she said, I've seen you operating
That blonde last night, har, har, har.
Flattered, I introduced my name's Bill. Priscilla.
—As in S.S.? We laughed over the coincidence,
Wringing fragile martini chill stems all
Around us similar neo couples were
Gangplanking each other, coral lounge dusk deck.
Dinner, we promised. Then the moviedance,
Then . . . ? Our eyebrows guessed "The night?"
Separating to change, we hugged all sprinkly
But at table that P.M. I stained her napkin but
She didn't show up went looking for wasn't at the dance
Either. Hmmpf, not on deck—where could she
Be? I asked all the other cats and chicks
Where the hell's Priscilla? describing her. No way
Man ain't never seen no piece like that since we
Ask the purser—man you sure? Tete
A tete sure, I replied. The purser!
I'll get her cabin number, she might not be feeling
Oh boy I didn't inadvertantly slip a torpedo into her drink that
Stud I scored from said they work every,
The purser. But no senor

There is no Priscilla everywhere listed amongs
The passenger list I'm jorry. The boat—she
Is S.S. Priscilla? he added helpfully, concerned, as though I
  were nutlong no
No you nit-tit—she has to be on look I met her this
Safternoon in the "Cock 'N' Tail" Lounge. Jorry
Is no let me have that thing here on the passenger look for
  jourselve.
Damn! she ain't on it
A stowaway hunh
That's even better
I'LL get her
She can't escape what's
Gonna do—hide in the ocean?
But
Finally, frustrato, angry not even drunk after no
Go searching all night, at sailor's-dawn I slunk to my cabin and
Guess who I found the bitch all tucked up in that little cute-ass
Type beds they have Priscilla!
I hissed. Come to bunk
She swelled. But you, you aren't . . .
Aren't what, know whatcha 're crazy dam-
Shh let's love she swayed. Okay: I'm game. 'S bout time. So we
Start fucking but, her movements were too calm
And rocking, elusive as chase in tune with the ship's
Wash on the waves. Gentle, coaxing, mocking-
Musky, chromosome zoney, internal
As sea. It was eerie
The ex of it cited
Frightened me. My Y shot up: I began
Fug and fury ramming, I urged
Harsh thrash strokes, I hard
To hurt her with my penis, I remembered
That Norman Mailer story where he calls his "The
Avenger" I was pissed, make me
Frantic look all over the goddamn
Ship you cunt slammed all my spite ptooey

Into her. And then, and then . . . instantly . . .
Something . . . all I know is I came the split
I hit the water. I was drowned, of course,
In the famous shipwreck. The famous shipwreck
You remember
It was in all the TV—
Shots of it sunk in shallow clear just
Off an atoll. And everyone aboard was lost, adios,
Unusual or not unusual in these cases. But no one
Nobody could figure out how
The S.S. Whatshername had
Gotten all those great big gaping holes
Ripped, slashed, torn in her hull nor
What caused this deadfall rupture, the grievous eely capsizing.

Couldn't a been a iceberg
That
        far
                south.

Note:
The movie I made from this was rejected by all Festivals, cinepurists objected to its cross-fate wedding of two related genres, the shipboard romance and the shipwreck flick: the former ends in fornication which here brings on the latter's climax: each time Tab Hunter thrusts into Dorothy Malone's loins another great gaping hole is ripped in the ship's hull. Orgasm occurs when the ocean collapses together gasping above its regained void.

I HAVE

have you ever tried to apply makeup
to a teardrop
under kliegwater

floodlit
and the starlet
you're trying to get fit

for the premiere
is all fidget
and praying her

tit-tape stays on
and you have to keep saying
stand still hon

or else'll
it'll run

THE NEVE VILLANELLE

He was a Montague and she was a Capulet
yet no feuding families threw them in thwart—
it wasn't that that stopped Romeo and Juliet

from Act Five Scene Fiving it on their first date:
no, it was that Neve Campbell that left them reft-heart—
It was Neve Montague and Neve Capulet

they wrote on their carnal diaries' most intimate
page: every time they tried to kiss they'd start
to Neve-itate, and that stopped Romeo and Juliet

from making out further. Neve made them hot
but not for each other. They'd just sit there in flirt
gone faux at the Montague or the Capulet

manse and navigate some Neve-or-die site
and ram *Scream 1/2/3* up the DVD insert—
that comely Campbell stopped Romeo and Juliet

from consummating their teen-tragic fate:
and even when she did indie roles for her art
they'd still curse the Montague and Capulet

DNA that kept their lives so punked, so pre-set:
Why can't we be Neve? Why can't we clone her part?
Having to stay a human Montague/Capulet
stopped them from loving Romeo and Juliet.

TCM BLUES

I can't go far
I can't go free
although I am a star
everywhere I move is
right there (see me?)
on Turner Classic Movies

Mad scene cued for Oscar
my head looms closeup size
gosh I feel so lost there
trapped in celluloid
I collide inside with eyes
I can't escape them
on TCM

No one under 85
remembers my name
that's the forget-its the fuck-its of fame
the goodies and the groovies
why am I still alive
on Turner Classic Movies

I wish they'd forget me
and let me rot in peace
why the hell they have to show
all the B's that Louis B made me
get on my knees for I don't know

Silents mute me
Garbo suits me
Bogie shoots me
Bette boots me

out the door
then comes the War
Coop salutes me
Film Noir
convolutes me
I'm ready for more
but time and TV executes me

My birthday they unvault me
popcorn butter and salt me
their experts all exalt me
for each posthumous premiere
of the pics I wish would disappear
once a year like Dracula I up and rear
from my mausoleum here
at lovely Forest Lawn
my death goes on and on and on
like boring Norma Shearer
even though I look so young
I just hate how they approve me
on Turner Classic Movies

I should have stayed on the Stage
my Chekov Ibsen defined the Age
I was the rage with Page One raves
all Hollywood ever saw was my Beauty
I told Jack Warner Go ahead Sue me
I don't need the movies
screw you you studio enslavers
I'm off to Hedda Gabler's

The gangsters and the crooners
the roughies and the smoothies
the dames who came from nowhere

in their furs and rubies
it's Turner Classic Movies

The chippies from the chorus
do their Queens and Madame Boovrys
the hams who knew their Hamlet
are clowns and falldown boobies
the teens who grew up meanies
the Garlands and the Rooneys
come join the ingenues and juvies
on Turner Classic Movies

Producers used me
directors abused me
my co-stars co-screwed me so
please don't behoove me
don't Catherine Deneuve me
all you SOB's just leave me let me go
all you Mickeys and you Goofys
you hasbeens and newbies
12-step friends and floozies
don't try to sob-and-soothe me
don't emote and quote you love me
you really really love to view me
on Turner Classic Movies

(fadeout:)
My flicks all used to slay em
in the big towns and the boonies
but now they only play em
on Turner Classic Movies

DEMISE

Not enough moviestars—

Why not one for each of us!

Until then every film we attend mocks us with its excess

of cuts and cameras, when we know what it lacks.

Until then, their sparse

disparity disconsolates us, we treasure

down each glimpse of that rumored screencomer,

that cinemanque who roams the scenic wilds around this premiere

as it lies dying here,

as it flashes flickers out its tiny faltering campfire

of squeals and smiles.

REDCARPET STARLETS

All shadows dream of facing klieg—the urge—
to sag magnificent in staged wattage—

that fire which squints all sight, see-dense hive—

eyes cubed to one would seethe like bees
—only the moon can tongue such honeys,

or unisex models whose hair is being sucked
into their navels for a rote secondum of time.

Seized via dimples—calf-loined by tan-tucks—
their taut skin tours the pound-sun (beadbrilliantined)

down foreheads in a stream of them shines.

Touch Connors and Race Gentry attend them—

Where dustweevils fight the air they zoom
sheepish desires or soughcomb for a kiss.

The Premiere can shine no more than this.

Note:
Touch Connors and Race Gentry: male starlets of the 1950s.
Fourth stanza: this image seems to have come from a Dorothea Tanning painting.

POEM NOIR

(Braille Balls)
Angry at my wife I drove out to our
Cottage by the lake. Around 1 AM a March shower
Began to fall and when I went out on the porch
To see it I saw a young man lurch
Into the lake with all his clothes on. There
Was nobody else around, the other cottages were
Dark, as was mine. He kept walking straight out
And soon the water was over his head. I shout-
Ed but he obviously didn't hear. He was trying
To drown himself! So I swam out and grabbed him. Sighing,
I resuscitated him. He lay on our bed
Smiling. Thanks a lot but no thanks, he said.
Then he convinced me that no matter what I did
He was going to commit suicide.
I had an idea: Does it make any difference how
You do it? I asked him. No, he replied,
What do you mean. Well, what about the electric

(I Want My Friends In Woody Lots, With French Toast Up
Their Nostrils)
Chair? Would you care if it was that? No,
He said. Well I'll send ten thousand dollars
To anyone you cite, if you'll kill my wife and
Go to the electric chair for it. Yes,
He said, I'll pretend to be a burglar, kill her, then get
Caught. Send the ten grand to N, who rejected me. She'll
Feel sorrier then when I'm dead. He grinned. I
Said, Great. The next night I slipped
My wife 2 sleeping-pills then drove to my brother's
To try to establish an alibi but he got drunk,
Passed out so that was no go—damn.
When I got home I went right to my wife's room where
I found her snoring. What the hell, I said. Then
The phone rang. It was my brother,

He said someone had murdered our father. Father!
I said. A hectic day followed. Police, the tax
Lawyers, not to mention, my worthless alibi.
Finally that night I sat up late waiting for the guy

(Eel-tripled Eyes and Freezing Initials)
Who was supposed to murder my wife. The phone rang. My
Brother had been killed! I was chief suspect
Since I inherited the family millions. Wake up, wake up,
I shook my wife, but the 3 sleeping-pills etcetera.
The police followed me all the next day
But I slipped them. They didn't know I was hitting all the joints
To try and find that young drown man. We
Had a few things to discuss: That night
Down by the deserted docks we fought.
I was slugged into the river and I drowned.
No-one ever saw him. When they found
My body the coroner ruled suicide over remorse at my
  terrible crimes.
He had done the murders but I got the blame.
My wife got all the money, and married him.

Note:
When I made the film of this poem I changed the ending: following Hitchcock's example in *Vertigo*, I added a flashback 2/3rds of the way through—in which the young drown man (Tab Hunter) reveals her husband's scheme to the wife (Dorothy Malone): they then plan the other murders; the conspiracy inspires them to sex of course. Later after the husband (Rex Reason) is arrested, rich soon-to-be-widow Dot jets off to Acapulco, up into a penthouse suite where Tab, who had earlier mysteriously vanished, welcomes her with open sheets and champagne to celebrate their successful plot . . . Next morning they breakfast on the sunny balcony overlooking a swimmingpool; she goes in to take a shower, she leaves him gazing down at 20 storeys: she comes back naked with a turban towel on but he's nowhere there: she hears distant screams which draw her to the balcony railing where she leans over zoomshot to see his dark-robed body sprawled dead on the bottom of the pool below. Then she hears knocks and voices at the door: "It's the police, Mrs Reason . . . We have some questions for you." The End.

(MURAL) (MONDO) (NULFRESCO)

In Shakespeare's *Last Supper* the
disciples (you, me, all of us here)
are depicted seated alongside where
He stands at mid-table and grins
down like an MC at our expressions—
are we shown, the goblets gleaming,
gloating as they goad us on to toast
the centrality of this spokesperson,
the notional character whereby
everyone has been sketched vis-à-vis
the honoree we can only eulogize,
dependent as we are on His
moodswings. Astonished, confused
by the ultra ups and downs of manic
means, now we watch, we lean, we pout
(the whole propitiatory repertoire)
worried about our survival, inert
(like a frozen rictus facing its fate)
unless depression drafts and draws
us forth the extempore pose, myth,
puppetary projection, limned mobilary
mosaic that apes some drab-escapist
syndrome, imagination. Which is why
each evening we pray for a chance
to cross the ditch-penny distances
between the footlights and the fear,
vowing to allow each guise of role
to kill us, to raise us from the dust, to
guide us like magi toward summons,
obediently steered by the stock star
the marquee, believing our need—
such faith could pass those deserts

of farce to find this upper room.
Sensing the inn beneath us seethe
with indifference with doubt, we
concentrate harder on His remarks
and jokes, trying to make up for all
the audiences who've failed this test.
Never quite reassured by any overt
wink of His assessing eyes into
our ranks (are any of us missing—
was castcall taken?), we keen forward,
eager for our cues, nervous knowing
that if there is error here, at a signal
the maitre d' will find replacements
for this testimonial "Eucha-Roast"
from the rabble stabled downstairs
where the tavern yawns into its beer.
Life is rescue from such anonymity.
Their situation is death, is subject—
those groundlings can never guess
how much it crowns to end up here,
costume-chosen, endowed by makeup
with certitude, form, identity—
Who wouldn't be jealous to know
just how blessed we fictions are!
And yet every member of our
Dramatis Personae wonders if s/he
got jotted into life as whimsically
as Emperors choose sacrificial
victims, as any Divine Ruler or
Hollywood Player and whether
with a fingerflick Hamlet Portia Timon
erased, gone, again. This banquet—
how many have we attended like it?
Daily we wait like napkins to get

opened, held to the face like a mask,
stained and used then tossed aside
like paper towels, paper disposables,
paper identities (similies/metaphors)—
like the paper whose headlines fade
around our names/our fame. Our bits
done, our pieces recited, oh it's bits
alright, it's pieces it crumbles into,
and yet how avowingly we cry, foils
corrupted by one front-row cough.
Exit as trash, as avid kleenex exiled
in a breath to the canteen of lost
turns, the greenroom of oblivion.
Now if there were respite in such
neglect, a grace period with no need
to perform, but both in the wings and
on one's caught, regardless of what's
true. Far, near, (hall or gallery) that
mendicant theater is pursuant always,
lugging and luring its wares:
wherever we are, wherever *here* is
is also an entrance, a set of false steps,
(bright-lit pratfall-pit) a trap for fools,
a stooges' cage, every scrim and apron
prinked with sham, props, champagne
buckets doffing their caps in fealty—
Even the proscenium's subservient
arch bows and begs a platform for
actors trumpeting loft-aired routines,
voluminous effusions or, what's worse,
kingly-haired creatures washing
the feet of their inferiors, sudsy
obsequious declamatory eruptions
filled with the rehearsed lava of

bold slaves, the bald brimmings
of an improperly-public humility
(unlike the servant who never spills
his waiting master's entree except
in the pantry when there is no-one
to witness his extravagant remorse)—
All these openly-imploring apertures,
these theme-cut bubblings-up, paeans,
(akin to lame critics' acclamations)
would crack like a laughtrack at
that imposture, that pastiche, applause:
who'd pity these pathetic devotees,
advocates haunted by nothingness,
by that same humanhood to whom
white placecards validate each plate.
Who sat us here? (Athwart this portrait
the descending order of our dinner
ranks auditions more disdain,
every hors d'oeuvre daubed with scorn)—
In our state, our omnipresence,
to which can we aspire? Sometimes
we think: if only there were Someone
somewhere, somehow, though of course
that's impossible: Someone outside
this frame—an absent self, a spectator
vivid at duress, who can feel
the real joy and pain we mime—
who sees the sun setting out there now,
the approach of a nighttime unlike
our curtain: Someone who lacks
the judas window wherein we acolytes
recognize ourselves, the betrayal
portal we have all portrayed so
plausibly it has at last retained us,

replaced us with stainedglass.
(Through which, on rare occasions,
that said Someone fills us with light,
illuminates us.)—Overcome, undone,
we feel ourselves vanish, we dwindle
to a painted panel. We fade, we die.
His stasis renders us too slenderly.
Or is this endless attendance
the promised purgation, the shedding
of every emotion, every weight?
Is it gain, this loss, this usurped,
staged starving, this repast-of-reruns
upon a menu whose full-promised
delicacies remain a manna dream,
backdrop glamour (milk-and-honey)
a feastless Eden, a heaven hunger's
expelled whole from. Why aren't we
at home here, in this plenty, this
supernal supper—why this finicky
desire to avoid the silverware, the knife
paler (because it reflects us) than
the poor fork that renews whose flesh
and encores veins across each dish
until its unction-urged tines impale
spearlike and nail the cacodaemon
that shall huzzah hail our Hostmaster . . .
See: the chair He occupied is empty—
expecting the miracle or bloodcrime
through which all of us must assume
His part, the mummers-meal, the sealed
communion. Bard bread, scene wine,
unyield your transubstantiations:
beyond that superceded throne
lies the utter ubiquity of the known.

And so, viva, bravo, boffo, olé,
so each paraclete's performance moves us.
Cheers! echoes the pledge, promiscuous
each voice ID's the oath. The mic
on the dais quivers, shook by our cry,
sole intercessor of this ceremony.

CONTINUOUS SHOWINGS

The days all drawn to December
can't remember their own
though every shopwindow offers
24 hour plus. It is precisely this
excess of time, its hyperhoopla
extolled by even the smallest streets,
its torturous emporia, tedium
temples that fly their boxoffice flag
higher each weekend, or towers
with clocks that would love to stick
their hands like neckticktockties
down into the traffic, that's the stuff
that stabs me in stride. No wonder

I run to take cover before the FX
kick in, witness en masse to those
of us who crouch in our pockets
trying to conceal the serial killer
zapcams we use to chop ourselves up
for camouflage, face snaps and shots
which hide us inside our wallets.
How beamingly we blend in with
our A-Z via the usual ID charade.

Isn't that me we quiz the sentry
who scans our cards with laser
razors while we bleed the answer,
fearing that most bandages lack

(no stanza break)

those panacea, those superpowers
evinced most and emblemized by
the youth-roles of film, the skilled
portrayals of its hero-informal mold.

It is the movies have made me old.
Looking up struck at the blankgaze
screen I see that I too must suffer
that knowledge which the brow
burrows beneath its furrows to show
the visible effort an idea creates
if nothing else. All else is else.

Surface the mind repeats as pure,
hear my TV mirrormode: I can always
remote a world's particulars, my
closeups can quell-control the quick
extinctions of your soul in oceanroll
or twig miniscule; lens can always
find a puddle to push around or
a forest to erase from a woodcut,
but Jan-to-Nov, now it's gone, no.

HISTORICALE

If I were part of a tableau viveaux
and I fell asleep or died
none of the spectators
would notice or else
they haven't so far—
they haven't realized yet
that in essence I am absent
from this artful scene
when it freezes to depict
the panorama where
I nurse various withered
and storm-lit emergencies,
though perhaps there
is one in the audience
who suspects, who fears
that he or she will surely
be hauled up on tiers
to replace me soon,
and who even now
shrinks back in their seat
and frowns at my perfect mimicry.

TRAGEDIES

The time actors take to make up
stalls the inevitable fall of the mask
worn by the audience, though maybe
a throwaway gesture will do, like

goalposts with whips curled around
them, all lashings of wit await their
cue stage-rear where the one playing
the door gets grafted on the wall's skin—

this is only human, the halts in line,
the queue with no A at its head. No
solving of the riddle today, sufficer.

Romeo at age 8 or 9 kicking soccer
doesn't know yet even in a vacuum
one can easily stray out of bound.

VISION

moon of all means
sun of all ends

this TV screens
whatever day

or night sends
me away

HAIBUN: THE JUGGLER TO HIS AUDIENCE

One must be able to juggle at least 3 things to be a juggler (2 is not enough). But whatever the 3 things are that one juggles—whether it's (for example) father, son and holy ghost; or mother, father, child; or id, ego, superego: whatever this minimal trinity consists of—the juggler must acknowledge that his audience is not external to the act; and the juggler must confess to that audience:

One in my hand,—

one in the air—

and one in you.

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