POEMS FOR DEATH

Bill Knott

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INTRO NOTES

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Karl Krolow's "Poems Against Death," besides the intrinsic merits of his verse,

has always fascinated me with its title——which seems so splendidly redundant—

I mean, nobody is going to publish a book called "Poems in Favor of Death,"

I warrant . . .

In any case, in putting together this selection of the poems I've written about death over the years,

I had his example illustratively in mind.

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As I collated the poems they seemed to separate themselves into the sections here, but their order within each group is random, neither chronological nor thematic.

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This is a somewhat cursory SELECTION, which may be augmented or changed in future editions.

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I have (I hope) mostly chosen poems about actual perishing as opposed to metaphorical—no "The Death of a Love Affair" stuff . . .

PART ONE:

MEMORIES OF DEATH AND MOURNING

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.

MY MOTHER'S LIST OF NAMES

My mother's list of names today I take it in my hand
And I read the places she underlined William and Ann
The others are my brothers and sisters I know
I'm going to see them when I'm fully grown

Yes they're waiting for me to join em and I will
Just over the top of that great big hill
Lies a green valley where their shouts of joy are fellowing
Save all but one can be seen there next a kin

And a link is missing from their ringarosey dance
Think of the names she wrote down not just by chance
When she learned that a baby inside her was growing small
She placed that list inside the family Bible

Then I was born and she died soon after
And I grew up sinful of questions I could not ask her
I did'not know that she had left me the answer
Pressed between the holy pages with the happy laughter
Of John, Rudolph, Frank, Arthur, Paul,
Pauline, Martha, Ann, Doris, Susan, you all,

I did not even know you were alive
Till I read the Bible today for the first time in my life
And I found this list of names that might have been my own
You other me's on the bright side of my moon

(stanza break)

Mother and Daddy too have joined you in play
And I am coming to complete the circle of your day
I was a lonely child I never understood that you
Were waiting for me to find the truth and know

And I'll make this one promise you want me to:
I'm goin to continue my Bible study
Till I'm back inside the Body
With you

TO A DEAD FRIEND

mourning clothes worn
inside out
would be white
if things were right
if opposites ruled

if truth prevailed
then me and you
would be two
instead of the one
we've become

THE DAY AFTER MY FATHER'S DEATH

It's too complex to explain,
but I was already in
the orphanage when dad died:
and so that day when I cried,
to keep the other children safe
from my infectious grief
they left me in lockdown
in some office where I found
piles of comicbooks hid
which they had confiscated
from us kids through the years,
and so through wiped tears
I pored quickly knowing
this was a one-time thing—
this quarantine would soon end—
I'd never see them again:
I'd regret each missed issue,
and worse than that I knew
that if a day ever did come
when I could obtain them,
gee, I'd be too old to read
them then, I'd be him, dad.

GOING MY WAY

The one boy who died of polio
in our orphanage in the early
1950s was such an important
icon that even now I remember
his favorite movie since that's
what we do with the famous,
retain some anomalous fact
that quiets them in our mind.
We, I say, but was it everyone—
did all of us shed that kid: did
a thousand child incarcerates
replace his face-and-name with
an actor's mask and cast it as
star of the waste disease whose
cause was always doubt, germ
caught perhaps from local lakes
prohibited. Who thought of him
those summers we could not
swim until a vaccine came, too
late to amend lackwarm days,
to change our fate/our film to his.
That movie—"Going My Way"
featuring Bing Crosby as a young
priest, kindly, loveable, unreal—
Tommy, Jimmy, whatever he
was called, he probably knows
still by still now every camera
angle and closeup, every cut
we living are allowed to forget.

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.

THE CLOSET

(. . .after my Mother's death)

Here not long enough after the hospital happened
I find her closet lying empty and stop my play
And go in and crane up at three blackwire hangers
Which quiver, airy, released. They appear to enjoy

Their new distance, cognizance born of the absence
Of anything else. The closet has been cleaned out
Full-flush as surgeries where the hangers could be
Amiable scalpels though they just as well would be

Themselves, in basements, glovelessly scraping uteri
But, here, pure, transfigured heavenward, they're
Birds, whose wingspans expand by excluding me. Their
Range is enlarged by loss. They'd leave buzzards

Measly as moths: and the hatshelf is even higher!
As the sky over a prairie, an undotted desert where
Nothing can swoop sudden, crumple in secret. I've fled
At ambush, tag, age: six, must I face this, can

I have my hide-and-seek hole back now please, the
Clothes, the thicket of shoes, where is it? Only
The hangers are at home here. Come heir to this
Rare element, fluent, their skeletal grace sings

Of the ease with which they let go the dress, slip,
Housecoat or blouse, so absolvingly. Free, they fly
Trim, triangular, augurs leapt ahead from some geometric
God who soars stripped (of flesh, it is said): catnip

To a brat placated by model airplane kits kids

My size lack motorskills for, I wind up all glue-scabbed,
Pawing goo-goo fingernails, glaze skins fun to peer in as
Frost-i-glass doors. . . But the closet has no windows.

Opaque or sheer: I must shut my eyes, shrink within
To peep into this wall. Soliciting sleep I'll dream
Mother spilled and cold, unpillowed, the operating-
Table cracked to goad delivery: its stirrups slack,

Its forceps closed: by it I'll see mobs of obstetrical
Personnel kneel proud, congratulatory, cooing
And oohing and hold the dead infant up to the dead
Woman's face as if for approval, the prompted

Beholding, tears, a zoomshot kiss. White-masked
Doctors and nurses patting each other on the back,
Which is how in the Old West a hangman, if
He was good, could gauge the heft of his intended. . .

Awake, the hangers are sharper, knife-'n'-slice, I jump
Helplessly to catch them to twist them clear,
Mis-shape them whole, sail them across the small air
Space of the closet. I shall find room enough here

By excluding myself; by excluding myself, I'll grow.

WATER

you ask me why I come among you to mourn you
I say: I am the mourner
but we are not dead or dying
well: I am the mourner
we aren't afraid of you
I know: I am the mourner
but what do you mourn then if not us
not you: I am the mourner
is there anything worth mourning but us
yes: I am the mourner
when you leave us do you continue to mourn
to mourn: I am the mourner
your answers are only echoes
to echo is to mourn: I am the mourner
we won't feed you you know you'll starve
I live on lament: I am the mourner
but we are young and strong we don't need you
I am the mourner
here's a dollar beat it
thanks: goodbye
where will you go from here
there are others to mourn: I am the mourner
wait a sec is that all don't you have anything else
to say to us
I say: I am the mourner goodbye
wait you can't leave it like that wait up
no: I have finished mourning you
hey wait up fraud fraud stop you catchsleeve you cheat
sorry: you have been mourned as much as you can be
but don't worry:
I am the mourner

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.

BURIAL

Parting like long innards under postmortem
The sky pours
The winds come covey to call
Earth's balanced between its elements

The rain falls clinging to the mist
Which is its shadow
Is that why scarecrows are
Attending as the sole mourners

Now the bereaved shake hands
Across the open grave but some
Are too timid or too gap-fragile

To reach over far enough
For a consummate grasp
And can only barely brush their wet limp glovetips

PART TWO:

MURDER / SUICIDE

TYPE-CAST

Of course I refused all roles until
they offered me the lead
in "The Co-Star Killer"

BANG BANG GLUB GLUB

My ark/my life's-boat
had two of everything
necessary for salvation
with the exception
of two bullet-holes
in its bottom hull.

[UNTITLED]

are there some
invulnerabilities too
hard to bear perhaps
the bulletproof vest
stabs itself in secret

CIRCUS: AERIALISTS

Their soars restore our disbelief,
Yet trapezists leave us wanting more:
Can't we rip down those damn ladders
And all their other means of safe
Descent, ropes, wires, (cut the nets, too)—
Let's strand them all up there, ignore
Their arrogant screams for rescue.

Stay up there, we'd shout (or whisper).
Pretend you're one of those angel
Acts, bigtop happy, heaven's troupe—
Hang bright as nails on a tightrope
Tree, spread spangled arms and fly free
Caught in air, spotlit spaced, dangle
Dare: see sphere sights beyond our glare,

Dying soon to gawk for good. When
Finally from hunger or sleep one
By one you faint and plummet home
Your stiff poses against the ground,
Hoping your souls have remained
Aloft: but then like clowns we'll trip
Deliberately over the smashed up

Bodies you were always scorning
Skyward, forsaking all fallenness
To pass the massive eyes of envy,
And sprawled in dust of center ring
May take back our lack of sympathy
When once like shadows shown or less
You lowered yourselves among us.

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."

LONE GUNMAN

Imagine there's no heaven
(the CIA gave me this gotten gun)
It's easy if you try
(see the FBI boys they're wavin byebye)
No hell below us
(the Pope says you reap what you sow us)
Above us only sky
(Nixon okayed the kill so die)

Imagine there's no countries
(I stand behalf of all the police)
It isn't hard to do
(I'm programmed to terminate you)
Nothing to kill or die for
(I'll kill you and you'll lie there)
And no religion too
(you can't say no religion
you can't say that and live John)

Imagine all the people
(the Church ain't gonna weep you)
Living life in peace
(who d'ya think paid for this firepiece)

You may say I'm a dreamer
(like the Manchurian Candidate remember)
But I'm not the only one
(it only takes one misfit loner gone wrong)
I hope someday you'll join us
(gotta plug you in the groin-ass)
And the world will be as one
(they brainwashed me to see it done)

Imagine no possessions
(imagine us mind-wiped assassins)
I wonder if you can
(all unbelievers are damned)
No need for greed or hunger
(they said put that Brit six feed under)
A brotherhood of man
(blam blam I'm from the Vatican)
Imagine all the people
(all the Wall Street capital)
Sharing all the world
(yeah the Lee Harvey Osworld)

[UNTITLED]

The trafficlight on Lovers Leap never changes to red.

POEM NOIR

(Braille Balls)
Angry at my wife I drove out to our
Cottage by the lake. Around 1 AM a March shower
Began to fall and when I went out on the porch
To see it I saw a young man lurch
Into the lake with all his clothes on. There
Was nobody else around, the other cottages were
Dark, as was mine. He kept walking straight out
And soon the water was over his head. I shout-
Ed but he obviously didn't hear. He was trying
To drown himself! So I swam out and grabbed him.
Sighing,
I resuscitated him. He lay on our bed
Smiling. Thanks a lot but no thanks, he said.
Then he convinced me that no matter what I did
He was going to commit suicide.
I had an idea: Does it make any difference how
You do it? I asked him. No, he replied,
What do you mean. Well, what about the electric

(I Want My Friends In Woody Lots, With French Toast Up
Their Nostrils)
Chair? Would you care if it was that? No,
He said. Well I'll send ten thousand dollars
To anyone you cite, if you'll kill my wife and
Go to the electric chair for it. Yes,
He said, I'll pretend to be a burglar, kill her, then get
Caught. Send the ten grand to N, who rejected me. She'll
Feel sorrier then when I'm dead. He grinned. I
Said, Great. The next night I slipped
My wife 2 sleeping-pills then drove to my brother's
To try to establish an alibi but he got drunk,

Passed out so that was no go—damn.
When I got home I went right to my wife's room where
I found her snoring. What the hell, I said. Then
The phone rang. It was my brother,
He said someone had murdered our father. Father!
I said. A hectic day followed. Police, the tax
Lawyers, not to mention, my worthless alibi.
Finally that night I sat up late waiting for the guy

(Eel-tripled Eyes and Freezing Initials)
Who was supposed to murder my wife. The phone rang.
My
Brother had been killed! I was chief suspect
Since I inherited the family millions. Wake up, wake up,
I shook my wife, but the 3 sleeping-pills etcetera.
The police followed me all the next day
But I slipped them. They didn't know I was hitting all the
joints
To try and find that young drown man. We
Had a few things to discuss: That night
Down by the deserted docks we fought.
I was slugged into the river and I drowned.
No-one ever saw him. When they found
My body the coroner ruled suicide over remorse at my
terrible crimes.
He had done the murders but I got the blame.
My wife got all the money, and married him.

Note:
When I made the film of this poem I changed the ending: following Hitchcock's example in *Vertigo*, I added a flashback 2/3rds of the way through—in which the young drown man (Tab Hunter) reveals her husband's scheme to the wife (Dorothy Malone): they then plan the other

murders; the conspiracy inspires them to sex of course. Later after the husband (Rex Reason) is arrested, rich soon-to-be-widow Dot jets off to Acapulco, up into a penthouse suite where Tab, who had earlier mysteriously vanished, welcomes her with open sheets and champagne to celebrate their successful plot . . . Next morning they breakfast on the sunny balcony overlooking a swimmingpool; she goes in to take a shower, she leaves him gazing down at 20 storeys: she comes back naked with a turban towel on but he's nowhere there: she hears distant screams which draw her to the balcony railing where she leans over zoomshot to see his dark-robed body sprawled dead on the bottom of the pool below. Then she hears knocks and voices at the door: "It's the police, Mrs Reason . . . We have some questions for you." The End.

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.

POST

the one skull I'll never find
between my teeth is mine

anyone else's skull I may
(all the dystopians say)

have to suck the brains
out of if no food remains

postnuke postplague
(I'll crack it like an egg)

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.

FBI KILLS MARTIN LUTHER KING

When this calendar has
undressed will I know, I mean
be able to recognize,
its most naked day—

but to see what was
in what is mistakes time
for its effect—I study
my hand, how
the palm hides in it, slyly,
or like a sullen puddle
refusing reflections—

and my 2-scoops-please blouse—
a passerby's
meander-fall hair—
though the sky's blue is through-outed
with spots of balm, do

they all
praise null but you,
null but them?

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST GROCERIES

The violence in the newspapers is pure genius
A daily gift to the reader
From some poet who wants to keep in good with us
Brown-noser wastepaperbasket-emptier

I shot 436 people that day
2 were still alive when I killed them
Why do they want to be exhumed movie-stars,
I mean rats still biting them, the flesh of comets, why
do they walk around like that?

I'm going to throw all of you into the refrigerator
And leave you to claw it out with the vegetables and meats

ADVICE FROM THE EXPERTS

I lay down in the empty street and parked
My feet against the gutter's curb while from
The building above a bunch of gawkers perched
Along its ledges urged me don't, don't jump.

SECRETARY

The technocrat gloats
at his remote desk
but just to show
he's still human

he still does a few
chores by hand
and adds a human
touch for example

rather than having
his computers do it
he himself stamps

all by himself
stamps PAID on
the casualty-lists.

Note:
Robert S. McNamara, USA Secretary of Defense 1961-8.
For his services in overseeing the murder of millions, he was appointed President of the World Bank, where he continued his lucrative life's work of administering the policies of the oligarchs. One of history's henchmen; a competent monster.

OEDIPUS RIDDLED (heptasyllabics)

the course of his crime unfolds
each time at a blind crossroads
whose four legs forever show
less murderous ways to go
but every young man must opt
to stand his ground and stay stopped
so to prove unmoved he waits
daily till he demonstrates
to the empty thoroughfare
how brave how bold how strong there
beneath noon's knelled prophecies
bound to meet all enemies
on his own two feet alone
or has he halted hearing
the stepsound of his unknown
father's cane tap tap nearing

ANT DODGER

A suicide applicant
Who braces himself out
On a high ledge at noon
While busy peeking down

Noticed an ant crawling
Dottily on the ledge
Right
There near his left toe

Below crowds all pushed
Oblivious babbling
Omniscient like in the movies
Out whooshy doors

But his gaze halt ant
Ant the true ant
He dimly remembers
Not like them

So now
He hesitates
A million stories up
Shifts weight trying

Make his mind up
Distantly deciding
Whether to step
Before he jumps

On it
Or not

ASSASSIN

kiss each bullet
before you load them
so every saliva'd
shell will slurp up
during its inspired flight
some of the confetti
snowing down on
the motorcade
and will use those
alphabet bits of
newspaper or torn
campaign posters
whose false hope
peoples this parade
to compose an obituary
to collate out
of those shredded
syllables and words
those puffery lies
like a poem drawn
dada from a hat and
thereby at the end
of their satisfactory
trajectory come to
imprint some random
elegy in the flesh
of the tyrant me

ANOTHER FALSE EXECUTION

The crime-rate in our land is so great that
I could commit Murder A confident that
Simultaneously someone unknown to me
Would nearby be committing Murder B—

My plan's to confess to Murder B which should
Cover up my real guilt for A because if
I was busy perpetrating B how could
I have done A. The identical times of

The crimes and my evidentiary shame
Convince the law of that. The subsequent
Trial verdict shall hoistpetard my scheme,
Girding me with the gloat I'm innocent

Of that of which I stand condemned: I die
Endowed in the knowledge my sentence
Is wrong, thereby maintaining to the end
That moral superiority, that perfect high

Which is the cause of most crimes if not mine.

AND SO ON

suicide sex it's so much fun
you take 3/4ths of a fatal dose
and then fuck till you pass out
you cunnil her or fellate him
while they slit their wrists and
then you call 911 and so on

DEAR ADVICE COLUMNIST

I recently killed my father
And will soon marry my mother;
My question is:
Should his side of the family be invited to the wedding?

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

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.

*

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 assocations 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.)

LAST WISH: TO AN AMAZON

Don't kill me yet
With bow and arrow
Through my heart—

Please: I want to die
But first grant this:
If for that aim

To better shoot
Your right breast was cut
Off and if that

Cut-off breast still
Exists: graft it
—Implant-surgery

It—to my chest:
Then, shoot.

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.

MYSTERY MOVIE

The business rival, the jealous lover,
the distant heir: once I've guessed
who the murderer is, it's over before
it's over, like life. The detective will
continue to not see the obvious or
else pretend to lack the answers till
his hunch is confirmed: if he's Poirot
or so, he savors his superiority and
holds his gloat over the heads of all
the stupid others: the cast still looks
each suspicious close-up in the eye,
but my attention fades to patience.
Post-intrigue and somewhat bored I
settle back, awaiting the confirmation
of my solution. Then: each clue hangs
abacus-like on the bars I've placed
around it all, safe and cell, confident
the guilty one shall confess to prove
that even I must suffer exoneration
in the executions destined for those
who foresee the end, who linger here
complacent in our deductive wisdom,
reviewing the forensics, the shrewd
sleuth-insights that result in the death
of suspense, the loss of our audience
innocence. Now the soundtrack swells
to leitmotif its list of suspects, each of
whom could have done it if this world
were only perfect, equal in its sharing
of virtue or crime. Sherlocks who solve
the puzzle pre-climax are most to blame
perhaps: are we to show for this lack

of justice, we who jump the gun, who
deny the drawing out of the dilemma,
thrill of the withheld. The unknown.
We who rush too soon to the revelation.
We killjoys who slay its necessary delay.

MADE FOR EACH OTHER

Today a fashion-model stopped me on the street
And asked me to marry her because
She said
She wanted to eat all the rat-poison in the world for
  her wedding-supper

PRISCILLA, or THE MARVELS OF ENGINEERING
(A Fatal Fable)

A "Swingles Only" Cruise to souths tour on the
S.S. Priscilla: parties, spurtive romances, confided
Antiperspirants, quickchange partners. Suddenly
3rd day poolside blank, sun
Ouch I meet up a daze dish somehow ain't
Crossed my eyes' equator yet: she preened
To have appeared out of that presumptuous
Nowhere our hoarse soggy captain's
Nailed in place on his compass: in all the swarmy sticky
Nightlong pairings off, secret lifeboat
Drill assignations, where did you come from
I offfered haven't laid uh eyes you behind musta been blind. Oh
I've been around she said, I've seen you operating
That blonde last night, har, har, har.
Flattered, I introduced my name's Bill. Priscilla.
—As in S.S.? We laughed over the coincidence,
Wringing fragile martini chill stems all
Around us similar neo couples were
Gangplanking each other, coral lounge dusk deck.
Dinner, we promised. Then the moviedance,
Then . . . ? Our eyebrows guessed "The night?"
Separating to change, we hugged all sprinkly
But at table that P.M. I stained her napkin but
She didn't show up went looking for wasn't at the dance
Either. Hmmpf, not on deck—where could she
Be? I asked all the other cats and chicks
Where the hell's Priscilla? describing her. No way
Man ain't never seen no piece like that since we
Ask the purser—man you sure? Tete
A tete sure, I replied. The purser!
I'll get her cabin number, she might not be feeling
Oh boy I didn't inadvertantly slip a torpedo into her drink that
Stud I scored from said they work every,
The purser. But no senor
There is no Priscilla everywhere listed amongs
The passenger list I'm jorry. The boat—she
Is S.S. Priscilla? he added helpfully, concerned, as though I

were nutlong no
No you nit-tit—she has to be on look I met her this
Safternoon in the "Cock 'N' Tail" Lounge. Jorry
Is no let me have that thing here on the passenger look for
jourselve.
Damn! she ain't on it
A stowaway hunh
That's even better
I'LL get her
She can't escape what's
Gonna do—hide in the ocean?
But
Finally, frustrato, angry not even drunk after no
Go searching all night, at sailor's-dawn I slunk to my cabin and
Guess who I found the bitch all tucked up in that little cute-ass
Type beds they have Priscilla!
I hissed. Come to bunk
She swelled. But you, you aren't . . .
Aren't what, know whatcha 're crazy dam-
Shh let's love she swayed. Okay: I'm game. 'S bout time. So we
Start fucking but, her movements were too calm
And rocking, elusive as chase in tune with the ship's
Wash on the waves. Gentle, coaxing, mocking-
Musky, chromosome zoney, internal
As sea. It was eerie
The ex of it cited
Frightened me. My Y shot up: I began
Fug and fury ramming, I urged
Harsh thrash strokes, I hard
To hurt her with my penis, I remembered
That Norman Mailer story where he calls his "The
Avenger" I was pissed, make me
Frantic look all over the goddamn
Ship you cunt slammed all my spite ptooey
Into her. And then, and then . . . instantly . . .
Something . . . all I know is I came the split
I hit the water. I was drowned, of course,
In the famous shipwreck. The famous shipwreck
You remember
It was in all the TV—

Shots of it sunk in shallow clear just
Off an atoll. And everyone aboard was lost, adios,
Unusual or not unusual in these cases. But no one
Nobody could figure out how
The S.S. Whatshername had
Gotten all those great big gaping holes
Ripped, slashed, torn in her hull nor
What caused this deadfall rupture, the grievous eely capsizing.

Couldn't a been a iceberg
That
        far
                south.

Note:
The movie I made from this was rejected by all Festivals, cinepurists objected to its cross-fate wedding of two related genres, the shipboard romance and the shipwreck flick: the former ends in fornication which here brings on the latter's climax: each time Tab Hunter thrusts into Dorothy Malone's loins another great gaping hole is ripped in the ship's hull. Orgasm occurs when the ocean collapses together gasping above its regained void.

THE WAY

the juggler could
amputate parts
of himself and
juggle them so

as to fill the air
with synecdoche
the boffo finish
one final echo

to climax his act
to sacrifice limb
by limb his all

transformed to ball
that juggler'd
never fall

from A SUITE FROM SUMMER/AUTUMN 2001:

2. ROOM 5, HOTEL ANGLETERRE, MOSCOW, DECEMBER 28, 1925

Outside in the collectivist night late AM
a cart-horse hit by an automotivist died
so reasonably that a hurryingby Futurist
without thinking made the wrongful sign
of the cross against his greatcoat, then
ran on hard for his work at the Stalineum.

Cupid lanks of hair, like crib-slats, blond
petulant hung before the always beloved
eyes of Esenin peering down at his last
poem written in wrist's wake, his blood
that dried as he died that dawn, his feet
working the pedals of a Singer drowning
machine as the noose above grew tight.

Kicked over like a choirboy in a police
raid on a speakeasy his chair lay empty
as Pasternak declared it should be and
yet his spoiled snotty brimchild brattiness
was no way to vacate it or so the spotlit-
gnarled Mayakovsky told the upward-
gaping-my-god poets of the Last Village:
his merciless hot-rod hissed and shot
sparkypuffs and gasbows all over them.

But now streetmenials peeled the collision
horse up off its blood in the Moscow snow
to show the red skidstreak, the flag scourge
first-degree burn on Sergei's right thigh

inert by a hot steampipe in Room 5,
Hotel Angleterre, not (as Trotsky wanted)
(as Mayakovsky vowed to always be)
a “champion of boiled water”—his scald
flesh was cold there, his colt soul lost
in that land of angles which the Big M
had all figured out, that algebraic
Age of Science, that Future whose high
inevitable advent he praised odelessly,
that Workers’ Paradise where Euclid’s
eunuchs, the robots, did all the work—

(Stalin at this dark hour everyone on
their way to work was snoring by but in
his dream he was crawling heroically
through deserts dying of thirst of course:
he begged his headsmen dear, his sweet
guillontinist to haul that Mandelstam
forth: Now take the O off him he roared,
foolishly believing a ‘sip’ would save him—

(My pun is false in Rus-sync, yes: but once
I would have altered all my words to work
for him: newsed in Knott his worth would be;
my poems’d propagate that great reign,
nor deign to name the summa millions
murdered he: a true Ellipsodicist, I
should have shunned the reality before me
and sung in hymns that time to come,
that holy day they’ll control our DNA,
knowing until then the old male will
kill to kill: we shall overslaughter all
wholehog, human or horse who cares
because what joy, what Y it is to us

to exterminate the rest—ah yes, mustache
boots are just the mask our role requires!)

But instead it was Esenin's head entering
the hoop of who, the rope whose zero
knot contained all noughts and else,
the perfect sum of value versus capital,
the stateless state both he and Isadora
had sworn their art would bring back
to a world hate was prohibiting, a void
vision she might have shared with her
millionaire children had they survived
their limousine's dive and lived to join
her dance collective, her Collected Works.

Note:
Too many recondite allusions here, but briefly: 8 years after the car-accident drowning of her only children (their father the Singer sewingmachine heir), Isadora Duncan moved to Soviet Russia in 1921, believing, as she put it in her *My Life*, "that the ideal State, such as Plato, Marx and Lenin had dreamed it, had now by some miracle been created on earth . . . I was ready to enter the ideal domain of Communism." She married Sergei Esenin, "the last poet of the villages" (as he described himself) in 1922; they separated soon after. His suicide was considered a decadent act of treason against the Revolution by Mayakovsky, who killed himself a few years later. . . . Futurism was the only Ism embraced by totalitarians of both the Left (Soviets) and Right (Italian Fascists). It continues to fascinate all kinds of dogmatists.

SUDDEN DEATH STRIKES JET SET

well racecar driver Peter Revson's
luck
ran out today
the Rev revved up once
too often

despite his rugged
good looks heir
to a cosmetics
fortune he

was driven
daredevil
death defy

once
before a big race
his mother told him
he was crazy

Rev
age 35
one year older than me
a playboy
millionaire frequently
seen with the world's most
beautiful
and glamorous
personalities all

during his
150 thousand

dollar racecar Nascar burning
crash Miss
World the fiancee was photographed
repeatedly

seconds after
the fireball burst his friends took
their friends aside
brusque to confide
that most eligible
bachelor of
them all is a mess

hell
he was positive
meteoric
to say the least

but don't worry the
whole thing
will be hushed up

a quickly announced
memorial foundation of
lipstick
nailpolish
nailpolish remover
eyeliner powder
puffs and pomades
proved useless
when applied to the burnt pan
cake skin

in

New York
Lauren Hutton is reported
to be devastated on
behalf of VIPs
everywhere thank you

one year older than me
hmm
say why am I writing this poem

is it to gloat
glad he's dead
glad I don't have to try to be
him anymore a poet
penniless frequently
seen with the world's most
ugly and worthless
nobodies

and that's just what
I have to put
Pete down for
in the end
snobbery

even his pigheaded death
wish was a kind
of social
climbing I bet
he thinks he made it
today
into the not set

fat

chance
capitalist
rat

Note:
The factoids came from People magazine. Revson was (an) heir to the Revlon cosmetics dynasty. Lauren Hutton: actress, spokesmodel for Revlon. Miss World is replaced annually by a duplicate Miss World.

BEDDYBYE

Just hope that when you lie down your toes are a
firing-squad

NOBLESSE OBLIGE

I always put on a whole-slick tuxedo
when I jump off tall buildings so

when I'm sprawl in the streetdust
that passersby can say, "Oh no: and just

when he was at the height of his success;
look at that tux—now that's the way to dress."

PART THREE:

AFTERLIFE / AFTERLIVES

(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.

SEANCE

Around the readiest table
a manicurist with a hammer
nails in place all hands together
to hold the ring of our focus clung

and keep this communion open:
like jousling airliners the dead
must circle before they land
along the medium's tongue.

[UNTITLED]

after the carnival suddenly
mysteriously burnt down they
stirred the fortuneteller's ashes
to try and find the reason why
but sadly it seems prophecy
does not work in reversus

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

RACIST POEM

we had our chance Pilate
washed his hands of it
and left it up to us

we had our chance
we could have chosen
one of our own
a thief
a murderer

the cross the tomb the
resurrection
then heaven
the right hand throne
a smirk on his face Barabbas
one of us

we could have chosen him
for son of god
might've stuck up for us up there
someone who was flesh
of our flesh

our kind
a pure one hundred
percent human
but we goofed

(stanza break)

we picked that halfbreed
that mestizo
from Nazareth

we had our chance Barabbas
a thief
a murderer
one of us

MUTABILITY (Polvo serán, mas polvo enamorado)

Quevedo wrote he would be dust, but dust in love—
And while I can't believe that millions from now
A rose and a quartzstone will embrace, I can believe
Still less that my arms are around you here: or how
Your sharp crystals
Are tearing my petals.

A COMIC LOOK AT DAMOCLES

Sometimes Damocles is less afraid that the sword may drop
than that his enthusiasm for his plight might
—through the illogical process of displacement—
cause him to rise exuberantly up to it.

Once he glues a plastic bust of himself atop his pate;
once, while paring his fingernails with a pocketknife,
he sees an ant on the floor and throws it at it.
But all (both artistic and magic) remedy fails.

By old age he has quite forgot the deadly blade:
to his feeble sight, that gleaming flash above him
is himself, I mean his soul getting a headstart, already in
flight.

In heaven he hears about an angel who tied a noose
to his own halo and hung himself from it, but sees
no way to apply the case, retroactively or otherwise.

FOOTNOTE

All of us who lived on earth
and all our loves and wars
may not appear at all
in the moon's memoirs.

MISDIRECTIONS

If world is north to infants
and south to adults
is it east to the unborn
west to the dead

Kafka's *Castle* is home
to Count Westwest meaning
God whom K the land-surveyor
meaning human must map out

Jesus Christ on the other hand
not being human lacks
spacial awareness lacks place

Consequently all he says is
set the timelock on
my tomb for 3 days boys

SEFFI'S BLUES

every year the same
they've forgot my name
I take some time away
and when I'm back in May
it's like I never was
all my former buzz
my résumé my respect
where's my endorsements
they treat me worse
than a fatality-show reject
didn't I have a series
didn't I star once
special guest appearance
Sharon Stone as Ceres
but looky here is
this my career this limbo
where'd it all go
I want my audition
I want my youtube hit on
but no it's always no
can't even get a video
or a pilot slot
or a Phil Spector shot
I used to be lah-de hot
now look at this wan
subterrene skin
this bone I'm in
god Dis I'm damned
Angelina can tan
but the sun won't bide
Brad Hades' bride
whitened-hide I stride

past the poppin'-rot-zi
it's me they can not see
I'm fade to the shades
I read the trades
I was Liz and Cher
but the Biz says where
so please don't tell
TMZ I'm back from hell
stale out of rehab
for a while until
I feel that heel-jab
fang again this Fall
that icky-phallic python
is waitin' to writhe-on
when my rerun begins
and my comeback ends
he'll fuck me Paris Hilton
and lay me Lethe Lohan
till I'm gone for rotten
a hasbeen-to-be
signed Persephone
PS don't 'lert the media
don't IM your TV
don't earth to Mom
she cursed the sitcom
I died on and I agree

TCM BLUES

I can't go far
I can't go free
although I am a star
everywhere I move is
right there (see me?)
on Turner Classic Movies

Mad scene cued for Oscar
my head looms closeup size
gosh I feel so lost there
trapped in celluloid
I collide inside with eyes
I can't escape them
on TCM

No one under 85
remembers my name
that's the forget-its the fuck-its of fame
the goodies and the groovies
why am I still alive
on Turner Classic Movies

I wish they'd forget me
and let me rot in peace
why the hell they have to show
all the B's that Louis B made me
get on my knees for I don't know

Silents mute me
Garbo suits me
Bogie shoots me
Bette boots me

out the door
then comes the War
Coop salutes me
Film Noir
convolutes me
I'm ready for more
but time and TV executes me

My birthday they unvault me
popcorn butter and salt me
their experts all exalt me
for each posthumous premiere
of the pics I wish would disappear
once a year like Dracula I up and rear
from my mausoleum here
at lovely Forest Lawn
my death goes on and on and on
like boring Norma Shearer
even though I look so young
I just hate how they approve me
on Turner Classic Movies

I should have stayed on the Stage
my Chekov Ibsen defined the Age
I was the rage with Page One raves
all Hollywood ever saw was my Beauty
I told Jack Warner Go ahead Sue me
I don't need the movies
screw you you studio enslavers
I'm off to Hedda Gabler's

The gangsters and the crooners
the roughies and the smoothies
the dames who came from nowhere

in their furs and rubies
it's Turner Classic Movies

The chippies from the chorus
do their Queens and Madame Boovrys
the hams who knew their Hamlet
are clowns and falldown boobies
the teens who grew up meanies
the Garlands and the Rooneys
come join the ingenues and juvies
on Turner Classic Movies

Producers used me
directors abused me
my co-stars co-screwed me so
please don't behoove me
don't Catherine Deneuve me
all you SOB's just leave me let me go
all you Mickeys and you Goofys
you hasbeens and newbies
12-step friends and floozies
don't try to sob-and-soothe me
don't emote and quote you love me
you really really love to view me
on Turner Classic Movies

(fadeout:)
My flicks all used to slay em
in the big towns and the boonies
but now they only play em
on Turner Classic Movies

PART FOUR:

THE CEMETERY

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.

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.)

KNOT (Hendecasyllabics)

After you've sewn it, bite the thread off my grave—
Please leave no loose seam of me to wave above
The bones unknitting, the flesh unweaving love.

MY EPITAPH

WANT
TO EARN
BIG MONEY
CARVING
TOMBSTONES?
CALL NOW
FOR DETAILS:
[illegible]

Note:
unfortunately snow or grass obscures
most of the phonenumber.

SALON POEM IN LEAFGRAVURE

Cemetery statuary
ought to be deciduous: wings
that fall from angels every
year, all the cherubs losing
their curls, the harps their strings—

Or imagine graveyards in autumn
minus those high carved out figures:
and not just the sculptures,
but names, dates, epitaphs. Each tomb
turned into a bare limb—

Each stone branch of the 'ceme-tree'
would stand once more a slab
the better to weather tragically
another Dec-Jan-Feb.
Come springtime gallery by gallery

etched letter-buds could open
that blankest bark
where new-limned numerals will mark
those old lives' span,
and spranked up there above them

let crosses blossom,
the tall crosses regain
their nailed arms. Now all the chisel
foliage should follow until the whole
museum from within is risen.

ANOTHER RESURRECTION

God sucks off tombstones
until they cum, the soul
up from its finest gloryhole
gushers across His tongue—

Only the premature flesh
(for the last time/eternally)
is left to detumesce, just
another BJ, another JC.

[UNTITLED]

Rice thrown from
an open grave marks
the height of a ceremony
somewhere in our lives.

EPITAPHS

Their meaning seems to be there aren't
enough of them: why else would "REST
IN PEACE" show up so endlessly doled
from gravestone to gravestone, "LOVING
FATHER, DEVOTED SON", "FAITHFUL
SPOUSE" and all the other ubiquitudes—
every cemetery's a clone of its own one.

This sameness betrays a bewildering faith
in the inadequacy of words—it implies that
whatever you or I might choose to have
indited there for a final phrase of grave
would be as lacking and even less would
fail to qualify as equal to these primeful,
these small, one-sign-suits-all sentiments.

But the main reason may simply be size:
maybe these commonquotes total right
and totemize the most to measure down
our lives, they make as much meat as one
can carve on a standard tomb, they sate
whatever else the eye fills up with after all.
Maybe these filigree graffitti fit the bill.

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."

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.

OCCUPATION

Error is everywhere,
but one might hope
that the graves of surveyors
would at least be dug
the correct distance apart.

KEEP

You will keep growing until
your measurements are the same
as the exact degree of the pain
inside your grave.

Until then,
statistics always misspell your name.
And the fate of a misprint
concerns no-one.

In fact, the same one occurs
until it’s fact,
meaning epitaph.

When each grave becomes too painful
we will fill it with
the anodyne of self.

MINOR POEM

The only response
to a child's grave is
to lie down before it and play dead

AT THE NIXON MEMORIAL
(Nixon Beach, California, USA)
(Just minutes away from OzymandiasLand®)

They say that robots simply have to slap mirrors
Up against their voice grilles to try and make sure they're
Not breathing, whereas I kiss caress this monument,
This eternal mall on which Herod has chalked x,

This statue stands for more than blowjobs in spaceships
Or all our names have razed, aimless oceans frying,
While a scab forms on the world's microphone: praise him.
Oh orgasm you robot's vomit I come unheck.

(tape gap) lie back gunked motel whispers dream . . . back (gasp)
To be the genre of my frontier! One hears aborigines
Prefer to, er, fornicate. Money for thought, nyet?

Will the army vote to internalize its camouflage;
At the Reagan Rotunda Paul Valéry allowed how
Shores erode too, rumorous as their dunes.

Note:
Line 14: adaptation of a line from Valéry's *Le Cimetière Marin*: "Le changement des rives en rumeur." (A seaside mausoleum, so it seemed appropriate. With thoughts of the Shelley sonnet's last line.) Line 6: some have objected to the vulgarity of the phrase "blowjobs in spaceships," forgetting that the Nixon Era brought us both the Sexual Revolution and the NASA moon-landing. This slogan should have been one of RN's campaign promises.

PART FIVE:

PRESENTIMENTS

DEATH

Going to sleep, I cross my hands on my chest.
They will place my hands like this.
It will look as though I am flying into myself.

THE RETURN

Behind me someone stalks
with shovel and covers
every footprint with
a spadeful, all my faultless

tracks effaced by small
mounds of dirt that mock
my slowing walk and show
the graves where to excavate

themselves, to get their holes
ready for that lag-leg day
I will have to halt in the heart
the pace of my stride

and turn and try to take
the first steps back . . .

TRANSIT

my hand feels odd without its wrist which ticked itself away
other parts of my body are similarly running out of time
and one by one are vanishing
my left foot is gone
and my right eye and the list grows daily—
if they are departed from here
have they started to appear
elsewhere
weighing down its sill a tick more each second
ectoplasmically emerging there
from the nowhere of this life
this nonexistence I feel in every pore
ever since childhood revealed
a gap in the text or
an amputation of the hand from its gesture
a separation of act from intent
a limb from limb interstice
ever since childhood began to feel
the intrusion of that split that portal that doorway place
which little by little piece by piece
I am entering now

WAS

Age 20 to 40
everyday I said
"I wish I was dead."

40 to 65
each day I cried
"I wish I was alive!"

65 to whenever
daily I'll whisper
"Wish I was either."

EACH THOUGHT EMITS A CAST OF ITSELF

Every roll is a new role
And each shows its truest face
When Yorick's skull is tossed you'll
Reveal your final disguise

Bone against bone they spin
Exposed by a thrust of wrist-lace
Yet Hamlet stripped to his skin
Scolds the players' displays

Don't saw the air when you throw
Don't wince at seven eleven
Whatever odds you're down to now
Will zoom up zero soon

Act Five Scene Five waits
To quietus these words words words
Death itself is just one of the fates
Our dice are rolling towards

WHEN

Everyday yawns, not a hand
but a body covers the yawn,
the body's innate politeness
hides death. Its ill-mannered

dailiness offends our sense
of occasion. Why can't it stay
a holisolemn lark from work—
a wishfilled birthcake instead

of this always. We'd appreciate
it better and celebrate its own
unique event if only we knew

beforehand to buy the candles
here and now and then so we
would be prepared, but when?

SOME QUESTIONS

taking into account
all the poems I wrote

about death when
I was young shouldn't

my tote sheet show
a surplus of life no

it doesn't balance out
did I figure this right

I guess the one never
pays for the other does it

but I didn't write
more of death then so

there would be less
of it now did I

AGAIN

One of my pores creaks
when I pass through it,
as I invariably do—

if I found that aperture
whose verge protests
at my constant

farings forth,
I could oil it with
kisses or apologies,

promises to restore
the tender sill its
welcome mat violates;

to renew the world
it opens onto, to destroy
the one it opens into,

if I only knew
why it alone
amongst the millions

dares to complain,
to voice its distress
in the form of flesh

when I pass through
as I invariably do,
soon for the last time.

WHAT

I envision a doctor saying
to me someday soon
(and any day is too soon)
your diagnosis
is terminal . . . then
I imagine myself
replying
well I've had a good life—

That daydream ends,
and I sit in my room
surveying, estimating
trying to guess
while I still can
what's good
about it.

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.

WHEN THE TIME COMES

there is no alleviation
from the pain
there is no balm

there is no balm unless
via the inner alias
of rhyme it's
Li Po's palm

as it lays
another just-written poem
on the river
to let
it float away

all that effort
lifelong to create
a self sacrificed
as soon as
you got it finished

I hope I can say
when the time comes
as considerately
as calmly
Li Po let go of me

FOREST FEARS

Everything I invest in frightened energy
deludes me, every attempt to see death's good—
all the roads from childhood have wayside
slopes where shadow grows back to its roots,

grubbing a thirst in dirt as I walk by wondering
if I could thrive from such dry clods too if
I knew what shoots do sprout from this corpus
of quick arriving as me, departing as itself—

What a lingering hate I feel as it goes,
a resentment that it can never remain me
but must return to its numb vegetable
state, the shape it had before taking mine on.

Stirred by its terse, its quiet commonplace,
my body loathes the tree my life will crown.

RESUMED PLEA

To pick up where I left off
at birth,
as I was about to say before
being interrupted by
the midwife,
my parents,
my teachers,
my commanding officer,
my employers,
my various wives/children etc.,
my physician,
one or two astrologers,
and the undertaker:

"Free me or worship me!"

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

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

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.

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.

SUSPENSE

The final page of
everyone's book
reveals the same
dunnit, don't it, even

Agatha Christie could
spring no surprise
there: nobody sneaks
a peek at the end

to see the murderer's
identity because we
know it and yet

mysteriously
this boring story absorbs
us as if we didn't!

TWO LEFT FEET

they say if you can hum
you can dance
if you can live
you can die

guide-graphs on the floor
may draw our soles
toward a ballroom grace
in the first case

but with the other
each time we look down
there are no paths
no ways no wonder

we're always stepping
on our own graves

NIGHT THOUGHT

Compared to one's normal clothes, pajamas
are just as caricature as the dreams
they bare: farce-skins, facades, unserious
soft versions of the *mode diem*, they seem
to have come from a posthumousness;
floppy statues of ourselves, slack seams
of death. Their form mimics the decay
that will fit us so comfortably someday.

PRISONER

What raw name scrapes and saws at my breath-hatch . . .
This voice wanted always only to soothe, not grate.
And its last noise, that rasp, that deathrale scratch?
—A file, smuggled in to an empty jail cell, too late.

PART SIX:

OUT OF IT / WHAT THE FUCK

GOODBYE

If you are still alive when you read this,
close your eyes. I am
under their lids, growing black.

POEM

when the balloon bursts
where does all the air
that was inside go

is it bound together briefly
by the moisture
of the human mouth
that birthed it

poor pouch of breath
long expulsion of nothing you
must dissipate too
nor remain intact
no matter how pantingly
against the outer atmosphere
you might try to secure your
whoosh-hold

and what an effort
what heave and heft-work
what strain of frame what rib-rift
to have to lift to shift around
all that oof and uff

why strive and huff just
to stave off death
to survive
to be a substance a stuff

(stanza break)

to live live as a pocket
a cluster
a cloud
to maintain your interior
mode

I can understand
that having once been
contained in bouyance
you'd want to retain
that rare coherence

you'd pray to stay a one
to remain a unity an
entity a whole in
this unencased heaven

but smatter of ghost
how can you persist
or save yourself
when all us others disperse

so let it sough
dissolve in draft
little whistlestuff
pathetic kisspuff
flimsiest flak

(stanza break)

up into the sky goes
two lungs worth
of earth
unstrung
unloosed
the exhaled
soul of a boy a girl

alloonaloft
aloftalloon
lost

MINUS

For time to consist of me,
it would have to halt.
And space, if it wanted to exist of me,
empty.

I forget the other dimensions—

but whatever they are, they
must cease as I
to be me.

IN ORDER

the dead you
wrote about
in order to
forget about
so you could
write about
the living are
still living there
where you aren't

BOTHERSOME

what's that clatter-clack a jack
in the box having a heart attack

open him up crack the seal
but if we let the poor guy out we'll

just have to close him in again
and this time with a coffin

so let's save an hour or a minute
and bury his self with him in it

WISH I COULD (*AND* DO IT IN 31 SYLLABLES)

like someone whose quick
halt in the midst of traffic
to check his wrist makes
him late for that appointment—
that's how to think about death

[UNTITLED]

the past and the future
are my parents
meeting for the first time
when I die

[UNTITLED]

now that I die
my past becomes as endless
as my future used to be

POEM

Night, in whose death did your ennui take refuge?
The women all lay their kerchiefs on the water, and
stepped back.

[UNTITLED]

Check out the Obituaries—each
day there’s another page and
guess what, those fucks,
there’s nobody on it but us.

UP TO THE MINUTE

A jet falls on a cow.
Part of the animal sticks out and twitches like the
usual closeups of the hero's jaw.
Children I admire play in the crushed cow's shadow.
And even the plane itself has been left atop the skel-
etonized milk-giver,
clouding one's dreams of a bloodless coup.

ANCIENT MEASURES

As much as someone could plow in one day
They called an acre;
As much as a person could die in one instant
A lifetime—

PUTATIVE POEM FROM SAMURAI ERA

he made a haiku
before his blade took my head
why not a tanka
tanka would have let me live
fourteen syllables longer

ANOTHER COLD WAR POEM

So what if you lived only
One second longer
Than we
Did: to us
You will always be known as the Survivor.

CONTRIVANCE

The perfect artist is
the one who manages to die
at the hands of the critics.

JUNK

Nothing evicts our everydayself
(our (as Heidegger calls it) *they-self*)
like a glimpse of that tenant within,
Occupant Corpse.

And to think that all the mail addressed to it
is elegant throwaways.

SLUM SCENE

poor children sharing
back and forth their one
set of Dracula's teeth—
here even the dead
live hand to mouth

FUNNY POEM

death loves rich people
more than us poor
coffin salesmen look down their sniffs
shoot their cuffs
at us

funeral directors obit-pages priests
all want classy
can't afford
a headstone
a silk lining
daily lawn mowers flowers plus
catering service for the worms
they get mortally insulted

and you know it's funny
while I never
believed that stuff about god
loving
the poor so much
made so many

I never believed that stuff about god
but this
death preferring the rich thing you know
it's kind of funny but you know
I believe it
it makes sense

(stanza break)

in fact
I think we
should start a movement
our slogan would be
GIVE DEATH WHAT IT WANTS

yes
let's lend it a helpin' hand
be neighborly
it makes sense
since what death seems to want is
the dead
i.e. the rich

ORPHEAD

The head displayed
for maenad analysis;
remedy amputee,
to the chute of the sea.

Disposal is all. Past
the path of its tongue
let it travel long,
unraveling song.

Through terebis territory
stained Ebro pursues
his severed lipwreck's
lyre-waxed intervals.

Its banks refuse tomb
to this bodilessness
assaulting vacuum
backbouyant combed.

Now none come to nurse
his neck where pegasi
loose their reins in blood;
missing his vein they fly.

Noon-heat leafs its hate,
whirlpool tugs his curls.
Whose garland was
grief-i-er than a girl's.

Whose love for boys
briefer than a girl's was—

stray now he sights
dame straightway at last.

Late now Europe-land
has eurid itself of him;
Eurydice finally risen
tidally takes his lid swim.

Those phalloi he laid
shake their snakelike psychs;
unshouldered his bust rolls
oceancast depthsighs.

Lesbos waits to claim
this refuse of its myth.
But Sappho says fuck it
we've no one to lay him with.

QUESTIONS

Before we're born we're
lowercase, and after we die,
we return to it. Only life
renders us in capital letters.

(Every headstone ms.
should really be edited
by clones of e.e.cummings.)

Life is caps for the usual reason,
an exaggerated sense
of the significance
of one's thoughts.
Life is a Beat poet.

Upper existence or
lower nonexistence,
I'm sure the eye adjusts its focus
towards either case—

But which is easier to read—
greatness or goneness,
headline or poem?

Life or its foreword-afterword?

AT THE CROSSROADS

The wind blows a sheet of paper to my feet.

I pick it up.

It is not a petition for my death.

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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

"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's poems are . . . rhetorical fluff . . . and fake."
—Ron Loewinsohn, TriQuarterly, Spring 1970

"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] incompetent . . ."
—Alicia Ostriker, Partisan Review (date? 1972?)

"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