

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 also 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 and perhaps most 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 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

## 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 ledgelife.  
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 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?

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

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

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

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

transient the transparency  
you brandished here so recently.

## 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 KHNOFF

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

The culling of love from our facades is.  
Once, never to go the cling thing seemed what's  
Sublimest. Look at those 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.

This edition: DECEMBER 12, 2008

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