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CHRISTMAS AT THE ORPHANAGE:
RHYMED QUATORZAINS
VOLUME ONE

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.

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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.

MY PLEA FOR SANCTUM IN THE SCULPTURE GARDEN
OF MEDUSA

A statue's first pedestal is the stone
It was cut from out in. Those are just words, though.
Like: Spring! Then death puts on the wrong clothes . . .
Then air ruts flushed as bathtub sex, as . . . proseate?

Because, that prince of an ostrich Narcissus
His embedded-headed gaze upon his
Twin the corpse Hamlet proposed, posing for those
Snapshoticisms is so, so 'real-ergo-vile', less

Tangent than tangible, hell. —Till I stand
In Her garden's one among many I can only
Torment vesanic vanities/age-of-oh orbs where

Deep in the honor of my ether I soar, where
—Passing at high mimicries through the night
I go, all lop-worlded and alone, to kill abandon.

Note:

Line 8: "Exclus-en si tu commences / Le réel parce que vil" —Mallarmé.

NOTE

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The order of the poems is random...

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Rhyme for me is such an important aspect of writing
sonnets (if I dare use that term), that it's hard
to think of any I've done
as UNrhymed,

but these end-rhymed ones do have their
own equity and compact with the form,

and hence these three pdfs——

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.

OCT-NOV (MICHIGAN MEMORY #4)

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

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

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

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

THE SCULPTURE

We stood there nude embracing while the sculptor
 Poked and packed some sort of glop between us
 Molding fast all the voids the gaps that lay
 Where we'd tried most to hold each other close

Under the merge of your breasts and my chest
 There remained a space above the place our
 Bellies met but soon that clay or plaster
 Of paris or state of the art polymer

Filled every hollow which we long to fit
 Then we were told to kiss hug hug harder
 And then our heat would help to harden it

We stood there fused more ways than lovers know
 Before the sculptor tore us away
 Forced us to look at what had made us so whole

ROMANCE (Hendecasyllabics)

But when it had engulfed them all two by two,
 the Ark itself became a greater creature,
 an omni animal. And yet Noah knew,
 surely this new behemoth shall also pair

and mate now, and that unlike the beasts before
 this one is destined then to find true marriage:
 because as soon as his keel breaks the water,
 born beneath it will be that surface image

none of us desires to engage in divorce—
 Natural nuptial partner, mirrored other,
 the Ark's clone would emerge from nowhere out there

in the waves. And upside down hold bound the course,
 faithfully accompany her spouse across
 any world to reach at last their offspring shore.

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

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

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

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

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

I HAVE

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

floodlit
and the starlet
you're trying to get fit

for the premiere
is all fidget
and praying her

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

or else'll
it'll run

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 denial?)
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.

ANOTHER HOLE FOR W. R. RODGERS

Speak like a singularity, a lack
 residing deep inside every lock, just
 past the point keys can jab: against all thrust
 make safe-ensure your door's core is held back,

for reckless access to this pure center
 quarks more quintessence than taking exits
 from those pried voids whose secret quickly sates:
 ubiquitous if Space presses Enter.

Which inadmissible sill still calls us
 with imagine: our skeleton keeping
 each such portal neither open nor shut,

unhoused of that exclusive airborne dust
 we breathe, though there must be something
 it accumulates, accommodates: what?

SAVE AS: SALVATION

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

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

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?

THE SONNET IN ix

The nube, the nude, the not—you know: the Nix—
Her Septet of orifices? (males have six):—
Was it massed by Master Malyoume for the fix
The fucks. Rape-scene: she, some defunc'-off, kicks

The mirror while centaurs click centerfold pics
Of her fingernails—each closeup mimics
The anguish with which our pallored poet sics
Midnights on. Encore encore, you sexniks,

Steph calls, tiptoeing away toward his sonics
Lab, 'The Sign in X.' A thousand-quicksand thicks
His step. He's pitbogged by all the nitpicks

Critics have glitched his path with, those pricks!
Don't they know that stars—stars can't hold shit wicks
To his candle?! (That bitch, that *Nix*: *he* sucks it: "I-icks!")

Note:

Failed translation of Stéphane Mallarmé's 'Sonnet en yx.'
Line 14: I-icks! (both i's are short, as in "kiss") is an
onomatopoeicism that accompanies the expectoration and
or taste of the candle's cum. Sort of the sound you make
when you use your teeth to scrape it off your tongue
ostentatiously. But why did I end the poem this way? Was
I influenced by the Master's regret, expressed in his essay
Crise de Vers, that words lack an embodied, material, tonal
consonance with their meanings: "Quelle déception" (he writes),
how perverse, that the "timbres" of the word "jour" should
be dark, while those of "nuit" are "clair." And yet, he concludes,
without such "défaut des langues," poetry itself would not
exist. Assuming he's right, then onomatopoeia are defective
because they're not defective. In Japanese, kireji—"cutting-words,
used to separate or set off statements"—are onomatopoeic,
and "have the meaning that lies in themselves as sounds."
But as Hiroaki Sato notes (in his book, *One Hundred Frogs*,
from which I've taken these quotes): "Bashō himself simply
said, 'Every sound unit is a kireji.'" In any case, the faults
and falls and false of my trans. should be clair to all.

CELEBRATION

The conversation-pit is filled to the level
 Of the floor with the soil of former parties here—
 Crushed cigarettes, napkins, all kinds of cocktail swill—
 We stand at its edge, grinning, wondering who's there:

Is there some version of us lost in that rubbish.
 Such a Pompeii probably took years of soirees.
 Where's the carpet to cover it—dense, bottomless,
 It makes the livingroom around it seem empty.

And why get superstitious—why greet our fellow
 Guest from way across this trashhold—since we must know
 Its surface could bear our most intimate meetings.

Oh, somewhere the host is winking working elbows,
 Showing no embarrassment—but here we have grown
 Sober over the grave of what greater gatherings.

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.)

POEMCLONE #4: HIS LIFE, HIS FATE (LAMENT)

Beautiful as a TV tuned to me,
Ending every line with words that end in
The letter z renders him total, final,
Whole. By analogy? Ergo-oh-oh,

How simul/how my epitome's prose. So
Extra-lapsed from time—from time's yawns blending
Our matinal soles (our toll head of vesper) where
My brain (that scab of bonbons) mimes a dung-

Gone thing as long—as long as this elevator
Of nothingness descends into whose lungs . . .
This down-urge of air, this breathe-me, breathe-me . . .

Then: whenever the xerox cries he dies.
Is it fancy, is it drifty? What's all or null
If I see my teardrops copy my eyes.

TWO POEMS TO S.

1. (Desire) Threadbare (Desires)

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

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

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

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

2. The Tethering

The handclasp is burned up by the embrace
and the embrace is consumed by the coitus,
and I too am subject to a hierarchy
that requires every stratum version of me

to be fuel for the one above till each one is lost,
impossible to find in the final illusion
(a mirage is something that doesn't see us
even when we blind it) of a final one.

Why and whom must we each our own to? Go,
let cemeteries bomb our sleep with omen
hiccups, I'll nil persuade myself there is a person
somewhere up there, perhaps perhaps it's you.

Identical arms babe your arms in theirs.
But love, tied hand to foot to flute, lingers.

DOWNLOAD QUOTA FOR A QUAND OF SOUNDS

Question nothing else none as the poem comes into swim,
 although I hear the true soliloquist doesn't care
 about acoustics: for him each room or realm is bare,
 or so says the sort of solver of this problem.

Exclude all quirks of love—the corkscrew inside the kiss,
 the tongues that twirled themselves around yours and
 yanked you out pop, suave wine spilling a space
 maps render near enough, sunder's purest land.

Sill-pale, false, I shall toss the dust on my feet at
 each huge wedge of wet which looks to be glass but
 softens here to the condition of tear. I'll bear
 their failure, a grain of quicksand in every pore.

It begs its boundaries from the surround. And yet
 the surround itself must seek its limits in them.

SELF-PORTRAIT OF THE POET AS HYENA

Kindly deferrer to lions,
 Late flocks of vultures, packs of winds.

Last to destroy the lost, discreet,
 A shy, toothpick aristocrat.

Servile, even, leaning over
 Drove of bones who disdain such care,

Who in their marrow preen and bear
 Huge swarms of self, a hubris herd.

Is that why he laughs—why he finds
 Joy in these humiliations,

These measured modesties that mass
 And make him eat his words at last?

How strange it is to stay astride
 This prey, to taste its pride of pride.

ENVY-EROT-ETCET

Sexshorn in a fanfare museum, where
 my kisses' strings crisscross Picasso's mattress—
 I gropejob its lumps, those dents creases
 scored by his endless corps of mistresses,

how cogently they queued up to lie there;
 just one of the icons the fetishes
 I mount in myself to make myself more jealous:
 look, Anais Nin's douche wig, it's here

too, in this exhibit. As if spitballs
 when they hit split/became origami—
 But the transformation can't be that

instant childlike, can it? I wring it
 all over my lips my love my lust for
 those poets whose pics appear in *APR*.

Note:

Line 14: the acronym stands for *American Poetry Review*,
 which during its brief existence was best-known for all the
 pin-up photos of poets that appeared in its pages and
 on its covers.

HERITAGE

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

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

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

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

STRAND

To swim in water colored green
 means you may never reach the shore—
 but if the waves are blue, then you
 might revive your stroke and strike more.

Past surface shades could find the one
 arranging dust, the hue your own
 adequately echoes, earth tone.

Neither primary nor pastel,
 its prism all but shallow bathes
 every island that can be found
 in scenes preserved by paint: it saves

the picturesque yet quickly drowns
 our honed harbor, your wake, your wake
 says, flowing home beneath no ground.

FIRST THING

"The first thing I can remember at all was
a dead dog at the bottom of my pram."

—Graham Greene, *Journey without Maps*

A dead dog at the bottom of my pram
Seems to be my earliest memory,
Unless I am part of an implant program
To stock Earth with mock-human irony—

In which case I must have been abducted
By ETs and beamed up into the sky
Where I was undone then reconstructed
Out of bytes and obits from the diary

Of Graham Greene: that gruesome deceased dog
I mean: before Mother or the Mothership
Popped that pug in my pram my time was mine

Alone, unknown, a page torn from the log—
Until that moment died I had no script
No guide: no word undeified my sign.

EXTENDED

Those positions sought in vain by trainwrecks
These two achieve quite quickly. Contorted
Limbs and mouths chuting their routeless tracks
They litter that linen landscape. The bed

Goes off the rails. Mountains or valleys push
Each place that's reached for beyond its distance.
Here in time's commute communed for the rush
Hour this kiss lasts. Yet always late since

Lovers' travel is over where but when.
How far they've come. Both bodies disembark
Homeward tramways while memories remain

Head-ons hurled from one's normal course again
And again. Everything goes bright then dark.
Either emerges on a further line.

DREAM AMID BED-WOODS

You must pull down sheets from these linen trees,
 Blankets too, a pillowcase in full leaf,
 But can't: to snooze amongst their fruits, beneath
 The sheath of that composite canopy's

Roost, you must raise yourself past hammock heights—
 Up where its deepest roots feel doubly sapped,
 That orchard dormitory might lie wrapped
 And ripe with you, whose foliage still invites

More lure of surface sleep. But must you trust
 The ease in these boughs, the sway of whose loft
 So often now wakes vows to never rest,

To somehow remain alow, to resist
 All berth above: you must push off this soft
 Palletted grove, this tall, forest mattress.

CURTAIN UP

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

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

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

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

THE UNSUBSCRIBER

Like all children, you were a de facto
 Member of the Flat Earth Society,
 Believing nothing but what you could see
 Or touch or whatever sense led act to

Fruition: mudpies made summer beneath
 A tree whose measured shade endowed decrees
 Between light and dark: such hierarchies
 Gave you implicit, a sophistic faith—

(Fallacious fellowship!)— Youth's adherents
 Ignore the fact that most factions reject
 Their lyric league (which only fools have stayed

Striplings of) and none condone its nonsense:
 No-one loves that vain solipsistic sect
 You'd never join, whose dues you've always paid.

1946

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.

ROCK PICKED UP FROM THE BEACH

To focus on thing, thing whatever it is,
 in some cases a mountain, an object
 somewhat more intimate for most of us—
 a fate transformed then framed into a fact

plucked from a beach full of rocks the same size
 and shape, not much to distinguish it or
 confer more meaning than perhaps the eyes'
 choice, the hand's: what justifies this favor?

Nothing. And nothing is appropriate
 for something common chance has snatched from
 phenomena's moment, its montage pace

down the page. One word leads to the one right
 for it: that's right. One can reach out random
 or one can wait until it's in its place.

TRANSHENDECULOUS

Granted every poet “constantly aspires
 towards the condition of music,” that sphere
 of perfection which Walter Pater declares
 the other arts must humble themselves before:

so why shouldn't I kneel by the podium
 and beg the conductor to leave her baton
 propped upon my proselyte head like a sword
 knighting me until I can hardly rise from

that ideal sill: one could have no grail beyond
 that grace; could never long for that pated wand
 to guide your own quest: its shadow bids us toward

the stead path still, sticking out over the brow
 like some penile spicurl: so why not die there
 while maestro Mater makes his lowest bow?

Note:

“In music, then, rather than in poetry, is to be found the
 true type or measure of perfected art.” —Pater.

Title: Trans(from poetry to music/from Pater to Mater)
 hendec(-asyllabics)ulous(ridic- of no-brow me
 to adumbrate the Great Pate).

COMPACT DUSK

Here at the height of the day night change
 The color of the sky is uncertain,
 The sky depending in which direction
 One's eye strains, each of its swatches a strange

Hue which dies too soon and which makes this hour
 Linger in the mind transient as a life,
 Whose name once known remains another
 Posied-up portrait on our palette knife.

Until even I wonder if one tint
 Ever survives the harm of seeming unique
 (Evening's intrigue, time's singularity).

Study for its trace, its placemap, I see
 —Redundant as a stopsign in italic—
 The face on which my profile leaves no print.

Note:

This began as a trans. of Jorge Borges' *A Un Poeta Menor de 1899*, but ended up as a kind of homage/meditation upon the original. The homage or translation is always a profile compared to the fullface original.

FRAGMENTS FROM THE BEACH
 (Enneasyllabics)

In retrospect the tragic nature
 of sea is a taste wept too freely,
 soon depleted by scenes of rupture;
 the eyes have other secrets to see

and deeper use for the detritus
 within us: the bright effluvium
 of ego dries up, mired as it is
 in wealth, that remedial medium.

Blame it on fate, on beach memories—
 pebble put in the pocket or shell
 fragments; any memento carries
 us as much as we it. Time capsule

contains every evening's interval.
 Each ocean observes its own puddle.

THE SINGULAR (enneasyllabics)

Whistlecraft aloft in the blue, birds,
 belief has assured me your choral
 enthroatments are whole and yet I spell
 them out as similar to our words—

Your songs define you while mine unvoice
 my field of lieu and fail to call up
 a likeness new enough from the group
 auguring each face its fate. The choice

seems too great for me but you seem to
 flourish as flocks beyond your final
 ornifact which Braque for one pictures

a wingspan style, his pursuit single
 as I used to be. Is he more true
 tracing the tune that eludes my ears?

Note:
 After Braque:
 singleness/wholeness; individual/group; poetry/art; etcet—?

WINDOWBEAM

Ray that overruns every pane,
 force that first invades but then

is pervaded: sunstripe penetrant!—
 what made your phalanx fail: why can't

its pure-greaved asbestos-armor
 avert our dirt: must the conqueror

convert his ways, the savior adopt
 savage customs? We slaves corrupt

all bright kings—each mote of us
 holds abject thought that blots with dust

your gold-shed greatness: shadow
 breaks your arc and essence. How

transient the transparency
 you brandished here so recently.

FERNAND KHNOFF

Days in the lull, gathered afternoons of it,
 —A touch of star-decals on one's bookbag,—
 Silence, like a vast confetti of souls, and that
 Torporic breeze: oh how difficult

The culling of love from our facades is.
 Once, never to go the cling thing seemed what's
 Sublimest. Look at those cobwebcrobats,
 Skittering skyward, fingerhold, nor toe- .

Deep down (in my ough-roots) I longed to brag
 My spiel shall deign define no July of these.
 I'll fall chapter closed across your chest is all.

Now I am an atrocious expert; who answers
 Every question by, "It is very simple:
 We must listen to Beauty with frozen ears."

Note:

I don't understand writers who prefer "painterly" painters over
 "literary" painters. How can I as a poet place Cezanne (or Monet,
 Matisse, etc.) above Khnopff, and not be disloyal to myself?
 Shouldn't we appreciate most those painters willing to stain their
 canvases with some of the impurities of our own art?

AFTER BORGES' "TO A MINOR POET OF 1899"

Who sought that sad height and that constant change
 Laboring on an extraneous verse
 Which through the dispersion of universe
 Might elect one second whose spectrum's range

Was so capricious it broke the scholar
 Caught in daily efforts to confine the eye
 Pursuant of ceruleanesques that lie
 Against each longing to fling a color

As brief as my life if I am alive
 And am the one destined to undergo
 Any authorship of the words that show
 Whether such vexacious tints can survive—

You must judge, ancient friend! what I've seen
 Or accept as real the illusion I mean.

“THOUGH MUSIC MAY HAVE OTHER AIMS THAN US” (Wayland)

If scores were blown off music-stands against our
faces, they'd cause us to not see, to bump into things;
struggling to follow the notes, straying towards
each others' arms we'd branch out in such songs.

If here harmony comes from false maps cast
across our visage like pages in the notebook of
the composer, she whose echoes lead us lost—
Or is it the blindfolding wind directs acts of love.

Music that masks intent, make render my route.
Veer me off inward toward the core of detour
foretold, proving its path along a graph is more

a quest than this fumbling, stumbling progress
through the tactless swamp of the ears, this poem whose
strains undermine the main theme of your pursuit.

Note:
The title is fictional.

TO JOSÉ LEZAMA LIMA

The poem is a letter opener that slices
a to discover b in which c waits
and so on until z reiterates
my metaphor's acute dullness, its crisis

of belief: say this knife could core its way
past the final alphabet and penetrate
that rind that blinds us with its consummate
yield of polished inveighed truths which betray

nothing of the stuffing, the seeds that rot
innate tumors of meaning, enemy
rumors amassed across your desk each morning—

what if that surfeit of words was a warning
label only, just another skin to be
cut? And all this is unless the poem is not.

Note:
Line 10-11: 'enemy rumors': Lezama Lima's second book
of poems was entitled *Enemigo rumor*.

NUN CLAIMS MOST SNAKES TOO SERIOUS TO MAKE

GOOD BOOKMARKS (YOUR SOUL IS A CHOSEN LANDSCAPE)

À la gongs, that await the Emperor's semen
 But in vain, I partition silence into rooms
 Called poems. Why? Only Empresses remain—
 Is this too rigid: should seed, blown from some

Sunflower come to land solely on sundials . . .
 Yet wig of compass-needles; comet. Soars
 —For sync's sake? Like optional hearts, in styles
 Singular averse against the opus wall of stars

Spring safetypins my penis to my navel,
 Praying that so fetal a petal shall shrivel still:
 A thank-quiet follows; a field day feeling;

Queen Staypower paints out our scene's see-me's
 (Dream-prussic pupils flare, flush with their irises).
 Then sun wonderlands it all a bit, by falling.

Note:

Paranetical title: "Votre âme est un paysage choisi . . ."
 —the first line of Verlaine's *Clair de Lune*.

THE HUNGER (enneasyllabics)

If a path to the Gingerbread House
 could be established by breaking crumbs
 off its edifice and sprinkling them
 so as to find what lies behind us

across the featureless fairytale
 void of childhood: yet how very quick
 that trick wears out when the story's track
 takes hold, takes toll, a far-older trail

prevails, we're forced to give up this lost
 cause; and the fact is that every last
 morsel was gone long before the you

or I might totter our way back here
 to try to dissuade all these other
 Hansel-Gretels hollering in queue.

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
 Therefore is not to find the way

RILKE (SEBASTIAN)

He lies where he stands, he stands there as if
 his bed erected him to stand this stiff:
 no *Symbolist* can feel the real arrows
 that milk his mother ribs of their marrows.

These weapons are the tech his lost, his fierce
 groin shot up in proving arcs to pierce
 their progeny: iron they want to be, iron,
 with virile shafts that almost make him grin.

Albeit he waves off his disciples,
 fateful, mild to their autotelic reels;
 how male they remain, despite his example.
 His patience renders droll the actors' drill.

Renouncing, blinking life away as all,
 already he allows for our survival.