

"[T]he remarkable poet Bill Knott is not the type to win prizes, become the pet of academic critics or cultivate acolytes. But this thorny genius has added to the art of poetry." —Robert Pinsky, *Washington Post*, 2005

"For the past thirty-five years Bill Knott has shown himself to be one of our very best poets and perhaps the most original. . . . I think he is one of the few poets of my generation who will remain with us." —Stephen Dobyns, *Harvard Review* (Spring 2002)

"Bill Knott is a meld between Gerard Manley Hopkins and MTV, producing poems with the former's violent beauty and the latter's largely ironic postmodern presence." —Mary Jo Bang, *Lingua Franca* (May 2000)

"Knott was an incredibly important poet to me and still is; I think Bill Knott is a genius and probably the least known great poet in America. It's really kind of pathetic that he's not as well known as he was even thirty years ago because he's even better now." —Thomas Lux, *The Cortland Review* (August 1999)

"Bill Knott is one of the best poets writing in America. Without question, he is the most original." —Kurt Brown, *Harvard Review* (Spring 1999)

"Bill Knott is a genius." —Tom Andrews, *Ohio Review* (1997)

"It is no accident that the major British and American poets of the 19th and 20th century were outsiders. . . . The most original poet of my generation, Bill Knott, is also the greatest outsider." —Stephen Dobyns, *AWP Chronicle* (1995)

"Bill Knott is the secret hero of a lot of poets. . . . [P]oets who differ radically from Knott look to his work for the shock of recognizing themselves." —David Kirby, *American Book Review* (1991)

"Bill Knott's poems . . . are the poems Beckett's Gogo would write if he were among us." —Sharon Dunn, *Massachusetts Review* (1990)

"[Knott's 'Poems 1963-1988' is] a powerful and original book, a record of one of the most disturbing imaginations of our times. Few people can create a world so completely and concisely as Knott does time and time again." —Kevin Hart, *Overland* (1990)

"Knott is no parlor poet. His work is the most sharply original of any poet in his generation." —Jim Elledge, *Booklist* (1989)

"Among people who know his work, Bill Knott is regarded as one of the most original voices in American poetry." —Charles Simic, blurb for *Poems 1963-1988* (1989)

“Knott sets up principles far outside most of those we know, and he always writes up to and beyond those standards.” —Sandra McPherson, blurb for *Outremer* (1989)

“Bill Knott is an American original. No one else could have imagined what James Wright once referred to as Bill Knott’s ‘indispensable poems.’” —Stuart Dischell, *Harvard Book Review* (1989)

“I think Bill Knott is the best poet in America right now.” —Thomas Lux, *Emerson Review* (1983)

“Bill Knott’s first book, ‘The Naomi Poems,’ published in 1968, established him instantaneously as one of the finest poets in America. Subsequent publications deepened and reinforced that reputation.” —Andrei Codrescu, *The Baltimore Sun* (1983)

“[Knott’s poems are] shrouded almost always in the glaring and polluted light William Burroughs foresaw with such brilliance in ‘Naked Lunch.’ In fact, Knott, *Poet of Interzone*, is the poet Burroughs seemed to call for in his seminal novel. . . . Knott is one of a handful of original poets working today. His genius suits the times better than any poet I’ve read . . .” —Robert Peters, *Los Angeles Times* (1983)

“With the death of Berryman, Knott seems to me to be the chief embodiment in language today of Mallarmé’s spirit. . . .” —John Vernon, *Western Humanities Review* (1976)

“. . . Knott’s originality as a poet: he is absurd and classical and surrealist all at once. A marvelously impossible animal.” —Paul Zweig, *Contemporary Poetry in America* (1974)

“At his best, Knott is a kind of surreal classicist. . . . He is already a formidable poet.” —Karl Malkoff, *Crowell’s Handbook of Contemporary American Poetry* (1974)

“[Knott’s] images are astonishing. Whatever you may think of Knott’s poems, they have not been written before by anyone else. . . . Poetry such as this strikes me as extending our awareness.” —Louis Simpson, *New York Times Book Review* (1969)

“Bill Knott is one of the most remarkable poets to appear since James Wright and James Dickey.” —Ralph J. Mills, Jr., *Poetry* (1969)

“I think [Bill Knott] is one of the best poets I know.” —James Wright, blurb for *The Naomi Poems* (1968)

“I think the most significant group of young poets are those published in *Choice* and *The Sixties*, and the most impressive of these is certainly William Knott.” —Kenneth Rexroth, *Harper’s Magazine* (June 1965)

CHRISTMAS AT THE  
ORPHANAGE

:

SELECTED SONNETS  
1969-2009

Bill Knott

COPYRIGHT 2010 by Bill Knott

This edition: April 2, 2010

## Intro

\*

I got interested in this form around 1969-70, and published several in my 1974 book, *Love Poems to Myself*, and then more in the ones that followed: *Rome in Rome* (1976), *Becos* (1983), *Outremer* (1989), *The Quicken Tree* (1995), and *The Unsubscriber* (2004).

\*

The order is (mostly) random, neither chronological nor thematic.

\*

This selection is somewhat hit or miss, and even I'm not sure these are the "best" of my sonnets, and surely if I re-edited next week some of these would be weeded out and or replaced with others—

if anybody's interested in my "Collected Sonnets", it can be downloaded free from [Lulu.com](http://Lulu.com) . . .

\*

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.

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.

## 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 amidst 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 afloat, to resist  
All berth above: you must push off this soft  
Palletted grove, this tall, forest mattress.

## 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.

## 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.

(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

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.

## SAVE AS: SALVATION

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

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

## 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.

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 SCULPTURE (to SB)

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

## COVER STORIES

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

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

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

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

## ACTORS: THE DENOUEMENT

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

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

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

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

## NECKOGNITION

In love the head turns  
the face until it's gone  
into another's where  
it is further torn

from its own mirror  
and grows even more  
erased and lost and though  
the former still yearns

to be his/be hers,  
it sees these lovers  
over your shoulder show

that whatever disappears  
can also go as verse  
whose shape's nape-known now.

## JOHN GRAY

I try to tonguejob a languagejob you  
You continue to perfect the anonymity  
Of your first and final lovers or is that me  
I try to occupy my debris till I see.

Are we the cow that swallowed the hymen Jesus  
Spat out at birth for example-psych or  
Dorian's portrait faced off with a virgin mirror  
Is that what Life Beyond The Baton is like.

A disservice to myself is my head  
The kind of divingboard that slices bread  
They gnawed the renowned for fun they said.

Where the linger of one thought longer than  
An other brings distress will this settle gelid  
Its aspic of aspect make ick my eye.

Note:

John Gray: author of *Silverpoints* (1893). Ada Levenson in her preface to *Letters to the Sphinx from Oscar Wilde* (1935) writes that Gray was "then considered the incomparable poet of the age." Line 7: he was thought by some to be the model for Wilde's hero. (The choice: Dorian vs. Jesus—or, as Barbey d'Aurevilly posed it to Huysmans after *À Rebours*, "the muzzle of a pistol or the foot of the Cross": Gray was ordained a Catholic priest in 1901.)

## GROUP PHOTOGRAPH (THE EARLY YEARS)

Most biographies of the Moderns share  
A common pose: ranks of raw youth appear  
Often capped and gowned, uniformly there—  
It looks alike in all such *Lives* we read.

Torn from some album somewhere, its focus  
Is general: all the figures are crushed  
Anonymously together and lost—  
Just, some airbrush has dinked a single head.

Imagine rummaging through raindrops on  
Transmundane panes and eenymeenywhile  
Plucking from amongst them 'Source of the Nile'!

How of this many is there but one self—  
Whose underneath name obtains its caption—  
In book beside book, on shelf after shelf?

## THE FLAW

Like a teardrop that although of many  
Teardrops composed hangs singly in an eye

Which likewise might be meld of plural  
Orbs if all were known I mean visible

Must I also go aggregate go greet  
A global bitter mime that bears its white

Situate amidst their company sought  
Opposite I wake lost at night without

The pains I have pawned my own for him  
Grieve and the obeyed sweatbeads lamentum

Made for the mead whose gracious weaves supply  
The final humors that give our body

Physicality current as the sea's  
Before its fall repairs the fault that sees.

## SURETIES

The police see you, but it doesn't.  
Indifferent to return your gaze,  
And therefore free. You will never be  
Able to smash it sufficiently  
To erase the stasis it makes in space.

Rilke's "Apollo," this is. Headless limbless,  
A tortoise that has retracted everything  
Into its obdurate lair, defiant den.  
Only the gods are as patient through lenses.

You dance like wallpaper thawing its father  
And still you lack that proof-in-all, that aloof  
Olympian ennui, the sniper's prize.

As long as change is your life it will shun you.  
No shot will shut your target torso.

## PERFORMANCE-ART PIECE

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

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

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

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

FEBRUARY FOURTEENTH: FREEZEFRAME

(to James Elroy Flecker, with thanks  
for translating teardrops into handcuffs)

Please press a valentine shape tool to my chest  
And extract from it what was never there  
Then sing your ciggie on this thing that mists  
Over only when shattered 's no mirror

I lie beside you my caresses deepmeant  
Though they fade as fast as escape plans traced  
Across a prison blanket by an absent  
Fingernail whose blood you piss in my face

Is that it is that why I cry for more torture  
That way you look at me pityingly  
Iffen I say things like rain ice drops cling

There our branch out there like someone been trying  
On all their bracelets at once to see  
Which is prettiest but of course none are

Note:

Flecker: Parnassianism (his list: "Hérédia, Leconte de  
Lisle, Samain, Henri de Régnier, and Jean Moréas"); *le vice  
anglais* (the home version); death at age 30 (consumption).

## ECHO NEAR THE END

Severs and brothers, brokens 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.

CO-STARRING OSCAR WILDE AS MADAME  
SOSOSTRIS

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

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

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

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

## PARABLE FROM CHILDHOOD

Something about a pond, and on the pond  
a paper boat; something about a child's  
act, dropping a pebble upon that boat  
to study the effect: but then to let  
other pebbles fall to see if it holds,  
to kneel there spilling them one after one  
until, until finally . . . If I weigh  
this poem down with much more, it too will sink—

Writing my poems of a boy on the brink  
has shown how ripples horizoned by sky  
remain the only real cargo aboard  
whatever that craft that unmoored us was,  
and yet why he treasured such passages.  
Saying they be lost we would launch each word.

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.

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:

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

## 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.

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.

## 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.

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

all 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 gallant-greaved angels'-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.

## 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.

## DE-EVOLUTION OF THE POET IN RUMOR'S HOUSE

Neutered condom, amphibianed from whose lips—  
The times I've tried to dive to Rumor's house! which,  
I have to quote that brute, Ovid, is "the world's  
Center," most quested-for, yet nearest core:

What verse ensures the windows doors there never  
Close, oh porous palace where every phrase  
Blurtd by earthen creatures goes stored. Surface  
Abyss, endless source swearing itself his page.

Who welcomes my omega—elsely geared, I bleed—  
Island keeled in the always flood of fade.  
The dying D and end N of our days' A

Resumes these scattered patterns, theme's mutest speech.  
Each time it tries to say more than this  
The tip of the tongue must wrestle a leech.

FERNAND KHNOFFF

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 ugh-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?

## BAT HABIT (or, Who's that Coughing in My Coffin?)

bats are the nicotine of night  
that's why I always need a light  
ten packs o' Dracs a day or die  
my lung-caves crave that fang-wing high

skreakedy skreak suckin' soot-sticks  
makes me blind but I find my fix  
when I unearth that undead stash  
I slake its flake through a neck-gash

bat-weed bleeds me butts and gobbets  
can't switch to cygnet cigarets  
flick and sip those swan-white filt-tips

no heck I'm hooked black-hack bad-toke  
what a tough puff bite-you-back smoke  
Vlad the Inhaler loves my lips

## DEARTH DEMISE

Satiety help me I have inhabit  
of this world. Extant upon its designs  
to be more aimlessly fluttering at  
the window, to shadow all the patterns

it offers each sun. In frames far as eye  
I draw my words towards a juggler's shards  
as if our fallings-down our deaths occurred  
but did not involve a lot of colloquialized

arm movements, the body language throws. Thus  
the shape of your silence when it speaks me  
is different than mine in saying you,

though both of them resemble that spasm hymned as  
repose lifepause a happen of sorts the way  
the horizon's a long way without meaning to.

## TEMPTROUSSEAU

The clock is dressed in drag, I mean it wears  
*space* instead of its own proper aspect—  
but if it wore *time*, would it disappear—  
isn't visibility an effect

of transvestism, that shield/pastime whose  
crosscausal aim unmask the eye: must you  
assume the costume of the other to  
be here, to present the sense with an *ess* . . .

Narcissus saw his guise decked out all ruse,  
but if there were none, what would our true clothes  
consist of, our rig rags, our regalia—

Whose dapper element dons us: Einstein's  
continuum, or Flaubert's confidence  
that come the same the Bovary *c'est Moi*?

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

Where every rose  
blows more bellicose  
than the killer heroes

below: 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 translator of the above to change "Arlington. . ." to the name of their own country's national military cemetery, and to use the colors of its flag in substitution for "Red White and Blue."

## ADHESIVE VALENTINE

not knowing where you are  
not knowing who  
so I'll coat with glue  
all the envelopes I mail

where most words fail  
mine will still pursue  
kept in these veils of glaze  
every postal maze

no matter how far  
no matter how overdue  
they will find the true

letter bound for you  
and there be pressed  
adherent to its address

## THERE'S THE RUB

Envy young poets the rage  
You wish you could reverse your night  
And blaze out born on every page  
As old as them, as debut-bright.

Child of that prodigal spotlight  
Whose wattage now is theirs to wage—  
What gold star rite you wish you might  
Raise revised to its first prize stage.

But listen to my wizened sage:  
He claims there's one disadvantage  
Should time renew you neophyte—

There'd be one catch you'd hate, one spite:  
Remember if you were their age  
You'd have to write the way they write.

## 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

## OVERLIFER-BAG

Age is a case of aches  
you try to strap closed  
with your own arms  
but even they can't hold  
shut what this tote crams  
like hotel-soaps stole  
when it pops open.  
No clasp will fasten.

Packed up and parked on  
the curb where a cab brakes  
impatient to leave—  
cheap valise  
spilling out undies  
each time we breathe.

CELEBRATION (dodecasyllabic)

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.

## 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 loud  
with imagine: our skeleton keeping  
each such portal neither open nor shut,

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

STORY OF OR (to Pauline Réage)

To pose nakedness is  
To refute it. A pose  
Is a clothes. Like  
Stanzaic arrangements of

The word which should  
Ideally, be in pain against  
Its w and its d. No slack  
Is why such heaves of or

To denude itself could  
Make us exude gold, yet when  
Was that ever opposite enough

What scream or epigram  
This sperm has come  
To measure our mouths for.

Note:

For "or" to free itself from "word," it must strain ("heave") against the "w" and the "d" that enclose it. If, via this strenuous (perhaps squeamish) process, the meaning of "or" is transmuted from the English into the French as a sort of homage to the pseudonymous author of 'Story of O' (*Histoire d'O*), then, alchemically speaking, (or so an Aurealist might suggest) it will have risen from the pose of its measures to or-emerge as an else-gasm.

MERRY - NO - ROUND

The wooden horses  
are tired of their courses

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

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

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

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

the fire will free them then  
as once the artisan when

out of the tree they  
were nagged to this neigh.

## 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.

TO RIPLEY (*Alien 1-4*)

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

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

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

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

## 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.

## 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  
Droves 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.

## 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.*

ALFONSINA STORNI

Feeling as you wrote that the cancer quote  
Is on its way upstairs to the throat  
One breast had already flown migrant  
Heart de facto amazon only the sea remained

Like a jealous mattress an old pillow stuffed  
With insomnia's phonebills the sea  
Is there to throw oneself at at dawn late  
Up all night over a poem called Voy a

Dormir and which says this better than this  
(Each time I read one by you I revise  
Myself my suicide is to be me instead of you)

Sea that swallowed your poet throat  
Does not for the having of it sing less  
And besides only that cancer tried to float

Note:

Storni (1892-1938), Argentinian poet. In 1935 she was afflicted with breast cancer. A partial mastectomy did not keep the malignancy from returning, and Storni drowned herself in the Atlantic after writing a final poem, "Voy a dormir." The quote in lines 1-2 comes from a post-op letter: "I fear the cancer is on its way upstairs."

## 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 gift  
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.)

## 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  
onomatopoeticism 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 clear to all.

## LAST ON EVERY LIST

Each schoolroom tells them who they are,  
But rollcall always goes too far

So what boy listens any more  
Beyond his own responsive roar—

If names get lost in roster blur  
The zed lad's shout may not occur:

Throughout that endless classmate choir  
One final voice will still aspire.

Like him the poet waits aware  
He'll harken heed all others there

While he of course remains obscure,  
His word ignored and ergo pure:

Unheard it screams in every ear  
Its absent claim of being "Here!"

## DEPRESSIONISM

Without any necessity to name it or anything,  
I remember this bombrater 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.

## THE SPELL

All the days with you in them  
are better than the ones with I.  
If you were me you'd know why.

All the words with o in them  
are better than the ones with e.  
If you were me you'd see.

Best of all of course is a  
because it always comes first, ha!  
(Is it better being me or worse.)

But say these charms reversed  
at times, would I worry who  
surpasses me as versus you—

at times I could barely tell.  
Better is good but not as well.

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.

## SONNET

(to MK)

The way the world is not  
Astonished at you  
It doesn't blink a leaf  
When we step from the house  
Leads me to think  
That beauty is natural, unremarkable  
And not to be spoken of  
Except in the course of things  
The course of singing and worksharing  
The course of squeezes and neighbors  
The course of you tying back your raving hair to go out  
And the course of course of me  
Astonished at you  
The way the world is not

## PORNOKRATES

We paged through the phrase as though it were ours.  
—The lovers in the act—those de Sade-laden hours,  
Where, dumped out daily as ashtrays this dream  
Some room's motel, will it burn a hole here too—

And coop us full of that till our limbs' arms  
Chainsmoked by adrenalin, slither dour-white  
Unepitaphed beds but. What gargoyle jail  
Their contortion poses (the lovers in the act

Of mailing themselves to famous crimes) if  
(If perched on each other's tongues we fly)  
Only by his mind these bodies thrash—

To share this fire is, surely, a tithe entire.  
So each of us alone unless upon our lips  
The world forgets our name and stammers out its.

Note: Title: of a work by Rops.

THE CONSOLATIONS OF SOCIOBIOLOGY  
(to JK)

Those scars rooted me. Stigmata stalagmite  
I sat at a drive-in and watched the stars  
Through a straw while the Coke in my lap went  
Waterier and waterier. For days on end or

Nights no end I crawled on all fours or in  
My case no fours to worship you: Amoeba Behemoth!  
—Then you explained your DNA calls for  
Meaner genes than mine and since you are merely

So to speak its external expression etcet  
Ergo among your lovers I'll never be . . .  
Ah that movie was so faraway the stars melting

Made my thighs icy. I see: it's not you  
Who is not requiting me, it's something in you  
Over which you have no say says no to me.

## KEYS IN HIS HAND

Sometimes a man home late  
is steps away from his door  
when suddenly out of the dark  
a passing car lights up a window

just in front of him so the room  
behind it is thrust into such  
a semblance of clarity that once  
again he sees why we see only

with glimpses like this, with  
happen flashes as avid as this,

but always the lane's corner takes  
that revelation past before  
he even resumes the posture  
of his intent to enter, to live there.

AN OBSOLESCEMENT AND HIS DEITY  
(POLYPTYCH)

(for Charles Simic)

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 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.

## WIDOW/WIDOWER'S WINTER

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

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

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

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

Note:

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

GRANT PROPOSAL (Category: Performance Arts)

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

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

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

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

Note:

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

## TRUE STORY

We stole the rich couple's baby  
and left our own infant with  
a note demanding they raise our  
child as if it were theirs and we

would do the same. Signed,  
A Poor Couple. Decades later  
our son racks summa cum laude  
while theirs drapes our hovel

with beercans. But did we prove  
our point? This heroic experiment  
(a jeu de joie of performance art)

attempts to assert the adroit  
of nurture over nature, the pure  
narrative we write in order to write.

## 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.

## A BACON

An oval invested with teeth;  
the brief orifice of a head  
thread-melted through its tweedboned coat,  
half throatway down a sundial drowned

with chalk-caul runes for avoiding  
such rains: though of course the chew maw  
that crowns this gnome with no likeness  
also barks forth a white porkdrip,

unsustenance for those of us  
who seek a resemblance here: see  
how the magician longs to saw  
the swordswallower in half. Now

this facial Francis finds our mouth;  
hell toppled by its wells without.

Note: not an ekphrastic re one canvas in particular,  
but a response to several of his paintings from the  
1940s. "Figure in a Landscape" (1945), for example.

## TO LIVE BY

Work from the original toward  
the beautiful,  
unless the latter comes first  
in which case  
reverse your efforts to find  
a model worthy of such  
inane desire.

Even the mouth's being  
divided into two lips is  
not enough to make words  
equal themselves.

Eavesdroppers fear  
the hermit's soliloquy.

Wake up, wound, the knife said.

## 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

## SPACE

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

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

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

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

## GRAFTING BOARD

The way the grass weaves my walk into its  
intricate bouquet, the sway of my hips knees  
branches snatch and carry aloft all moves  
that imitate apples cherries: orchard

(it lingers by the ways prior to it)  
I could accomplish you who cry.  
The days have their noise and I none else.

If the sleep I poach from is posted with  
echoes, does tapping these trespass keys—  
does each step staple a sapling to a tree?

Because nothing is changed by beauty because  
beauty is a part of the way things were  
changing anyway because it's never  
a catalyst but a process (I guess).

## BOY AT THE MIRROR

A child emulates what he can't know  
is true, a murderous dew  
that appears every morning to be  
his face, but already it evaporates at

a touch: the lurking effects of  
the unity granted by night are never  
enough to maintain this ripeness called  
time, this waking up to a cherub-scope

that looks back at him in the glass growth  
like hammerblows a devil checks off  
a list—the routine begins so early

and even the wattage of the womb  
behind him is too bright, too ready  
to hale an unsought self into sight.

## 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?

PEACE (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 problems proceed from our inability  
to sit quietly in a small room." —Pascal

# QUICKIE

Poetry  
is  
like  
sex  
on  
quicksand  
ergo  
foreplay  
should  
be  
kept  
at  
a  
minimum

## BY HAND

The day is a book of hours  
out of whose painted pages  
a minute drips from time to time.

This almost never happens—  
the tints usually dry right away—  
but when it does, everything

is left dyed by that drop.

(How cumbersome to memoirists,  
all those lean nonfictionists,  
whose futures already leak.)

Crowding us out of our pocket lives,  
ever-enhancing event/event,  
overflowing the most fulgent eye—

Luckily, it almost never happens.

## FIRST SIGHT

Summer is entered through screendoors,  
and therefore seems unclear  
at first sight, when it is in fact  
a mesh of fine wires  
suspended panewise  
whose haze has confused the eyes . . .

What if we never entered then—  
what if the days remained like this,  
a hesitation at the threshold of itself,  
expectant, tense, tensile  
as lines that crisscross each other  
in a space forever latent  
where we wait, pressed up against  
something trying to retain its vagueness.

## THE FOUR VIEWS

Each dawn you wake to find that once again  
during the night the four windows of your  
room have been newly carved into the shape  
of the loveliest object each one overlooks:  
the east glass is now a worm's silhouette  
while the west gleams bicycle-like, the north's  
a sycamore leaf, the south a snowblind face . . .

Who remolds these panes while you sleep  
and who carpenters the sills and lintels and  
why are the four vitriforms always changed,  
different each day: is beauty so inconstant—  
so subjective—assuming someone chooses.

Are you a phantom here in your own home,  
or a squatter in the house of René Magritte?

## 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.

EROS AND ESPIONAGE IN THE BENT CENTER  
(for Helen C., after reading  
D. G. Rossetti's "Troy Town")

More undermined by your meander than my thirst  
From wine's first cup what shard still tastes this milk  
Above whom shone a normal polaroid of the void  
A song saliva cannot tie its envious vines to

Shall I paint through all the Isms to show you  
Bricabrac from that breast fill worlds marked sale-price  
Yet conceptualists slumming in the real congeal  
Is here a thing to say of this say or said place

Now the merry-go-round it goes-a-round old 'Troy Town'  
My bed hangs out the window by its toes shouting  
Each day your hair strays across such ruins

But to live live simply in compress with our time  
TV-star footprints to immortalize sidewalk  
Me slurp your sweetpuddle up out of an autograph

## THE FROOTLOOPS OF CONSOLATION

One of those landscapes that explicate Eliot.  
Up: evening-pubescent clouds tuft-about a sun  
That rusts like a shelf of spare parts for god  
Or such, who flee with perhapses as pitstops:

The airport that sold me all I know is gone now.  
The welcome-mats that were so cheap (a foreign  
Manufacturer had misspelled them)—that whole symbol  
Semblage/emblem forum: bereft of forms I bend

Across this blindfold's bliss land and see  
My soul or a lobotomy spaghetti  
—Choice of terms—crawl by. By what small light the

Day has not betrayed you step so long among  
The Magritte-lit map. A single tight-rope  
Stretches between its houses, threading the keyholes.

ART OR THE CARESSES OR THE SPHINX  
(CASTRATION ENVY #36)

The Lord Peter Mumsey of Thebes, that yummy  
Oedi-poo dick, advises me, It's no use. To  
Detectify a guilty party will  
Soil the purity of our respective plagues.

Like a silo filled with silhouettes of sigh  
I reply. My smarm/your frissonpassion  
To be eliminated from the world's  
Verticalities are more of what photons do

To Phaëtons. Therefore, if that obliteration  
Our face slash esperanto saliva  
Trace or clue is left to sift through but this

Issuey stuff, whoa, who's to blame, us! So I whore  
Is for sure and if death occurs, facile  
Excel. 'What's named between the knees' 's not me.

Note: Title (excluding the parenthesis): of a work by  
Khnopff. Line 14: I can't recall where this quote comes  
from, or if in fact it is a quote.

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

EUCLID ALONE (to RN)

Androids strolling up Everest will know  
How harder it was for us to care, to cuddle  
Visits from that summit within. The pique  
Of pickups is endless. And when our oxygen

Thins to a pin who cares who's X who's Y—  
That altered acme stares at me—icily—  
That game where time (come to theme) recombines  
To dial them new stars night never fell on: it

Beads up as my eye, friend planet. Who like  
The sate—crazed by my birth's first trip at bat—  
A pork genus cordless vibrator whose tip

Whose tongue exbunded from your hinder heart, wet  
With non-umbrageous plus-signs or what?  
(But can we touch each other's thwart I thought.)

Note: Title: "Euclid alone has looked on Beauty bare." —  
Edna St. Vincent Millay

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 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.

MOTHER TERESA TREATS TERRORISTS TO  
TAFFY

The A rack and the O thumbscrew, the  
E pincers. Yeah, I brandingiron, U electrodes.  
World I am defeatist of—elysium—  
You eviscerate asterisks like me:

Pick up that hotline in your hushed-up highrise,  
Higher-ups! I videopoemed them please  
But did God's Little Guru LISTEN? Nope  
So, tipping my head sideways as if trying

To pour it into the ear's cup I shut up. Oh  
To nix my thought on 2 fingers giving  
The peace sign inside my mouth nose ass—

Or any other orifice they fit—'s  
Fine with me. Neutron bomb has the same  
Theory. Our entrails is taller than we.

## THE CLIMB

Always you will know you have reached  
the peak the moment your bootsoles  
go out of sight, since you can only  
get there by following yourself up.

Craning your neck to see that trail,  
you'll plummet past the hope to scale  
any summit if you overtake a guide  
whose shadow is you, whose spoor

you are. Know him as the truer you,  
the perfected precursor emitted by  
this act of aspiration alone, this try—

stay in his tracks, obey the protocol  
of all such quest-stakes, the miracle  
no tree-line mars, the height it takes.

## MIZU NO OTO

Pain passes for sunlight at some depths  
which most of us never strike; the dive  
is too far: or is the ear sheer enough—

Basho by a pond heard a frog make  
the usual faucet-dripping-into-a-keyhole  
sound; it wisely ignored his efforts

to collaborate. Get your galley-slaves  
rowing with icicles for oars, that's  
one way some say. Resist the urge

to halve the sea/be laser Moses,  
to submerge yourself as a slice  
speciman, all random camera words.

Beyond the caprice of earth to slake,  
thirst issues from the source it breaks.

Note:

A meditation upon Basho's most famous haiku,  
whose final syllables I've used for the title.

## POEM FOR GEORG TRAKL

Graves that revert to suns at the end of  
the movie remind us our lyric is thatch,  
thatch this, thatch that, a cottage industry with  
its piecework approach, its mode of pain thresholds:

so if the sky is a column of birds who  
root each sorrow in a sievewalk sense,  
distance astronomers splash dates at,  
out where the sought torch gathers adornments;

and if my face on an eyelash leash reach  
toward yours like hands that offer glass a space  
to grow transparenter in, sheer-opposites  
that squander unison upon this nest

precarious hosts of myself I deign to attend,  
what else accrues to one's true instance?

Note:

Written after trying-failing to understand Heidegger's  
comments on Trakl's *Ein Winterabend*. Images from  
that poem have obviously influenced this. (His wine  
and bread my glass and host, etc.)

## ANOTHER NAOMI POEM

Her tongue was melting at the center of an iceberg  
That had sank the 13th floor of every building  
In which we were living, our sunglasses broken like *ciao*,  
Overlooking what vista of siesta: nightly we rose

To harvest the end of a kitestring whose importunate  
Tugging from below sowed heresy; we smashed  
The one snowflake that was carving all the other  
snowflakes;  
I warned her: "Your clitoris is my boyfriend."

Decades; quits; fades; she wrote some books, I tried  
To write some books; we met occasionally, but why?  
Other strangers than our own may remember. I  
remember

One time, my hair was hippie, she had to keep pushing  
It off, averting her face, finally complaining that  
This must be what it's like to go to bed with another  
woman.

## SONNETAIRE

what if I could  
somehow combine  
the games of

solitaire  
and sonnet what  
the heck would  
the rules be for

this cross pastime  
and would you  
even know if

you won aha  
last card slapped  
down first word  
or what

\*

in the game  
of sonnetaire

you lay down  
fourteen lines or

piles of cards  
or words as

you prefer  
either combo

is irrefutable  
and if you deal

the permutations  
of it right

you win  
a copy of the rulebook

\*

Would it be possible to create  
a game that combines the rules  
for the sonnet and the rules for  
solitaire, an amalgam of the two,

with a set of guidelines one  
could be able to follow and play:  
using 52 cards and 14 lines,  
how would the mathematical

interfaces work, if indeed they  
could. Or should the term be:  
sonnetarot. Should we  
employ that picture deck instead.

Four stanzas and four suits.  
The Joker's your perfect volte.

## VAGUE CONSOLES

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

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

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

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

THE END

*Pain has petrified the threshold.* —Trakl

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

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

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

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

from 7 1/2 POEMS TO, FOR, AND ABOUT RN:

### 5. Long Distance Affair

The saliva gathered daily  
by telephones across the world  
from lovers yelling at each other  
is an ocean with no bottom.

But say you pried apart those phones,  
you'd find that all that wild white tide  
of promises, cries, kisses, threats—  
it also evaporates. The spit

is what we call each other,  
I mean the words themselves, condensed:  
distills us into clouds, into mist.

Rising clarified it drifts toward  
Comsat, Telstar, there to orbit  
closely around our distant lips.

## THERAPY

Scissor out random lines  
from poembooks.  
Fill a bathtub with these snips of paper.  
Lower the patient in.

One by one extract the verse-ripples  
and recite them to him.  
When you've finished  
he will be cleansed, perhaps,

but you, will you be empty of your effort—  
weary, soothed enough  
to dive in with him,  
floating naked amid the strips,

the chopped waters of poetry  
(the saw-tides, the cut-wash).

## CRITERIA

The rose is  
more poetic than  
other flowers because  
it has

only one  
syllable where  
daisy lily violet  
et cet

are over-verbal,  
poly-petal.  
Beauty

based not on color or  
odor but  
brevity.

## STRESS THERAPY

*Time, time, time, time*, the clock  
vaccinates us,  
and then even that lacks  
prophylaxis.

Ticktock-pockmarked, stricken  
by such strokes, we  
get sick of prescriptions  
which work solely

on the body.  
Systole diastole—  
It is by its very

intermittency  
that the heart knows  
itself to be an I.

## FORTHFABLE

What if everytime you cried you cried  
the same teardrops originally shed by  
Adam until all of them, their ripe total  
will be transferred down through history  
as far to fill, to flood then our final  
human. And you too shall have carried  
as lash-lade others before you your  
socket-borne share toward our latter  
great cisternment that dolor water or  
lacri-liquid if we ever reach there.  
You too must pass this on. See Eve  
as she would have first received it, bent  
beneath him: the wide brows, the wider stare,  
both eyes bearing forth his bared bereavement.

## AFTERTHOUGHT

]Just as all streets and roads could  
be amended to include  
bicycle paths,  
so all literary avenues  
should have a sonnet lane—

Everywhere those big  
poems roar expelling their  
hauxious exhaust, there  
also our footpowered craft  
could glide—

all SUVs (surface ugly verses)  
ought to make room  
for these smaller more  
eco-esque vehicles.]

