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PLAZA DE HOMAGES:
POEMS
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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.

AN AUGUR'S AIRS

Pale as a sucked-out penny, I scale an alp/map
that copies the entrails of a phoenix who
loves to drop Sylvia Plath on Hiroshima.

Visceral flightplan: hover in mid-air sprayed,
glimmer there like a bloodbead curtain sashayed
through by chantsvestites from movies lightyears off.

Often I too must exit the blitz of you,
lapse-window/wired birdguts: make my meatus
moot. Transmute me (via Gaia)—

let me Plathfirst myself/lastfirst myself,
while a furtive abacus crawls down our spine.

BARREN PRECINCT

(homage Hagiwara Sakutaro)

Tightropes cross swayingly from church belfry
 to church belfry, in one street a pileup of mattresses
 is burning. If it were snowing it would be
 like their very first sheets returning,
 fresh from the sky's laundry. In the bracingly cold air
 I see doorframes with no houses, houses with no rooms, and houses
 where they serve lunch in its most naive form. I amble toward
 a wood fence, a childishly-chalked bullseye, in which
 I find some kind of old military medal pinned dead center:
 the medal has a pale, harmful ribbon; it flutters and or rattles
 whitely, whitely withstanding the wind,
 defending the bullseye's secret, inmost ring.
 If cornered, I would agree—with almost no argument—:
 this medal should get a medal!

Barren precinct,
 eyes stare at you without our even knowing it,
 like the statue of a buddha
 they regard you with immobilized eyes, with
 carven idol eyelids,
 you are the eternal non-unguent of tearless eyes,
 the blink that will never be.

Note:

Hiroaki Sato's translation of Hagiwara's "A Barren Area" inspired this poem—which means I borrowed its subject and mood, but not its content. It's an homage, not an adaptation. Also, it's an attempt at *bon'yaku-cho*, a favorite mode of Hagiwara, according to Sato, who defines it as "Translation style . . . writings that read like clumsy translations." Line 1: "J'ai tendu des cordes de clocher . . ."—Rimbaud.

INTRO NOTES

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A miscellany of poems.

Most of the poems come from a book ms. called "Plaza de Loco," which was rejected by over 30 publishers.

Some are from the vanity book, "Homages," which is now defunct.

Others are drawn from various vanity volumes published in fugitive whimsical editions.

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The order is random, neither thematic nor chronological.

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IN MEMORIAM

What the Year Says:

I am a bud.
I am a blossom.
I am a leaf.
I am a branch.

What the Year Doesn't Say:

I'm burgeoning.
I'm ripe.
I'm falling.
I'm bare.

What John Logan Said to Me in the Year 1960:

Show, don't tell.

Note:

Logan was the first real poet I met, the first poet I studied under. Although we were never close personally, I admired and emulated his work. This poem was written after his death.

AN AFTERNOON WITH EUGENIO

But how boring. And so, the rain was of use . . .
 that window ratatat threw my smiles' drift.
 Thimbledown heavy its downplay lasted for hours;
 were the core seasons flowering, no longer
 believing that to die that way, sated
 in that cloud-loud debate, in that nacre-null sky,
 would (finally) reify more gender: stars, all
 those birthday elements, the bare *paysage*
 of a blaze too logical for our headlines, massed
 to shed the odd ganglia we misname them by . . .
 And this despite those arriviste freighters—
 and in the harbor, no less! Gilded grew
 each porthole's penny of envy. But now
 Damocles' last wig smacks down, toward the mouth
 of Etna whose wisest cigarette-lighter (lifted
 from the giftshoppe there) strikes flameless
 three times in a row: trick omen, infernal feign, and so.
 Unless the rain can be blamed, this ratatat rain:
 gun that aims my fingers at my thumb—instead of him.

Note:

A parody of Montale the Monotonous.
 One of the poets I don't admire but keep going back to (I don't know
 Italian, so I read the translations) . . .

THE CODE

(for Heather McHugh)

All while I tried to brain myself
 With my key-ring
 Which unfortunately
 Was one shy of being fatal

The fickle key itself lay
 In infamy
 In the hands of my wife
 Who as I fell the blood

Making my forehead
 Squeak against the floor
 Slid open the secret drawer

Of my escritoire
 That's weird she said
 He uses real names in his diary

Note:

Some of the metaphors here were elaborated
 upon in a later poem, also dedicated to H. McH.:
 see "Emigrations" on the following page.

EMIGRATIONS

(for Heather McHugh)

Shouldn't there be a word that sounds like an extraterrestrial clearing his throat
of human phrases, their roughness roseate,
plush thorns that tart each normal timbre—
And when that word's punctuated by two ears,
can it be said to not hold all our meanings?

Vocal as those envelopes one discovers
tell-traces of tongue-blood on the flap of
(licked too reckless—mistake it for love),
we fail to seal shut the heart, to kissproof
its distant alien stains: kept vigilant over
that bouquet of papercuts, I remember

a cloud installed with thumbtacks scouting
across planet, pinning down oceans, denoting
islands, deserts. Borders, poured from the sky—
We felt safe on such worlds, behind guards,
armies braced to rebuff incisor postcards.
Death rose to greet us with a flower in its eye.

*

But count the kisses, Catullus wrote, meaning
to waste your time first multiply your tongue.
Oh make that prime mistake again; repeat
what the explorers of sea-roared corridors
promise the coils that conch them, desperate
to remain unsounded, sole. All such figures

are promiscuous: love is repetition
and layer/layer lovers disrobe; overlapping
matteshots which hatch-depict what deepest down

THE TWO-ROOM THEORY

Call the masturbator,
the muscular one,
and bid him whip his big cock
till it fills our mouths
with cups and cups of cum.
Tell the whores to dress
in undress and use their clothes
to get the boys hot: our cocks
are white and dirty as
old-rolled-up newspapers
and want to spout flowers.
Let the birds and bees
final-anal my seem, sow,
sew their seed
into my slit my seam.
The only emperor is
this emptier of cumcream.

Hi hum, hic he, another
office party at Hartford Surety.
These prissdressers,
they see me as ideal: well,
I do try to please my wife,
that frigidess—I grab her knobs,
I squeezey lick those glass tits
but even the big cigar, Father
Freud, couldn't whip Kit's
ice-cold B-cups to a curdle.
Try anything, suck her toes,
kiss her feet to make her horny
and she just lies there numb on
that damn dumb sheet she
sews fannytails across but
ask her to sow her butt, to
spread her asscrack just once
she won't. She won't. Nope.
Let my lamp, my limp lump dick
affix its fucks, be its cum.
The only emperor I am
is a jack-off chump.

THE DAWNING

Now it takes only minutes
for light to travel from
the sun to the earth,

but an eternity to go
just six feet further, down
to where the dead are,

yet I could arrive there
immediately if I left
right away, my journey

blink-instantaneous,
world by world unscreening
itself: if I shed all trace

of surface—unsoiled each
skin which holds me here—
if my rays suddenly

were allowed to blaze forth
against their distance in
whole less time than this,

although I know they lack
the lightyear's intuition,
the nova's needle's-eye,

I pray they penetrate
always the dirt and find
a place haven to our kind.

most elusive nudity. Our stripped-off skin hurts
to acknowledge the body is the blankest map
onto which earth will eventually start

to imprint itself dirtgrain by dirtgrain,
mud by mire it will come to cover us entire
with minutiae of the utter matter
ground around us until we are its textual
affirmation, and therefore a refutation
of what? The self—but if its loss is a sexual

discovery, the poet has entered hell
demanding to plumb whomever these charts
misquote. À la Cocteau's torturous *Orphée*,
she guides herself through fog-stellar hallways;
every step begs to be reversed. Their cry
is always the same: what exquisite urge

to tame all welcome-mats has portaged us
averted, shielding our gaze from its suffice,
to this place! Waving an exit visa stamped
with each other's lips, the lovers have sailed
beyond i.d. But the ship sinks, no-one can build
enough lighthouses to surround that swamp—

*

Orpheus croaks, the frog in his larynx jokes,
each time Euridice crumples backwards, implodes
from sight: he is what she breaks—his grid, his husk.
When the sperm disembowels my orgasm, he asks,
what self-restraint it shows to commit suicide
in front of a mirror, knowing beauty is

personalized by paralysis . . . then, if the wound
learns to probe for its own kind, flesh will never

unvoice that loss, harvest that scar. By harping on her name he hopes to gloss, to refine this epitaph. Meanwhile the eternal tatter of her smile flares fainter, firefly trying to land down a mineshaft.

Fact: the frog can't see the fly if the fly sits—it is literally its flight obscenes the eyes, whereupon the long tongue zaps out, severs and appetites. With this in mind, perhaps the truest desire is blind, concealed, a phantom wandering the deep net of optic intersections, of pang-swerved nerves—

lost, one of its possible fates might be starve. The poet traverses this labyrinth—the maze carves emaciations from her face. Her way is gropes which somehow render aim that inner landscape our window (at night the white moth's easel) drapes, that site razed by home. But could she place her poem

if it moved her mouth with mine so they became one, one mouth which then looked for another mouth to kiss. It first appears there are only two bodies here—the one you are, and the one you desire to unite with. But then, beyond the mingle of that longed-for synthesis, we

may hunger for more antitheses, further incarnations, until (exponentially) our body orbits what rapt apogee, that pure theory. I believe it. And thus to make them whole your lips must be divided by these words. She who utters such catharsis/communion will

have to seed or sate whatever wing-hung thing we nurse in our throatpit. Gordian gorge:

APARTNESS

They placed the sky in birds instead of inside themselves.

Now from pane to pane the sun must depend on the clarity of elsewhere.

An expanse of please, the day regained, its goodness land.

But there are mondotrash who still war and waste in border disputes brave Procrustes' realm.

They let their gods debate the measure mete, the counterfeit of zeroes.

Hell's lepidopteral heirs, heap dragons.

They are lost.
They are blind, they are shoeless as an orchestra of exits.

They are us.

We place the bird in skies who have misplaced it inside ourselves.

(POEM) (POSTHUMOUS) (POEM)

The brain sustains its water through the eye
 which later runs dry. I am that serene derided echo
 known as form, that scalded snowstorm, I too
 must seem almost a solo mist, my orchestral body

trying to tiptoe up to its conductor's deathbed.
 Around me far as the bare can see fields shed
 whatever misprints my head to toe showed forth
 as evidence of presence, though repetition of earth

is not existence. Life was a place to erase from my
 pockets, an I.D.-deposit attesting something gone
 absent as the dot above "i" is when the first-person
 is forced to sing the self so deeply, so unutterably

uppercase. Sometimes my words are a language
 (human is still the only hue whose chameleon
 has never been true), id est, puns in camouflage.
 And yet if birth that always wealth be mine,

may it gather suit to say your name. Name? Say?
 Yesterday, tomorrow. Least of all the days today.
 As closed as my eyes were during their face phase.
 As open as they are now in this latest guise.

just ingest each knot and trust—trust your intestines
 will undo it? Orpheus or Herpheus, the poet
 cannot reduce the roughage verbiage her diet
 imposes on us since it is our emptiness, purged.

*

*We who journey towards tomorrow rather than
 today walk behind a door which our arms are tired
 of holding held out in front of us, the wrists ache
 from its weight—although our knuckles come to admire
 the knob—merely on the pray-or-none chance the one
 who keys our phrase may be straying yesterday's way.*

PARADISE

Always reading the recto
translation of a verso
original, my eye fades,
I notice how the paper
here on this side seems
darker than its opposite:
it is brighter over there
on the lefthand page, the
words of the real poem
give it that glow which
the prized act of creation
emits. We who must live
here in Righthandland
are damned no matter
how hard we try to rhyme
minds with that perfect
realm across the gutter.
Even if our pulp comes
from the same stock,
we fear closing the book
will bring us face to face,
mouth to mouth with
that tongue we've always
lost, and can never kiss.

WEDDING PARTY

Cake tiers nearing the ceiling must
sacrifice their bride and groom
and often the frosting too.

Aspirations to burst up
through the roof are
part of this occasion.

Glasses lifted high in toast
create a transparent cathedral
upon whose altar
a dove is cut in two.

The priest who remembered the vows
is nowhere to be found.
The one who forgot them
eats rice from everyone's shoulders.

Pausing only to fling aloft a bouquet
the clean-up crew finds later
stuck to a floral carousel,
today's couple escapes,
committed to life for life.

Left-behinds from both families
link elbows and sing
surrender to the scarlet dizziness
that reaches into their wishes.

Love will last as long as the ring
can still be easily slipped
from one's finger.

CEMETERY

Who whispers here is forgotten.

Saliva's emptiest fruit
adorns the stones,
words ripening your mouth
to a spoilation
of silence.

Who speaks here
reads a text that downloads
the screen of his fingernail,
through which nothing's visible
as glass is.

For the memorial
we must kneel
to pick each flower
from amongst its modifiers:
but to do that
one needs a hand bared
of all uses, of all trades:
as ours is not.

LATER/LITERAL

If what happened
happened upon
this earth which
I stand on here
could it be in
my knees now
and later will it fill
my waist then
neck until until
it will have been
atop my head
as I pass as it
occurs above
me no longer on
but in this earth
if what happened
then was birth.

MRS. FRYE AND THE PENCILSHARPENER

I'll remember how in 8th-grade English class, always bending toward the desk I would try to avert my eyes from the mysterious ways Mrs. Frye's hair displaced the blackboard's space with its black coils, to the paper my pencil tip raced across, certain to pass each test: and if these gaze shifts got too switcheroo I'd retreat (daily, it seems) to the back of the packed classroom

where, leaning forward on my toes, I could push with my left hand the nubile tube of wood into the mouth of the pencilsharpener which hung there like some natural protrusion of the wall, an indigenous Deity, the mask of a Goddess, erosion-endowed, rockformed—then feel my righthand fingers and thumb slowly turn the oiled wheel while knowing I would have to face

close to that sac-shaped sharpener, have to inhale the high smell of its depths, earthy, ripe, pubic: to see in my mind the parings inside, those musky dark curls whose incense was increased of course like mold-mildew by the subtle saliva we kids might use to lick the lead's point, though nearly none of our tongues could unblunt the conundrums grownups posed, in my case Mrs. Frye

especially: so if I lingered back there, grinding away, it was not to gloat, not to play the saintly A-student snickering from behind at the others' heads bent intent as penitents, because I too, I sinned at times, whenas, no matter how proud I was of my proper grammar or propounded syntax, stuffing my text thick with fetish parsemarks, I myself went taunted, teased by the urge

THE FUTILIST

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

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

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

Note:

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

FLEDGLINGS OF THE CYMBAL

Dawn, the ledge of day, is where
every dreamer's reflexes are tested;
one misstep is enough. Each waking
is a fall from that high surefootedness,

a descent from grace. All sleepers
thread their beds with this steadiest
of paths that they may arrive at last
in the plunge, the giddiness of worlds grasp—

Now who shall lift his hands to show
an hourglass in each armpit: birds emerge
screeching, we devour his wormgroin.
His moist declivities scour our habits.

When evening empties the buildings of
what is tall in them, we will return
each to his roost, ledging and listening
to a percussionist lapping against lilypads.

to erase the very prodigy evidence my page revealed—
all the knots and quirks of those perfectly traced letters—
to restore the blankness I spoiled with each sentence—
to castrate every phrase before its errors rose by rote
to make my chthonic-greatest mistake grow and grow
erectile, inherent, that habit hateful male participle
I always was unable to shear the nib the stub off of—

*

(But how could I flub and flunk such a crucial ordeal?—
Forgive me: I was lost pondering, musing about a poem
memorized from the boys' bathroom, tongued fluent
but not understood: yet how truthshod its lines ran
to my anxiety—their meaning escaped the precocious,
the goldstar me—so if I stalled—if I stayed chewed over
and left a stammering dimwit by their immallarméan

import, which paired its print alongside a syllabus
of pornocoiled stick figures whose mouths were pierced
by the sharpened ends of toonballoons—verses verse
alone can't explicate in systematic prosaic terms that
forced and torsoed my head shy—if I was stuck on
their sphinxian simplicity—unable to decipher any
of the prodigal doggerel lessons gesticulated down

our school's scribbly corridors, snicked and snatched at
across its game fields, a whole curriculum of secret lore,
a litany of my-big-brother-told-me's, my-uncle-said's,
a rumor primer which claimed complete mastery of
the only discipline inpenetrable to my inquisitive
quests never mind the autodidact airs I had to affect
during discussions of this topic, the nods and knowing

grins I wore to pass, to show my mastery of its arcana,
to prove what a pored nerd drill-diligent pupil I was
of those endless piss-walls, those scrawled rhymes and
confident lectures by croneys and guys who made sense
of the insane instructions re the sole subject I mark
zero on: all the dunno-dumb ideas I dunned then drove
core to me, carved their myths into me—and one in

particular goes to this poem, from the gendergabble
that gorged my brain: it hissed that She/the unknown
reared an inward toothly sheathdeath essence geared
to *vagina dentata* whatever pedant-pendant I'd proffer,
I, alma-matered to cram every exam with phallocratic
tits and sexist tripe psuedotype scionbabble, the entire
wisdom of my mentors' art-patriarch, old gobbledy-tropes—)

*

All gradeschool the fear of failing hovered in overstudy
as children riddled fears never to be learned, but could
I have continued to hone my fate, could I have stood
there for years and still the pencilsharpener wait
like a patient questioner, a warm, smiling teacher,
filled with such dense scents, shavings, shorn graphite,
its soil rich with words no-one would ever have to write.

THE SIGHTSTOP

To spell amid a tree's sundapples
the birds' practiced shadows argues
an eye for effects, dark against dark—

simple discernment, nerves aligned
and brain, perception minus squinting:
the true 20-20 if you can bind

that sight until through repetition
it is nothing, a blur which focus
has lost itself in, a memory mimed.

Even windows, those indentations
of day, hold a void of the view.
They too are restrained by its stops.

Meanwhile the hydra of my soul
needs just one more mirror to see
itself whole, so hold your eyes still.

PORTRAIT

When the mirror paints itself,
how quietly it sits.
Its posing is perfect.

But when it paints us,
no matter how hard we try,
eventually
we fail to be still.

What if we propped a corpse up
for model: even it
would fidgit
after a while;
the flesh would droop then drop,
spoiling the sitting
by spoiling.

No: only the mirror itself
can pose properly
for its incisive portraits,
which mock our mortal
impatience—

Displayed everywhere,
they are the walls we live in,
they make a museum of us.
Our provenance (if any)
comes from them.

And no expert needs
to authenticate
these masterworks.

We are the forgeries.
We are the fakes.

SUITE (to X)

A poem is a room that contains
the house it's in, the way you
accommodate me when I lie
beside you, even if the address
is lost so many times and the names
of streets are strangers that pass
shuffling a card-deck of maps
whose rubberband has snapped:
still beyond all chance or choice
perhaps, your arms fold mine
to indicate location, the close
custom of place held together
or flung into the bedroom's air
where your dress tries to come in
from the rain it has become:
the way shelter finds us one again,
and the opus of this nearness,
the poem on its own, wandering.

BY THE RIVER BAAB

We know that somewhere far north of here
the two rivers Ba and Ab converge to form
this greater stream that sustains us, uniting
the lifeblood length of our lands: and we believe
that the Ba's source is heaven, the Ab's hell.

Daily expeditions embark upcountry to find
that fork, to learn where the merge first occurs.
Too far: none of our explorers return. Or
else when they reach that point they themselves
are torn apart by a sudden urge to choose—

to resolutely take either the Ba/the Ab, to trace
good or evil to its spring. Each flips a coin
perhaps, or favors whichever one the wind's
blowing from at that moment. Down here
even we who have not the heart to venture

anywhere that would force us to such deep
decisions, even we, when we hold that glass of
water in our hand, drink it slowly, deliberately,
as if we could taste the two strains, could somehow
distinguish their twin flow through our veins.

NAVEL

Last link with the Mother's body,
and therefore with the self,
I accumulate around you. My belly
oceans your lame island.

You are the eye that blinks once
only, at birth, and since
then peers at me
as if to question
that recognition.

Every finger is a limpid father;
but what mounts up in you
is the motherhorn,
the day of lesson,
the hey-nonny non-me.

Any shiver passing over the skin
must always return
to nakedness.

In some homelands they dry
and twine the umbilical-cord
into a knout
and then use it
to spank the placenta, crying
"Bad! Bad! You made me bad!"

POEM

Can my clone cast
a shadow
that resembles
my shadow
the same
as it does him,
or me them?
Is the difference thin,
meaning within,
or merely
attenuated—
where does the line
leave off and,
leaving,
does it end?

THE WORD

I am the windowkeeper
of the Tower of Babel.

Whoever built this place
put one window at its top
and one door at its base.

I dream of the door far below,
where all the commerce,
the majestic intercourse
must pass—
or so I imagine.

Parsecs above that possible
bustle I attend our tower's
sole window.

Up here nothing.

Forget a lookout vigil:
this pane's too high
to spy an army
or a peacenik approaching.

(stanza break)

Glass I wash and wash always
for the sake of the light/dark
it admits, but what is it?—

An eyepiece of clouds
for someone's height;
a cyclops outlet
for no one's sight.

And what if
that door down there's
as little use as this—
and the doorkeeper too,
his efforts
fallow as mine—

if there is a doorkeeper;
if I'm not alone
in here.

If we exist—
if one day soon
we can open
our vents our hearts
simultaneously,

(stanza break)

VIZVISUAL

Blood seeping from puppets
into a wineglass.

One of the tombstones
reads OCCUPIED all night,
VACANT all day.

Panning right these instants
Pollack poured,
will its flood of colors hold
still for the word?

I am blind inside your blow;
in your caress, I see.

See? See what? The spokeseye wants to know.
(Trees. Loftlost. Tossed
in their attitude of rain.)

“Nothing beside remains.”
—Shelley's Ozymandias; a base
of the real; a bas-relief.

A lively doling of the hands out to grief.

KNIFE TIMES FORK EQUALS SPOON

I comb my crack with a lit fuse.
 It makes me weep my wage.
 How far I am from days
 And all the harm they do.

This lust to be real
 Conceals its microbial
 Appetites. They fare too whole,
 Their hosts are housed to earth.

I love the way in graveyards
 The dead guard the dirt
 From being torn open yearly,

Wracked by seed. They save
 It from cultivation, from
 Our human need to feed.

POEM FOR NOW

I live bent over now
 like pages folded down
 in books, the ones
 I meant to get back to
 but won't.
 These are my dog-ear years.
 What I write now
 will never
 be read again.

mightn't some stir occur
 in the vacuum
 of this hollow highrise,
 provoking its ghost
 to whisper at least
 one pure, one
 pre-word word—

Maintaining my post
 would otherwise
 be a waste,
 hopeless
 if not
 for the thought of that.

EXCERPTS FROM THE DIARY OF DAMOCLES

*

I don't dare speak too loudly,
some timbres could be fatal—

that string is not too strong
I think: and at times I have

to breathe. Or maybe I fear
my paraphrastic exhalations

will spoil the oiled perfection
of its sleekness, will mist

over that bright shaft whose
needle-sharp point compasses

my every stray. I am as
edgy in my way as it—

as little-rippled, as subtle.

Prey to vapors, to sudden
icecap thaws, seismic

dicethrows, the world wires me,
I hex myself up to a pitch

of infinite finicky sensitiveness,
alert to every window opening

POEM

His eyes devoid him of the end.

Those who uphold life in the form of water
often drop death in the form of earth.

Carrots and peas and please go away.

A child who never lived where always did.

My fingers through the woeface feel your face.

I sank my youth to the half in the cry that loved me.

You wage the world in your flesh
daily,
daily watching lovers forge duplicate keys.

Day my hands have cast away until
it has their fall.

Afterwards I stood there stirring the loss.

Unlike me all this takes place in the open.

THE WORDS TO THE TITLE

From my eye is plot a tear that contains
 The odd-numbered waves
 Of a lost ocean
 That writes help on a thought and then throws it

Through the window of a floating handmirror
 Some mimes
 Pass among themselves while drowning
 Sharing it back and forth like a fun book

From my eye is paint a tear that stains
 Those splash-grasped pages
 Un-bled-black inks
 White-subtle faces

Enjambed beneath these even waves that lay
 Solitaire on the sand
 Where I stand crying
 Trying to remember the words to the title

down in my castle's bowels,
 each mousehole emergence.

A simple housefly—a moth
 murders my rest when it

mistakes for light that glittering
 blade in which every passing

glint is glassed—barometer
 of my highest apprehension.

*

I know my fear is only a ploy,
 a sticking point in the old

hairsplitting debate of the winds . . .
 I the first split personality

divide into a Dam, or an Ocles—
 a mother and her myopic

son. Then, since everything
 is reversed in its mirroring

slash, a Selcomad, mad and sulky.

Language does this to me.
 It inverts my position: King

I am, but await my crown,
 unmanned till it come down;

my kingdom lies in twain
to each, I am in half to all.

*

If only I could reach up, up,
and take it in my teeth,

suckle that penile projection,
cloister its unremitting hardness

in the sheath of my throat—

swordswallower who exalts
his posture with this adjunct

stronger spine, aligning gut with
palate, my groin with my height.

*

Male means to be in the crime
of things here, this frail planet

killed wide, maimed down.
Male means murder, rape and war.

Its indomitable will will not allow
approach. All broach will fail.

It must fall on you or not at all.

Despite which some delinquencies linger—
Take our instinctive counting by finger—
(All other tallies seem cramped in compare)—
Since age equals memory times failure—
Though mentor modes slam such bad behavior:

Our worst, they swear, is using metaphor
To avoid the quiz/to solve the problem.
Leaners from lecterns omniforum warn
That effing mistake is what makes us dumb.
Minusminds, try to amend your error.

Those tutors tell us still—they always will—
Go suffer fools what all erasers learn
To rain down blah blah blah—they talk and talk!
But in the meanwhile: cloud loud as a chalk
Rattling back in place on the blackboard's sill.

ELEMENTARY LESSON

Sometimes even in Math class a downpour
 Would rise against the windows and render
 The normal decorum hard to restore—
 Fittingly we'd split a grin when lightning
 Stuck out its multiple tongue at teacher.

Smartlike fling our arms in the air, crying
 To be called on, smug, eye-bright, cheek-aware
 When thunder drowns our correctest answer.
 A failsafe secret form of defying.
 (Not like spitballing the hall monitor.)

These quickstorms were at last the world's Recess,
 Whose games toss random nebu-numerals
 In play impromptu streams and teams across
 Unmarked-off endless fields or else more schools
 Reluctant-ruled, would-be truants like us—

.
 We welcomed those rebellious showers then
 And remember them now. Of course we know,
 As grownups—these afteryears—their brilliant
 Fractiousness scores less than quantic fractions.
 Most of childhood's coups come to sum zero.

*

Insane, isn't it? History hangs
 impregnable to the mind, eager
 to halve your brain with rift,
 intrusion and strife, the warrior's
 dissonance. No whole is hallowed,
 no peace. Don't let the humor of
 this scene (when the phallus
 falls the fears recede) attend
 you away from its cruelty.

*

I stand here exposed to whose
 justice, my crime my Y
 chromosome. That Y aims
 his prick point down at me.
 A dowsing wand that seeks
 my artesian quench, my depths
 of death. His insistence
 sustains me in steel, his encased
 incursion covers my melt,
 my metal. Each day he rights me:

his richterscaled tremors are
my weather, my wherefore:

his gloss his gleam condemns
my fortunes, his ore loads my gold

with schist. His soliloquy
interrupts mine at every word.

Linebreaks enforced by sword,
his poem sunders my rhythm.

All mine at last is made him.
His blade remembers my name.

*

Note:

Although not included in Robert Graves' book of the Greek Myths, Damocles appears to be one more version of what Graves posited as an archetype, the surrogate sacrificial king. Graves was impatient with Freudian interpretations, but the sword must suggest castration. Its post-Hiroshima Cold War nuclear associations are most frequent. I'm haunted by an insight from Dr. Phyllis Chesler's book, *About Men*, in which she reveals History's biggest secret: All men are terrified of their fathers. That overhanging sword is the Father's hand threatening. "Those to whom evil is done / Do evil in return," as Auden writes. We males must kill one another or die. Courage, bravery, stoicism, esprit de corps, patriotism, Sparta, West Point, all the warrior virtues of manliness branch from that primal childhood fear. Is there no escape from this hereditary terror which, despite the efforts of brave theorists like Chesler, seems to remain the

greatest secret in the psychic lives of men. We can barely sustain the untoldness of it, the strickening thought. It will cut us in two, cleave us apart. Damocles is the scream which I as George Bush or I as Saddam Hussein have no choice but to introject, to inject, to stab, to pierce all peace. Just normal male murder, the kind they give us medals for. Arlington National Cemetery and all that Taps crap. (Graves reads many of the Greek Myths as disguised parables relating the historical displacement of peaceful matriarchal societies by military-based patriarchal systems. Now here in the 21st Century, to paraphrase Heidegger, only a Goddess can save us. Only a total worldwide reversal of male hegemony. A good start: feminist geneticists creating a virus that would attack and destroy that segment of the male brain which perpetuates violence. Or eliminate the Y chromosome entirely. Males must become an extinct species. Advancements in cloning technology could replace traditional human reproductive practices. All future poets can be replicants coined from the DNA of Adrienne Rich.)