

"[Bill Knott's] poems are so naive that the question of their poetic quality hardly arises. . . . Mr. Knott practices a dead language."

—Denis Donoghue, *New York Review of Books*, May 7, 1970

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

—Charles Molesworth, *Poetry Magazine*, May 1972

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

—Meghan O'Rourke, *Poetry Magazine*, Feb 2005

"[Bill Knott's books are] filled with venom. . . . Knott seems to hate himself . . . and he seems to hate his readers."

—Kirk Robinson, *ACM (Another Chicago Magazine)*, date?

"[Bill Knott's work] consists almost entirely of pointless poems, that say disgusting things. . . . [His poetry is] tasteless . . . and brainless."

—Michael Heffernan, *Midwest Quarterly*, Summer 1973

"Bill Knott's poems are . . . rhetorical fluff . . . and fake."

—Ron Loewinsohn, *TriQuarterly*, Spring 1970

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

—R. S. Gwynn, *The Year in Poetry, DLB Yearbook* 1989

"[Bill Knott is] incompetent . . ."

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

"Eccentric, uneven . . . poet Bill Knott is not [fit] to win prizes . . . [His work is] thorny . . . rebellious, avant-garde . . ."

—Robert Pinsky, Washington Post.com, April 17, 2005

"[Bill Knott's poetry is] queerly adolescent . . . extremely weird. . . personal to the point of obscurity. . . his idiosyncrasy has grown formulaic, his obscure poems more obscure, his terse observations so terse they scoot by without leaving much of a dent in the reader. . . . There is a petulance at work [in his poetry]. . . . [H]is style has grown long in the tooth. . . . In fact, [at least one of his poems is] unethical."

—Marc Pietrzykowski, Contemporary Poetry Review (<http://www.cprw.com/Pietrzykowski/beats.htm>)

"Bill Knott's [poetry is the equivalent of] scrimshaw. . . . [It's] either self-consciously awkward or perhaps a little too slangily up-to-date."

—Stephen Burt, New York Times Book Review, November 21, 2004

"Bill Knott . . . is so bad one can only groan in response."

—Peter Stitt, Georgia Review, Winter 1983

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

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

"[Bill Knott is] a malignant clown."

—Christopher Ricks, The Massachusetts Review, Spring 1970

"Bill Knott should be beaten with a flail."

—Tomaz Salamun, Snow, 1973

CHRISTMAS AT THE ORPHANAGE:
SELECTED SONNETS 1968-2008

Bill Knott

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

INTRO NOTES

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This particular book is a selection of the best (I hope) from my four volumes of quatorzains, which are not currently available on Lulu.com . . .

I've changed the label to "sonnets" for this publication. Why? Marketing. Hoping to reach more readers with a less-arcane title. Conformity to the normative term—

*

Here's the Intro to those volumes of "Quatorzains":

I got interested in this form around 1970, 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).

Why "quatorzains" rather than "sonnets"? I feel superstitious about using the latter term. I feel defensive and or resentful: only real poets write sonnets, and I'm not a real poet, am I. No, I'm a—a poet-biscuit.

*

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

*

I should note that many of these are syllabic.

*

DEPRESSIONISM

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

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

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 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.

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 if 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.

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 my undead stash
I slake its flake through a neck-gash

bat-weed bleeds me butts in 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

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.

LAMENT

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

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 (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

PORNOKRATES (homage Felicien Rops)

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
Chain-smoked 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.

LEDGELIFE

The taller the monument, the more impatient our luggage.
Look, look, a graveyard has fancy dirt.
Historians agree: this is the pebble which beaned Goliath.
Every billboard is theoretically as beautiful as what lies unseen behind it.

Mouth: the word's exit-wound.
It is impossible to run away face-to-face.
Shadow has closed the door out of you to you, but not to us.
The sign on the wall advises: Hide your gloves beneath your wings.

Even sculptors occasionally lean against statues.
Migrations?! Fate?! Life swears up at ledgelifelife.
All the sad tantamounts gather. They want, they say, to errand our ways.

Please aim all kicks at the ground.
Address all blows to the air.
We are to be barely mentioned if at all in the moon's memoirs.

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.

(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

ENDLESS EVENING: MY LIFE AT IL VITTORIALE

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

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

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

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

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

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.

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 the poor 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.

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?*

THE MAN WHO MARRIED HIS CHECKOUT LANE

Daily, in the supermarket where I go,
I gravitate to this one lane—the one
that's most full—you know: the busiest one.
Have I fallen in love with my checkout lane?

Well, I am male, I feel drawn to this aisle;
its openness is shameless, sexistly exciting;
the real way it squeezes my shoppingcart
and deigns to crowd me in. Oh my checkout lane

has the longest wait of any—though unlike
all these others in line I won't leaf through the life
those tabloids provide rumors of: none of them

are beautiful as what infills me as I enter
as I am queued up for that brief orgasm
as my cash is on the counter and I am home.

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.

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.

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 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.

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.

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?

GESUNDHEIT (quatorzain version)

Sneezes wouldn't be so bad if they filled balloons.

How many sneezes on the planet at any given time;
and if each sneeze filled a balloon,

imagine (bless you!)
all those sneeze-balloons floating in the air.

But a sneeze-balloon might be rather fragile—
more like a bubble than a regular balloon . . . hmm.

A sneeze is sort of like a balloonburst:
sudden, violent, unforeseeable. Out of nowhere.

In either case, burgeoned or burst, this transfer
of ether occurs whenever Entropy beckons,—

see its deadly equality shining up there,
glittering like globules of star saliva,

worlds atchooded by all.

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.

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.

POEM THAT WANTS TO BE ASH

Each time day returns to its sun
to forget the windows we opened
in it, I see the past minus peace
equals me, plus war you.

I stab a candle down through one hand,
an icicle through the other,
then flail them about,
restaging the stale battle of doubt

with faith, whim against bone.
Guess who always wins. Imagine
a color so true every prism
it passes through melts—

Because hasn't your voice
running mine, cindered this?

AS USUAL

Immediately I'm dead
Body laid out straight
Please don't hesitate
Just cut off my head

Lift it and lay it a foot
Or so below my feet
Shift it till I look like
An exclamation mark

Overt sign of joy pain
Surprise consternation
Despair exuberance

As usual a metaphor
Meant to make up for
My lack of coherence

HEILSTYLES

Of course the Spring fashions buried in Fall
And dug up to wear in boisterous April
Make the models even more skeletal:
Body by Buchenwald; shade by Chanel.

Nazi nurses infiltrate CIA hospice—
At Safehouse Haven the dying agents
Are coaxed by swastika sisters to confess
A. Hitler was their greatest influence.

A disappearance echoing with shoulders,
A veinburst serpent evolved to doubt all,
Still these lifecopy killers follow me.

Wise fashionists resist history
By staging it over in stale revivals.
To stay in mode, though, one must grow older.

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.

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.

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

CODE FACADES

When light passes through a Mies Van der Rohe
it grows greenlike, cubed, a square root of itself,
absinthe ice. Architecture fractures the sun
with the earth, earth's verdures and verdants suture

solar gold with grass/emerald-held stems
transpierce our ledge-stalked land. But montage
refutes all light, the flicker when it dips itself in time
is like the moment a stopsign changes tense

and other transits, closeup mesmerization
effects. The flesh fauved from the bone. Thus
no imprint stays in the wind of the rain which
fell all night until now, at dawn, tides worry puddles—

then I move to Sands of Time, New Mexico;
shampooed by hammers, I shut my window.

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.

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

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

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

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

Where every rose
blows more bellicose
than the killer heroes

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

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

these barbarous bushes
the most vicious
flower that ever grew

swishes—
the Red White and Blue.

Note:

I ask any 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."

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).

TO MYSELF

Poetry
can be
the magic
carpet

which you say
you want,
but only
if you

stand willing
to pull
that rug out

from under
your own
feet, daily.

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 unmasks 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?

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

(L)ID

Each time I blink
Is a lapse in my life.
Each blink outlives me.

The one I was before
The blink is never
The one I am after.

And the one I shall be
Desires me to cease
Quenched with each crease
Instant of the lids.

An eye juggled on
The tips of its own
Lashes might see
Who I have been then.

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.

POEM FOR LOCATION

Looking out the window is no worse or
is equal to accepting advice from
a hallucination, but you continue to
glare through it, certain that the flowers

out there could stop your lobe-shaped laments,
time truer to one's due self than you:
they seem to lure something surer, something
pervasive, a creature seeking abandonment;

lying in wait amongst its private parts,
is it me is it you is it who? And starts

to purge our whip-appld childhoods,
to lecture the thoughts learned through lapse—
but how? I must try to find more words
accented on the erratum-syllable.

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?

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."

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 clair to all.

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.

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.

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.)

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
Posed-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. 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.

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 angel's-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.

FERNAND KHNOPFF

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 cobwebcroats,
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?

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*.

MENAGERIE OF THE AEDILES

Now what thought is thrashing from this brain to be
unleashed by a brow-to-brow collision with
a unicorn? Or could it go released through
other throes I wonder. For if I were gored

there, mightn't I, like, die? When *Terminator* zaps
a hole in someone's forehead they don't write
a poem response, they drop and he steps on them
crunch, french, act, your soundtrack may vary.

The plan was to get scalpels taped to the Creature
From The Fuck's huge flipper-tentacles and
then lie down hoping that perhaps their wild wave ways

surgically correct my defect my gender—
penis revealed as gap in consciousness—
Though I know none of you beasts loves me that much.

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.

QUICKIE

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

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

STRETCH

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

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

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

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.
An ocean observes its own puddle.

HAVENOT

Out of a dozen I prefer the one
That's most like thirteen, the one
Autumn drops its cease-colored nets on.

Out of a once I prefer the one
That never was, that eludes its own,
Twins peering at each other through keyholes.

Out of a one I prefer the none
Who has my face, who evens the end
And odds the origin. The belated begun.

Out of a most I prefer the many
Who are not me, who remain free
Of that disciple number, that slave figure.

Twelve nonce, thirteen's the tense, which fourteen ends.
Despite my choice, I have no preference.

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"[Bill Knott's] poems are so naive that the question of their poetic quality hardly arises. . . . Mr. Knott practices a dead language."

—Denis Donoghue, *New York Review of Books*, May 7, 1970

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

—Charles Molesworth, *Poetry Magazine*, May 1972

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

—Meghan O'Rourke, *Poetry Magazine*, Feb 2005

"[Bill Knott's books are] filled with venom. . . . Knott seems to hate himself . . . and he seems to hate his readers."

—Kirk Robinson, *ACM (Another Chicago Magazine)*, date?

"[Bill Knott's work] consists almost entirely of pointless poems, that say disgusting things. . . . [His poetry is] tasteless . . . and brainless."

—Michael Heffernan, *Midwest Quarterly*, Summer 1973

"Bill Knott's poems are . . . rhetorical fluff . . . and fake."

—Ron Loewinsohn, *TriQuarterly*, Spring 1970

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

—R. S. Gwynn, *The Year in Poetry, DLB Yearbook* 1989

"[Bill Knott is] incompetent . . ."

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

"Eccentric, uneven . . . poet Bill Knott is not [fit] to win prizes . . . [His work is] thorny . . . rebellious, avant-garde . . ."

—Robert Pinsky, Washington Post.com, April 17, 2005

"[Bill Knott's poetry is] queerly adolescent . . . extremely weird. . . personal to the point of obscurity. . . his idiosyncrasy has grown formulaic, his obscure poems more obscure, his terse observations so terse they scoot by without leaving much of a dent in the reader. . . . There is a petulance at work [in his poetry]. . . . [H]is style has grown long in the tooth. . . . In fact, [at least one of his poems is] unethical."

—Marc Pietrzykowski, Contemporary Poetry Review (<http://www.cprw.com/Pietrzykowski/beats.htm>)

"Bill Knott's [poetry is the equivalent of] scrimshaw. . . . [It's] either self-consciously awkward or perhaps a little too slangily up-to-date."

—Stephen Burt, New York Times Book Review, November 21, 2004

"Bill Knott . . . is so bad one can only groan in response."

—Peter Stitt, Georgia Review, Winter 1983

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

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

"[Bill Knott is] a malignant clown."

—Christopher Ricks, The Massachusetts Review, Spring 1970

"Bill Knott should be beaten with a flail."

—Tomaz Salamun, Snow, 1973