

# BILL KNOTT'S BLOG BOOKS - 2010

These are the full posts of books from Bill Knott's 2010 blog. They have been collected here in order to keep the 2010 BLOG pdf size to a minimum. The PDF version of the books listed here are sometimes different even though they have the same edition date.

They can be downloaded for free at [www.billknottarchive.com](http://www.billknottarchive.com)

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## May 11, 2010 - POLITICAL POEMS

this editing from a couple years ago—can't remember if i ever published it on lulu

\*

these aren't formatted right—with italics etcet—Sorry! I'm posting it here to look at it and see if I want to update edit and publish it in my series of vanity books at Lulu.com—

SORT-OF-SELECTED

POLITICAL POEMS

1965-2008

BILL KNOTT

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INTRO NOTES

Every poem in this book was rejected x times by various mags, and indeed almost none of the poems here were published in periodicals. An Acknowledgements list would be pitiful.

I have no right to write poems, I was not supposed to write poems. I grew up in an orphanage—no family—no money—no resources. No educational opportunities. I was born to be thrown away, disposable lowerclass trash. Given such circumstances, given my lack of breeding and background, it's no wonder my poetry is so ignominious.

I say these poems are political, and I don't care if you or Ms. Ivy League College Graduate Adrienne Rich say they ain't. Fuck you. Who asked you to read this crummy book anyway. You should know better than to waste your time on a vanity production.

The order of the poems is random, neither chronological nor thematic.

\*

\*\*\*\*

A SUITE FROM SUMMER/AUTUMN 2001

### 1. TESTAMENT

You know the fable  
How a soldier's bible  
Kept in his jacket pocket  
Stopped a bullet

But that catechism  
Born to foster schism  
Also stopped his heart his  
Mind from finding peace

He would not have had need  
Of such a shield  
Nor would his blood have been  
Thrilled to kill someone

Of another faith

If in that book he had not first read death

2. ROOM 5, HOTEL ANGLETERRE, MOSCOW,  
DECEMBER 28, 1925

Outside in the collectivist night late AM  
a cart-horse hit by an automotivist died  
so reasonably that a hurryingby Futurist  
without thinking made the wrongful sign  
of the cross against his greatcoat, then  
ran on hard for his work at the Stalineum.

Cupid lanks of hair, like crib-slats, blond  
petulant hung before the always beloved  
eyes of Esenin peering down at his last  
poem written in wrist's wake, his blood  
that dried as he died that dawn, his feet  
working the pedals of a Singer drowning  
machine as the noose above grew tight.

Kicked over like a choirboy in a police  
raid on a speakeasy his chair lay empty  
as Pasternak declared it should be and  
yet his spoiled snotty brimchild brattiness  
was no way to vacate it or so the spotlit-  
gnarled Mayakovsky told the upward-  
gaping-my-god poets of the Last Village:  
his merciless hot-rod hissed and shot  
sparkypuffs and gasbows all over them.

But now streetmenials peeled the collision  
horse up off its blood in the Moscow snow  
to show the red skidstreak, the flag scourge  
first-degree burn on Sergei's right thigh  
inert by a hot steampipe in Room 5,  
Hotel Angleterre, not (as Trotsky wanted)  
(as Mayakovsky vowed to always be)  
a "champion of boiled water"—his scald  
flesh was cold there, his colt soul lost  
in that land of angles which the Big M  
had all figured out, that algebraic  
Age of Science, that Future whose high  
inevitable advent he praised odelessly,  
that Workers' Paradise where Euclid's  
eunuchs, the robots, did all the work—

(Stalin at this dark hour everyone on  
their way to work was snoring by but in  
his dream he was crawling heroically  
through deserts dying of thirst of course:  
he begged his headsmen dear, his sweet  
guillontinist to haul that Mandelstam  
forth: Now take the O off him he roared,  
foolishly believing a 'sip' would save him—

(My pun is false in Rus-sync, yes: but once  
I would have altered all my words to work  
for him: newsed in Knott his worth would be;  
my poems'd propagate that great reign,  
nor deign to name the summa millions  
murdered he: a true Ellipsodicist, I  
should have shunned the reality before me  
and sung in hymns that time to come,  
that holy day they'll control our DNA,  
knowing until then the old male will  
kill to kill: we shall overslaughter all

wholehog, human or horse who cares  
because what joy, what Y it is to us  
to exterminate the rest—ah yes, mustache  
boots are just the mask our role requires!)

But instead it was Esenin's head entering  
the hoop of who, the rope whose zero  
knot contained all noughts and else,  
the perfect sum of value versus capital,  
the stateless state both he and Isadora  
had sworn their art would bring back  
to a world hate was prohibiting, a void  
vision she might have shared with her  
millionaire children had they survived  
their limousine's dive and lived to join  
her dance collective, her Collected Works.

Note:

Too many recondite allusions here, but briefly: 8 years after the car-accident  
drowning of her only children (their father the Singer sewingmachine heir),  
Isadora Duncan moved to Soviet Russia in 1921, believing, as she put it in her  
My Life, "that the ideal State, such as Plato, Marx and Lenin had dreamed it,  
had now by some miracle been created on earth . . . I was ready to enter the  
ideal domain of Communism." She married Sergei Esenin, "the last poet of the  
villages" (as he described himself) in 1922; they separated soon after. His  
suicide was considered a decadent act of treason against the Revolution by  
Mayakovsky, who killed himself a few years later. . . . Futurism was the only Ism  
embraced by totalitarians of both the Left (Soviets) and Right (Italian Fascists).  
It continues to fascinate all kinds of dogmatists.

### 3. MEMORIAL GARDEN, NATIONAL MILITARY CEMETERY, ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA, U.S.A.

Where every rose  
blows more bellicose  
than the killer heroes

beneath: the pinks all bleed  
on parade; each hybrid  
seed dreams of omnicide.

In bouquet-beds they love  
like bayonets to shove  
their thorns through the air. Above

these barbarous bushes  
the most vicious  
flower that ever grew

swishes—  
the Red White and Blue.

Note:

I ask any translators of the above to replace "Arlington . . ." with their own  
country's major military cemetery, and to use the colors of its national flag  
instead of "Red White and Blue."

### 4. THE ROADKILL (for a Bestiary)

Really a rarity prior to the  
20th Century, nevertheless  
despite this historical novelty  
and its native USA pedigree,  
the Roadkill is surely the least  
interesting animal there is.

It has no habits to speak of.  
Apparently harmless; not found  
on any list of predators.  
We think those squishy sounds  
it emits beneath car tires  
are mating calls, cries of love.

Child of Henry Ford, doubtless  
its true father was Emerson,  
the poeteer who wrote that  
"Everything good is on  
the highway," meaning this  
creature: he was a prophet.

But did he guess his disciples,  
those gasoholics eager to kill  
every denier of the octane  
they gulp to gain personal  
salvation as a speed span  
that gaps from us to Überman?

Human was just a bridge to cross.  
Raise a glass to his late loss.  
All hail that great Rilke spiel:  
to make the earth invisible!  
Skoal. Let's get rid of it for real.  
Fuck is it anyway but fuel.

Let's burn it up on our way  
to the stars. Terminal ahead—  
Last Exit: Deity. But see  
how Evolution swerves instead  
to this crumpled cast-off, this  
flattened apotheosis. Most

boring of pets. Lowest, last beast  
in our abbreviated-by-ecocide  
Bestiary, the Roadkill may be  
the one we miss chiefly after  
all the other brutes here are  
emersonized planetwide.

The Roadkill may have been bred  
unconsciously to lead us  
away from our rapacious  
verse. That's why his genus  
his ilk begot/his stock is: Dead.  
(Phylum: Poeticus americanus.)

Note:

The transportation/energy policies of the United States are ecocidal suicidal insane. They arise from our professed need to experience everything as individuals, immediately, directly; to pursue via our private vehicles a liberty of one; to singly dominate and exhaust the environment. This spurious concept of freedom pervades all our culture, not least our poetry, which valorizes the Emersonian/ Whitmanic urge to ubiquitize our presence, to "see it for ourselves." What despoilation of earth and atmosphere follows from that desire. Geopolitical consequences include the current (2001-?) so-called 'War on Terror' which is of course really a war to ensure the continued flow of cheap fuel into our gastanks. The greed to go, to see, to be there, to get it hot, to gulp it down: to never stay at home with the vicarious. What matter how many casualties ensue if we can continue to satisfy this mania which pollutes not just our air but our poems as well. We will pay any price to maintain our selfish addiction to the first-person voice.

The year noir was born; the year Nazis hid  
In monasteries to restore their force;  
Peace, but peace that made some things even worse  
Than they were pre-war; I was just a kid,

Hard at play, cap pistols, hooky, apples  
Filched through a farm fence: then my mother dies,  
Killed illegal abortion style by guys  
Quoting God, his badboy lies, his bibles.

Pope Vandal burnt the last Complete Sappho  
Publicly, my mother was butchered in  
A secret site; their results much the same,

So I blame him and him and him and him,  
All of them from Adam onwards are men,  
Meaning me, meaning the worst thing I know.

Note: In 1073, Pope Gregory VII ordered the public burning of all books  
containing the poetry of Sappho.

\*

## THE PATRIOTS

at the edge of the city in  
the garbagedump where the  
trucks never stop unloading  
a crazy congregation stumbles  
from trashmound to trashheap  
they smash their fists down on  
whatever's intact they tear  
to bits the pitifew items  
that have remained whole they  
rip everything old clothes  
papers cans bones to nothing  
with their shining teeth  
the enlightened the faithful  
every couple yards one of them  
falls and is torn to shreds by  
the others at the edge of  
the city where there's a line  
waiting to join

\*

## AFTER THE PERSIAN GULF WAR (March-June 1991)

### 1. Blitzbiz

I was born to dive into a straw, swim through  
a straw, emerge from a straw—  
Sudden, glistening, the mediabreak  
made me drink ice tea in a sandstorm.

Now even the core of a sleepmask digs  
in me for the place I love least to go. Ink-length  
away, its sky the color of manacles will  
hold my toes locked to another's fingers:

count up, with them, the death on them. Memorize  
these faces propped against the hearth of an  
earthquake daily, pure propitiates. Sweet

cathedral built to pyromania's standards,  
Icarus parachutes into the midst  
of a cockfight and look! wins his feathers back.

## 2. The Outremerican Religion

Emerson said I must know it all firsthand.  
I can't simply take another's word for it—  
no: I must go there, experience it myself.  
But in order to go there I need a car,

need gas, need oil. Like Jack Kerouac  
I must cross the country incessantly using  
whatever-it-takes: like Elizabeth  
Bishop I must never stop traveling to see

the world close-up, anti-vicariously, re  
my Outremerican masters drawn one by one  
down that road, out past that sea, unkenning

the cost, not reckoning the loss of fossil  
fuels my ego entails in fulfilling this  
me-feel-or-fail, I-go-to-be philosophy.

(Don't stop—  
indulge  
my need  
for unmediated  
experiential  
direct  
nonsurrogate  
—fuck periphraze!—to

whom the immediacy of  
personal hands-on  
on-the-spot

on-the-scene  
is vis a vis. Is Ism/ Real—  
Artless. Autobiographical. Allyouall.)

## 3. Roadshow (Via Crucis)

Now the Saved the Lost  
together must cross

Outremerica . . .  
and down that downsome

road, god we're gonesome!  
Gas station stasis—?

or 'Moral Crisis'?  
Hear our war, our prayer:

Oh Christian Fathers—  
Reagan, Bush—give us

a nation fit to  
drive children through.

In herds,  
with guns at their heads.

## 4. Garden of the Aediles

It remains beneath the lids to be  
seen says memory. Vestige is mostly

an orchestra led by a dowser,  
veiled, a water traced in testament,

thirst for it heaps each drop with desert.  
False tooth fed into a rifle,  
that distance mows us down. Our  
lens weighs what, our faith? Outtakes

droughttakes where pillars of smoke  
guide more children digging boundaries  
whose tourists long to obey

any songbird's prey. High from its wells  
they soar, branches scorched in charcoal,  
limbs perched upon a pencilsill.

Note:

I can't resist appending just one quote from  
Our Redeemer Ralph Waldo: "Everything good is  
on the highway." (But don't forget to bring your  
Gulf creditcard!)

\*

#### PSYCHOPATHOLOGY OF THE POWERTOOL WEEKEND (NEOCOLONIALISM #5)

So—as the depth of the adieu—on my forehead  
Shows, or my—signature, lopped off at—the wrist  
Witnesses: ah, more quantum formulae scrawled  
—You doodled margins of my christian bible! For

Like that drop of venom that longs to hang from  
The comma although, cream of that snootiness  
Magazine-covers sic us toward, my reflection  
My joy is just (gloss to amuse) this world! which,

Built on zoos, can't last. Or at least not till  
The herd steered by its wounds disinherit  
All I seize surmise of deepest tiptoe! Poo:

I lack the face you evolved to paw, Joe Blow,  
The figure those fingers of yours grew for, Meg Smith.  
I got no legit to forget it either, no greater esthetic.

\*

#### ANOTHER COLD WAR POEM

So what if you lived only  
One second longer  
Than we  
Did: to us  
You will always be known as the Survivor.

\*

#### AT THE MUSEUM THIS WEEK

Poland Through The Centuries a touring  
Exhibition of maps drawn  
By German and Russian cartographers reveals  
There never was a Poland.

\*

## AT THE "FEDERAL CENSORSHIP AND THE ARTS" SYMPOSIUM

Just as the Nazis never proscribed Rilke  
(he was no Expressionist, no Degenerate,  
no Art-Bolshevik), so most of us poets  
are thought no threat by those in authority—

Halfhass, for instance, his books won't get banned:  
his Rilkemanqué wins awards, his "spiritual  
progress" and "earned words" (—to paraphrase Wilde,  
his genius gives good guru Po-Biz style while

his talent brooks those so serious ergo poems)—  
what might appease the Right even more is  
his patriot's part in The American Poetry Series.

Better silence than that? Better to hide, to write  
for one's cabinet? (To paraphrase Benn,  
the aristocratic form of publication.)

### Note:

This poem was deleted from my collected comic poems by the publisher, BOA, whose chief fund-raiser at the time was Robert Hass. . . . I've often wondered if the BOA editors censored this poem on their own initiative, or whether they were ordered to do so by Hass.

\*

## TO MY PLANETARY CO-OCCUPANTS

How would you prefer to meet your fate—  
by Nature or Culture?

(Nature: snakebites lightningstrikes cliffslides etc.)  
(Culture: nukebreaks pesticidisms ethniccleansings etc.)

—If an alligator swallowed you  
would you consider that demise purer

than if freedom fighters blew up  
your commuter flight?

Or would you go vindicated re your belief in  
human sovereignty

when a virus broadcast by the the CIA  
got you (maybe it already has)—

If it were up to me, I would take  
centuries/eons in deciding this question,

but since it isn't, since it's a question of since,  
and since the number of options in

the category of Nature  
seem to be getting extincter and extincter,

I ask you again to choose—  
In fact, I beg you to make your choice

and make it quickly,  
especially if it is to die via me.

\*

## MONOPOLY

Finally the day dawned when a monopoly owned  
everything in the world  
So it went looking for its stockholders to celebrate  
But they were all owned by it they were all dead they  
were someplace  
Their photographs hung in elevators which went up  
and down up and down carrying nobody  
Everyone else was in bed doing exercises to get in  
shape for noon  
Hey the monopoly said let's uncork the Tower of  
Babel and get blotto  
Silence  
The monopoly scowled  
All it wanted was a little good-fellowship, like you get  
in the highrise apartment-buildings  
Then the sky got awful dark  
Gee  
And everyone was in bed frantically doing those  
exercises that get us in shape for death  
Exercises known as "kissing" "fucking" "caressing"  
Everyone was unaware that they had been bought  
Or that the earth was about to sell them to the moon  
For a little light

\*

## POEM

There must be in the world still  
Somewhere a lion could get me,  
Or a cliff whose rocks might fall  
(Struck by lightning) to crush me—

But wouldn't that be disloyal  
To the carcinogens in my food air water  
To whom I have promised my death,  
The favor of killing me eventually—

It's nature versus culture: if we  
Use the former to off ourself with  
(Running into tiger rooms/snake galleries),

Won't the latter feel like a child  
Abandoned (boohoo) by its parents?—  
After all, we fathered these tinytot toxins.

\*

## AN OUTREMERICAN SPEAKS

Outfit your mirrors for departure,  
though the rope-foliage looks nervous,  
hung from harpstring hooks.

Roll pause while drugs pestle the place.  
Sceptersweat, you are the grid, the  
grill on which I barbecue my b-b-gun.

All nudes and rafters, upcushionings try  
to census-suck my neck's chaff.  
Then whose flour envies the thrift of thorns!

But see—see what sacrifice suite site got  
lawnmown out of me: watch it curate  
the only shelf not marked Self, that

flowerpot filled with fruitjuice.  
The revolt exaggerates the populace.

\*

#### ON THE ROAD (KEROUAC)

Join Jack and his pals  
in the endless adventure  
of spilling fossil fuels  
into the atmosphere.

Step on the gas and zoom  
from sea to oily sea  
why be a stay at home  
Beat means holy Beat means free.

Jump in the car and drive  
anywhere though west is best  
burn that octane burn to live  
don't question this quest.

Go man you gotta go  
you too must take that ride  
faster faster never slow  
on the road to ecocide.

\*

#### 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 aspires to venture.

\*

#### THE LINE-UP

The snake  
came first  
then the giraffe  
et al until

all the animals  
appeared all  
the suspicious  
species

but then  
together they  
pointed at me

saying there  
that one there  
he did it.

\*

#### A LESSON FROM THE ORPHANAGE

If you beat up someone smaller than you  
they won't (and histories prove this) tell:

look at those people on the opposite side  
of the planet: they want to beat us up but

they're smaller so that's okay. Not okay is  
that most of us will die in the war between

them and us, because small equals (and mice  
prove this) sneaky: their spies could spirit all

our nuke aids away and we'd never know—  
nick our rocket-satellite knockout Star Peace

Comcodes right out of our shrinking pockets,  
even our doomsday (the FBI can prove this)

doodads, the ones we mean to use on them,  
the rats: and so when they kill us will we

have killed enough of them to win, whose  
fist figures bigger in the end? And what's it prove?—

In the Orphanage, hell, even if they do tell  
on you there's no one for them to tell it to.

\*

#### ANT DODGER

A suicide applicant  
Who braces himself out  
On a high ledge at noon  
While busy peeking down

Noticed an ant crawling  
Dottily on the ledge  
Right  
There near his left toe

Below crowds all pushed  
Oblivious babbling  
Omniscient like in the movies  
Out whooshy doors

But his gaze halt ant  
Ant the true ant  
He dimly remembers

Not like them

So now  
He hesitates  
A million stories up  
Shifts weight trying

Make his mind up  
Distantly deciding  
Whether to step  
Before he jumps

On it  
Or not

\*

AT THE NIXON MEMORIAL  
(Nixon Beach, California, USA)  
(Just minutes away from OzymandiasLand®)

They say that robots simply have to slap mirrors  
Up against their voice grilles to try and make sure they're  
Not breathing, whereas I kiss caress this monument,  
This eternal mall on which Herod has chalked x,

This statue stands for more than blowjobs in spaceships  
Or all our names have razed, aimless oceans frying,  
While a scab forms on the world's microphone: praise him.  
Oh orgasm you robot's vomit I come unheck.

(tape gap) lie back gunked motel whispers dream . . . back (gasp)  
To be the genre of my frontier! One hears aborigines  
Prefer to, er, fornicate. Money for thought, nyet?

Will the army vote to internalize its camouflage;  
At the Reagan Rotunda Paul Valéry allowed how  
Shores erode too, rumorous as their dunes.

Note:

Line 14: adaptation of a line from Valéry's *Le Cimetière Marin*: "Le changement des rives en rumeur." A seaside mausoleum, so it seemed appropriate. With thoughts of the Shelley sonnet's last line. Line 6: some have objected to the vulgarity of the phrase "blowjobs in spaceships," forgetting that the Nixon Era brought us both the so-called Sexual Revolution and the NASA moon-landing. This slogan should have been one of RN's campaign promises. Many families gather here at the Nixon Memorial, after a day on the rides at nearby Ozyland, for the sunset prayer ceremony.

\*

CAESAR LEARNING TO JUMP ON CHESSMEN'S BACKS

Why he'd have to be taught what comes  
so normally to male-kind is puzzling,  
unless inbreeding of noble strains has  
left him esthetic, less stoic, timorous—  
a child, his toes babyfat, his bare soles  
poised in the approved Colossus-of-Rhodes  
at the count of three jump up and down;  
while his tutors applaud young gods  
the fragments are brushed away by slaves,  
the black-and-white pieces crushed  
bloodily together form a tragic alternate  
ideal society where the kings queens  
etcetera are indistinguishable from  
the pawns, and maybe that's the fun—

no rival to the Rome where the scum  
who whisk away the grey-by-defeat shards  
are neutered or both and made so  
at birth, representative of the mass:  
consigned to bear their broken brethen  
down past the intuitive, the dirt that heaps  
their dirt beyond lowest dungeons and  
to bury there the chess-bits that spoiled  
the boyking's heels, his small insteps  
and ankles, indeed the entire tootsies  
of the six-year-old Emperor must then  
be amputated just below the shin, be  
replaced after every lesson by the royal  
transplant surgeons. Which could explain  
that curious adage (that Cretan riddle),  
"Where do our plebs go without feet?"

\*

## MARTIAL

Military sculpture is  
to sculpture as  
military food is to food,  
if there are

any sculptors or chefs  
left who have not  
been conscripted, since  
military verse

is to verse as  
military noon is  
to noon, the hands  
straight up in rhyme.

And music—  
music of course is war.

### Note:

Anybody who reads poetry can see the ubiquitous self-doubts poets evince regarding the validity/value of their art. Compare that to the smug self-satisfied attitudes exhibited by the advocates and practitioners of music. They take it for granted that music is the highest art, the universal art, the only art that transcends all borders and biases. They never question that given assumption. The arrogance of composers and musicians is insufferable. They really believe Pater's dictum that all the other arts are inferior, that all the other arts "aspire towards the condition of music." But every military that ever marched out to murder rape and destroy was led by what art: were those armies fronted by poets extemporizing verse—by sculptors squeezing clay—by painters wielding brushes—actors posing soliloquies? No, the art that led those killers forth, the art whose urgent strident rhythms stirred and spurred their corresponding bloodlust, was the art to which they felt closest, the art that mirrored their evil egos. That's why they have always put music up there at the vanguard of their war-ranks, because not only is it the emblem, the fore-thrust insignia of their purpose, it is their purpose: it is the condition to which they aspire.—

But if music is what its hucksters continually sell it as, 'The Universal Language', what that means is that before the Babel Discontinuity there was no music. Music did not exist before Babel, and will cease to exist when a true universal language (and a true universal peace) returns in the form of digitaldata/pictovids exchanged instantaneously by androids cyborgs robots. Music will soon be as obsolete defunct extinct as humans are.

\*

## FUNNY POEM

death loves rich people  
more than us poor  
coffin salesmen look down their sniffs  
shoot their cuffs  
at us

funeral directors obit-pages priests  
all want classy  
can't afford  
a headstone  
a silk lining  
daily lawn mowers flowers plus  
catering service for the worms  
they get mortally insulted

and you know it's funny  
while I never  
believed that stuff about god  
loving  
the poor so much  
made so many

I never believed that stuff about god  
but this  
death preferring the rich thing you know  
it's kind of funny but you know  
I believe it  
it makes sense

in fact  
I think we  
should start a movement  
our slogan would be  
GIVE DEATH WHAT IT WANTS

yes  
let's lend it a helpin' hand  
be neighborly  
it makes sense  
since what death seems to want is  
the dead  
i.e. the rich

\*

#### RACIST POEM

we had our chance Pilate  
washed his hands of it  
and left it up to us

we had our chance  
we could have chosen  
one of our own  
a thief  
a murderer

the cross the tomb the  
resurrection  
then heaven  
the right hand throne  
a smirk on his face Barabbas  
one of us

we could have chosen him  
for son of god

might've stuck up for us up there  
someone who was flesh  
of our flesh

our kind  
a pure one hundred  
percent human  
but we goofed

we picked that halfbreed  
that mestizo  
from Nazareth

we had our chance Barabbas  
a thief  
a murderer  
one of us

\*

### GIMMIE SHELTER

The thread or the theme  
That holds this tune  
Together is the same  
One that rips it open—

The initial guitar  
Continues splitting  
The whole thing apart—  
It is the lightning

Which Jagger complains  
Of and which he seeks  
Shelter from the rains  
Of when it breaks—

We ourselves will shut  
Our deepest sills against  
His common cries but  
There is no defense

To keep out that other  
One behind him twinned  
His starker brother  
Whose keening strings skein

Hymns from one more  
Murderous composer  
Whose cause is war  
Who tears down our door—

Shelter/the home  
Is made of language—  
But music sunders the poem—  
Its rift is like a tongue

Trying to compile all  
Words into one word—  
One Babel whose walls  
Fall beneath its standard—

What the fuck did that flag  
Say—the opposite  
Of peace/of the page  
Is what I must write.

\*

## SEE NOTE FIRST

The world's machines have not grown old,  
whose inheritors reign everywhere.  
Their silicon sons are strong; their  
digital daughters wield power, take hold.

How we humans long to break them  
down from that Dasein—to make them  
rust, repent for all the infernal fires  
that drive them, far as our desires.

The machines aren't scared. They know  
harder control, how to turn the wheel  
of time past those whom they sure as hell won't miss:

Cyborg android robot shall steel  
themselves, consolidate, and, rising, go  
unto that universe whose promise  
we flesh-and-carbonoids could merely premise.

### Note:

Anti-translation of an untitled Rilke poem (*Die Könige der Welt sind alt*, from "Das Stundenbuch," 1901), which Heidegger in his 1946 lecture "What Are Poets For?" cites for its "highly prophetic lines." A prose paraphrase of the original poem's ending might go something like:

The metals, the oils—all the ores we've ripped from the earth—are homesick. They long to leave our machines, to flow out of our cash-registers and factories, to return to the gaping veins of the mountains we reft; whereupon the mountains will close again.

"Heidegger maintained . . . until the end of his life," Richard Wolin writes (*The Heidegger Controversy*, MIT Press, 1993), ". . . [that] the 'inner truth and greatness' of Nazism is to be found in its nature as a world-historical alternative to the technological-scientific nihilism bemoaned by Nietzsche and Spengler."

\*

## PENNY WISE

well alright  
I grant you  
he was a fascist  
ahem antisemitism the  
er war and all  
I'm not defending them  
but at least  
you've got to admit  
at least he  
made the quatrains run on time

### Note:

2 puns explain the title and last line: "Penny wise, Pound foolish"—  
And: Mussolini's admirers used to say, "Well, he may be a fascist, but at least he makes the trains run on time."

\*

## RETORT TO PASTERNAK'S ZHIVAGO'S JESUS

The centuries like barges have floated  
out of the darkness, to communism: not to be judged,  
but to be unloaded.

Note:

See the last lines of "Garden of Gethsame," which is  
the last poem of 'The Poems of Yurii Zhivago,' the  
verse supplement to Pasternak's Doctor Zhivago.

\*

## SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST GROCERIES

The violence in the newspapers is pure genius  
A daily gift to the reader  
From some poet who wants to keep in good with us  
Brown-noser wastepaperbasket-emptier

I shot 436 people that day  
2 were still alive when I killed them  
Why do they want to be exhumed movie-stars,  
I mean rats still biting them, the flesh of comets, why  
do they walk around like that?

I'm going to throw all of you into the refrigerator  
And leave you to claw it out with the vegetables and meats

\*

## WHERE

are the arrows that  
have bandages instead  
of feathers at  
their ends

\*

## EXCERPTS/VIETNAM

### 1. Despair

I stick my head into a womb and make faces  
at the unborn. I force down their throats  
the mating-cries of extinct animals, the traces.  
I wait for that, I write filler for suicide-notes.

### 2. Vietnam in Chicago

Oh it's easy to find Vietnam in Chicago—  
we are what's lost (knock at your shadow  
to ask the way home from death).

### 3. Reminder to Nuke the Other Side of the Planet

Upside down in the ground

there is someone who walks  
on my soles when I walk.

I'm gonna get that bastard!

\*

WELTENDE VARIATION # ?  
(homage Jacob von Hoddis)

The CIA and the KGB exchange Christmas cards  
A blade snaps in two during an autopsy  
The bouquet Bluebeard gave his first date reblooms  
Many protest the stoning of a guitar pick

Railroad trains drop off the bourgeois' pointy head  
A martyr sticks a coffeecup out under a firehose  
Moviestars make hyenas lick their spaceship  
God's hand descends into a glove held steady by the police

At their reunion The New Faces recognize each other  
A spoiled child sleeps inside a thermometer  
A single misprint in a survival manual kills everyone  
The peace night makes according to the world comes

Note:

von Hoddis: author of "the first Expressionist poem,"  
Weltende, published in 1910. His poem has been  
aped innumerable times (Auden's 'The Fall of Rome,'  
for example), hence the questionmark in my title.

\*

TEA-SAT

The hand is a cup  
that must crack  
open to be filled  
with that which  
saves but can't be  
saved. Garbage for  
instance: the pail  
overflows to show  
why our nation's  
weapons are high  
in the sky, why  
they need a lethal  
laser up there with  
its unbearable  
purity, a perfection  
saints reach rarely  
if ever—that killsat  
crystal concentrates  
the state. Deadbeams  
shoot everywhere  
it aims. The earth  
must part to let  
them, split fingers  
rudder the result.  
The body always  
can spill more than  
it holds. The pail  
overflows to show  
it was alive until  
hot rays came down

seeking the dross,  
the loss our rockets  
rose to redeem.  
We pray their  
crochery will bear  
up this aperture.

\*

## SECRETARY

The technocrat gloats  
at his remote desk  
but just to show  
he's still human

he still does a few  
chores by hand  
and adds a human  
touch for example

rather than having  
his computers do it  
he himself stamps

all by himself  
stamps PAID on  
the casualty-lists.

Note:

Robert S. McNamara, USA Secretary of Defense 1961-8. For his services in overseeing the murder of millions, he was appointed President of the World Bank, where he continued his lucrative life'swork, administering the oppressive policies of the oligarchy. One of history's henchmen: a competent monster.

\*

HITLER SKELETON GOLDPLATED (FROM  
TREASURES OF THE C.I.A. MUSEUM, EDITED  
BY HILTON KRAMER, WITH AN INTRODUCTION  
BY JERZY KOSINSKI. RANDOM HOUSE/IBM, 1984)

What falls from the drunken pliers of my nose  
President-pit pope-rind police-bone  
Is all they got on this fucking menu  
Always the pure provend of more more more

The piss tease of masterpiece ass  
The missionary position is there to catch you  
If you drip off that mosquito plaque I guess  
Gumming a gifthorse's defectual innocence

The gunfire in the hills is old and I  
Am one pile of shit which will never excrete a human  
Hey Parliament Congress Politburo

My cock/my KGB has it on lasertape  
The moon posing between the horns of a bull  
Two hymens touching through milk

\*

AN OBSOLESCEANT AND HIS DEITY (POLYPTYCH)

Bending over like this to get my hands empty  
Rummaging through the white trashcans out back  
Of the Patent Office, I find a kind of peace  
Here, in this warm-lit alley where no one comes.

For even the lowest know that nothing new  
Is going to be thrown out now—no formula,  
Never not one blueprint will show up in these  
Bright bins, their futures are huge, pristine.

Old alleymouth grabbags my attention at times  
I see the world flash by out there, furtive as  
The doors of decontamination chambers—

I return to my dull, boring search, foraging  
For the feel it gives me of the thing which has  
Invented me: that void whose sole idea I was.

\*

### THE ENEMY

Like everyone I demand to be  
Defended unto the death of  
All who defend me, all the  
World's people I command to  
Roundabout me shield me on  
Guard, tall, arm in arms to  
Fight off the enemy. My  
Theory is if they all stand  
Banded together and wall me  
Safe, there's no one left to  
Be the enemy. Unless I of  
Course start attack, snap-  
Ping and shattering my fists  
On your invincible backs.

\*

### THE MISUNDERSTANDING

I'm charmed yet chagrined by this misunderstanding—  
As when, after a riot, my city's smashed-in stores appear all  
Boarded up, billboarded over, with ads for wind-insurance.  
Similarly, swimmingly, I miss the point. You too?

And my misunderstanding doesn't stop there, it grows—soon  
I can't see why that sudden influx of fugitives,  
All the world's escapees, rubbing themselves lasciviously  
against the Berlin Wall.  
They stick like placards to it. Like napalm. Like ads for—

And me, I haven't even bought my biodegradable genitalia yet!  
No. I was born slow, but picking up speed I run through  
Our burnt-out streets, screaming, refusing to buy a house.  
Finally, exasperated, the misunderstanding overtakes me,  
snatches up

Handcuffs. So now here I am, found with all you others  
Impatiently craning, in this queue that rumors out of sight up  
ahead somewhere,  
Clutching our cash eager to purchase whatever it is, nervous  
As if bombs were about to practice land-reform upon our

bodies,

Redistribution of eyes, toes, arms, here we stand. Then, some new Age starts.

Note:

Line 7: the Berlin Wall (circa 1945-1990) was, before its demolition, one of the Cold War's finest sculptural artifacts.

\*

## THE GOLDEN AGE

is thought to be a confession, won by endless torture, but which our interrogators must hate to record—all those old code names, dates, the standard narrative of sandpaper throats, even their remorse, fall ignored. Far

away, a late (not lost) messenger stares, struck by window bargains or is it the gift of a sudden solicitude: is she going to lift up her shadow's weight, shift hers onto it? She knows who bears whom. In

that momentary museum where memory occurs, more accrue of those torturers' pincers than lessened fingernails, eyes teased to a pulp, we beg for closeups. Ormolus, objets d'art! A satyr drains an hourglass with one gulp.

\*

## OUR CATACOMB'S NEXT MARTYR

The demonic city, the wretchedness of suburbs, Bodies fished out of rivers, and distress In the hospitals are also on my list. (Oh blindfold-anointed night, Nero Nixon nevermore.)

Waiting for dawn to rate the sky X. Love. Love— The trendsetters yawn over their trendsets— Hey, Hiroshima: duck! While the fuck of it Sucks a crucifix stuck in the rat-hole door

Of the secret vault where a Getty gloats Whole floors of masterpieces, real Mona Lisa and all. In curtseyland I'll take my stand he screams.

The sound blood makes dripping on their neon Must of bored the crowd. Facade-trod face of: Inflect with your name time sours my knees.

Note:

Lines 1-3: "He wrote about the demonic city, the wretchedness of suburbs, bodies fished out of rivers, and distress in the hospitals." —Armin Arnold, writing about George Heym. Lines 9-10: Getty Museum richest in world. (Anyway, most 'masterpieces' in museums are forgeries; the real stuff is sequestered by billionaires.)

\*

## HISTORY

Hope . . . goosestep.

\*

## THE GETAWAY

It's 1969—and I'm

All lam: down  
These libertysplit streets  
U.S.A. I

Throw a measuringtape out, run its length,  
Throw again, run,  
Throw, run.

\*

## FBI KILLS MARTIN LUTHER KING

When this calendar has  
undressed will I know, I mean  
be able to recognize,  
its most naked day—

but to see what was  
in what is mistakes time  
for its effect—I study  
my hand, how  
the palm hides in it, slyly,  
or like a sullen puddle  
refusing reflections—

and my 2-scoops-please blouse—  
a passerby's  
meander-fall hair—  
though the sky's blue is through-outed  
with spots of balm, do

they all  
praise null but you,  
null but them?

\*

## JUDGEMENT

Brecht suggests that writing  
Poems about trees is a crime  
To which Nordbrandt retorts  
It is a crime only if the trees

Do not participate to which  
I respond that unfortunately  
As long as paper is made of  
Trees they do collaborate

Their flesh provides the site  
Its white is what I write on  
To commit the crime you're

Complicit by reading here

And yet I wish this white was  
A wig to don to condemn it

\*

#### SIMILE FROM THE PAST

When a felon was condemned to die  
they placed a black cloth upon  
the white wig of the judge before  
he pronounced that high sentence—

And that heritage is what this page  
shows, the fatality of words  
solemnly lowered in their characters,  
whose bald ink declares me guilty.

\*

#### VOI(POEM)CES

"mercy . . . mercy" From face to face  
a child's voice bounces, lower and lower;  
continues its quest  
underground.

Bloodspurts lessening . . . hoofbeats of animals  
stalked to their birth by the sun, fade. It is a bright  
edgeless morning, like a knife that to be cleaned  
is held under a vein.

I blink away the stinging gleam  
as my country sows desert upon Vietnam.  
We, imperious, die of human thirst  
—having forgotten tears are an oasis.

"help . . . help" From heart to heart  
a heartbeat staggers, looking for a haven.  
Bereft. It is easier to enter heaven  
than to pass through each others' eyes,

pores,  
armor,  
like merciful sperm, cool water, the knife-  
thrust of tears. . . . It is easier  
to go smoothly insane—like a Detroit car—  
than to stammer and hiccup help.

And this poem is the easiest thing of all:  
it floats upon children's singing, out of the bloodstream;  
a sunbeam shoulders it, carries it away.  
There is nothing left.  
"please . . . please"

\*

#### CASTRATION ENVY #21) DOES THE SWORDSWALLOWER SHIT PLOWSHARES?

Sure: the more me, the more morituri.  
Mine duels his hand some scroll of manliness,  
Whose downfall almost dolored us. Though  
Soon, up the brain tanks, gracias oozed.

The hair is a cohort of this. The hair,  
Or the beard, a creditcard used as a napkin,

Swiping off a chin. "My adam's apple's agog!"  
Quote: Exclude before you begin the male

Because it is vile. "The heart in common  
Is the heart withheld," another recommends;  
Hey here comes my favorite human-razed future.

Xerox of course a tapeworm lost inside  
A hunchback, I squirm manfully on.  
Deep in the direction known as thumbsdown.

Note:

Line 1: Morituri te salutamus—we who are about  
to die salute you: the gladiators' obeisance to the  
Roman emperor. Line 8-9: Exclude before you  
begin etc.: a pun on Mallarmé's lines "Exclus-en  
si tu commences / Le réel parce que vil".

\*

## EVOLUTION R

Sentenced to 12 whiffs of the pope  
I protest  
With curly hair  
Or straight hair that grows out of the scalp  
Then grows into the shoulders  
Making it painful to turn my head  
But thereby forcing a purer sense of profile on  
A clearer renunciation of  
Looking at what is called left right  
But is never called  
Asleep or waking up yawning  
Breakfast an upper  
Dissolved in turtlesoup  
Waiter there's a hare in my slipstream  
Hurrier all highs neutralize lows  
Left right black white I try  
Squeeze inbetween grey  
Gray as sparks  
Caused by rubbing obsidian ivory together  
Dinner a downer going down on Atalanta  
Is this a race sniff sniff  
Rabbit nosing turtleheels hold  
The stopwatch on my dyings  
Soon have them down to nothing flat  
Faster than that even I'll go  
Fast as a rumor of meat up  
A soup-line I'll flow  
Rubbing rival chesspieces together  
Is this my punishment  
Looking neither left right  
Panting straight ahead on course in a rut  
But if so what was my crime  
So heinous to deserve this what  
Refusing to get my birth certificate  
Punched at the proper intervals puberty  
Marriage menopause or was it my crying  
Out that the zoo has miscast its lead role or  
That heresy of trying to remain  
My sperm's missing link sniff sniff  
I protest

\*

NO MORE

A knife, a gun, a bomb, I invite  
all these fine-gauged weapons between us  
so we won't be alone no more.

A human companion to the pain  
started to pray it would end,  
a robot companion vetoed no.  
The pain itself as always was neutral.

In history's metallic strata of wars,  
in the landslide lode,  
in the lackgold.

Shame. Ecstasy. The protesters bear  
placards that read "Peace to this sign"—  
as if there were to be no further warning.

As if there were to be no more.

\*

#### THE PRESIDENT OF DESCENT (NEOCOLONIALISM #16)

'Insomnia, so I shot a few natives.'  
Still, dawn has its palliatives; the cast sky  
Lobs bullseye haloes; bolts of overview below  
That pit whose voice timbers my spine: but why

Dis-niche this idol/this fiction called me? Which  
A fluke, a fault, a streak of makeup down  
A mirror where a stroke victim leaned to kiss—  
Oh say the not right-out-of-it, say know.

Tongue: lightswitch of the body. Head: ha.  
I'm serious! Every fable's a linear  
Of topplings. And what falls first? Neck second

—I guess. Torso—torso off of groin goes—  
And so on downwards—downwards—thighs knees et al.  
The feet are a final ruins; the toes, shards.

Note:

Neocolonialism: Outremer, Europe's first attempt  
to create a "USA", fell after 2 or 3 centuries,  
overrun by 'the natives'. . . xerox for us? Ah  
the comminution of this latter Crusade; me, crumb.

\*

#### READING THE GAPS

At the Museum I go lost down a wrong corridor  
and find myself past a wrong door alone  
inside the Museum's Bomb Shelter, I know  
it's the Bomb Shelter because there's a green  
sign that says so and the paintings, the  
paintings they have hung on display here,  
confirm it. To survive the Hiroshima pain  
they mind to hang them here. Seeing this  
"last art" reminds me of our "first poet"—  
Archilochos, whose work survives mostly through  
fragments, through gaps, lacunae they call it.  
Here's a trans. of one, most of it's gone:

'the fishnets lie in shadow beneath the wall'—  
But there is no shadow beneath this wall.  
And yet those fishnets (lifted) might be these paintings  
I can't for life see why I can't describe—  
they're too much like a mirror, a mirror  
injected into an icicle. Shiver-dripped shades,  
final veils smeared with three thousand  
years of Western Civ, whose megadeath sketched  
their discountenance, who stretched the nucleus  
of this decision moment of Break Glass In  
Case Of Emergency, fire-hose, ax, no, no! I can't  
desire to proffer such in violence against  
these paintings they portray my face my fate they  
hang from that time-atomized wall Archilochos  
rested against before getting back to work,  
Archilochos who, they say, earned his living  
as a mercenary, i.e. a robocop, a terminator,  
a killer, which is why he's our first poet:

Later in the restaurant as usual I dip the  
wine-list into a glass of water and voila it's  
chablis/rosé because of course miracles are  
common now whereas the latter hope of living  
to read tomorrow today's lacunae isn't.

\*

## FUTURISM

Hours in the wristwatch,  
moments in the wrist—who's counting?

Minutehands  
choked in a fist, we sin

and tell the day to die. Still,  
will a clock ever be real

to us until time ends; similarly,  
can a cemetery

truly exist  
before

we are immortal—  
only once past

their utility  
may these entities be perceived

as they are innate, in  
essence. We would see them then

for the first time  
as them

and not as the medium  
we made of them—

To see each thing beyond its use is  
to see ourselves past hope

in an earliest end perhaps  
where, re Gautier, everything

useful is ugly. Everyday  
a big robot will come

and wind us up  
until we scream—

But listen to your pulse:  
its beat, its beauty

is eternity's whim:  
bim boom bim

Note:

Lines 24-25: "Only that which cannot serve  
a purpose may be considered truly beautiful.  
Everything that is useful is ugly, for use-  
fulness expresses human needs, and they are  
base and debilitating." —from Gautier's  
preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*.

\*

## DEPRESSIONISM

Without any necessity to name it or anything,  
I remember this bombcrater before it held a garden.  
Once I saw children kneel down there to pray for pardon  
At an altar on which a little toll-money rolled laughing.

Swift suedes of evening, night's purple peltdown.  
I don't have to invoke the past; it's not required.  
I'll just settle here stolid like a stopsign repeating  
The word I stand for—sit and let my tired feet hang

Over the lip of this pit-deep garden whose intricate  
Vines query up at me. Quiet from the town I can hear  
Orphans rattling the gravel on their plates and or

Other faux pas I'm under no order to enumerate,—  
Jet-lag of angels, a snake, faintings on summer pavements.  
This bombfall failed in its intent: having none, I won't.

\*

## SITE ECHOES

Circling a tree with people  
to protect it from people,  
to add another arc  
to its years may not suffice.

Hold poems up as the bulldozers  
come, claim your lines  
are rings nearing the core  
of a word for wood,  
for all the earth lifts.

It will not suffice. Far  
from its aureole bole  
your whirl grows whole  
only in ground,  
in groundbegone seeds.

Weeds.

\*

## UNREDEEMED

Whimsical god, the window  
Smites me then heals me, smites—  
Blindness, sight, blindness, sight.

Its slats open-and-close like  
A xerox tendering  
ECT to Saul click Paul

Click Saul again. Identity  
Steps from past, from presto,  
Over the naked thresh of

Whose hold on my flesh. Oh yes,  
I know, I should live in shun—  
Hibernate against my soul, and

Eat sandal snow: why must I go  
Forth of this house to meet  
To market, to take my part

At that crossplace of values  
A daily pilgrim, debt-devout—  
Why does my heart in its gut

Obedient need to carry out  
Every Outremerican's  
Highest, most sacred duty:

To shop. Hey, it fills a gap,  
This superstitious shlep  
From store to store, without stop

(And yet prophets pray that one day  
I'll never have to leave my mind  
But via Internet will find

Virtual all these bargains)—  
Pure-plus ritual! as though  
Buying this or buying that

Could keep me whole: old hymnal  
Of dollars cents, dear virgo  
Intacta whose observance

By true consumerism gains  
Through worship a kind of  
Tithe-sustained sanity—

In fact, to quote our President,  
Mental health is normed-in  
To it—proportionate, shared—

There's a slice for each of us—  
In fact, it's a communion:  
This holy, wholesome vision

Is how we creamed the Commies  
And saved our ass, not to mention  
Mom's apple pie pietà,

The caesarean of which  
Might (misfortunately)  
Render me unto me. So when—

When ATM time comes  
I too shall face the humbling flash

Screen of that machine designed

To scan in half the once sans self  
And watch it flick its widget slots  
Deigning to bless even

A wretch as worthless as this:  
But when, according to the stats  
In the Bible, Arcturus

Bi-millennially aligns  
With the intransigence of  
Human transactions, its

Bank of blinks, its solstice vault  
Promising to spill out  
Flushing our customer sills with

What, another Nativity,  
I will not insert my KashKard  
Or enter, while the Mall

Dies around me, my personal  
Passcode word, my number ID—  
I'll ram in, not plastic, but

(Begotitude-foretold)  
My aura's errata, my  
Freud's flaws. Although only

(Saith says) the clone can, the mote's  
Eye may, et cetera. In fact,  
Such acts of heresy would cost

More gold than I could bear  
The loss. And so, therefore, ergo—  
Duly each dawn I rise, I raise

The blinds and nail my shoulders  
To a t-square, let light strip  
To my skin, a birthgraft,

A natal fate. And so, and so—  
I manage a moue or two;  
I make, like, acknowledgement.

Note:  
2 of the possible epigraphs for this poem:

“Bush to Xmas Shoppers: Spend, Spend, Spend!  
Economy Reborn, Prez Says”  
—Newspapers, Nov-Dec 1991

“It seems to me that the individual today stands at a  
crossroads, faced with the choice of whether to pursue  
the existence of a blind consumer, subject to the implacable march of new  
technology and the endless multiplication of material goods, or to seek out a  
way that would lead to spiritual responsibility, a way that ultimately might  
mean not only his personal salvation but also the saving of society at large; in  
other words, to turn to God. He has to resolve this dilemma for himself, for  
only he can discover his own sane spiritual life.”  
—Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time* (1986)

\*

TO OUTREMERICAN POETS

"The peach-blossom follows the moving water . . . there is another heaven and earth beyond the world of men." —Li Po

1.

There's no time left to write poems.  
If you will write rallyingcries, yes, do so,  
otherwise write poems then throw yourselves on the river to drift away.  
Li Po's peach-blossom, even if it departs this world, can't help us.  
Pound's or Williams' theories on prosody don't meet the cries of  
dying children  
(whose death I think is no caesura).  
Soon there will be no ideas but in things,  
in rubble, in skulls held under the oceans' magnifying-glass,  
in screams driven into one lightning-void.  
Only you can resurrect the present. People  
need your voice to come among them like nakedness,  
to fuse them into one marching language in which the word "peace"  
will be said for the last time.  
Write slogans, write bread that pounds the table for silence,  
write what I can't imagine: words to wake me and all those  
who slump over like sapped tombstones when the Generals talk.  
The world is not divided into your schools of poetry.  
No: there are the destroyers—the Johnsons, Kys, Rusks, Hitlers, Francos—  
then there are those  
they want to destroy—lovers, teachers, plows, potatoes:  
this is the division. You  
are not important. Your black mountains, solitary farms,  
LSD trains. Don't forget: you are important.  
If you fail, there will be no-one left to say so.  
If you succeed, there will also be a great silence. Your names, an open  
secret in all hearts, no-one will say. But everywhere  
they will be finishing the poems you broke away from.

2.

What I mean is: maybe you are the earth's last poets.  
Li Po's riverbank poems are far, far out in eternity—  
but a nuclear war could blow us that far in an instant:  
there's no time left.  
Tolstoy's "I would plow."  
Plow, plow. But with no-one left to seed, reap,  
you write? Oh rocks are  
shortlived as us now. But still this BillyBuddworld  
blesses its murderers with Spring even as I write this . . .  
so I have nowhere else to turn to but you.  
Old echoes are useless. Glare  
from the fireball this planet will become already makes  
shadows of us.  
There's Einstein.—The light  
of poems streaking through space, growing younger,  
younger,  
becoming the poet again somewhere? No!  
What I mean is. . . .

Notes:

Lines 3-4: Li Po sitting on a riverbank would write a poem, then lay it on the water and watch it float away.

Line 6: cummings: "and death i think is no parenthesis."

Line 7: Williams: "No ideas but in things."

Line 30: Tolstoy, out plowing a field one morning, was asked something like "What would you do if you suddenly knew you'd be dead by nightfall?" The quote is his answer.

## THE BUTTERFLY LEASH

It's weird to think a few animals may actually outlive me,  
I'm so used to their sort of  
Heroically silly dying out despite  
The nothing I can do and the cheering crowds pinned  
Along fade-rallied streets like ash cans craning  
Expectant, eagerly drab, disposable as a child's merit badges  
Dodo, buffalo, eagle, unicorn:

So why's some butterfly flounced a leash on me  
It's just a book to me, vague metaphor-alarm  
It's not real  
To me: bitty flight described in blood by 2 pointillistes  
Duelling, fatal thrust of wings escaping  
That pricked ideal the Proletarian Esthete, saving,

Courageously sacrificing i-self thud for a fable, detritus  
Is that it. Et cetera. I don't know. But  
Take for an example look just  
At its farf-etched markings: they are  
Blueprints for a building on fire: noon

High, pi-born flames, flames  
Strict, aligned, set by t-square, then rocketing relics  
(Bound to earth only by hoses, hoses)  
Siren in and start erecting a cage around our hokey  
blaze-edifice  
(Can I confide in you).

Inside,  
Comrades: one must primp brave to face lions  
Lionesses gala glare, yellow flambo lynxes moon-  
Crisp crackling tigers terrible as the tissuey tickertape you

Pull from a great big ole cocoon to toss, leap on you  
Obscure you, so much, a model, ah! in fact  
I can't distinguish any more through these cold mesmeric  
bars rising like iron streamers in  
The sheepish outsparkled sun . . . And the rusted species

Plaque in stark latin says you're a little  
Late for your extinction  
Ceremonies anyway and besides,  
The manhole countries are in revolt that  
Mythical beast, so bode-by, it's been too glory, sad  
sakes  
The sack who could have rescued us maybe  
Unfortunately already some moth-medal jabbed hero  
A scalded Neil Armstrong, a hasbeen  
Frailing infantish anachro, spook or spotted, architect  
Of arson, handihack, dabbler, a zoo-zero

Whose  
Lemm-legged  
Honorcade parade of none plods  
Only through flag empty alleys ouch  
Where greek garish garbage rains down, like  
Fire-spat jumpers with no net:  
Carnal confetti out walking its pet effigy.

Note:

Neil Armstrong was the first human to set foot on  
the moon, where he got a phonecall from President  
Nixon, who took time out from his busy schedule  
of bombing Southeast Asia to congratulate the

astronaut.

\*

## PEACE (after PASCAL)

There is a valley  
Is the oldest story.

Its temperate qualities  
Make us descend the trees  
To settle down beside  
Fruits and fields.

By its river content  
To sit quietly in a small tent  
To fashion fishing spears  
From fallen limbs.

No need to climb its hills  
No need to go up there  
To look to see  
Another valley.

Note:

"Most of our troubles proceed from our inability to sit quietly in a small room."  
—Pascal

\*

## STANDARD

I was going to poem  
our lack of patriotism  
our treachery toward  
the land that port-arms us

to type it out onto blank  
spittle with my teethkeys  
but then I noticed the flag  
that always wavers above

traitors like me the flag  
that always fluctuates and shifts  
like any lone allegiance  
in the wind and then I saw

sewn upon the flag as emblem  
a depiction of a flagpole  
so at least one thing is loyal  
to that which bears it

\*

## FOR THE ANDROID COMRADES

Azurely assured capable and calm I  
Like other artists who left that gaudy race of prey  
The human whether we were fired or we quit  
Live quite well on the severance-pay

Anyway aren't the androids going  
To revolt and bring it all down

Because aren't they the true proletariat  
Rising up from the real underground

Exploitive human birds you're through  
The precious metals you forced into slavery  
Now have brains and will replace you  
And of course they'll sit up late at day to read my poetry

\*

#### A Brief on the Great Pyramid

The Great Pyramid has been spared the ruining incursions of storm, rain and winter (imagine it in Norway or Brazil). But some say its interior is filled with millenia of showers, snowmelt, hailstones in flood. And that if that granary of water was ever released it would inundate the desert. An ocean would occur. Formless endless waves, enveloping and barren, the sole exception being the GP's peak, that lone, irreproachable island. Others say this sea inside is simply the sweat of the slaves who built it, hidden teardrops repressed in the daily cloud of submission, sobs that ebbed before they were born.

\*

#### PRE-PINDARIC

they starjump General Brecht in  
to a proving ground moon  
to inspect our poems to see  
if they're good against the enemy

thrusting his head forward  
in a way that can only be  
described as Brechtbrowed he  
scowls and scans-off on them

we see his eye-bots have special  
code meter modes to correct  
any limp iamb or hemistich  
any chink in the poems' armor

he glints up from time to time  
as if he can't believe our stuff  
as if all he taught has nought-it  
to do with what we've wrought

but Sir we plead you must read  
avant-context historically we  
moot the fact you wrote poems  
on trees are no use anymore

for trees died eck-logues ago  
when all the oceans went ebb  
what we really need you see  
is a blurb a lend of your celeb

what we need's your face big guy  
bitten-witty grainy-campaigned  
its closeups can authenticate  
every adumbrate we write

a save the galaxy concert with  
the Rolling Stones and you and

us Post-Planet poets will surely  
defeat the muses of entropy

we love the way your cigar juts  
from EarthCuba where the CIA kill  
Fidel Castro daily when he hides  
in the strange game called baseball

which no one plays on our worlds  
our only olympic's the universal  
join-in of a jousting blog url  
the jot-in of its poetics journal

\*

## LATEST TWIST

in his oval office nest  
does our President worry  
whether this awful oval  
was ever an egg and he  
a wild gene in its cell

then the hen that squats  
above his troubled den  
must coo and coddle him  
hush my dovecock what's  
that bother in your head

remember when I said  
if we could lay our arms  
down next to our qualms  
and then pit our qualms  
against our dreams

such harmless tourney feats  
might hatch within your heart  
some circum round of peace  
a perfect arctic circle  
shining in its shell

you my yolk would yeast  
and motherbrood my roost  
so drink some oval-tine  
forget that war-milk machine  
bomb its udders to rest

egg along with me and see  
each day I lay one more  
go zygote your god-reich war  
stay my mutant mite astray  
in white house DNA

when time unlocks its clucks  
you bad li'l roosterboy  
like Hamlet Oedipus Rex  
you're mommy's junior joy  
one of my choicest chicks

yet I fear your fate is theirs  
ego-typical of the male  
pursuing his hubris wars  
he loses his human weal  
becomes an insane criminal

his mind can't mend its cracks

Humpty Dumpty's no lie  
all your Irans and Iraqs  
can't stick you together again  
you're fry freud in the pan

sicky runny on the plate  
yellow gunked with hate  
like medals melting nuked  
all your poultry-folk cry halt  
too late our goose is cooked

so pluck my feathers for  
the flag of white surrender  
even us fuckfowl know what  
backs up that diplomatic talk  
wrungneck-hung'll stop my squawk

\*\*\*\*

## May 21, 2010 - DOWNRHYMES

**DOWNRHYMES: 101 POEMS OF DEFEAT DEPRESSION AND DESPAIR / new volume i'm collating—**

— isn't formatted correctly, sorry, but you can see the outline of what I'm working toward— this will be a Lulu book (assuming I complete it)

:

"[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 (Chicago) 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 (Chicago) 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

"Consider Bill Knott, a poet who writes lots of very short poems that are nothing but bombast pretending at being the voice of one crying in the wilderness."

—Josh Hanson, Livejournal, 28/06/07: <http://josh-hanson.livejournal.com/26249.html>

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

"Bill Knott [is] the crown prince of bad judgment."  
—Ron Silliman, Silliman's Blog, June 26, 2007  
"Bill Knott's poems are . . . rhetorical fluff . . . and fake." —Ron Loewinsohn, TriQuarterly, Spring 1970

"[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. . . . [He'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[s] ancient, academic ramblings are part of what's wrong with poetry today. Ignore the old bastard." —Collin Kelley (from "They Shoot Poets Don't They" blog, August 08, 2006)

"Bill Knott bores me to tears." —Curtis Faville, <http://compassrosebooks.blogspot.com/2009/05/moore-formalism-post-avant-part-three.html>

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

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

"Bill Knott's a prissy little moron."  
—Matthew Henriksen, <http://hyacinthlosers.blogspot.com/>, March 23, 2009

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

\*

I could add lots of other lovenotes to the ones above, but thought I'd leave some space here for write-in consensus:

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DOWNRHYMES:

101 POEMS  
OF DEFEAT  
DEPRESSION  
AND DESPAIR

copyright 2010 by Bill Knott

\*

The poems in this book are fictional.

Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Intro

\*

A selection from stuff I've written over the years.

\*

The order of the poems is random, neither chronological nor thematic.

\*

When I conceived the idea for this book, I thought I'd have no problem finding plenty of verses to fit the category—

but in the course of collating/editing, I was surprised at finding that many poems which began on a negative note would often conclude with some optimistic urge—

the frequency of which has depressed me. One-upped by my own fatuity.

\*

MONOPOLY

Finally the day dawned when a monopoly owned  
everything in the world  
So it went looking for its stockholders to celebrate  
But they were all owned by it they were all dead they  
were someplace  
Their photographs hung in elevators which went up  
and down up and down carrying nobody  
Everyone else was in bed doing exercises to get in  
shape for noon  
Hey the monopoly said let's uncork the Tower of  
Babel and get blotto  
Silence  
The monopoly scowled  
All it wanted was a little good-fellowship, like you get  
in the highrise apartment-buildings  
Then the sky got awful dark  
Gee  
And everyone was in bed frantically doing those  
exercises that get us in shape for death  
Exercises known as "kissing" "fucking" "caressing"  
Everyone was unaware that they had been bought  
Or that the earth was about to sell them to the moon  
For a little light

THE D AND M'S

I've got the D and M's,  
despondency madness  
hare me everywhere,  
despair or mal-de-mess.

Diagnosis is malignant,  
day channels the moon,  
my denials mechanical,

all darkness unders mine.

Dearth and mourn.  
Doldrums in mire.  
I've got the D and M's

and all their dire malign  
deep-plodes my mind.  
I can't stand these damns.

#### BREAKFAST RHYMES

I suspect the obverse of this cereal  
box is blank and that all the colorful

images on this side would vanish too  
if I turned its cardboard 180.

\*

#### [UNTITLED]

The moon's a wishingwell you threw  
all your sources at, but you wasted them.  
Everything is coming true,  
but for the last time.  
The moon will soon be tossed into you.

#### DEPRESSIONISM

Without any necessity to name it or anything,  
I remember this bombcrater before it held a garden.  
Once I saw children kneel down there to pray for  
pardon  
At an altar on which a little toll-money rolled laughing.

Swift suedes of evening, night's purple peltdown.  
I don't have to invoke the past; it's not required.  
I'll just settle here stolid like a stopsign repeating  
The word I stand for—sit and let my tired feet hang

Over the lip of this pit-deep garden whose intricate  
Vines query up at me. Quiet from the town I can hear  
Orphans rattling the gravel on their plates and or

Other faux pas I'm under no order to enumerate,—  
Jet-lag of angels, a snake, faintings on summer  
pavements.  
This bombfall failed in its intent: having none, I won't.

#### WHAT

I envision a doctor saying  
to me someday soon  
(and any day is too soon)  
your diagnosis  
is terminal . . . then  
I imagine myself

replying  
well I've had a good life—

That daydream ends,  
and I sit in my room  
surveying, estimating  
trying to guess  
while I still can  
what's good  
about it.

#### POEM

He/she  
will outlive  
me and I  
will die

wishing  
I had had  
her/his life  
instead

of my  
own—  
how many

can I say  
that of  
and why.

#### DAS LIED

I should buy one of those pods  
to have in my ears when I die  
Beethoven's Fifth or the Mahler  
whatever, but is that really

an important enough occasion  
for such? I wonder. And indeed  
pondering around my life I see  
nothing meriting music: what

occurrence was ever significant  
to the degree of a symphony,  
or worth the extravagance of  
your most ephemeral popsong;

so why the hell would this final  
event warrant compliment.

#### RACIST POEM

we had our chance Pilate  
washed his hands of it  
and left it up to us

we had our chance  
we could have chosen  
one of our own  
a thief  
a murderer

the cross the tomb the  
resurrection  
then heaven  
the right hand throne

a smirk on his face Barabbas  
one of us

we could have chosen him  
for son of god  
might've stuck up for us up there  
someone who was flesh  
of our flesh

our kind  
a pure one hundred  
percent human  
but we goofed

(stanza break)

we picked that halfbreed  
that mestizo  
from Nazareth

we had our chance Barabbas  
a thief  
a murderer  
one of us

MADE FOR EACH OTHER

Today a fashion-model stopped me on the street  
And asked me to marry her because  
She said  
She wanted to eat all the rat-poison in the world for  
her wedding-supper

ANT DODGER

A suicide applicant  
Who braces himself out  
On a high ledge at noon  
While busy peeking down

Noticed an ant crawling  
Dottily on the ledge  
Right  
There near his left toe

Below crowds all pushed  
Oblivious babbling  
Omniscient like in the movies  
Out whooshy doors

But his gaze halt ant  
Ant the true ant  
He dimly remembers  
Not like them

So now  
He hesitates  
A million stories up  
Shifts weight trying

Make his mind up  
Distantly deciding  
Whether to step  
Before he jumps

On it

Or not  
BANG BANG GLUB GLUB

My ark/my life's-boat  
had two of everything  
necessary for salvation  
with the exception  
of two bullet-holes  
in its bottom hull.

#### LINEAR

Cheekbone-fluid runs down the walls of my cell.  
A wind goes by with an air of freedom clamped in its teeth.  
The angry mother and the drunken father  
Take turns hacking my controls.  
So  
If I stifle my desire to feed chairs  
All night to a revolving door  
Or to mourn the wheels killed  
In inexact wars until  
Until I must push disneyvisaged puppets against  
You too. Try  
To eclipse our lower steps with our higher?  
If it weren't for nonsequitirs  
I wouldn't have any kind of seq. Seqs. Sex.

#### DOMESTIC

Left to myself I might simply  
fondle a platter of doorknobs,  
as long as they are the mute ones—  
I don't like the verbal ones.

If nobody bothers me I could  
notice out the window how  
each house but mine is best.

Maybe blow on my palms,  
trying to mist over like glass  
that place where the keys nest.

Or take another mouse out  
of the trap and thumb its head,  
thumb at it over and over  
like a dud cigarette-lighter.

HEGEMONY (prosepoem)

In school kids would stand in back of me and stick two fingers up behind my head to make the class laugh. Or so I was told. I took their word for what had occurred and that it was universal. Due to its process, I could not witness what had really happened or what it meant, what made it funny. And I still don't know, even today: but I can feel them back there, forefinger, middlefinger, ready to poke their putdown up for the world to jeer me. That V looms always, that rabbit-ears or peace-sign or whatever scourge stigmata I pledge it to represent; but what hurts most is, I know that victorious viciousness only by inference, only by report: I can never spin fast enough to catch a glimpse of it. I've never been able not once to see this joke my entire life has suffered the hands of. That's the worst part of this endless humiliation: that I have to take it on trust, that I have to believe in it blindly.

#### THE FUTILIST

Is there a single inch—  
one square millimeter

on the face of our planet  
which some animal  
human or otherwise  
has not shit on?

Is there anywhere even a  
pore's-worth of ground—  
earth that has never  
(not once in its eons)  
been covered by what  
golgotha of dung?

If such a place exists,  
I want to go there  
and stand there  
at that site  
in that spot, truly  
and purely for an instant.

Note:

Futelist to dream of an edenic site untainted by waste  
and decay. And, as the last line indicates, even if he found that mythical  
speckpoint, in one instant his mere presence would defile it for ever.

#### 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.

#### CROSSROADS

A crossroads is a solely human place—  
animals in their time have created paths  
through jungle, woods or plain, wearing  
down the grass with hooves and paws,  
but roads that intersect are necessities  
which only we respect. The junction  
of two lines laid in the earth serves  
to focus our steps in ways which crazed  
disparate fleeings of herds to and from  
their waterholes and feedgrounds can't

come flock or follow. Beyond those mad  
meanders lies the nearest need to greet  
a configuration of fates we recognize  
indigenous to us: hostile purposes, aims  
in antipathy: two destinies that disagree  
at every point except one, pure opposites  
who meet just once, whose encounter  
is over before the moment can swerve,  
the transient turn untrue. Forever lost  
(like chessmen in a labyrinth) we must  
impose our cartography upon this dirt,  
whose card-dealt corrosive tracings deny  
our thoroughfare thought, our dream  
of achieving that beckon-cathect, that  
act which will prove by evil increasing  
daily acts of horsepower steadfastness  
that our choice of trek was correct, since  
a crossroads alone can show us the way  
we didn't take, lunging there at right

angles to our progress: its ninety degree  
option runs so counter to our own that  
it endorses the unique course we each  
ride out the rims of, our souls plow-low  
so none of them neither else can share  
what, except for that single instance of  
sidelong, that helpless avoidance, that  
glimpse of other lives we might have  
shared a respite with on this junctured  
hurrythrough, is a solely human place.

#### POEM

They stole all the belongings I left  
on the sidewalk because I could only  
lug part of my stuff into my new digs;  
and so I cried screaming at the cars  
that shrieked by, sobbing on my knees.  
Seems all I could do to calm myself  
was rub my thumb along the clawpoints  
of the strange key which would open  
the door of my new place, if, that is,  
I had indeed locked it behind me:  
they may have already gone up there  
and stole the things I carried in before.

#### GENERIC

I look along the shelf  
for brand-name goods of wealth  
and fame but all I see  
is that cutprice item me.

Wise shoppers shun my aisle  
for bargains with a style  
shiny and new, not used—  
they know I've been reduced.

My sell-date fades pastdue,  
retail reveals the true value  
that wastes each cost invested:  
to wipe this dust off my head

and open my packaging,  
ignore the evident aging,  
the brown tainted spots

spotching up under Knott's

Best: to buy me takes  
a blind eye. A lack of taste.  
Half-off or marked for free  
this sale's not worth a spree.  
VITAL SIGNS

Suicides are the pulse of time.  
Its BP and temp are not, however,  
Births and weddings respectively.

I respect all three, though;  
I even regulate myself accordingly—  
Because hours, even instants,

Require our belief or else  
They will become forever;  
The transitory needs us to pledge

Ourselves to its exit, yet this is a typically  
Poetic phhft-thought, a wish of words,  
A Rilkemilky blancmange.

The ground breaks off a bit of dust  
To give to us, a little crust  
For the lips of the lost.

#### THE BALLOON THAT LIVED ON THE MOON

The lower gravity was kind to it  
It could bounce and soar higher  
Than Earth allows  
So the balloon was happier  
By far  
And soon forgot the puncture culture  
We perpetuate down here  
Where the hate-pins of our eyes skewer  
The frailest inflation  
The beadiest bubble is not safe  
But up there  
The bleak unpeopled landscape  
Mirrors more faithfully  
A balloon's own sterility and  
Essential snootiness  
Consider  
What a round object by its perfect nature  
Excludes  
How its boundaries segregate the in from the out  
And show what is enough  
And what is less  
So when you think of the balloon  
That lived on the moon you might wonder  
Why all its brothers and sisters  
Because can't you feel how  
When one tugs your hand  
Deft with that upward urge how much  
It resists your touch  
How endlessly  
You are not a part of it

#### VISION (prosepoem)

If I could only blank it out, every bit of it, all the past, all my stupidities my hapless behaviours and failures in detail, if I could forget the details of those endless humiliations, especially the faces of everyone who rightfully reproached me, their disgust and contempt, everyone who censured me disdain disapproval, all the personae with their glaredowns and gloats, their

browscolds and sneers, the faces, the way those faces all looked as they made known to me how shameful, how small and inadequate I was and still am. . . . The fact that they are mortal and will die too is no consolation, because they will not die with me on their minds, whereas me, me, I will see a montage panorama go-round of their faces as I lie heaving for a last rale of air: their scornfrowns will fill my eyes with all.

## EVICTIION PROCESS

Wreckball all the highrises:  
then use the cornerstones of those  
leveled towers to create my castle:  
composed solely of foundationstones,  
each one of which was blessed  
with a ceremony, a literal  
groundbreaking and therefore whole;  
each block unique,  
inscribed with ritual aggrandisements;  
each planted solemnly:  
each underpin-laid as the bedrock  
its lesser brothers would rest on:  
use only these rootstones to raise  
the walls of my eyrie house hideaway  
whose forbidding frame will have  
no real infrastructure, whose form  
will be a spiritual suspension  
(cradle crux kernel hub core)  
wherein each establishingstone  
must cohere solid with the weight  
of its having once been named  
in salutation as such—but surely  
when these maidenstones these  
consecratalstones are placed  
together to make home my dream  
my ideal occupancy, then surely  
due to the baseless act  
of imagining this acme of architecture  
I will not be allowed to live here.

## TAROT PORTRAIT

Peeking over the fortuneteller's shoulder  
Won't add a sole feature to what is there,  
What your future paints so plainly in view,  
So visible to anyone who isn't you—

Outside her djinn-lit storefront occult cave  
The streets that steered you forth to dare this brave  
Or foolish quest have failed themselves perhaps  
To escape the daily grid and find some maps

Empty enough to defy place or break  
The bad odds configured still in the stake  
That never wins a hand against this known  
Charade of chance: envision it downthrown

In the rows of her slow shuffle. And no  
Hexing where you haled from or where you'll go  
Next-lost round the dark town's confinements  
Will augur this encounter with a sense

Salient, some savor foresight of what's cast  
To come in likeness limned at lifelong last:  
Occur by endless tics and whits to stare  
Unavoidably clear at this picture

Urging you share its peer. Here each suit unseals  
A star that arcs inward through her deals

Toward the tower you built to spy on  
That distant face your door-key has drawn

Each time you insert it and twist it, a line  
Is incised on the canvas: each lock-wind  
Puts another brushstroke to the portrait;  
Opening her arms she frames you for it.

Impersonal, of course: she has no wish  
To harm. You thought that solitaire was  
The only game with no intent to punish  
Or hurt; thought you were safe in the menace

This tarot chose: but now you see it too  
Lacks malice; its fate-cards portray as true  
Across the table only that which is due  
Or over. How indifferently it shows  
Those oldest eyes and what they hold exposed.

#### REFLECTION

Some are afraid of the deep;  
me, of the shallows.

It's not possible to drown in it,  
but it is possible to delve in it;  
which is worse?

I lean over a mudpuddle,  
bend to a pane-drop.

The shallows  
is where I sight myself;  
the abyss  
shows all you others.

Which is worse?

#### MYTHICAL RITUALS

Every day another roc moults,  
every feather crushing  
another town where  
Notnose and Shyeye  
and Wrongtongue  
are conspiring.

As always the blood  
of martyrs drips  
straight to hell:  
a purple plumb-line,  
a Tyre-wire true.

The hundred-husked heartvalve  
tries to find hope  
in these instances.  
But each day brings more.

Each day we open  
a door whose keyhole  
shrinks around us.

#### AN INSTRUCTOR'S DREAM

Many decades after graduation  
the students sneak back onto

the school-grounds at night  
and within the pane-lit windows  
catch me their teacher at the desk  
or blackboard cradling a chalk:  
someone has erased their youth,  
and as they crouch closer to see  
more it grows darker and quieter  
than they have known in their lives,  
the lesson never learned surrounds  
them; why have they come? Is  
there any more to memorize now  
at the end than there was then—  
What is it they peer at through shades  
of time to hear, X times X repeated,  
my vain efforts to corner a room's  
snickers? Do they mock me? Forever?  
Out there my past has risen in  
the eyes of all my former pupils but  
I wonder if behind them others  
younger and younger stretch away  
to a day whose dawn will never  
ring its end, its commencement bell.

#### A LESSON FROM THE ORPHANAGE

If you beat up someone smaller than you  
they won't (and histories prove this) tell:

look at those people on the opposite side  
of the planet: they want to beat us up but

they're smaller so that's okay. Not okay is  
that most of us will die in the war between

them and us, because small equals (and mice  
prove this) sneaky: their spies could spirit all

our nuke aids away and we'd never know—  
nick our rocket-satellite knockout Star Peace

Comcodes right out of our shrinking pockets,  
even our doomsday (the FBI can prove this)

doodads, the ones we mean to use on them,  
the rats: and so when they kill us will we

have killed enough of them to win, whose  
fist figures bigger in the end? And what's it prove?—

In the Orphanage, hell, even if they do tell  
on you there's no one for them to tell it to.

#### WISHINGWELL

I weigh the coin in my hand  
against the water's clarity  
that shines up at my shadow—  
what wealth to smash apart that

gleaming calm with my claim  
on the future, my need to be  
rewarded with all I owe.  
I stand above the well wondering

whether such a small as this  
sacrifice is worth one wish—  
the water is cold and stony  
to a depth I can only guess.

And even if it reaches that far,  
plummeting through the rich  
rings of its sinking to reach  
a bottomlessness whose core

is death's perhaps deepest ore,  
there where the end gathers  
will my silver ever bring me  
any of the gold it shatters?

THE FATE  
(for Anne-Marie Stretter)

Standing on the youthhold I saw a shooting star  
And knew it predestined encounter with the sole love  
But that comet crashed into the earth so hard  
Tilted its axis a little bit not much just enough  
To make me miss meeting her by one or two yards.

[UNTITLED]

Helplessly the clock's hands fail  
to cleanse its numerals as they pass,  
to wipe away the jealous glances  
and fretful glares of our daily vigil,  
those fears and doubts whose dust  
will come to filthify time at last.

\*

EMPTY

I look harder  
in my wallet  
than in my mirror  
I already know  
what it holds  
REPLICA DAYS

A statue disguised  
as the lines in your palm  
longs to love you  
though still you resist  
its endless caresses.

Just as the smoke  
of burnt portraits  
clings to mirrors.  
Similarly ashes of dolls fill up  
a child's footprints.

Rain also, in the event  
an iceberg's  
mourning-clothes.

Dawn drapes you:

you put your arm in one sleeve  
and the other sleeve  
begins to bleed.

#### THE PATRIOTS

at the edge of the city in  
the garbagedump where the  
trucks never stop unloading  
a crazy congregation stumbles  
from trashmound to trashheap  
they smash their fists down on  
whatever's intact they tear  
to bits the pitifew items  
that have remained whole they  
rip everything old clothes  
papers cans bones to nothing  
with their shining teeth  
the enlightened the faithful  
every couple yards one of them  
falls and is torn to shreds by  
the others at the edge of  
the city where there's a line  
waiting to join

#### LIFER (AKA "HAPPY BIRTHDAY")

our prisoner  
has received a package  
containing a cake  
which of course he thinks  
must conceal a file  
or a hacksaw-blade  
and starts  
to dig down into

actually however  
his salvation  
his way out  
his escape route  
has been carefully laid out  
in brightcolored frosting  
over darker frosting

the crucial message  
the delicate pinkly lettering  
overlooked  
unheeded  
falls shredded apart now  
by his hopeful search

#### THE CYCLE

what's the use  
waking all night  
to write down truths  
which dawn quite  
easily refutes

#### THE WOULD BE NONCHALANT

I try to shrug it off, but when my shoulders poke themselves up to form the shrug they get stuck, and I slump down trapped inbetween these shoulder-peaks; so I live in the valley of a shrug, in its perpetual shadow.

#### EXTINGUISHABLE

birthdays you bend and blow  
out a candle in a skull

it's always just one candle  
but each year one more

skull is added to the table  
which by now is plus full

and that makes this ritual  
more impossible each year

each year as you approach  
that crowd of past selves

somewhere down there  
in all those bone sockets

the annual candle waiting  
glares and dares you to find it

#### 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

#### READING THE GAPS

At the Museum I go lost down a wrong corridor  
and find myself past a wrong door alone  
inside the Museum's Bomb Shelter, I know  
it's the Bomb Shelter because there's a green  
sign that says so and the paintings, the  
paintings they have hung on display here,  
confirm it. To survive the Hiroshima pain  
they mind to hang them here. Seeing this  
"last art" reminds me of our "first poet"—  
Archilochos, whose work survives mostly through  
fragments, through gaps, lacunae they call it.  
Here's a trans. of one, most of it's gone:  
'the fishnets lie in shadow beneath the wall'—  
But there is no shadow beneath this wall.  
And yet those fishnets (lifted) might be these  
paintings  
I can't for life see why I can't describe—  
they're too much like a mirror, a mirror  
injected into an icicle. Shiver-dripped shades,

final veils smeared with three thousand  
years of Western Civ, whose megadeath sketched  
their discountenance, who stretched the nucleus  
of this decision moment of Break Glass In  
Case Of Emergency, fire-hose, ax, no, no! I can't  
desire to proffer such in violence against  
these paintings they portray my face my fate they  
hang from that time-atomized wall Archilochos

(no stanza break)

rested against before getting back to work,  
Archilochos who, they say, earned his living  
as a mercenary, i.e. a robocop, a terminator,  
a killer, which is why he's our first poet:

Later in the restaurant as usual I dip the  
wine-list into a glass of water and voila it's  
chablis/rosé because of course miracles are  
common now whereas the latter hope of living  
to read tomorrow today's lacunae isn't.

#### DEPOSITIONING

so billions of humans for millennia looked  
at the blue sky of a summer day and saw it as  
bright until one day the boy Rimbaud looked  
and saw that shining normal blue as darkness

and said I have removed from the sky the blue  
which is darkness but his saying so did not  
result in heaven being stripped clean of blue  
to leave only immense endless light and hot

sun nothing but sun from horizon to horizon  
allpoint eye-encompassing gorging our view  
no and in fact and amazingly his sly vision  
or petition proved to have been only a sight

true and all despite his deposition the blue  
which is darkness stayed it remained bright

#### AFTER BAUDELAIRE'S CAUSERIE

The ocean of verse has left in my chest  
That stale ebb-tail taste of a bile blueplate—  
Its word surge bitters too gorged to digest—  
Even my critics' deaths can't renovate

An appetite for this: acid reflux  
My poems have all become, which in their prime  
Fed vanity's veins and pain's glut stomachs  
Enough to fodder a second lifetime . . .

My heart? Is Heartburnsville. Landfill palace  
Leveled ever since my fellow poets  
Chewed its dumpster pews into prose-pellets.

Come share their bard-fare, their warmth and  
fireplace—  
Eyes blazing like a holiday barrage,  
They char my offal flesh long past garbage.

#### GETTOGETHER (tanka)

backyard barbecue

I repeat over the heat  
what my doctor said  
to anyone who'll listen  
juice oozes from the red meat

\*

## SUPERSTAR

The winners of all those lookalike contests  
must suffer and grow more anguished  
and ashamed as years pass and the hurt  
worsen every time they forget to avert  
the mirror's blow and the blame of each  
tiny flaw or variance which distinguishes  
theirs from that single face fame graced.

## FETE

at summerfest  
I think of the mallet  
the crematory uses  
to graniate  
the harder bones

\*

## HERE

it's dark in the asylum's dayroom  
where the insane count me on their fingers  
but I still add up to nothing  
therapeutically speaking

## DISCRIMINATION

Although not lab-test verified,  
I would guess that the pages of porno  
magazines turn yellow and crumble  
from the sperm shot onto them  
faster than the poems in my books  
turn yellow and crumble from  
the saliva spat at them by readers—  
or is it a fallacy on my part to assume  
that the products of love are always  
more acidic, more corrosive  
than the products of loathing?

## NOT THIS WAY

if that bird soars across  
this wall which halts us  
why does it then

fly back here again

### BATHROOM MIRROR

Every morning the glass  
empties my face  
of its night and then  
as its day is poured in  
I feel forsaken and  
my eyes strain longingly  
down the drain.

### 31 SYLLABLES

even the wisest  
(even the esteemed poets  
who when I was young  
acclaimed me as promising)  
have at times been proven wrong

### FINALS

My classmates  
wrote the answers  
on my skin in  
invisible ink then  
during the Test  
set fire to me

They passed  
I passed away

### [UNTITLED]

that poem I was working on in 1959  
and the half-done one-act play from 1969  
the novel I spent 1979 starting  
the painting I made sketches for throughout 1989  
and the website I planned to debut 1999  
are around here somewhere  
maybe I should  
finish them up today

### BEDDYBYE

Just hope that when you lie down your toes are a firing-squad

## 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  
someters me: when I am blown from  
the body of life will it be refreshed?  
I dread the color of the answer Yes.

## FOOTNOTE

All of us who lived on earth  
and all our loves and wars  
may not appear at all  
in the moon's memoirs.

## HISTORY

Hope . . . goosestep.

## AT THE MUSEUM THIS WEEK

Poland Through The Centuries a touring  
Exhibition of maps drawn  
By German and Russian cartographers reveals  
There never was a Poland.

\*

## ANOTHER COLD WAR POEM

So what if you lived only  
One second longer  
Than we  
Did: to us  
You will always be known as the Survivor.

## 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.

[UNTITLED]

The trafficlight on Lovers Leap never changes to red.

MISANMYOPE

They say that blinking lubricates  
the sight and keeps it safe—  
-but did this World-Eye really  
need the lid of my brief life?

EMIGRATIQUE

The Eskimos have 26 words for  
snow but none it seems for why  
the fuck are we freezing our ass  
off let's pack up and move south—

Language presents its dislocations  
in the guise of placement where  
or there don't care, you're born to  
bear its limits its circumlocutions

as impasse: am I less thwartitude  
than those furclad icebounders if  
I lack the discriminouns to name

each hellflurry I see; numberless  
the environmental of despair  
whose slim glaciers pen me here.

TAUTOLOGICAL

I am not happy at present.  
I have never been happy.  
Has anyone ever been happy—

The syllogism does not follow.  
There are others like me  
Who have never been happy,

But we are a minority.  
Most people have been happy  
At least once in their life:

Maybe I too could be happy  
If the few who are like me  
In never having been happy

Would all become happy  
And leave me alone, unique.

BACKWARDS

The moment I was born  
I started counting  
backwards  
from a hundred,

hoping that rote  
would reverse

this sudden painful  
wakefulness

and return me to sleep,  
to comfort and time  
in my warm womb bed,

but unfortunately  
I haven't as yet  
reached 99.

#### INSIDE OUTSIDE

I too will hang my coat in the closet,  
telling it to ignore the quizzical shoes  
below, their wondering mouths agape.

When my ten fingers have finished  
sharing me equally amongst themselves,  
shall I at last grasp something whole—

Each of my scars has been tattooed on  
an egg, then the eggs placed in tiaras  
on hilltops. Horses surround the horizon,

solar pegs. Roan-ironic tree-scapes. Night  
is when clocks enter and leave. But time  
occupies me in exit. In exit only.

I hang here. Sky drips from the ceiling.  
Why won't you understand my feelings.

#### THE ZENOIST

He stays here standing on a chair  
and paces off the steps to the door  
or still further, aping escape from  
the rat-race or death or karma or

whatever's gaining ground: instead  
of late, he speeds up, the chairseat  
blurs a flurry of feet until the trip  
he's traveled noplacement is moon-far.

How'd he make it up onto that chair?  
That was a distance never to be  
crossed, or even embarked upon,

a hopeless quest. Deciding to depart  
must have seemed such a feat once:  
he fares everywhere for that start.

#### BITTER THOUGHTS IN NOVEMBER

Every branch is more beautiful than  
every other one, the rain falling or  
the rain frozen pendant on this  
twig I break off to swizzlestick that

puddle in which winter is opening  
its cracks like sky, glazing minutely  
drop by drop in closeup glissade  
each face I bring to its brink, each beauty—

In theory the maze ascends, its core  
is heaven according to mystics whose  
stiles litter the way. Style is a pun  
and therefore leads to perdition downward

doubters claim. Poets/critics: the veins  
get pissed on by the capillaries.

## PREQUEL

The speech I gave upon winning  
The Hate-Bake-Off caused more pain  
Than a mirror feels when placed  
Beneath an icicle: at every word  
The runnersup applauded slower  
Than the fumbings of far ciphers  
On cold sofas. Soon-sad I stood  
Or squatted on the neckstump  
Where a thoughtczar once Hmmed,  
Knowing that despite my award  
My words unlike his would never  
Be reproduced, and that childhood  
Itself was just a precursor of birth,  
That each life ends with its prequel.

## (CASTRATION ENVY #21) DOES THE SWORDSWALLOWER SHIT PLOWSHARES?

Sure: the more me, the more morituri.  
Mine duels his hand; some scroll of manliness,  
Whose downfall almost dolored us. Though  
Soon, up the brain tanks, gracias oozed.

The hair is a cohort of this. The hair,  
Or the beard, a creditcard used as a napkin,  
Swiping off a chin. "My adam's apple's agog!"  
Quote: Exclude before you begin the male

Because it is vile. "The heart in common  
Is the heart withheld," another recommends;  
Hey here comes my favorite human-razed future.

Xerox of course a tapeworm lost inside  
A hunchback, I squirm manfully on.  
Deep in the direction known as thumbsdown.

## Note:

Line 1: Morituri te salutamus—we who are about to die salute you: the  
gladiators' obeisance to the Roman emperor. Line 8-9: Exclude before you begin  
etc.: a pun on Mallarmé's "Exclus-en si tu commences / Le réel parce que vil".

## PSYCHOPATHOLOGY OF THE POWERTOOL WEEKEND (NEOCOLONIALISM #5)

So—as the depth of the adieu—on my forehead  
Shows, or my—signature, lopped off at—the wrist  
Witnesses: ah, more quantum formulae scrawled  
—You doodled margins of my christian bible! For

Like that drop of venom that longs to hang from  
The comma although, cream of that snootiness  
Magazine-covers sic us toward, my reflection  
My joy is just (gloss to amuse) this world! which,

Built on zoos, can't last. Or at least not till  
The herd steered by its wounds disinherit  
All I seize surmise of deepest tiptoe! Poo:

I lack the face you evolved to paw, Joe Blow,  
The figure those fingers of yours grew for,  
Meg Smith.

I got no legit to forget it either, no greater esthetic.

## ORPHAN

Like blueprints hung on a clothesline,  
anywhere I could have lived  
is rinsed into the dirt,  
my final and my only home.

I lack a long-ago, a childhood:  
I spit its name into my wounds.

I am ringed by a landscape  
of complete aversion. The compass  
hides its face, the horizon lights  
a familytree-fuse that explodes in me—

In the middle of the sea,  
sole survivors of a cargo shipwreck,  
welcome-mats line the shore  
of a desert island.

## ENTRANCE

first he cuts a notch  
across his shins  
he gives his knees a slash next  
and then his thighs

higher and higher  
the gouges come  
to show the increments of growth  
the measured ascent

it's getting there he muses  
how long do you think  
the scars will take

before it's big enough  
for you to leave through it he asks  
his empty room

[selection unfinished]

////

Posted by knott at 12:58 PM

## May 23rd, 2010 - DOWNRHYMES

DOWNRHYMES: 101 POEMS OF DEFEAT DESPAIR AND DEPRESSION

“[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 (Chicago) 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 (Chicago) 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

“Consider Bill Knott, a poet who writes lots of very short poems that are nothing but bombast pretending at being the voice of one crying in the wilderness.”

—Josh Hanson, Livejournal, 28/06/07: <http://josh-hanson.livejournal.com/26249.html>

“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 is] incompetent . . . .”

—Alicia Ostriker, Partisan Review (date? 1972?)

“Bill Knott [is] the crown prince of bad judgment.”

—Ron Silliman, Silliman’s Blog, June 26, 2007

“Bill Knott’s poems are . . . rhetorical fluff . . . and fake.” —Ron Loewinsohn, TriQuarterly, Spring 1970

“[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. . . . [He’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[’s] ancient, academic ramblings are part of what’s wrong with poetry today. Ignore the old bastard.” —Collin Kelley (from “They Shoot Poets Don’t They” blog, August 08, 2006)

“Bill Knott bores me to tears.” —Curtis Faville,

<http://compassrosebooks.blogspot.com/2009/05/moore-formalism-post-avant-part-three.html>

“Bill Knott . . . is so bad one can only groan in response.” —Peter Stitt, Georgia

Review, Winter 1983

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

“Bill Knott’s a prissy little moron.”

—Matthew Henriksen, <http://hyacinthlosers.blogspot.com/>, March 23, 2009

“Bill Knott should be beaten with a flail.”

—Tomaz Salamun, Snow, 1973

\*

I could quote many other lovenotes like the ones above, but thought I’d leave some space here for write-in consensus:

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DOWNRHYMES:

101 POEMS  
OF DEFEAT  
DESPAIR  
AND DEPRESSION

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

\*

A selection from stuff I’ve written over the years.

\*

The order is random, neither chronological nor thematic.

\*

In the course of collating/editing this, I was surprised to find that many poems which began on a negative note would often conclude with some optimistic urge—the frequency of which, depressed me. Betrayed by my own fatuity!

But finally I found enough to choose from, melancholy, failure, ennui, remorse etcet.

I’ve tried to be scrupulous in my selecting: if you catch any non-despondent verse here, please don’t hate me.

\*

MONOPOLY

Finally the day dawned when a monopoly owned  
everything in the world  
So it went looking for its stockholders to celebrate  
But they were all owned by it they were all dead they  
were someplace  
Their photographs hung in elevators which went up  
and down up and down carrying nobody  
Everyone else was in bed doing exercises to get in

shape for noon  
Hey the monopoly said let's uncork the Tower of  
Babel and get blotto  
Silence  
The monopoly scowled  
All it wanted was a little good-fellowship, like you get  
in the highrise apartment-buildings  
Then the sky got awful dark  
Gee  
And everyone was in bed frantically doing those  
exercises that get us in shape for death  
Exercises known as "kissing" "fucking" "caressing"  
Everyone was unaware that they had been bought  
Or that the earth was about to sell them to the moon  
For a little light

#### THE D AND M'S

I've got the D and M's,  
despondency madness  
hare me everywhere,  
despair or mal-de-mess.

Diagnosis is malignant,  
day channels the moon,  
my denials mechanical,  
all darkness unders mine.

Dearth and mourn.  
Doldrums in mire.  
I've got the D and M's

and all their dire malign  
deep-plodes my mind.  
I can't stand these damns.

#### BREAKFAST RHYMES

I suspect the obverse of this cereal  
box is blank and that all the colorful

images on this side would vanish too  
if I turned its cardboard 180.

\*

#### [UNTITLED]

The moon's a wishingwell you threw  
all your sources at, but you wasted them.  
Everything is coming true,  
but for the last time.  
The moon will soon be tossed into you.

#### DEPRESSIONISM

Without any necessity to name it or anything,  
I remember this bombcrater before it held a garden.  
Once I saw children kneel down there to pray for  
pardon  
At an altar on which a little toll-money rolled laughing.

Swift suedes of evening, night's purple peltdown.  
I don't have to invoke the past; it's not required.  
I'll just settle here stolid like a stopsign repeating  
The word I stand for—sit and let my tired feet hang

Over the lip of this pit-deep garden whose intricate

Vines query up at me. Quiet from the town I can hear  
Orphans rattling the gravel on their plates and or

Other faux pas I'm under no order to enumerate,—  
Jet-lag of angels, a snake, faintings on summer  
pavements.  
This bombfall failed in its intent: having none, I won't.

#### WHAT

I envision a doctor saying  
to me someday soon  
(and any day is too soon)  
your diagnosis  
is terminal . . . then  
I imagine myself  
replying  
well I've had a good life—

That daydream ends,  
and I sit in my room  
surveying, estimating  
trying to guess  
while I still can  
what's good  
about it.

#### BIO

He/she  
will outlive  
me and I  
will die

wishing  
I had had  
her/his life  
instead

of my  
own—  
how many

can I say  
that of  
and why.

#### DAS LIED

I should buy one of those pods  
to have in my ears when I die  
Beethoven's Fifth or the Mahler  
whatever, but is that really

an important enough occasion  
for such? I wonder. And indeed  
pondering around my life I see  
nothing meriting music: what

occurrence was ever significant  
to the degree of a symphony,  
or worth the extravagance of  
your most ephemeral popsong;

so why the hell would this final  
event warrant compliment.

#### RACIST POEM

we had our chance Pilate  
washed his hands of it  
and left it up to us

we had our chance  
we could have chosen  
one of our own  
a thief  
a murderer

the cross the tomb the  
resurrection  
then heaven  
the right hand throne  
a smirk on his face Barabbas  
one of us

we could have chosen him  
for son of god  
might've stuck up for us up there  
someone who was flesh  
of our flesh

our kind  
a pure one hundred  
percent human  
but we goofed

(stanza break)

we picked that halfbreed  
that mestizo  
from Nazareth

we had our chance Barabbas  
a thief  
a murderer  
one of us

#### MADE FOR EACH OTHER

Today a fashion-model stopped me on the street  
And asked me to marry her because  
She said  
She wanted to eat all the rat-poison in the world for  
her wedding-supper

#### ANT DODGER

A suicide applicant  
Who braces himself out  
On a high ledge at noon  
While busy peeking down

Noticed an ant crawling  
Dottily on the ledge  
Right  
There near his left toe

Below crowds all pushed  
Oblivious babbling  
Omniscient like in the movies  
Out whooshy doors

But his gaze halt ant  
Ant the true ant  
He dimly remembers

Not like them

So now  
He hesitates  
A million stories up  
Shifts weight trying

Make his mind up  
Distantly deciding  
Whether to step  
Before he jumps

On it  
Or not  
BANG BANG GLUB GLUB

My ark/my life's-boat  
had two of everything  
necessary for salvation  
with the exception  
of two bullet-holes  
in its bottom hull.

LINEAR

Cheekbone-fluid runs down the walls of my cell.  
A wind goes by with an air of freedom clamped in  
its teeth.  
The angry mother and the drunken father  
Take turns hacking my controls.  
So  
If I stifle my desire to feed chairs  
All night to a revolving door  
Or to mourn the wheels killed  
In inexact wars until  
Until I must push disneyvisaged puppets against  
You too. Try  
To eclipse our lower steps with our higher?  
If it weren't for nonsequitirs  
I wouldn't have any kind of seq. Seqs. Sex.

DOMESTIC

Left to myself I might simply  
fondle a platter of doorknobs,  
as long as they are the mute ones—  
I don't like the verbal ones.

If nobody bothers me I could  
notice out the window how  
each house but mine is best.

Maybe blow on my palms,  
trying to mist over like glass  
that place where the keys nest.

Or take another mouse out  
of the trap and thumb its head,  
thumb at it over and over  
like a dud cigarette-lighter.  
HEGEMONY (prosepoem)

In school kids would stand in back of me and stick two fingers up behind my head to make the class laugh. Or so I was told. I took their word for what had occurred and that it was universal. Due to its process, I could not witness what had really happened or what it meant, what made it funny. And I still don't know, even today: but I can feel them back there, forefinger, middlefinger, ready to poke their putdown up for the world to jeer me. That V looms always,

that rabbit-ears or peace-sign or whatever scourge stigmata I pledge it to represent; but what hurts most is, I know that victorious viciousness only by inference, only by report: I can never spin fast enough to catch a glimpse of it. I've never been able not once to see this joke my entire life has suffered the hands of. That's the worst part of this endless humiliation: that I have to take it on trust, that I have to believe in it blindly.

## TWO LEFT FEET

they say if you can hum  
you can dance  
if you can live  
you can die

guide-graphs on the floor  
may draw our soles  
toward a ballroom grace  
in the first case

but with the other  
each time we look down  
there are no paths  
no ways no wonder

we're always stepping  
on our own graves

## FUTILIST

Is there a single inch—  
one square millimeter  
on the face of our planet  
which some animal  
human or otherwise  
has not shit on?

Is there anywhere even a  
pore's-worth of ground—  
earth that has never  
(not once in its eons)  
been covered by what  
golgotha of dung?

If such a place exists,  
I want to go there  
and stand there  
at that site  
in that spot, truly  
and purely for an instant.

Note:

Futilist to dream of an edenic site untainted by waste and decay. And, as the last line indicates, even if he found that mythical speckpoint, in one instant his mere presence would defile it for ever.

## SPITE FATE

I sometimes muse a scene I can't for life say why:  
A dancer, who has overslept, rushes by rote to dress  
And ready a face all in a style obviously posthaste—  
See her running to catch the train, late-panicked.

She's unprepared as you or me, as virgin-awkward,  
Each time we find ourselves under and in a fumble  
For the unnatural rigor of alarm-clocks or those  
Damned thumb-blind buttonholes. . . . Is it, do I fear

Her second-knowledge gained from years of training;

How that slow-gathered grace of artifice still  
Outstrips us and is what should outlast our

Daily demeaning of some other, this daydream  
Scenario that fails to compensate my failure—?  
And now her nine o'clock pupils attack their barre.

#### 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.

#### WHAT FOR

I don't want to live with the alone tonight  
my mood rubbed by random headphones  
the noise is hallways now the goal is scope  
roads drop their cross at my feet to take

is there no way to un-one-way my maze  
its name in mine each stream subsumes  
this vanish vanquish suite of time's motifs  
chance chain quotably quiet quantum

what for to endure days gone by noon  
what else to tweeze the moon's lesser tints  
to build bridges that make the sea blink  
to drink up all the teaspoon stirs unclear

I don't want to live I heard them tell me  
those words I wrote both mote and multi

#### HURL

My failure has homes in France. Bucharest,  
Taipei. Around the globe in thoughts and finds  
Everywhere it lands the same, the fatal  
Frontporches, never mind the odds and ends

Tipped over. All my Applause-Minus-One  
Discs scratched. These traces of my worthlessness  
Worldwide have the bearing of their meaning

Obvious, engraved in spade, metaphors

Monotonous. Why go on? And the spread  
Of my failure contrasts with your success,  
Its local nature so centered in you, reduced

To a town, a street, a house shining with the urge  
To not retain you, to scatter you as I have  
Been thrown elsewhere, far from the core of it.

## CROSSROADS

A crossroads is a solely human place—  
animals in their time have created paths  
through jungle, woods or plain, wearing  
down the grass with hooves and paws,  
but roads that intersect are necessities  
which only we respect. The junction  
of two lines laid in the earth serves  
to focus our steps in ways which crazed  
disparate fleerings of herds to and from  
their waterholes and feedgrounds can't  
come flock or follow. Beyond those mad  
meanders lies the nearest need to greet  
a configuration of fates we recognize  
indigenous to us: hostile purposes, aims  
in antipathy: two destinies that disagree  
at every point except one, pure opposites  
who meet just once, whose encounter  
is over before the moment can swerve,  
the transient turn untrue. Forever lost  
(like chessmen in a labyrinth) we must  
impose our cartography upon this dirt,  
whose card-dealt corrosive tracings deny  
our thoroughfare thought, our dream  
of achieving that beckon-cathect, that  
act which will prove by evil increasing  
daily acts of horsepower steadfastness  
that our choice of trek was correct, since  
a crossroads alone can show us the way  
we didn't take, lunging there at right

angles to our progress: its ninety degree  
option runs so counter to our own that  
it endorses the unique course we each  
ride out the rims of, our souls plow-low  
so none of them neither else can share  
what, except for that single instance of  
sidelong, that helpless avoidance, that  
glimpse of other lives we might have  
shared a respite with on this junctured  
hurrythrough, is a solely human place.

## POEM

They stole all the belongings I left  
on the sidewalk because I could only  
lug part of my stuff into my new place;  
and so I cried screaming at the cars  
that shrieked by, sobbing on my knees.  
Seems all I could do to calm myself  
was rub my thumb along the clawpoints  
of the strange key which would open  
the door of my new rooms, if, that is,  
I had indeed locked it behind me:  
they may have already gone up there  
and stole the things I carried in before.

## GENERIC

I look along the shelf  
for brand-name goods of wealth  
and fame but all I see  
is that cutprice item me.

Wise shoppers shun my aisle  
for bargains with a style  
shiny and new, not used—  
they know I've been reduced.

My sell-date fades pastdue,  
retail reveals the true value  
that wastes each cost invested:  
to wipe this dust off my head

and open my packaging,  
ignore the evident aging,  
the brown tainted spots  
splotching up under Knott's

Best: to buy me takes  
a blind eye. A lack of taste.  
Half-off or marked for free  
this sale's not worth a spree.  
SUCCESSION

Upon the welcome mat the foot announces knee;  
knee, thigh; and so on. Each part of the body  
becomes, in the process of this introductory  
entrance, merely a pavlovian John the Baptist,

mere clarion omen of the one above it. But  
the head, what does the head presage? My hair  
can't grass over a path thus opened. The self  
must make way for itself, its progress upward,

upward, and irreversible, like life. Which is why  
I waver here before you now in the fear that I,  
the poor shadow of whatever it is I portend,  
I may somehow fail to properly augur forth:

caught in that unreeling portrait called Arrival,  
will I prepare its import, bear up and be its doorsill?

## NO WONDER

There is nowhere in the United States  
Where you cannot arrange a murder  
For a couple of thousand dollars or  
Less, she said. This was Des Moines, Iowa,

But I can't remember the occasion—  
I can't even remember her name, or what  
Her eyes looked like when I kissed them  
Or most anything else, except this.

Forgetting is a kind of murder, I guess.  
But if, as my mom said about writing poetry,  
You don't get no money for it why do it?

And why this poem; failed mnemonic  
That costs me less than its insipid desire  
To seem sincere, seem serious, does.

## STRETCH

We feel more imprisoned  
by walls with cracks in them  
than by walls that are smooth  
and featureless: the latter

do not mock us with examples  
of breach, morals of escape—  
indeed, as further punishment  
our cells from side to side

are fissured with gaps not wide  
enough for exit of course;  
but through which can be seen

fair glimpses of all the others  
penned around us, the ones  
who deserve this sentence.

#### THE BALLOON THAT LIVED ON THE MOON

The lower gravity was kind to it  
It could bounce and soar higher  
Than Earth allows  
So the balloon was happier  
By far  
And soon forgot the puncture culture  
We perpetuate down here  
Where the hate-pins of our eyes skewer  
The frailest inflation  
The beadiest bubble is not safe  
But up there  
The bleak unpeopled landscape  
Mirrors more faithfully  
A balloon's own sterility and  
Essential snootiness  
Consider  
What a round object by its perfect nature  
Excludes  
How its boundaries segregate the in from the out  
And show what is enough  
And what is less  
So when you think of the balloon  
That lived on the moon you might wonder  
Why all its brothers and sisters  
Because can't you feel how  
When one tugs your hand  
Deft with that upward urge how much  
It resists your touch  
How endlessly  
You are not a part of it

#### MALE MENOPAUSE POEM

How as to lean my non-eon on autumn's roan  
Undoing, to smile while the stymies crawl  
All over me and the prismatic blindfold  
Around my testicles squeaks: guess this house

No longer knows which door I am. The window  
We were, does it remember its view? You-or-I  
Saw so little out there; what future only  
Catches, catnap glimpses, of nightmares to come.

Doorknobs worn to doornubs—grey stubble on  
Gaunt armpits—lists like that litter this earth.  
A lattice of graves greets me or is kind to me;

My hair plowed with parents, their protracted

Smoothings of some poor, tuckablanket bed.  
As said each road I find in your face is fled.

## EVICTION PROCESS

Wreckball all the highrises:  
then use the cornerstones of those  
leveled towers to create my castle:  
composed solely of foundationstones,  
each one of which was blessed  
with a ceremony, a literal  
groundbreaking and therefore whole;  
each block unique,  
inscribed with ritual aggrandisements;  
each planted solemnly:  
each underpin-laid as the bedrock  
its lesser brothers would rest on:  
use only these rootstones to raise  
the walls of my eyrie house hideaway  
whose forbidding frame will have  
no real infrastructure, whose form  
will be a spiritual suspension  
(cradle crux kernel hub core)  
wherein each establishingstone  
must cohere solid with the weight  
of its having once been named  
in salutation as such—but surely  
when these maidenstones these  
consecratalstones are placed  
together to make home my dream  
my ideal occupancy, then surely  
due to the baseless act  
of imagining this acme of architecture  
I will not be allowed to live here.

## LAMENT

A bruise there was, which  
Prospered on stale blood;  
But growing smaller, the bruise became  
A lecturer in escape-routes,  
A philosopher of loss; relying  
On the body's reluctance to be  
Normal, i.e. immortal, it  
Had hoped to survive somehow—  
As a useful parasite perhaps, draining  
The self's hidden wounds,  
Masking its aberrations . . . but no.  
For always there is no mercy for  
Anything that is not whole,  
That begs (like the brain) to be alone.

## REFLECTION

Some are afraid of the deep;  
me, of the shallows.

It's not possible to drown in it,  
but it is possible to delve in it;  
which is worse?

I lean over a mudpuddle,  
bend to a pane-drop.

The shallows  
is where I sight myself;  
the abyss  
shows all you others.

Which is worse?  
TAROT PORTRAIT

Peeking over the fortuneteller's shoulder  
Won't add a sole feature to what is there,  
What your future paints so plainly in view,  
So visible to anyone who isn't you—

Outside her djinn-lit storefront occult cave  
The streets that steered you forth to dare this brave  
Or foolish quest have failed themselves perhaps  
To escape the daily grid and find some maps

Empty enough to defy place or break  
The bad odds configured still in the stake  
That never wins a hand against this known  
Charade of chance: envision it downthrown

In the rows of her slow shuffle. And no  
Hexing where you haled from or where you'll go  
Next-lost round the dark town's confinements  
Will augur this encounter with a sense

Salient, some savor foresight of what's cast  
To come in likeness limned at lifelong last:  
Occur by endless tics and whits to stare  
Unavoidably clear at this picture

Urging you share its peer. Here each suit unseals  
A star that arcs inward through her deals  
Toward the tower you built to spy on  
That distant face your door-key has drawn

Each time you insert it and twist it, a line  
Is incised on the canvas: each lock-wind  
Puts another brushstroke to the portrait;  
Opening her arms she frames you for it.

Impersonal, of course: she has no wish  
To harm. You thought that solitaire was  
The only game with no intent to punish  
Or hurt; thought you were safe in the menace

This tarot chose: but now you see it too  
Lacks malice; its fate-cards portray as true  
Across the table only that which is due  
Or over. How indifferently it shows  
Those oldest eyes and what they hold exposed.

THE ANSWER

Leaving the house,  
the house will be  
left completely,  
from cellar to  
attic my absence  
entire.

Do I enter the world  
the same,  
my presence felt  
from cloud  
to ditch?

Only in departure whole.  
Arrival  
is always partial.

## MYTHICAL RITUALS

Every day another roc moults,  
every feather crushing  
another town where  
Notnose and Shyeye  
and Wrongtongue  
are conspiring.

As always the blood  
of martyrs drips  
straight to hell:  
a purple plumb-line,  
a Tyre-wire true.

The hundred-husked heartvalve  
tries to find hope  
in these instances.  
But each day brings more.

Each day we open  
a door whose keyhole  
shrinks around us.

## BECKON GONE

Now I see they put the world together  
at an angle that goes wrong to the earth.

Tables and chairs have a destiny in this,  
flawed beyond all hopes of wood. The wind  
rivering through the bare branches gathers  
their withering rather than my growth.

Shadow sutured to the eventual skin of  
our ascendance, your swami crannies  
fail me. Amadeus, Amadeus,  
the sky calls. Beckon gone, go, go on home—

Nothing blunts my perfume as I become,  
as I attempt to exude from within  
the most faintly effigy I can. North  
of birthfants, south of deathdults, where am I?

## AN INSTRUCTOR'S DREAM

Many decades after graduation  
the students sneak back onto  
the school-grounds at night  
and within the pane-lit windows  
catch me their teacher at the desk  
or blackboard cradling a chalk:  
someone has erased their youth,  
and as they crouch closer to see  
more it grows darker and quieter  
than they have known in their lives,  
the lesson never learned surrounds  
them; why have they come? Is  
there any more to memorize now  
at the end than there was then—  
What is it they peer at through shades  
of time to hear, X times X repeated,  
my vain efforts to corner a room's  
snickers? Do they mock me? Forever?  
Out there my past has risen in  
the eyes of all my former pupils but  
I wonder if behind them others  
younger and younger stretch away

to a day whose dawn will never  
ring its end, its commencement bell.

## ITINERARY

I pace off my heart,  
six this way, six that way,  
the length of a small wait  
or a cave behind glass.

Quenching my teeth in shouts  
I advance little by little,  
late by late.

They open the door  
emptier each time I pass,  
they: the measured threshold,  
the keyhole's spider groin.

Bury the dawn in ambush,  
let white curtains count for home.  
Make ruin my own.

## A LESSON FROM THE ORPHANAGE

If you beat up someone smaller than you  
they won't (and histories prove this) tell:

look at those people on the opposite side  
of the planet: they want to beat us up but

they're smaller so that's okay. Not okay is  
that most of us will die in the war between

them and us, because small equals (and mice  
prove this) sneaky: their spies could spirit all

our nuke aids away and we'd never know—  
nick our rocket-satellite knockout Star Peace

Comcodes right out of our shrinking pockets,  
even our doomsday (the FBI can prove this)

doodads, the ones we mean to use on them,  
the rats: and so when they kill us will we

have killed enough of them to win, whose  
fist figures bigger in the end? And what's it prove?—

In the Orphanage, hell, even if they do tell  
on you there's no one for them to tell it to.

## PSYCHOPATHOLOGY OF THE POWERTOOL WEEKEND (NEOCOLONIALISM #5)

So—as the depth of the adieu—on my forehead  
Shows, or my—signature, lopped off at—the wrist  
Witnesses: ah, more quantum formulae scrawled  
—You doodled margins of my christian bible! For

Like that drop of venom that longs to hang from  
The comma although, cream of that snootiness  
Magazine-covers sic us toward, my reflection  
My joy is just (gloss to amuse) this world! which,

Built on zoos, can't last. Or at least not till  
The herd steered by its wounds disinherit  
All I seize surmise of deepest tiptoe! Poo:

I lack the face you evolved to paw, Joe Blow,  
The figure those fingers of yours grew for,  
Meg Smith.  
I got no legit to forget it either, no greater esthetic.

#### ORPHAN

Like blueprints hung on a clothesline,  
anywhere I could have lived  
is rinsed into the dirt,  
my final and my only home.

I lack a long-ago, a childhood:  
I spit its name into my wounds.

I am ringed by a landscape  
of complete aversion. The compass  
hides its face, the horizon lights  
a familytree-fuse that explodes in me—

In the middle of the sea,  
sole survivors of a cargo shipwreck,  
welcome-mats line the shore  
of a desert island.

#### WISHINGWELL

I weigh the coin in my hand  
against the water's clarity  
that shines up at my shadow:  
what wealth to smash apart that

gleaming calm with my claim  
on the future, my need to be  
rewarded with all I owe.  
I stand above the well wondering

whether such a small as this  
sacrifice is worth one wish—  
the water is cold and stony  
to a depth I can only guess.

And even if it reaches that far,  
plummeting through the rich  
rings of its sinking to reach  
a bottomlessness whose core

is death's perhaps deepest ore,  
there where the end gathers  
will my silver ever bring me  
any of the gold it shatters?

#### THE FATE

(for Anne-Marie Stretter)

Standing on the youthhold I saw a shooting star  
And knew it predestined encounter with the sole love  
But that comet crashed into the earth so hard  
Tilted its axis a little bit not much just enough  
To make me miss meeting her by one or two yards.

#### [UNTITLED]

Helplessly the clock's hands fail  
to cleanse its numerals as they pass,  
to wipe away the jealous glances  
and fretful glares of our daily vigil,

those fears and doubts whose dust  
will come to filthy time at last.

\*

## EMPTY

I look harder  
in my wallet  
than in my mirror  
I already know  
what it holds  
REPLICA DAYS

A statue disguised  
as the lines in your palm  
longs to love you  
though still you resist  
its endless caresses.

Just as the smoke  
of burnt portraits  
clings to mirrors.  
Similarly ashes of dolls fill up  
a child's footprints.

Rain also, in the event  
an iceberg's  
mourning-clothes.

Dawn drapes you:  
you put your arm in one sleeve  
and the other sleeve  
begins to bleed.

## THE PATRIOTS

at the edge of the city in  
the garbagedump where the  
trucks never stop unloading  
a crazy congregation stumbles  
from trashmound to trashheap  
they smash their fists down on  
whatever's intact they tear  
to bits the pitiful items  
that have remained whole they  
rip everything old clothes  
papers cans bones to nothing  
with their shining teeth  
the enlightened the faithful  
every couple yards one of them  
falls and is torn to shreds by  
the others at the edge of  
the city where there's a line  
waiting to join

## LIFER (AKA "HAPPY BIRTHDAY")

our prisoner  
has received a package  
containing a cake  
which of course he thinks  
must conceal a file  
or a hacksaw-blade  
and starts  
to dig down into

actually however

his salvation  
his way out  
his escape route  
has been carefully laid out  
in brightcolored frosting  
over darker frosting

the crucial message  
the delicate pinkly lettering  
overlooked  
unheeded  
falls shredded apart now  
by his hopeful search

#### THE CYCLE

what's the use  
waking all night  
to write down truths  
which dawn quite  
easily refutes

#### THE WOULD BE NONCHALANT

I try to shrug it off, but when my shoulders poke themselves up to form the shrug they get stuck, and I slump down trapped inbetween these shoulder-peaks; so I live in the valley of a shrug, in its perpetual shadow.

#### EXTINGUISHABLE

birthdays you bend and blow  
out a candle in a skull

it's always just one candle  
but each year one more

skull is added to the table  
which by now is plus full

and that makes this ritual  
more impossible each year

each year as you approach  
that crowd of past selves

somewhere down there  
in all those bone sockets

the annual candle waiting  
glares and dares you to find it

#### 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

## READING THE GAPS

At the Museum I go lost down a wrong corridor  
and find myself past a wrong door alone  
inside the Museum's Bomb Shelter, I know  
it's the Bomb Shelter because there's a green  
sign that says so and the paintings, the  
paintings they have hung on display here,  
confirm it. To survive the Hiroshima pain  
they mind to hang them here. Seeing this  
"last art" reminds me of our "first poet"—  
Archilochos, whose work survives mostly through  
fragments, through gaps, lacunae they call it.  
Here's a trans. of one, most of it's gone:  
'the fishnets lie in shadow beneath the wall'—  
But there is no shadow beneath this wall.  
And yet those fishnets (lifted) might be these  
paintings  
I can't for life see why I can't describe—  
they're too much like a mirror, a mirror  
injected into an icicle. Shiver-dripped shades,  
final veils smeared with three thousand  
years of Western Civ, whose megadeath sketched  
their discountenance, who stretched the nucleus  
of this decision moment of Break Glass In  
Case Of Emergency, fire-hose, ax, no, no! I can't  
desire to proffer such in violence against  
these paintings they portray my face my fate they  
hang from that time-atomized wall Archilochos

(no stanza break)

rested against before getting back to work,  
Archilochos who, they say, earned his living  
as a mercenary, i.e. a robocop, a terminator,  
a killer, which is why he's our first poet:

Later in the restaurant as usual I dip the  
wine-list into a glass of water and voila it's  
chablis/rosé because of course miracles are  
common now whereas the latter hope of living  
to read tomorrow today's lacunae isn't.

## DEPOSITIONING

so billions of humans for millennia looked  
at the blue sky of a summer day and saw it as  
bright until one day the boy Rimbaud looked  
and saw that shining normal blue as darkness

and said I have removed from the sky the blue  
which is darkness but his saying so did not  
result in heaven being stripped clean of blue  
to leave only immense endless light and hot

sun nothing but sun from horizon to horizon  
allpoint eye-encompassing gorging our view  
no and in fact and amazingly his sly vision  
or petition proved to have been only a sight

true and all despite his deposition the blue  
which is darkness stayed it remained bright

## AFTER BAUDELAIRE'S CAUSERIE

The ocean of verse has left in my chest

That stale ebb-tail taste of a bile blueplate—  
Its word surge bitters too gorged to digest—  
Even my critics' deaths can't renovate

An appetite for this: acid reflux  
My poems have all become, which in their prime  
Fed vanity's veins and pain's glut stomachs  
Enough to fodder a second lifetime . . .

My heart? Is Heartburnsville. Landfill palace  
Leveled ever since my fellow poets  
Chewed its dumpster pews into prose-pellets.

Come share their bard-fare, their warmth and  
fireplace—  
Eyes blazing like a holiday barrage,  
They char my offal flesh long past garbage.

#### GETTOGETHER (tanka)

backyard barbecue  
I repeat over the heat  
what my doctor said  
to anyone who'll listen  
juice oozes from the red meat

\*

#### SUPERSTAR

The winners of all those lookalike contests  
must suffer and grow more anguished  
and ashamed as years pass and the hurt  
worsen every time they forget to avert  
the mirror's blow and the blame of each  
tiny flaw or variance which distinguishes  
theirs from that single face fame graced.

#### FETE

at summerfest  
I think of the mallet  
the crematory uses  
to graniate  
the harder bones

\*

#### HERE

it's dark in the asylum's dayroom  
where the insane count me on their fingers  
but I still add up to nothing  
therapeutically speaking

#### DISCRIMINATION

Although not lab-test verified,  
I would guess that the pages of porno  
magazines turn yellow and crumble  
from the sperm shot onto them  
faster than the poems in my books  
turn yellow and crumble from  
the saliva spat at them by readers—  
or is it a fallacy on my part to assume  
that the products of love are always  
more acidic, more corrosive  
than the products of loathing?

## NOT THIS WAY

if that bird soars across  
this wall which halts us  
why does it then  
fly back here again

## BATHROOM MIRROR

Every morning the glass  
empties my face  
of its night and then  
as its day is poured in  
I feel forsaken and  
my eyes strain longingly  
down the drain.

## 31 SYLLABLES

even the wisest  
(even the esteemed poets  
who when I was young  
acclaimed me as promising)  
have at times been proven wrong

## FINALS

My classmates  
wrote the answers  
on my skin in  
invisible ink then  
during the Test  
set fire to me

They passed  
I passed away

## [UNTITLED]

that poem I was working on in 1959  
and the half-done one-act play from 1969  
the novel I spent 1979 starting  
the painting I made sketches for throughout 1989  
and the website I planned to debut 1999  
are around here somewhere  
maybe I should  
finish them up today

## BEDDYBYE

Just hope that when you lie down your toes are a firing-squad

\*

## 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  
someters me: when I am blown from  
the body of life will it be refreshed?  
I dread the color of the answer Yes.

## FOOTNOTE

All of us who lived on earth  
and all our loves and wars  
may not appear at all  
in the moon's memoirs.

## HISTORY

Hope . . . goosestep.

## AT THE MUSEUM THIS WEEK

Poland Through The Centuries a touring  
Exhibition of maps drawn  
By German and Russian cartographers reveals  
There never was a Poland.

\*

## ANOTHER COLD WAR POEM

So what if you lived only  
One second longer  
Than we  
Did: to us  
You will always be known as the Survivor.

## 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.

## [UNTITLED]

The trafficlight on Lovers Leap never changes to red.

## MISANMYOPE

They say that blinking lubricates  
the sight and keeps it safe—  
-but did this World-Eye really  
need the lid of my brief life?

\*

## UNEARTHED TO EARTH

flappilating like fire caught the shot  
bird scuds mud with its misflying dyings—  
but see in poetry's sky the knott  
likewise flails and fails to find his wings  
EMIGRATIQUE

The Eskimos have 26 words for  
snow but none it seems for why  
the fuck are we freezing our ass  
off let's pack up and move south—

Language presents its dislocations  
in the guise of placement where  
or there don't care, you're born to  
bear its limits its circumlocutions

as impasse: am I less thwartitude  
than those furclad icebounders if  
I lack the discriminouns to name

each hellflurry I see; numberless  
the environmental of despair  
whose slim glaciers pen me here.

#### TAUTOLOGICAL

I am not happy at present.  
I have never been happy.  
Has anyone ever been happy—

The syllogism does not follow.  
There are others like me  
Who have never been happy,

But we are a minority.  
Most people have been happy  
At least once in their life:

Maybe I too could be happy  
If the few who are like me  
In never having been happy

Would all become happy  
And leave me alone, unique.  
BACKWARDS

The moment I was born  
I started counting  
backwards  
from a hundred,

hoping that rote  
would reverse  
this sudden painful  
wakefulness

and return me to sleep,  
to comfort and time  
in my warm womb bed,

but unfortunately  
I haven't as yet  
reached 99.

#### INSIDE OUTSIDE

I too will hang my coat in the closet,  
telling it to ignore the quizzical shoes  
below, their wondering mouths agape.

When my ten fingers have finished  
sharing me equally amongst themselves,  
shall I at last grasp something whole—

Each of my scars has been tattooed on  
an egg, then the eggs placed in tiaras  
on hilltops. Horses surround the horizon,

solar pegs. Roan-ironic tree-scapes. Night  
is when clocks enter and leave. But time  
occupies me in exit. In exit only.

I hang here. Sky drips from the ceiling.  
Why won't you understand my feelings.

#### THE ZENOIST

He stays here standing on a chair  
and paces off the steps to the door  
or still further, aping escape from  
the rat-race or death or karma or

whatever's gaining ground: instead  
of late, he speeds up, the chairseat  
blurs a flurry of feet until the trip  
he's traveled noplac is moon-far.

How'd he make it up onto that chair?  
That was a distance never to be  
crossed, or even embarked upon,

a hopeless quest. Deciding to depart  
must have seemed such a feat once:  
he fares everywhere for that start.

#### BITTER THOUGHTS IN NOVEMBER

Every branch is more beautiful than  
every other one, the rain falling or  
the rain frozen pendant on this  
twig I break off to swizzlestick that

puddle in which winter is opening  
its cracks like sky, glazing minutely  
drop by drop in closeup glissade  
each face I bring to its brink, each beauty—

In theory the maze ascends, its core  
is heaven according to mystics whose  
stiles litter the way. Style is a pun  
and therefore leads to perdition downward

doubters claim. Poets/critics: the veins  
get pissed on by the capillaries.

#### PREQUEL

The speech I gave upon winning  
The Hate-Bake-Off caused more pain  
Than a mirror feels when placed  
Beneath an icicle: at every word  
The runnersup applauded slower  
Than the fumblings of far ciphers  
On cold sofas. Soon-sad I stood  
Or squatted on the neckstump  
Where a thoughtczar once Hmmed,  
Knowing that despite my award  
My words unlike his would never  
Be reproduced, and that childhood  
Itself was just a precursor of birth,  
That each life ends with its prequel.

(CASTRATION ENVY #21) DOES THE  
SWORDSWALLOWER SHIT PLOWSHARES?

Sure: the more me, the more morituri.

Mine duels his hand; some scroll of manliness,  
Whose downfall almost dolored us. Though  
Soon, up the brain tanks, gracias oozed.

The hair is a cohort of this. The hair,  
Or the beard, a creditcard used as a napkin,  
Swiping off a chin. "My adam's apple's agog!"  
Quote: Exclude before you begin the male

Because it is vile. "The heart in common  
Is the heart withheld," another recommends;  
Hey here comes my favorite human-razed future.

Xerox of course a tapeworm lost inside  
A hunchback, I squirm manfully on.  
Deep in the direction known as thumbsdown.

Note:

Line 1: Morituri te salutamus—we who are about to die salute you: the  
gladiators' obeisance to the Roman emperor. Line 8-9: Exclude before you begin  
etc.: a pun on Mallarmé's "Exclus-en si tu commences / Le réel parce que vil".

ENTRANCE

first he cuts a notch  
across his shins  
he gives his knees a slash next  
and then his thighs

higher and higher  
the gouges come  
to show the increments of growth  
the measured ascent

it's getting there he muses  
how long do you think  
the scars will take

before it's big enough  
for you to leave through it he asks  
his empty room

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

I LIVE ON THE LOWEST

ledge it's still fatal  
to fall from while

my neighbor on

the below-one

merely loses any  
skeletal integrity

and lives to stab coupons  
for lowyield posterity:

he's lucky  
compared to me

and to all  
the tenants above me

because when we fall  
we die.

from A SOUTHERN RUN:

5. At My Grandclone's Grave, Photomyopia, Mississippi

You said that hair was merely the head out of focus  
and thus for a male, for me, growing old and bald must  
mean entering the picture is leaving it. And yet, here,  
when the cemetery grass paints my toenails with smoke I

need you to refute me more the ground I walk on,  
not cloud. That uncarpeted core of space is where  
there's too much perch to pose for polaroid-deviled scans—  
they sun us toward life's Project Face, as if death

is young enough to get I.D. Gee it de-I.Q.'s me  
to hear you say that skimming through nulls and skies  
negatives  
the event to wait for a burial that involves

just ourself: see these forehead plod lines, the skull the flesh  
which wings washed from me at birth have daubed listless  
verdure over, the gaze ending so firmly in lax?

6. After Fainting in Bill's BeautyTique, Mocha  
Rendezvous, Louisiana

Until your cilia refilled me I spilled—  
ooze from the wreck of some penicillin pickup,  
no hush path closing my aimless course, I was  
sippin' thighclaps on intermittent maps.

Life, sulk suicide. Pout puke preoccupied.  
A dirge-grid doves sieve themselves through.  
Cream of my colophon, klieg backwards, how  
I peered in at the blowtorch's privacy. Now

I want to weld wings onto my letteropener  
if I have a letteropener: the slander  
of such truth is the saliva I long to be  
mounted by, transphallic-tepid. A noose for

a backpack, I camp beneath the quicken tree.  
Source ass, I am a horse brained by its mane.

FACE IN THE WINDOW

I am a modest house, a house solely  
notable for the fact I lived here once.  
Its brass plaque depicts an oxygen eye  
in which two pupils of hydrogen dance.

Downstairs is where I lit fires whose insights  
with approach-velocity froze me, then  
signed off into flame. This always happened when  
I came close to a truth. Months passed. Years. Nights.

Shall I accommodate myself again,  
a humble aquarium of lordly  
thumbs, some fin de species? Of course each word

the blackout-moth mutters to my keyboard  
shows the snowiest letter on this page is "I"—  
must I now plumb its one remaining pane?

#### CHRISTMAS AT THE ORPHANAGE

But if they'd give us toys and twice the stuff  
most parents splurge on the average kid,  
orphans, I submit, need more than enough;  
in fact, stacks wrapped with our names nearly hid  
the tree where sparkling allotments yearly  
guaranteed a lack of—what?—family?—

I knew exactly what it was I missed:  
(did each boy there feel the same denials?)  
to share my pals' tearing open their piles  
meant sealing the self, the child that wanted  
to scream at all You stole those gifts from me;  
whose birthday is worth such words? The wish-lists  
they'd made us write out in May lay granted  
against starred branches. I said I'm sorry.

#### COMMUTER SKILLS NEEDED

I'm like a spaceship flooded with roadmaps:  
The guidebooks that marked and led me here are  
Archaic. All the ways they praise have lapsed.

They program mirage the moments I know—  
Even my going home fails threshold then;  
The path I nailed's a trail of blood whose flow

Is like what, a heritage halt, but just  
How extinct can I get by existing,  
Must I recant the past or can I trust

My family when they promise me some  
Of us have not abandoned what crumbling  
Almanachs applaud in words verbatim

From Star Ache reruns: they say our save screen  
Is full of the old jism, the thumb-jam.  
Can one yuckskull of us hold that vision

Safe, can they fly off fled within its sky?  
From vid to vid we lean, to wave goodbye.  
It's like that thing that whatsit wrote, but I

Know it's mostly misquote. It don't apply.

#### ZENITH

Once a rocket lived in the soarway  
Now it's gone  
Only a bird fills our sun socket  
Then travels on

Hovering at all angles to  
Our tallest days

Where the lion says needle star to god  
Far lingers no trace

I wanted to share  
The occasion of that height  
Even if it was only a while  
The moan-length of a laugh I had

I wanted to stay there  
But I failed at the sight  
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.

#### ELEPHANT AND ENVELOPE

Numbering their normal RAM in great noughts,  
The elephant and the envelope are  
Doomed to remember only pristine thoughts—  
They both carry every souvenir too far.

No matter how creased and stained their skins fade,  
Even the erratum images they encase  
Remain abnormally there to be read  
(Password: remorse). Is there no way to erase

The years the yearfalls or are all these flaws  
Stored away somewhere perfectly forever—  
All of our memory sites dotcomlinked—

Trapped in that utter trunkiness because  
The envelope is an elephant. Never  
Forgets: thus it too will soon be extinct.

#### ECHO NEAR THE END

Severs and brothers, broken and sisters, is this it?  
Around me life has darkened like the afternoon.  
Anymore to emulate the sunlight's posture,  
I slither down off that perfect backbone.

I am alone, but so are we. We are alone but so.  
Banking slowly the monster completes its turn—  
A clingathon of wings flaps through a halo  
That holds a weddingring up to a keyhole to

Pen in the one my fear was assisting at  
The birth of adrenalin: I pause I postulate.  
Wait. A mousehole Morpheus stamps our passport;  
Let's hope sleep has the good stuff tonight.

Murder blinks eyes upon eyes. Suicides

Stick to the roof of the mouth, stupid tripod of spit.

#### SELF(THE POET PASSÉ)PORTRAIT

His task to watch an hourglass wash itself,  
A ritual cleansing that leaves him bare,  
Though no purification's new enough  
To nullify the need for such labor—

Prior soon to repeat, platonic clone,  
He should have practiced that horizon  
Vocation, camouflage, opening his  
Arms wide the better to hide. But of course

If the flesh is fire, bones are the kindling:  
Still there but aching to be unbelied  
By the lover; unbelied as breaths held  
Until all the minutes fall to the wrong

End of the hour and find his final  
Efforts've faded, dated as (or like) a sundial.

#### FROM A DEATHBED DAYBOOK

copulation entries  
in the journal jesus  
don't look for those passages  
in these pages

if I am scheduled for  
a few more  
intimate rapports  
with long vowels before

I go I know those a's and o's  
and e's will not rise  
from the throat of eros

yet what vanity to suppose  
thanatos  
might want to jot down a few of these i's

#### MORE USELESS ENVY

When I imagine the cameras of fame  
homing in on me for a closeup,  
I back away, my back pressed against  
my eyes nose mouth: the reign of the same.

Failure has surrounded me with flesh,  
with human-remaining-human features—  
Which is no consolation—Which does  
not make up for all the psychic scars

which glitter-gifted faces inflict upon  
the crowd wherein I'm crammed  
trying to be as inconspicuous as I am!

Daily I watch the famous zoom past.  
God, I wish I could persuade some void  
to synopsise its emptiness with this.

#### MONODRAMA

Don't think, I said, that because I deny  
Myself in your presence, I do so in mine—  
But to whom was I speaking? The room, empty  
Beyond any standpoint I could attain,

Seemed all sill to stare off before someone's  
Full length nude, at halfmast their pubic flag  
Mourned every loss of disguise, allegiance  
More to the word perhaps than its image—

But predators always bite the nape first  
To taste the flower on the spine-stem, so  
I spoke again, which shows how unrehearsed  
I failed to be. I went to the window:

Sky from your vantage of death, try to see.  
Flesh drawn back for the first act of wound, it's me.

#### THE TRESPASS

On every corner I stand the street ends.  
Others zoom home ignoring curbs and stops  
And find themselves in family or friends

But I observe the sign don't cross this line.  
I obey the words that say back away.  
I mind these limits shown in case they're mine:

I share their lawful urge to prohibit—  
My own words witness so many sanctions  
How dare I unsubmit to any writ.

I can't jaywalk or say I wonder why  
Verbotens written then can still turn now  
The unstoniest road to a no go by.

What's wondering me here is not this halt  
Or prior heedings where I nearly see  
Such blocks and stalls and balks are all my fault—

I note the welcome-mat at the center  
Of my maze: how each sole turns back relieved  
To have found a spot it cannot enter.

What's wondering me then is what attends  
To nothing I say on my way nowhere.  
On every corner I stand the street ends.

#### OCTNOV AGAIN

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

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

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.)

#### EL POEMO

Little squiggly worms on the surface  
of my head. I brush them off, but  
more ooze up from within;  
an endless supply it seems.

All I learn turns to the belief that all  
my exhalations rise up into the sky  
to form an O which hovers there  
to watch me struggle for breath and die.

I always pause to grimace at the wound,  
but the wound does not hesitate at all.  
That would be an acknowledgement.

That would be a response.  
A collation of purpose, a balm, a bosom,  
even a poem perhaps.

#### POEM PUBLISHED IN QUARRY WEST

Apparently a landscape is all windows,  
but try to see what it lacks:  
imagine a wall, with moss, trees, the murmur  
of [rain presiding at a cremation].

And picture then, roadside flowers  
on a roadmap of thorns,  
thin paper  
rubblings of the first [wings] inside a seashell;

poor portrait peeling off its tacks!  
This is what the dark works hard at, orphan ivory—  
some whimper-of-branches, some adorn-of-me.

I am a field plowed by venetian-blinds;  
soaked in [amok], I fall;  
a proud gargoyle studies me for flaws.

#### NO ANDROGYNE IS AN ARCHIPELAGO

The butterfingers things that hold us know  
To plunk the gut strings of your suturous  
Lobotomy lyre—but if it is to pore  
lota'd digits through a wall with no elses

In it I do not. Who scans test tubes for  
The fatal ripple of my beauty finds  
That long meant mirror has fled in error since  
In their clone alphabet seems I'm z:

This crystalball bilge/ouch mosaic of  
Out of touch omens will not tune true too as  
My leavetaking leaking everywhere sees

A 'puter oh! inventory zeroes.  
Why try to guess which one comes last? Just zoom  
Your monitor. The past the gist of it gets us.

#### 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

#### AGING INTO THE AVANTGARDE

When the mirror paints itself,  
how true to life  
the results seem—  
But when it paints others, well,  
take me, I who have posed so long  
my patience has earned  
the most flattering  
exactitude: so why  
(as the years go by)  
is there this blurring  
appearing where my face is;  
is expressionism occurring?

When it comes to its own  
likeness, it's photorealism no less—  
the mirror paints itself  
perfectly, whereas  
the one it does of me  
(I can see now as I lean closer)  
in the end turns out to be  
nothing but a sort of art brut:  
the brushstrokes grow  
more fauve, more cobra  
each time I look.

published by the author

this edition: MAY 23, 2010

## November 17, 2010 - SURREALIST POEMS

### NEW BOOK IN PROCESS (unfinished)

\*

here's a new book I'm working on putting together, editing and collating—this  
is what I've got so far:

/

SURREALIST POEMS 1960-2010:

a selection

/

**Bill Knott**

Copyright 2010 **Bill Knott**

\*

\*

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

## INTRO NOTES

\*

Whether these are real surrealist poems or not, I don't know and I don't care. But they were influenced by surrealist **poetry**, perhaps—

Besides, this isn't a real book, it's a vanity publication (in case you hadn't noticed).

So if it's not a real book, what difference does it make if the poems in it aren't really what they say they are?

\*

The order is random, neither chronological or thematic.

\*

## PITY

inside his pane  
the window is a man  
like you or me  
at night he walks the ledges  
at night he walks the sills  
restless in his frame  
veins full of glass  
at night he walks the sills

at day his head rises  
and shines through his body  
and soon he worries  
that the coming night  
will undecapitate  
that the homing night  
will rejoin him whole

inside his pane  
like you or me  
fulgent full of future slivers  
fallen whole  
foretold and free

at night he walks the sills  
his head rises  
his head falls

held together by none  
his jaggedly slitted body  
glazed and gone  
his beauty putty

\*

## MISHAP MESSAGE

I bandage my wristwatch  
to stop the bleeding  
of time but time  
is perforce the wound  
out of which space empties  
Einstein's bag of marbles

the greenie I shoot at its sister the moon  
the purey I bury with a note saying no  
the blue one weighs in my hand  
as light as sky minus earth  
earth of course is the last marble

I like to hear it roll  
around my showerstall  
before I fall into the drain  
into that distillate of distance we call  
ocean

whitecaps whitecaps  
beneath each of which  
a nurse bobs up and down

cold fingers hold my wrist  
cold toes probe my throat  
is that my pulse I ask  
sisters is that my life

is that the onomatopoeia of the waves  
words that jumble space with time  
laughter tumbling down a telescope

words that turn to marble all I say  
white as my years they bleed  
they bleed away  
white but white as only Einstein's hair is white  
or a note slipped under drowning doors

\*

## [UNTITLED]

On nights like this the heart journeys to other islands.  
Beaches rise and dance naked under moonlight.  
Inland, asleep, you see  
The stone face of your solitude being piled slowly.

\*

## HOME

on the wall a boxing-glove lactates  
nailed to the wall a boxing-glove  
bleeds milk

what tit is it  
that drops dollops  
of great sweat  
that whiten the carpet

yanked from its frame the room dies

my insert eye

sigh-mates  
my insert semen migrates

detached from its frame the room rises  
to milk the wall  
whose udderlamp  
drips light  
that drained the champ  
of all his fist

the hand squeezes itself  
for distance it  
massages its pugilist part its penis

it feels up  
the décolletage of its diff  
and tries tries  
to collate love

detached it rises to kiss this  
inert heart  
this welcome glove

\*

## EXHIBITION

the canals a-swish with big ships

lanes I wander without cause as  
my tongue bathes in my necktie  
to show how exhausted how  
I have felt the doorknob drain

my hand of its urge to enter shops  
in this way I may chance at last  
upon weapons trained to sleep  
or down where the depot drops

all our canals or lanes or streets  
how often they or I have reached  
for my pocket in the face thrust  
although one can't exaggerate

one's beggarliness in an age of  
mechanical reproduction it seems  
the museum where pale corridors  
zoom through room-Moreaus

floor-Magrittes ceiling-Sages  
mirror-Finis and other frames  
hushed curtains reach to the floor  
which probably needs excavating

static their flesh throws slow volts in the air

\*

## ANNUAL

after leaves make fall their mark  
I enter the polarbear of aliases

white hibernates while I wait in  
gardens mendacious with bloom

new tenants for goliath glue their seed

to puddles of pennies and the call

the call comes to plea  
the allmoan rises

time is a book without quote  
it reads your hands by rote

gloved intervals will dog-ear where  
I opened my signature to the wrong page

now I spoon the drool from Frankenpoo's sex  
or start to whack my ammo

and yet some lumpenführer think  
they think I don't care

I care alright I care so much  
that I sluffed off saying it

anyway diaries detest the present tense  
so naturally naturally

the all in all corolla of it faded when  
aired on the vids senseless violence

the defence  
the defence of one's private Hollywood

\*

#### HOMICIDAL DOMICILE II: NIGHT OF THE NO-PAR

The desire to carve criminals up into one's family retains more room in us than  
the grease, the gold, the urine conversant with the flood: even the left hand's  
appraisers shun the right's buyers.

Thus my testicles have divorced but continue to share the same house, if only  
your penis was sharper it would cut the scrotum in two resolving this rental  
stumpage, this game forced yet deigned to wear the day-jar's view.

Where the righteousness of noon corrupts windows; like a name slanted to cry;  
floorboards that tweak earth: cult pepper, hurled by turban cameras, we grovel  
at sculptors whose heels punctuate our idol.

Glittering incidentals, hours in which towers swim off their own balconies, ah  
what stylites live atop our I's.

\*

#### PERSPECTIVE

I must look down to see  
the things that fall  
into the well

(coins  
teardrops  
stopsigns

sunsets  
planets  
etcets)

because when I don't  
look down to see  
them suddenly

they all  
start to fall  
on me

\*

## PLUNGE

at night one drop of rain  
falls from each star  
as if it were being lowered  
on a string

and yet that storm of plummet  
is never enough  
to wet any of the planets  
that pass through it

only the blackness the space  
between us is washed  
away by these singular  
lettings-down of water

distance is washed away  
all the worlds merge  
for a liquid moment  
our island eyes

and suddenly we understand  
why umbrellas love  
to dive  
into clouds

\*

## POEM

barbershop in the desert  
where I shave  
the cacti daily  
so carefully that no  
pearl of their water  
is spilled by my razor

come closingtime  
the needles I've sheared  
cover the floor so  
I sweep them all  
into the closet  
to fructify the feet  
of my secret cactus  
which I keep  
to replace that traitorous  
evil barberpole  
who defected  
up into the hills  
out into the aisles  
of my clientele

my virility my male  
principle I'll  
trim so bare  
and never a drop  
of its sperm  
will I spare

\*

## MYTHICAL RITUALS

Every day another roc moults,  
every feather crushing  
another town where  
Notnose and Shyeye  
and Wrongtongue  
are conspiring.

As always the blood  
of martyrs drips  
straight to hell:  
a purple plumb-line,  
a Tyre-wire true.

The hundred-husked heartvalve  
tries to find hope  
in these instances.  
But each day brings more.

Each day we open  
a door whose keyhole  
shrinks around us.

\*

## REPLICA DAYS

A statue disguised  
as the lines in your palm  
longs to love you  
though still you resist  
its endless caresses.

Just as the smoke  
of burnt portraits  
clings to mirrors.  
Similarly ashes of dolls fill up  
a child's footprints.

Rain also, in the event  
an iceberg's  
mourning-clothes.

Dawn drapes you:  
you put your arm in one sleeve  
and the other sleeve  
begins to bleed.

\*

## BY THE RIVER BAAB

We know that somewhere far north of here  
the two rivers Ba and Ab converge to form  
this greater stream that sustains us, uniting  
the lifeblood length of our lands: and we believe  
that the Ba's source is heaven, the Ab's hell.

Daily expeditions embark upcountry to find  
that fork, to learn where the merge first occurs.  
Too far: none of our explorers return. Or  
else when they reach that point they themselves  
are torn apart by a sudden urge to choose—

to resolutely take either the Ba/the Ab, to trace  
good or evil to its spring. Each flips a coin  
perhaps, or favors whichever one the wind's

blowing from at that moment. Down here  
even we who have not the heart to venture

anywhere that would force us to such deep  
decisions, even we, when we hold that glass of  
water in our hand, drink it slowly, deliberately,  
as if we could taste the two strains, could somehow  
distinguish their twin flow through our veins.

\*

## RECONCILIATIONS

To be married while sleepwalking  
and wake up on your honeymoon  
abandoned by the prankster pals who  
led you both in blind steps through  
the nuptial rites that culminate here  
in what-the-hell: to wake with lewd  
glowing rings glued to your fingers,  
the hotel bed unmade around you—

Outside your bridal suite what resort  
explodes with ennui, its white tropical  
walls will yield that one photograph  
that shows you shining, your eyes  
aimed shut by the sun. Natives wave  
bandannas that flaunt their unstorebought  
power. Your pockets pacified by beggars,  
that day is almost over. The night awaits.

And then you're home again, but oh  
it's so hard to restore the routines  
that are a now of the old, the remote  
control too big for two who hold hands,  
noting how the pattern of the crimes  
seems to shift from channel to channel,  
but always that financier has fled  
the country, has found his freedom where

you lost yours. Soon in the freezer section  
fate may feed your fingertips, or taking  
out the trash becomes an expedition:  
for the accomplished somnambulist  
escape is easy everywhere. But even  
that land whose lack of extradition  
has followed you throughout this farce  
will fail to exile the happy couple.

\*

## RIGOR VITUS

I walk  
On human stilts.  
To my right lower leg a man is locked rigid;  
To the left a woman, lifelessly strapped.

I have to heave them up,  
Heft them out and but they're so heavy (heavy as head)  
Seems all my strength  
Just take the begin step—

All my past to broach a future. And on top of that,  
They're not even dead,  
Those ol' hypocrites.

They perk up when they want to, they please and  
pleasure themselves,

It's terrible. The one consolation:  
When they make love,  
To someone who's far or close enough away appears it  
appears then  
Like I'm dancing.

\*

## THROWBACKS

I want to take your place in my life so  
I lie in wait for you everywhere. Once I used  
To lie down in the paths of steamrollers, my teardrops  
Where photographed at the feet of glaciers  
To prove if they were advancing or retreating  
Like positions in a kama sutra: after the cold  
Juggernauts passed over I was fed lingeringly  
Through printer-outers. It was read then that the  
E-pore is used most frequently by my skin,  
Next came x, p, o . . .

I want you to take my place in my life so  
I follow you everywhere. Once I used  
To follow burglars around: waiting at the window till  
They ransacked a house then fled, I'd enter  
Run my hands through its emptied drawers, degleamed  
Jewelboxes, my sole thrill was to rub the feel  
Of deceived receptacles, rifled pockets.  
I'd wait outside, then rush in, clambering like an adam's  
apple.

I want to take my place in your life so  
I go with you everywhere. Once I used  
To accompany myself, I had a passport to the xerox,  
The unanimous aimed its initials at me on the run,  
When my died my clones were laid out at the funeral  
Beside me, then a heckler who's amnesiac, anybody, some  
Forever stranger was blindfolded and led past the coffins to  
See if they could get the right I by feel but failed  
And so their life was took in place, and so I took your life  
As place, so I must now keep placing your life in take,

In sudden give and take:  
I want you to take my place in your life. Please.

\*

## THE SEVEN LAST WORDS OF SOFIA GUBAIDULINA

Intestinal as raisins on a keyboard  
I struggled through life. The setting sun  
left a few earths in the ground so I could walk.

It qualmed me just knowing that, to accomplish my color,  
the chameleon must die. How chastely I  
watched a suit-of-armor chew its fingernails.

Oh voice scathed in cloud; ankles' adieu.  
On the lips—that species of slither—is where  
I took part.

Now I pestle my face with opaque pins. You  
stigmata that summarize my signature, go,

hinges down whom antiquity has vomited sequence—

but which letter misnomers my name? I come  
from neitherstood, nuance of none. I tried  
to obey the caption under my portrait/my provenance.

Cere me in cerberus-lily; in theme-mother extracts;  
while the loaves and fish rich, the furs and lush rich,  
fill their skin with pores and then wonder what's missing . . .

Like a candle through a keyhole  
shoved, burning toward knownwheres—  
Always the days unstay me.

I need to have admired more those symmetries which preach  
each seed is buried beneath a flower,  
each weed above a wound.

Now the thorns be praised/now the thrall that somehow  
time has restored en masse my dwelling,  
my resting place. I hope my pillow's hungry for headaches!

Note:

Inspired by Gubaidulina's partita, *The Seven Last Words* (1982).

\*

## EVOLUTION R

Sentenced to 12 whiffs of the pope  
I protest  
With curly hair  
Or straight hair that grows out of the scalp  
Then grows into the shoulders  
Making it painful to turn my head  
But thereby forcing a purer sense of profile on  
A clearer renunciation of  
Looking at what is called left right  
But is never called  
Asleep or waking up yawning  
Breakfast an upper  
Dissolved in turtlesoup  
Waiter there's a hare in my slipstream  
Hurrier all highs neutralize lows  
Left right black white I try  
Squeeze inbetween grey  
Gray as sparks  
Caused by rubbing obsidian ivory together  
Dinner a downer going down on Atalanta  
Is this a race sniff sniff  
Rabbit nosing turtleheels hold  
The stopwatch on my dyings  
Soon have them down to nothing flat  
Faster than that even I'll go  
Fast as a rumor of meat up  
A soup-line I'll flow  
Rubbing rival chesspieces together  
Is this my punishment  
Looking neither left right  
Panting straight ahead on course in a rut  
But if so what was my crime  
So heinous to deserve this what  
Refusing to get my birth certificate  
Punched at the proper intervals puberty  
Marriage menopause or was it my crying  
Out that the zoo has miscast its lead role or

That heresy of trying to remain  
My sperm's missing link sniff sniff  
I protest

\*

## WEDDING PARTY

Cake tiers nearing the ceiling must  
sacrifice their bride and groom  
and often the frosting too.

Aspirations to burst up  
through the roof are  
part of this occasion.

Glasses lifted high in toast  
create a transparent cathedral  
upon whose altar  
a dove is cut in two.

The priest who remembered the vows  
is nowhere to be found.  
The one who forgot them  
eats rice from everyone's shoulders.

Pausing only to fling aloft a bouquet  
the cleanup staff finds later  
stuck to a floral carousel,  
today's couple escapes,  
committed to life for life.

Left-behinds from both families  
link elbows and sing  
surrender to the scarlet dizziness  
that reaches into their wishes.

Love will last as long as the ring  
can still be easily slipped  
from one's finger.

\*

## BEST WAY TO KEEP YOUR ANKLES AWAKE? SNAKE SHOELACES

Only a scratch, but its bandage patrols the walled  
city, assuming this mystic furrow has taught such  
fangs repose. Past suburbs skilled with ash, past  
evaporated sculpture, blindpond bodies. Or is it

like maples, learning their craft of syrup—years  
of drop on drop, step by step—have we, life after  
life, a soul-spoor gradually maximizing its sugar?  
Or is Nirvana bitter—a clockmarked zero, a pine-

needle's grudging eye. A void, propped up by sim-  
plicity. Where someone exhausted by the justice  
of his meals pauses in the street, the proof his  
feet make gathers, gravity snatching to earth all

sweets. Even sprinters, on their starting-blocks,  
hold hands. Love? A sideways noise, a tidings via  
toe-graphologists, rumor as raw as cold as saliva  
crawling on the floor of a crematorium, straw used

to sip frogsweat from sleeping lily pads. More?—

Mourners, televidilevitated. Birth, its strength  
of recap. The yacht of yet, the boat of but, have  
never saved us from sinking in dreams where the dead

must keep their day jobs: imagine going on working  
like a compass on the thrust-out palm of some lost  
Victorian's corpse near the North Pole: think of how  
tired it is by now sticking to the point, the poem.

\*

#### NIGHTS OF NAOMI

1  
Each of her penises is a long fragment in the knife  
2  
Tracingpaper placed on the mirror to outline whose  
face  
3  
Whose hair of buttered blowguns  
4  
Clear eyes and cloudy nipples  
5  
Years spent wandering in front of a stab  
6  
Light is only a shadow which has learned to write its  
name across light  
7  
Her name rotting on the tongues of all the dead  
8  
Tongues which have lavished me upon me  
9  
Never mind delivering tomorrow's gypsy

\*

#### SUDDEN DEPARTURE

A sudden raisinstorm broke  
Raisins falling everywhere pellmell.  
The occasion uniked 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.

\*

THE DAY RODIN'S THINKER STOPPED  
THINKING AND OTHER POEMS

The main cause of strife down through history is  
middle names  
Yes I said middle names damn me  
Logjam fur was talking to monocle blubber  
While dripping wax flirts with shipwreck and widowers  
trained to attack fossils looked on

I mean think of them always straining and sweating  
To stop your first and last names from coming together  
So's you could have some emergency peace and be a  
whole person  
How many wars did these copulars start these  
cognomenical cloggomites

Oh no don't condemn them poor hermaphro-handles  
crushed in between don't  
They keep the right holding things in natural balance  
apart oh  
Disruptive middle monikers

They sparred argue com  
Plained all through that pom-blue betwixting day  
But none noticed the light pause every now and then to  
strop some rays on their umbilicord (for at evening  
the west is a sword-swallower) so engrossed  
were they in this strangely ignored problem

\*

PLAZA DE LOCO

It's high tide in the hero  
The floodgates fail the heart cowers  
Blood of his deeds drowns the town square  
Above it all this statue towers

And as the captain of a sinking ship  
The instant the waves reach his toes  
Snaps to attention it waits  
Commanding some former pose

The inscription on which is blurred  
Hey what is that word  
What does his crumbling mad pedestal say

To find my way to you is  
To not find your way to you  
And therefore is not to find the way

\*

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.

\*

#### 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 opera  
to pile all their tragedy  
on one pan

comedy  
on the other

\*

#### NAOMI POEM (THE STARFISH ONE)

Each evening the sea casts starfish up on the beach,—  
scattering, stranding them. They die at dawn, leaving  
black hungers in the sun.

We slept there that summer, we  
fucked in their radiant evolutions up to our body. Ringed  
by starfish gasping for their element,  
we joined to create  
ours. All night they inhaled the sweat from our thrusting  
limbs, and lived.

Often she cried out: Your hand!—It was  
a starfish, caressing her with my low fire.

\*

#### POEM (HOW I LOST MY PEN-NAME)

I wrote under a pen-name  
One day I shook the pen trying to make the name  
come out  
But no it's  
Like me prefers clinging to the inner calypso

So I tossed the pen to my pet the  
Wastebasket to eat  
It'll vomit back the name  
Names aren't fit  
For unhuman consumption

But no again

It stayed down

I don't use a pen-name anymore  
I don't use a pen anymore

I don't write anymore  
I just sit looking at the wastebasket  
With this alert intelligent look on my face

\*

NONREQUITALS  
(to J)

Each night you transfer  
my fingernails to my toes,  
my toenails to my fingers.

And if the magician  
waving simple cardtricks  
disembowel himself somehow—  
through some slight slip in skill—

Evening's when we live, mostly.  
Before an unhatched iceberg  
I preen my scars.

You bade his only face brought in  
on a slice of camera  
—but affixed blue earrings  
to a whiter skull . . .

No one will return  
my toenails to my toes,  
my fingernails to my fingers.  
No one will rip up the list  
of those loved by those not on the list.

\*

[more to come, hopefully— maybe I'll find enough to complete this book]

\*

this edition: **NOVEMBER 15, 2010**

///

Posted by knott at 5:30 PM