

"[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

RHYMING POEMS:
a selection from
1968-2008

Bill Knott

*

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

INTRO NOTES

*

Rhyme is obviously an ongoing preoccupation for many and perhaps most poets over the course of their lifetime—

this book is a SELECTION from the end-rhymed poems I've written through the years—

of various sorts and sizes—

*

The decision to use end-rhyme, whenever it arises in my compositional process, changes the content of the verse. The rhymes become directive—I move from writing *toward* rhyme, to writing *from* rhyme. Or perhaps the movement is back and forth.

But of course since rhyme is the property of the proper poet, the real poet, I am forbidden to employ it. I the faux poet, the vanity poet, have no right to what is theirs by right. My trespass shall not go unpunished.

*

The order of the poems is random in that it is neither chronological nor thematic,

but I have tried to present in alternate the three main categories here:

sonnet, short, homostrophic.

THE TRESPASS

On every corner I stand the street ends.
Others zoom home ignoring curbs and stops
And find themselves in family or friends

But I observe the sign don't cross this line.
I obey the words that say back away.
I mind these limits shown in case they're mine:

I share their lawful urge to prohibit—
My own words witness so many sanctions
How dare I unsubmit to any writ.

I can't jaywalk or say I wonder why
Verbotens written then can still turn now
The unstoniest road to a no go by.

What's wondering me here is not this halt
Or prior heedings where I nearly see
Such blocks and stalls and balks are all my fault—

I note the welcome-mat at the center
Of my maze: how each sole turns back relieved
To have found a spot it cannot enter.

What's wondering me then is what attends
To nothing I say on my way nowhere.
On every corner I stand the street ends.

DREAM AMID BED-WOODS

You must pull down sheets from these linen trees,
Blankets too, a pillowcase in full leaf,
But can't: to snooze amongst their fruits, beneath
The sheath of that composite canopy's

Roost, you must raise yourself past hammock heights—
Up where its deepest roots feel doubly sapped,
That orchard dormitory might lie wrapped
And ripe with you, whose foliage still invites

More lure of surface sleep. But must you trust
The ease in these boughs, the sway of whose loft
So often now wakes vows to never rest,

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

ROMANCE (Hendecasyllabics)

But when it had engulfed them all two by two,
the Ark itself became a greater creature,
an omni animal. And yet Noah knew,
surely this new behemoth shall also pair

and mate now, and that unlike the beasts before
this one is destined then to find true marriage:
because as soon as his keel breaks the water,
born beneath it will be that surface image

none of us desires to engage in divorce—
Natural nuptial partner, mirrored other,
the Ark's clone would emerge from nowhere out there

in the waves. And upside down hold bound the course,
faithfully accompany her spouse across
any world to reach at last their offspring shore.

GENERIC

I look along the shelf
for brand-name goods of wealth
and fame but all I see
is that cutprice item me.

Wise shoppers shun my aisle
for bargains with a style
shiny and new, not used—
they know I've been reduced.

My sell-date fades pastdue,
retail reveals the true value
that wastes each cost invested:
to wipe this dust off my head

and open my packaging,
ignore the evident aging,
the brown tainted spots
splotching up under Knott's

Best: to buy me takes
a blind eye. A lack of taste.
Half-off or marked for free
this sale's not worth a spree.

PORNOPUNCHINELLO

I lack the pleasure to claim remorse
Is at my loins earning its pariah's name
From me who may have kissed a worm or worse
In my time aspiring to that acme shame

Unless shame is a sense of having shirked
Refused what love dangled just above me
All those tantalus chances for lust were jerked
Out of reach but not by fate's absurd pulley

My own hands gangling in the back somewhere
Supported those puppets' pulp character

Tame filmstars lame mimes where are your faces
Enduring still your enticements I turn
And twist until you've all lost your places
Prompter-perfect I but you you never learn

IMMUNE

Listening's confined to animals,
What we call ear uncalls all we hear—
Eyesight applies to hawks and owls
But never to our narrow peer:

Each natural sense we experience
Here as humans pales, halved or less
To a modest of its male-ness—
Smell; touch; taste: can you even guess

Which of them if any might still prey on
Our higher-evolved state . . .
Which of that five's alive and hovering—
Dead to its lunge we wait.

STRAND

To swim in water colored green
means you may never reach the shore—
but if the waves are blue, then you
might revive your stroke and strike more.

Past surface shades could find the one
arranging dust, the hue your own
adequately echoes, earth tone.

Neither primary nor pastel,
its prism all but shallow bathes
every island that can be found
in scenes preserved by paint: it saves

the picturesque yet quickly drowns
our honed harbor, your wake, your wake
says, flowing home beneath no ground.

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.

CURTAIN UP

The last whirling dervish to drop
Beholds transfixed what those who stop
Dancing an instant prior can't:
His veil is pierced by orbs that grant

The properly-spiritual leer
A picture which should inspire fear.
They say the face of God, maybe—
In my case I would probably

Flashback to 1961
Where filmqueen Romy Schneider's gone
Down on co-star Alain Delon
To pose for my holy vision.

They're flung in bed with me between.
See us there: I am their screen.

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

THE UNSUBSCRIBER

Like all children, you were a de facto
Member of the Flat Earth Society,
Believing nothing but what you could see
Or touch or whatever sense led act to

Fruition: mudpies made summer beneath
A tree whose measured shade endowed decrees
Between light and dark: such hierarchies
Gave you implicit, a sophistic faith—

(Fallacious fellowship!)— Youth's adherents
Ignore the fact that most factions reject
Their lyric league (which only fools have stayed

Striplings of) and none condone its nonsense:
No-one loves that vain solipsistic sect
You'd never join, whose dues you've always paid.

(CRIBSONG)

can the dandled infant sense
when time's tall animal
will maladroitly spill
his frons of innocence

shall butterfingers shun
that fall whose one mistake
makes each baby brain break
its meek fontanel eden

was god the klutz that let me
land headfirst splatborn splayed
today's adult once prayed
beastlike on his fat knee

what clumsy bungling rage
as Rilke trained beware
in his poem Der Panther
runs evolution's cage

which creature cuddly come
bids parents lose their grip
and every cradle's urge to tip
rockabye your cranium

so try to be like Rilke
the lucky little bastard
the kid who oops was daily
dropped not down but upward

EXTENDED

Those positions sought in vain by trainwrecks
These two achieve quite quickly. Contorted
Limbs and mouths chuting their routeless tracks
They litter that linen landscape. The bed

Goes off the rails. Mountains or valleys push
Each place that's reached for beyond its distance.
Here in time's commute communed for the rush
Hour this kiss lasts. Yet always late since

Lovers' travel is over where but when.
How far they've come. Both bodies disembark
Homeward tramways while memories remain

Head-ons hurled from one's normal course again
And again. Everything goes bright then dark.
Either emerges on a further line.

DEATH AND THE MOUNTAIN

“There is no theme for old age
but death and the mountain.”

—Arab proverb

You should see the treeline on
that mountain
of update bulletin news;
no avalanche can blacklist me—
The twigline on the tree
said: You should see him on talkshows

sandpapering his
mug off totempoles, carved
of old, of pine—
Just past the christline
on that cross is
one sitcom one summit of this; scarred

as a skyline of thorns it grew
up, imperious, pious. . . . To
blindfold the precipice
before leaping
from it, okay; but try keeping
a straight face

when the punchline comes “kersplat”—
There, old skin-quilt,
saint peacock hedge! Feverchart
that wedges the door shut.
I see it
he said. I see my mountain’s peak-sized fate.

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.

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

ROCK PICKED UP FROM THE BEACH

To focus on thing, thing whatever it is,
in some cases a mountain, an object
somewhat more intimate for most of us—
a fate transformed then framed into a fact

plucked from a beach full of rocks the same size
and shape, not much to distinguish it or
confer more meaning than perhaps the eyes'
choice, the hand's: what justifies this favor?

Nothing. And nothing is appropriate
for something common chance has snatched from
phenomena's moment, its montage pace

down the page. One word leads to the one right
for it: that's right. One can reach out random
or one can wait until it's in its place.

FRAGMENTS FROM THE BEACH
(Enneasyllabics)

In retrospect the tragic nature
of sea is a taste wept too freely,
soon depleted by scenes of rupture;
the eyes have other secrets to see

and deeper use for the detritus
within us: the bright effluvium
of ego dries up, mired as it is
in wealth, that remedial medium.

Blame it on fate, on beach memories—
pebble put in the pocket or shell
fragments; any memento carries
us as much as we it. Time capsule

contains every evening's interval.
An ocean observes its own puddle.

ALOFT

once every student barber
to earn his certificate
would first have to lather
a balloon and shave it
then if it didn't burst
he'd pass his last worst test

but I wonder what happened
to that schooled balloon
did they use it again
or was it shown mercy
let go set free
to fly away safely

scrapeskin for a sheepskin
one nick will kill this bubble
let pupils skilled in scruple
cut its rubber stubble
here only dull shearers win
the hirsute-pursued laurel

a master's in mustache
a doctorate in down
summa comb or brush
cap-strop-and-gown
more honors-blown diplomas
than tenured hands can slash

our blood stays bearded for
that educating puncture
light hearts inflate and then
learn one slit-throat lesson

to flunk is remedial
if pop-quiz pops us all

undrape look up and see
those balloons still floating over
our razor-grad degrees
they hang on the air
they dangle from a hair
no blade can sever

NOT THIS WAY

if that bird soars across
this wall which halts us
why does it then
fly back here again

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

STRUNG

Song proceeds from a sort
of inner rectitude, gut
aligned with throat,
foot to palate straight
as sync: the link
tightens each thought on
a taut cord word caught
between this tension, strung
toe and tongue. Song
proceeds all wrong
unless it's wrung.

THE AMNESIAC'S NAME

Whatever it is it is
The only alias
Anonymous never uses.

COVER STORIES

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

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

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

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

COMMUTER SKILLS NEEDED

I'm like a spaceship flooded with roadmaps:
The guidebooks that marked and led me here are
Archaic. All the ways they praise have lapsed.

They program mirage the moments I know—
Even my going home fails threshold then;
The path I nailed's a trail of blood whose flow

Is like what, a heritage halt, but just
How extinct can I get by existing,
Must I recant the past or can I trust

My family when they promise me some
Of us have not abandoned what crumbling
Almanachs applaud in words verbatim

From *Star Ache* reruns: they say our save screen
Is full of the old jism, the thumb-jam.
Can one yuckskull of us hold that vision

Safe, can they fly off fled within its sky?
From vid to vid we lean, to wave goodbye.
It's like that thing that whatsit wrote, but I

Know it's mostly misquote. It don't apply.

THE HUNGER (enneasyllabics)

If a path to the Gingerbread House
could be established by breaking crumbs
off its edifice and sprinkling them
so as to find what lies behind us

across the featureless fairytale
void of childhood: yet how very quick
that trick wears out when the story's track
takes hold, takes toll, a far-older trail

prevails, we're forced to give up this lost
cause; and the fact is that every last
morsel was gone long before the you

or I might totter our way back here
to try to dissuade all these other
Hansel-Gretels hollering in queue.

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.

PARABLE FROM CHILDHOOD

Something about a pond, and on the pond
a paper boat; something about a child's
act, dropping a pebble upon that boat
to study the effect: but then to let
other pebbles fall to see if it holds,
to kneel there spilling them one after one
until, until finally . . .

If I weigh
this poem down with much more, it too will sink—

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

GROUP PHOTOGRAPH (THE EARLY YEARS)

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

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

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

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

BUMPY KISSES: POEM WRITTEN TO A POET
(to RS)

remember those bumpy kisses
in the back of that taxi
we should have begged the cabby
more hit more potholes please

when we hit a bad one whoops
everything got flung up hard
but don't some things just get better
by bouncing from lips to lips

kisses usually get their kicks
from boredom the normal routine
tongues stick the same linebreaks
the proper punctuation in

but not these bumpy babies
they jack out the box they
jump all the jolts of this jaunt
lucky for us it's transient

after a poetry reading
briefly we'll share a ride heading
uptown toward distant lives
has one of us now arrived

still the course of our smoothest words
is likewise unpaved by poems
we scribble them down sometimes
hurried as hugs through a cab-door

though even they must go

past first dates or last we try
we mostly try and let them be
the moment they were meant to

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."

POEM IN THE CARDIAC UNIT

Time-charted, nursed, I let the meds
dictate this verse: *roomriver rounds*
take my pulse down stairwaves of stairs
scan my aches in chairbanks of chairs
and wake me on bedbeds of beds.

Multiplicities, pre-scripted;
metaphors bled, already dead:
what wouldn't be a cliché here—
paranoid mirror, bathroom sink,
flowing over with normal fear

as I squint at what I might mean
if I poeticized this scene: age
LSDs my chin; my once-lean
profile spills profilefiles, page
upon page rippling to see

even their prolific output
data can never sate the spate
pathoscopes that hardrecord spot
surveillance of what vital signs
remain in these veins, clotted lines

whose parse usurps my sleep. (Forget
how literate you hate this surge,
absurd, heartbeat creation; your
necknoun must stet its tide-edit
now, to quiververbs, wattlewords.)

What would my peergroup say, could they
modify this hypergaud gush,

advise my florid veinflushed flesh
stop pouring forth such images,
euphony beyond me. Sweet excess.

Is that not the gist this critic
monitor that beeps down its *sic*
keeps vying to brightly display
while I lie here less than what, what,
watched all night, till more's the day.

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.

THE SINGULAR (nonasyllabics)

Whistlecraft aloft in the blue, birds,
belief has assured me your choral
enthroatments are whole and yet I spell
them out as similar to our words—

Your songs define you while mine unvoice
my field of lieu and fail to call up
a likeness new enough from the group
auguring each face its fate. The choice

seems too great for me but you seem to
flourish as flocks beyond your final
ornifact which Braque for one pictures

in wingspan style, his pursuit single
as I used to be. Is he more true
tracing the tune that eludes my ears?

Note:

After Braque: singleness/wholeness; individual/group;
poetry/art; etcet—?

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

OCTNOV AGAIN

The year's wrapping comes undone: foliage tied
By sun-strung cords is cut and cast aside

To present the godsend, the great last gifts
Time donates to its ingrates, sad thankthrifts

Who throughout their dotage-dole still forget
The parcelly-priceless rose of regret

Never stemmed them against one bestowed weed—
(Why can't our greed grant instead of our need:

Each field and tree stripped packing, boneward bare,
Was nowhere on our wish-list: we'd prefer

Ribbon-prinked paper/a crepe-plush pinkbow
Glitzing forth their vulgar veneer: and now

Mocked by how little of its kitsch remains,
We crave our carton, not what it contains.)

4 TRANSVERSIONS OF GOETHE'S *WANDERERS*
NACHTLIED II

Every hill is overcome
with peace, the trees are a dome
down which the wind echoes
to mass one last breath;
the forest song has rung its close,
bird by bird, descending—
await your death
no longer. Listen: this too is ending.

Over all the hilltops is peace;
in all the treetops no breeze
endures, merely the breath of one;
the birds are gone, or at least
their song has ceased. You have your wish:
desist, desist! Thy will on earth be done.

You can feel your breath stilling all the hills,
and oh, what an undulant illusion!
The birds have wrapped their wings around their bills
and sleep: soon you too will be no one.

Now peace envelops
the hilltops
and every tree's summit
seems to submit
its final breath to the pall
and harshly over-all
hushing of even
the baby birds' calls when
you, you and your haste, come near—
Beware: your place is here.

CELEBRATION

The conversation-pit is filled to the level
Of the floor with the soil of former parties here—
Crushed cigarettes, napkins, all kinds of cocktail swill—
We stand at its edge, grinning, wondering who's there:

Is there some version of us lost in that rubbish.
Such a Pompeii probably took years of soirees.
Where's the carpet to cover it—dense, bottomless,
It makes the livingroom around it seem empty.

And why get superstitious—why greet our fellow
Guest from way across this trashhold—since we must know
Its surface could bear our most intimate meetings.

Oh, somewhere the host is winking working elbows,
Showing no embarrassment—but here we have grown
Sober over the grave of what greater gatherings.

A LIFETIME YET

Look, in the sky, how those clouds turn
into a place which briefly appears
to be unique or is that pattern
repeated once every 33.3 years—

Termcycle which can't be seen unless
via long computers our sapient view
finds its site: or is this simply false
recurrence imposed upon a true

chaos. Can heaven's formations be
further figured beyond the phase
nonce of that one fate we suddenly
see: a third of the way through his

thirtythird year we hoisted Jesus
up to check this question out; he
was supposed to get back to us
on it but we're still on hold, aren't we?

HERITAGE

" . . . here thy generations endeth in accord."

I physically resemble my mother
And father and therefore must have been
Adopted, because on my TV screen
The role-children rarely share a feature
With either parent. The fact they're actors
And I'm not is what makes me misbegot—
Watch that matched world of monitors 2-shot
The mirror daily where I pray these stars

*Come: cancel everyone of us whose names
And clans have sundered human unity—
Descend always among daughters or sons
To live still, beyond the Web's trivia games,
Till their faces cloned shape ours. Family.
From android to ape, we'll be Thy reruns.*

INTHREADABLE

each snowflake's
a maze
whose center
no other flake can find
the ways
to enter

ESCAPE PLAN

I examine
my skin

searching for
the pore

with EXIT
over it

ELEPHANT AND ENVELOPE

Numbering their normal RAM in great noughts,
The elephant and the envelope are
Doomed to remember only pristine thoughts—
They both carry every souvenir too far.

No matter how creased and stained their skins fade,
Even the erratum images they encase
Remain abnormally there to be read
(Password: *remorse*). Is there no way to erase

The years the yearfalls or are all these flaws
Stored away somewhere perfectly forever—
All of our memory sites dotcomlinked—

Trapped in that utter trunkiness because
The envelope is an elephant. Never
Forgets: thus it too will soon be extinct.

DREAMTIDE

downways the beach
where waves battle shallows
I thought of maybe
a pillowfight with the sea
using hearts for pillows

sownways their feathers
would drift all day on me
childhood-hoarded could
I let my hours
finally jet free

but flownways the days
must wait to bare
that blood which neither
wound nor water
adulterates

yet yawnwaves waken when
every sandgrain sifts
its one memory pure
of the breakers taken
the oceans endured

down on drawnway beach
dream-tide high they've laid me
from comforter combatted
spread over lap dunes dead
wings wherever I reach

THERE'S THE RUB

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

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

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

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

THE CYCLE

what's the use
waking all night
to write down truths
which dawn quite
easily refutes

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

WINTER REGRETS

The snow on my ladder's rungs
seems to be stepping upward,
returning to that cloud which hangs
framed in the faded cardboard

of an old calendar landscape
whose dust holds the days I desire
to live in, fixing to climb up
past that summer sun and hammer

the scene in whole. I didn't haul
my ladder in and now it's too late—
I turn from the window and stare

lost at a vista of August air
tacked, half-peeled from the kitchen wall.
All the undone chores must wait.

TOWERS

1.

Pisa's power to bend the head sideways
must be envied by history,
which can only force it forwards—
and Babel of course is praised
in every book (on every page)
for the way it slanticulates our words.

2.

Galileo drops a pound of lead
and a pound of feathers from the top,
one of which hits you on the head,
but which one—
(which head?)—
It makes you think, as well as stop.

3.

Every tower around here
is always in need of repair,
due to the superstitious habit
of leaning over
to peek into its 13th floor
to make sure it's still not there.

NUN CLAIMS MOST SNAKES TOO SERIOUS TO
MAKE GOOD BOOKMARKS (YOUR SOUL IS A
CHOSEN LANDSCAPE)

À la gongs, that await the Emperor's semen
But in vain, I partition silence into rooms
Called poems. Why? Only Empresses remain—
Is this too rigid: should seed, blown from some

Sunflower come to land solely on sundials . . .
Yet wig of compass-needles; comet. Soars
—For sync's sake? Like optional hearts, in styles
Singular averse against the opus wall of stars

Spring safetypins my penis to my navel,
Praying that so fetal a petal shall shrivel still:
A thank-quiet follows; a field day feeling;

Queen Staypower paints out our scene's see-me's
(Dream-prussic pupils flare flush with their irises).
Then sun wonderlands it all a bit, by falling.

Note:

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

PERFORMANCE-ART PIECE

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

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

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

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

MY THEORY

The universe's mission is to expand,
all scientists now agree; yes, but why
should that be its quest, they question—

Based on my experience, my theory:
if one remains in the same place, one
must pay rent, life's made me understand.

Landlords and clerics may disagree
with me, but look, see every galaxy
sneak out the back, starcase in hand?

BATHROOM MIRROR

Every morning the glass
empties my face
of its night and then
as its day is poured in
I feel forsaken and
my eyes strain longingly
down the drain.

TEMPTROUSSEAU

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

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

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

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

ON THE ROAD (KEROUAC)

Join Jack and his pals
in the endless adventure
of spilling fossil fuels
into the atmosphere.

Step on the gas and zoom
from sea to oily sea
why be a stay at home
Beat means holy Beat means free.

Jump in the car and drive
anywhere though west is best
burn that octane burn to live
don't question this quest.

Go man you gotta go
you too must take that ride
faster faster never slow
on the road to ecocide.

TO JOSÉ LEZAMA LIMA

The poem is a letter opener that slices
a to discover b in which c waits
and so on until z reiterates
my metaphor's acute dullness, its crisis

of belief: say this knife could core its way
past the final alphabet and penetrate
that rind that blinds us with its consummate
yield of polished inveighed truths which betray

nothing of the stuffing, the seeds that rot
innate tumors of meaning, enemy
rumors amassed across your desk each morning—

what if that surfeit of words was a warning
label only, just another skin to be
cut? And all this is unless the poem is not.

Note:

Line 10-11: 'enemy rumors': Lezama Lima's second book of poems was entitled *Enemigo rumor*.

COMPACT DUSK

Here at the height of the day night change
The color of the sky is uncertain,
The sky depending in which direction
One's eye strains, each of its swatches a strange

Hue which dies too soon and which makes this hour
Linger in the mind transient as a life,
Whose name once known remains another
Posied-up portrait on our palette knife.

Until even I wonder if one tint
Ever survives the harm of seeming unique
(Evening's intrigue, time's singularity).

Study for its trace, its placemap, I see
—Redundant as a stopsign in italic—
The face on which my profile leaves no print.

Note:

This began as a trans. of Jorge Borges' *A Un Poeta Menor de 1899*, but ended up as a kind of homage/meditation. The homage or translation is always a profile compared to the fullface original.

AFTER BORGES' "TO A MINOR POET OF 1899"

Who sought that sad height and that constant change
Laboring on an extraneous verse
Which through the dispersion of universe
Might elect one second whose spectrum's range

Was so capricious it broke the scholar
Caught in daily efforts to confine the eye
Pursuant of ceruleanesques that lie
Against each longing to fling a color

As brief as my life if I am alive
And am the one destined to undergo
Any authorship of the words that show
Whether such vexacious tints can survive—

You must judge, ancient friend! what I've seen
Or accept as real the illusion I mean.

BASH (ten versions of *furuike ya*)

If I were a pond
and some frog jumped into me
I wouldn't respond.

I am a pond but
when a frog gets intimate
I keep my mouth shut.

I may look like scum
but some frogs can poke this pond
to orgasm come.

This pond is so old
even its frogs want it sold
to build the new road.

This pond is old as
me. That's how bad-off it is.
Frog-visits, I doze.

You're old, pond—the same
as me. But when your frogs come
you recall each name.

This pond is year-scored
as me. But frogs that shake it
up just make me bored.

I'll float in this pond,
fearing each frog that jumps down
will wash me aground.

This pond is old too—
But when a frog jumps into
It, it still sounds new.

This pond is dead earth
But listen to its rebirth
When frogs take a bath.

FURU YOU, EEKY YA

*

Ya, the old wash-hole—
wait-a-fuck—a frog?—oh, no!—
goes splasho Basho.

*

Ya, the old North Pole
where Santa Frog (ho-hop-ho)
chops a splashin'-hole!

*

Ya, old-boys brothel—
watch Oscar Wilde get Basho
to wet his tadpole.

*

Ya, here's to Basho!—
there's one frog-boozin' dude you
should raise your glass to.

*

Whoa, Ranger Basho!
frog-herd's at the water-hole—
leggo your lasso.

WINDOWBEAM

Ray that overruns every pane,
force that first invades but then

is pervaded: sunstripe penetrant!—
what made your phalanx fail: why can't

its gallant-greaved angel's-armor
avert our dirt: must the conqueror

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

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

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

transient the transparency
you brandished here so recently.

FERNAND KHNOPFF

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

The culling of love from our facades is.
Once, never to go the cling thing seemed what's
Sublimest. Look at those cobwebcroats,
Skittering skyward, fingerhold, nor toe- .

Deep down (in my ugh-roots) I longed to brag
My spiel shall deign define no July of these.
I'll fall chapter closed across your chest is all.

Now I am an atrocious expert; who answers
Every question by, "It is very simple:
We must listen to Beauty with frozen ears."

Note:

I don't understand writers who prefer "painterly" painters over "literary" painters. How can I as a poet place Cezanne (or Monet, Matisse, etc.) above Khnopff, and not be disloyal to myself? Shouldn't we appreciate most those painters willing to stain their canvases with some of the impurities of our own art?

MERRY - NO - ROUND

The wooden horses
are tired of their courses

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

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

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

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

the fire will free them then
as once the artisan when

out of the tree they
were nagged to this neigh.

CRAPSHOOT

Whoever it was, the first plagiarist
had to actually dream up the concept
of the crime, so don't fault him (I imagine
this culprit as male, but the poem he copped
was—I would bet—authored by a woman)
for lack of originality. I wish

I could excuse his bad act as madness—
that a crazy theory whose tenets value
words over typos caused him to go true,
to trace out hers so unerringly—
instead of greed, I'd plead psychosis
and cry, He's Realism's victim: that's why

his poor misled hand tried to break those laws
which make omnipresent subatomic flaws
subvert the verb of every medium
and blur our sheerest copier's laserbeam:
say now his felony should be absolved, since
wise Heisenberg has found that once and once

only can the poem stay per se, regardless
of Benjamin's *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter
seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*:
why couldn't I call his vile counterfeits
brave attempts, brilliant schemes to outmaneuver
the ways physics limits our digits' genius?

I wish I could. But, I can't. No: he's to blame—
just him, I think. Yes: the wank-ink of his name
on her work is un- , un- , un- , is a sin
I must atone. Oh, if he had only cloned

her signature the same as her poem,
no harm would have come from his plagiarism!

I write this knowing that random quantum
impurities in the surface body
of the paper or scanscreen on which
this is printed will betray all I say
here to some degree, any is too much—
each thought emits a glitch, thought Mallarmé.

I pray this page permits perfect access
what I would guess my xerox intended
to be a sincere apology to Ms.
Sappho and her sis, but may indeed instead
(despite our dearest efforts) appear as
the very opposite of what you've read.

ADHESIVE VALENTINE

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

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

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

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

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

THE WISHINGWELL STANZAS

Oracle whose hollow
catalogs each word I swallow,
I wish my birth had been false, I wish
the pregnancy which bled me was kitsch.

Nothing the pupil paints on our
eye easel will equal your
entry in non-entity,
whose unpaginate genitalia I
am one lack-me of.
May I try or is it type
to man-ingest the woman-digest of this?

Only a fishhook can play Hamlet adequately—
bright as skin pinned to a candle,
go dangle down a well, chapel
by inversion; the bells toll,
the toads flick my gnat-name home.

Oldest lodge and once as I was,
bring me, lightning for ballast,
the memory of a boy crossing
a creekbed, a ditch, look,
in which he steps on a snake:
I felt it shift, beneath my shoe,
felt tremor after tremor go
through my length, lure up muck

(no stanza break)

so far back. Its meander meat
realigned the path I meant to
take, my heel hung there
caught in the quickest loss
of ground, my footing was gone
from the moment and I poised
on flesh that refuted my own—
orator atop a trapdoor.

The ponderous sack of semen slice off:
sever all, soil it to the ground—
solve with blood the gordianhood, praise
this surface sacrifice, curse it and dance
over dying coils on virile instep,
stomp this lance that lacks true sibilance,
there, there, contrary penis! the drum and
the tambour of the Mother
the earthquake have spoke—

in Catullus LXIII
the faultline runs
from clit to anus, but can
an equator debate
itself—are they castrate
enough, these Attis strata—
at Delphi does my vein begin, then, or end?

Her hallowed handled echoes call
to me this cisternship, this landslide
water, oh Pythoness, oh cult-consumed womb;
let some aquarium of seeps accept each
of my pennies, my worthless wishes—
each treasure I offer the Goddess
mercifully confirms my emptiness.

OVERLIFER-BAG

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

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

HEILSTYLES

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

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

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

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

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."

CRITERIA

The rose is
more poetic than
other flowers because
it has

only one
syllable where
daisy lily violet
et cet

are over-verbal,
poly-petal.
Beauty

based not on color or
odor but
brevity.

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.

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 omniform 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.

STRESS THERAPY

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

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

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

intermittency
that the heart knows
itself to be an I.

OR NOT TO BE

Not Hamlet but his shadow
shows the clarity of performance—
see how brilliantly it holds its stance,
soliliquy bold and brando.

But then of course it is like all
such primadonnas, liable
to be much too much dependent upon
its prompter, the sun.

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.

TO RIPLEY (*Alien 1-4*)

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

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

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

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

OLD JOKE FROM THE TED & SYL SHOW

Hectoring her as usual with a bark in
His bite wit, Ted tutors his young gal Syl:
God, he scold-quotes, is in the details.
She grins and wanks his chin with pinkette nails
And winks that mock-erotic spark in
Her eye: You're wrong, you bodkin, you big moose,
You handsome sod: God is in the profile—
Got one, and you're God; you're Ted Hughes;—
Don't got one, you're Philip Larkin!

SYMMETRIES

How mirrored this merging: it's like lover/loved—
The poem aligns us and aims to make our skins
Correspond, each of your pores barrel-grooved
With one of mine, clone-gunned: then void opens
Onto void, grid-ideal, union, see, it joins!
First of course the skins have to be removed.

FEBRUARY FOURTEENTH: FREEZEFRAME
(to James Elroy Flecker, with thanks
for translating teardrops into handcuffs)

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

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

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

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

Note:

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

POEM

please don't scold
the kids who hold
lollipops up
for the raindrops
to lick at on
their way down

what a waste
but imagine the taste
of rainbow thunder
if you could get
your tongue up under it

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.

TAROT PORTRAIT

Peeking over the fortuneteller's shoulder
Won't add a sole feature to what is there,
What your future paints so plainly in view,
So visible to anyone who isn't you—

Outside her djinn-lit storefront occult cave
The streets that steered you forth to dare this brave
Or foolish quest have failed themselves perhaps
To escape the daily grid and find some maps

Empty enough to defy place or break
The bad odds configured still in the stake
That never wins a hand against this known
Charade of chance: envision it downthrown

In the rows of her slow shuffle. And no
Hexing where you haled from or where you'll go
Next-lost round the dark town's confinements
Will augur this encounter with a sense

Salient, some savor foresight of what's cast
To come in likeness limned at lifelong last:
Occur by endless tics and whits to stare
Unavoidably clear at this picture

Urging you share its peer. Here each suit unseals
A star that arcs inward through her deals
Toward the tower you built to spy on
That distant face your door-key has drawn

Each time you insert it and twist it, a line
Is incised on the canvas: each lock-wind

Puts another brushstroke to the portrait;
Opening her arms she frames you for it.

Impersonal, of course: she has no wish
To harm. You thought that solitaire was
The only game with no intent to punish
Or hurt; thought you were safe in the menace

This tarot chose: but now you see it too
Lacks malice; its fate-cards portray as true
Across the table only that which is due
Or over. How indifferently it shows
Those oldest eyes and what they hold exposed.

CHRISTMAS AT THE ORPHANAGE

But if they'd give us toys and twice the stuff
most parents splurge on the average kid,
orphans, I submit, need more than enough;
in fact, stacks wrapped with our names nearly hid
the tree where sparkling allotments yearly
guaranteed a lack of—what?—family?—

I knew exactly what it was I missed:
(did each boy there feel the same denials?)
to share my pals' tearing open their piles
meant sealing the self, the child that wanted
to scream at all *You stole those gifts from me*;
whose birthday is worth such words? The wish-lists
they'd made us write out in May lay granted
against starred branches. I said I'm sorry.

DEPRESSIONISM

Without any necessity to name it or anything,
I remember this bombr crater before it held a garden.
Once I saw children kneel down there to pray for pardon
At an altar on which a little toll-money rolled laughing.

Swift suedes of evening, night's purple peltdown.
I don't have to invoke the past; it's not required.
I'll just settle here stolid like a stopsign repeating
The word I stand for—sit and let my tired feet hang

Over the lip of this pit-deep garden whose intricate
Vines query up at me. Quiet from the town I can hear
Orphans rattling the gravel on their plates and or

Other faux pas I'm under no order to enumerate,—
Jet-lag of angels, a snake, faintings on summer pavements.
This bombfall failed in its intent: having none, I won't.

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 following
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

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

[UNTITLED]

Octopus floating
in earth's ink-ore core
whose arms extend
up here as trees
may your branches squirt
their black across
my pages please

SELF-PORTRAIT OF THE POET AS HYENA

Kindly deferrer to lions,
Late flocks of vultures, packs of winds.

Last to destroy the lost, discreet,
A shy, toothpick aristocrat.

Servile, even, leaning over
Droves of bones who disdain such care,

Who in their marrow preen and bear
Huge swarms of self, a hubris herd.

Is that why he laughs—why he finds
Joy in these humiliations,

These measured modesties that mass
And make him eat his words at last?

How strange it is to stay astride
This prey, to taste its pride of pride.

NOVEMBERNEW

Scoldingly, the way a nurse
waves a thermometer at a corpse,
branches thrash above us.

I've read the instructions how
a compass should always go
consulted beneath a Maypole.

If space orientates with time alone,
our position fixed by Newton
may now be nearing Einstein.

Quickly I place a teakettle
atop a dead volcano
and learn to wait for its whistle.

North lost, the needle pierces my wrist.
The mist is in the forest.
Our sighs are in the farthest.

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."

EVERY RIFT WITH ORE

How fiercely foilsome the facial knife shivs
its two blades up to where the forehead ends
as wound-deep-wedged widow's-peaks: how weakly
the old hero hair-line fights back and fends,
each pass of day fewer gray strands save me—
how deadly dull's the duel our sword lives.

[UNTITLED]

Hamlet in the nunnery kneels
to take his veilful vow
while Ophelia scales
with sword and bow
the enemy's walls

THE SONNET IN ix

The nube, the nude, the not—you know: the Nix—
Her Septet of orifices? (males have six):—
Was it massed by Master Malyoume for the fix
The fucks. Rape-scene: she, some defunc'-off, kicks

The mirror while centaurs click centerfold pics
Of her fingernails—each closeup mimics
The anguish with which our pallored poet sics
Midnights on. Encore encore, you sexniks,

Steph calls, tiptoeing away toward his sonics
Lab, 'The Sign in X.' A thousand-quicksand thicks
His step. He's pitbogged by all the nitpicks

Critics have glitched his path with, those pricks!
Don't they know that stars—stars can't hold shit wicks
To his candle?! (That bitch, that *Nix*: *he* sucks it: "I-icks!")

Note:

Failed translation of Stéphane Mallarmé's 'Sonnet en yx.'
Line 14: I-icks! (both i's are short, as in "kiss") is an
onomatopoeticism that accompanies the expectoration and
or taste of the candle's cum. Sort of the sound you make
when you use your teeth to scrape it off your tongue
ostentatiously. But why did I end the poem this way? Was
I influenced by the Master's regret, expressed in his essay
Crise de Vers, that words lack an embodied, material, tonal
consonance with their meanings: "Quelle déception" (he
writes), how perverse, that the "timbres" of the word "jour"

should be dark, while those of “nuit” are “clair.” And yet, he concludes, without such “défaut des langues,” poetry itself would not exist. Assuming he’s right, then onomatopoeia are defective because they’re not defective. In Japanese, kireji—“cutting-words, used to separate or set off statements”—are onomatopoeic, and “have the meaning that lies in themselves as sounds.” But as Hiroaki Sato notes (in his book, *One Hundred Frogs*, from which I’ve taken these quotes): “Bashō himself simply said, ‘Every sound unit is a kireji.’ ” In any case, the faults and falls and false of my trans. should be clair to all.

PAGEBOY

poetry is a matter of blond hair
of course dark works too you could use either

to wit tonsured sonnets and tanka conks
eclogue shags and song-of-bangs and blank hanks

add pastoral ponytails bob aubades
pomade odes and scads of other po-modes

brush them out bright for your any-anthol
dog-ear heads with the year's best doggerel

some word-gel helps if linebreak-curls won't hold
yet each poet fears her verse coiffure's bald

and the cowlick couplets the tress tercets
dread every stylist's editorial cuts

see formalist beehives and langpo buns
all cling together when the big comb comes

braid bards scalp skalds locklyric laureates
scared half their heaneys are a pollard yeats

let's tip our toupee to a topknot trope
before my permpoem flips its meter-mop

if the quicktrim rhythms they parnass-parse
today don't shampoo my poor metaphors

away I want to take and scan each strand
syllabic-chic and make it mane-enjambed

though most of the time I'd like to rhyme that
maybe-mussed-a-bit muse Erato's ringlet

*

THE MOURNER

Cast in the shapes of his passing
he goes down ended avenues.
A lament-*passant*, he longs to
rub his ass antlers on statues

of the moon. He swans whether
he has a shelter where unfenced
with trees to testify its ground
the land around him is against.

And often he lets his face rain
above his mouth, above his eyes,
his nose: lets it hover in the mist
of its ignorant verities.

FIRST THING

"The first thing I can remember at all was
a dead dog at the bottom of my pram."

—Graham Greene, *Journey without Maps*

A dead dog at the bottom of my pram
Seems to be my earliest memory,
Unless I am part of an implant program
To stock Earth with mock-human irony—

In which case I must have been abducted
By ETs and beamed up into the sky
Where I was undone then reconstructed
Out of bytes and obits from the diary

Of Graham Greene: that gruesome deceased dog
I mean: before Mother or the Mothership
Popped that pug in my pram my time was mine

Alone, unknown, a page torn from the log—
Until that moment died I had no script
No guide: no word undeified my sign.

THE GOLDEN AGE

is thought to be a confession, won by endless torture, but which our interrogators must hate to record—all those old code names, dates, the standard narrative of sandpaper throats, even their remorse, fall ignored. Far

away, a late (not lost) messenger stares, struck by window bargains or is it the gift of a sudden solicitude: is she going to lift up her shadow's weight, shift hers onto it? She knows who bears whom. In

that momentary museum where memory occurs, more accrue of those torturers' pincers than lessened fingernails, eyes teased to a pulp, we beg for closeups. *Ormolus, objets d'art!*
A satyr drains an hourglass in one gulp.

AFTER A BREAKUP

At times the distance known as us
Is measured off. Or so we guess: unless
An estimate be taken it is lost,

And all the usual rulers fail
By millimeters really, to fix as final
Our spreading split: what will surveil

This gap-apogee, this apartness-arc.
Horizons, forward! Borders, march!
Frame us and bind us with the starch

Our stance lacks, too human a pose
To exude the dimensions that raise
A statue whose limit is its eros,

That never spills over as we do
Across the bed's page like two
Errata in the same word, a hollow

Catachresis. Morphaphoric? Crammed
Together in a programmed
Antithesis figure, we seem

To have blundered our way here.
Mistake is the way we take our
First steps and last. And where

Desire beckons, who can resist
The climb to that nobodiest nest
Known as love, its endless

Thievings of each others' leavings,
Scraps and wisps and strings
Knitknocked together, tangle-things

Always unraveling, always
Getting in the way
Of our getting away

Knot-free. Free of me
How could anybody
Not want to be.

THE FLAW

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NECKOGNITION

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

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

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

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

GIMMIE SHELTER

The thread or the theme
That holds this tune
Together is the same
One that rips it open—

The initial guitar
Continues splitting
The whole thing apart—
It is the lightning

Which Jagger complains
Of and which he seeks
Shelter from the rains
Of when it breaks—

We ourselves will shut
Our deepest sills against
His common cries but
There is no defense

To keep out that other
One behind him twinned
His starker brother
Whose keening strings skein

Hymns from one more
Murderous composer
Whose cause is war
Who tears down our door—

Shelter/the home
Is made of language—
But music sunders the poem—
Its rift is like a tongue

Trying to compile all
Words into one word—
One Babel whose wall
Falls beneath that standard—

What the fuck did its flag
Say—the opposite
Of peace/of the page
Is what I must write.

SAVE AS: SALVATION

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

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

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.

(FACE) (AUTUMN) (EN FACE) (to NSL)

I lay your face along my palm and make
To trace its shape there a profile
Then I see the lifeline heartline break
Overlengthened by one leaf's fall

The plow it rests on a horror now
In the distance an ogre pulls in vain
To open a nailed shut window
Whose reverberancy is thunder rain

Begins its rheumatization of
The world we shared so spare-much of that
This sans season's hands' veins portray our love

The no two alike are kissing yet
I lie down alone not knowing a tongue
Can taste every flavor but its own

FOOTNOTE

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

CHANGE

Why don't the ranks in a marathon
carry little piggybanks, and listen
to the coins clank around as they run:
wouldn't that be an encouraging sound?

(Oh surely I can't be the only one
the sanguine clashing of cash spurs on!)

THE MIRROR INSPECTOR

Everyday when I arrive at their doors I am not
Surprised at how amazed they are, knowing of course
They threw the notification away without reading it:
Good morning (I say): May I inspect your mirrors—

No, you're on my list, is all: it's a regular checkup,
There haven't been any complaints. At least, none
I'm aware of. I try to be brisk but not abrupt
As I step smartly past them into the checklist zone

They call home, slicing my palmtop-puter across
Their immaculate floorplans. My first question
Now intends to reverse their post-breakfast ease,
I press my iniquity inquiring and just how often

Do you look at yourselves? Regrettably the rate per
Median is based on higher incident than most folks
Like you manage daily: no, you don't doubt your
Existence enough to satisfy the Law that yokes

Us together in this most commensurate duty,
Both me officially and you, you civilians must never
Neglect the brief barest urge toward beauty
Verification; we must take every chance to share

Our equity there. But what a ready home you have;
It's like all the others around. And that's why
I love assignments here: you should see the depraved
City, the rooms all wherefore sizes, the mirrors really

Get into a bit of—but out here, where the blocks
Are reflective—scapesules of their inhabitants—

Mirrors too need their own kind, their basics
Depend on exclusivity, the classical refinements

Of class struggle, of mass heritage. Your lovely children:
6 Lectras, 4 Meres, a Chandelite, and what else . . .
But where to start! I could fall back on tradition:
Bathroom first, the manual instructs! Toilet always tells

A steamy story but don't worry, we're discrete,
All according to our professional oath. The code
Of our guild would never allow us to reveal what
Shameful postures the public assumes: your rigid

Animadversions concern us only as they grieve
The victim, meaning our true clientele, the mirrors
Themselves. Oh yes, they're extremely sensitive,
They know when they're being slighted or worse,

Each time you refuse to meet your eyes in the glass
Or blink, they register that as a criticism of their
Impartiality—the Confront Affront, we term it. Yes,
The mirrors remember it all. Every gesture

Tears at their heart. It's a wonder they don't wear
Out but in fact sacrifice ensures that perennial
Glow, that youth that survives until they shatter—
Ah, it happens to us too. Everyone of you people,

And me, the perfect servant, the prime functionary
Of the Bureau of Mirrors, I too (though I'll try
To take a few with me when I go—to purge every
Mislooker whose infractions are so citeful—!) . . . Sorry;

Where was I: Your paranoia is appropriate—in fact

I've already punished the neighbors up and down this
Street, their episodes are serial now, the loathe-lack
Denaturedness of their crimes enough to furnish

Fellowship and whimsy to a waiting nation who's
Tuning in as I adjust my tie-pin camera to focus in on
Your astonishment: your snippet of tonight's news
Will augment that pageant of panic and guilt no clean

Sponge can wipe clear, all those dust streaks and flecks
Delaying the arrival of any nose-to-nose view
Of that cameo-coiffured face, that trap that reflects
Our truest self back to us, showing us how and who

But no, not that which we need to know most of all:
What is it in us that drags us each day to these sills;
And, how can one keep the self from this insidious role,
Which none escape, at least according to our files.

TRANSHENDECULOUS

Granted every poet “constantly aspires
towards the condition of music,” that sphere
of perfection which Walter Pater declares
the other arts must humble themselves before:

so why shouldn't I kneel by the podium
and beg the conductor to leave her baton
propped upon my proselyte head like a sword
knighting me until I can hardly rise from

that ideal sill: one could have no grail beyond
that grace; could never long for that pated wand
to guide our own quest: its shadow bids us toward

the stead path still, sticking out over the brow
like some penile spicurl: so why not die there
while maestro Mater makes his lowest bow?

Note:

“In music, then, rather than in poetry, is to be found
the true type or measure of perfected art.”—Pater.

Title: Trans(from poetry to music/from Pater to Mater)
hendec(-asyllabics)ulous(ridic- of no-brow me
to adumbrate the Great Pate).

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

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.

THE NEVE VILLANELLE

He was a Montague and she was a Capulet
yet no feuding families threw them in thwart—
it wasn't that that stopped Romeo and Juliet

from Act Five Scene Fiving it on their first date:
no, it was that Neve Campbell left them reft-heart—
It was Neve Montague and Neve Capulet

they wrote on their carnal diaries' most intimate
page: every time they tried to kiss they'd start
to Neve-itate, and that stopped Romeo and Juliet

from making out further. Neve made them hot
but not for each other. They'd just sit there in flirt
gone faux at the Montague or the Capulet

manse and navigate some Neve-or-die site
and ram *Scream 1/2/3* up the DVD insert—
that comely Campbell stopped Romeo and Juliet

from consummating their teen-tragic fate:
and even when she did indie roles for her art
they'd still curse the Montague and Capulet

DNA that kept their lives so punked, so pre-set:
Why can't we be Neve? Why can't we clone her part?
Having to stay a human Montague/Capulet
stopped them from loving Romeo and Juliet.

OCT-NOV (MICHIGAN MEMORY #4)

The bacon of the ankles crackles, and the sky
Perks up birds this coldsnap morning—every
Breath sheds a breath-effect, brief-bloomed steam-sheaf . . .
Puddles huddle in frost. Past the barn the path

Shoots hill-pastures which rose to winter early
And sun-shucked clouds blast-off from: migrants that fly
South—mouths that wet-nurse icicles—hatch forth
A form, a furious precision I sloughed

At birth, preferring life. And like the wind
Can reduce anything to description—
Running to finish my chores, beneath my scarf

I'll feel my chinbone seek my collarbone,
As if the flesh has ceded and the skeleton
Now must precipice itself against all warmth.

RELICS WITH OLD BLUE MEDICINE-TYPE BOTTLE:
TO X

This old blue medicine-type bottle, unburied
From your garden last year's the perfect centerpiece
To suit our supper—the totem-trope we need
Across this kitchen table, to show how dangerous

It is where we sit (knees near touching at times)
Dawdling and playing with our silverware,
Tapping teacups, tired and satisfied and prime
From a stint in that garden: in a few hours

We'll find ourselves in bed, but we don't know that now,
Do we—we're still exchanging histories,
(It's only my something visit to your house)
Just sorting out the portions of who, when, how—

Numbering the decades and the romances
That went bad, the faces that faded on us,
Though nothing too personal at first, just pain;
Divorces, liaisons, estrangements, fixations—

Of course our brows hurry away from hurt:
Anecdotes begun in wince end in wrinkly;
Our woeful tales go told through a mode that's mostly
A kind of moue, comic attitude, which flirts

With grimace-smiles, jokes, the mocking of those choices,
Those great mismatings: funny how it seems of late
Both of us have been alone, celibate . . .
Collating, getting our dates right, our voices

Shed their list of affairs, entanglements, crises:

So we accord the past its poisons, and theorize
That even this old blue bottle here, stored poisons
Before we were born:—followed by suggestions

That the toxin of those heartbreaks is gone
After this long, their vitriol has fizzed out,
And we could, given an occasion, again
Consume the spirit that killed us once, if not

The letter: confessions used as cue-cards to prompt
Mutual responses of empathy or hope:
No former hemlock can harm us now—we're immune
By now—don't you agree—because what happens

Ripens in retrospect; each sour memory
Blossoming like the flowers you sometimes spruce
This bottle's corroded throat with. We certainly
Are not eating much, are we, but we don't notice—

Can't we see how our fingers will likewise bloom
From off these knives and forks and force their field,
Interlocking like tugged-at roots . . . Untombed
Of its venom, this blue vial vigils our held

Glances. Sieved in its acid, its distilled mirror,
Would we (almost as soiled as it by time) appear
A beauty, a scarred heirloom any collector
Might stuff high on a shelf amid simulacra—

Somber still, it approbates that emptiness
We must be preparing to fill with each other—
It foretells the coiled taste, the bite unearthed
In the antiquity of a sudden, wild kiss

Whose disclosure will surprise us, as if
We have not been wholly inured by the years,
The stories we bare here across the rice, the life
Stories bittersweet, neutered, too well-rehearsed.

Will deadlier words then surface—their potency
Dis-elixired, drawn; decanted so often
That by our courteous age they've turned as grimy
And bunged with dust as this blue glass was when

Your shovel showed it that summer morning, and
My phrases here are (surely) just as corrupt—
What matter its sharpness, no metaphor can
Pare the ground from us as hard as we try to dig up,

To excavate feelings a bottomless need for
Soars as we toss the salad greens and pour
Dressing dripping down their fineleaved freshness
Starting to wilt already around the edges,

To rot back to that mulch they burst from. Such decay
Preserves some artifacts, if not us: they lie in
Graves contrived to obviate the skeleton
They survive beside, they strive to deny

The obvious, the crepitude fate-of-flesh bleak
Facts of our demise, obdurate bricabrac knickknacks
Laid by ancients in the coffin to propitiate
Ancestors, to aid, via these vain trinkets,

(Are we the 'subjective correlatives' of these
Objects, this chthonic junk the tomb-robbers missed,
Tools and talismans, amulets, a corpse-cache
Gear for ghosts, props to assist the posthumous)

Some afterworld sojourn of the soul entering
Itself, self dying to carpe diem one more day.
Refocus *us* on this figure, this table-centering
Blue bottle. Whose future dye indigos our day.

Dulled, we ignore these darker, gnawing warnings—
Our own skull-and-crossbone labels long since skinned—
We poke at our plates, we pat our napkins.
What antidote waits, withering, within

Against that great granulate upheaval of
Fields whose depths have grown archeological—
Filled by fucked relics and by that above-all
Most subterranean of discoveries, love?

THE SCULPTURE (to SB)

We stood there nude embracing while the sculptor
Poked and packed some sort of glop between us
Molding fast all the voids the gaps that lay
Where we'd tried most to hold each other close

Under the merge of your breasts and my chest
There remained a space above the place our
Bellies met but soon that clay or plaster
Of paris or state of the art polymer

Filled every hollow which we long to fit
Then we were told to kiss hug hug harder
And then our heat would help to harden it

We stood there fused more ways than lovers know
Before the sculptor tore us away
Forced us to look at what had made us so whole

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.

VISION OF THE GODDESS IN A CITY SUMMER
(to Carolyn Kizer)

And yet what if the sweat that breaks
Even from Her feet as they pass
Can never rain these pavements back
To a mud- a milk-cud grass

Time that diamond instant dew dulls
Is it quicker than them quote
That strode presence those fading puddles
Not in this godless heat

Oh mirage oh haze of hydrants
Go Isis-proud across crosswalks
Leave brief seas without a halt

Till all my doubts dissolve at once
And down I'll follow cowed to lick
Your soleprints for my salt

TOTAL

Babel on the table falls,
my poem topples
into words
whose rubble shards

I try to stack back up until
they crumble still
again: but all
my efforts only pile

those collapsing tropes
in heaps
of worthless chips
which are

counted forth
with column patience
over and over
by the miser Silence.

THE SPELL

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

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

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

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

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

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.

LOVELADE

The sea is the cargo of empty ships
Moon bears the sun when it's gone
My face with the trace of your lips
Will fare from now on and on

ANOTHER HOLE FOR W. R. RODGERS

Speak like a singularity, a lack
residing deep inside every lock, just
past the point keys can jab: against all thrust
make safe-ensure your door's core is held back,

for reckless access to this pure center
quarks more quintessence than taking exits
from those pried voids whose secret quickly sates:
ubiquitous if Space presses Enter.

Which inadmissible sill still calls loud
with imagine: our skeleton keeping
each such portal neither open nor shut,

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

LOVE, HATE, LIFE, DEATH, MAMA, WATER, ETC.

If everyone on this planet was forced to write
one word on a piece of paper, their favorite

word, the resulting anthology might add up to less
than Shakespeare, who had, or so I've read,

a 40K vocabulary: wouldn't most of us
just put down the same few words; how many could

resist the usual abstract homilars, our limited
minds consisting of each other, non sequitur. I would

be ashamed to show that book to my UFO guests,
no matter how repeated or urgent their requests.

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)

AFTER BAUDELAIRE'S *CAUSERIE*

The ocean of verse has left in my chest
That stale ebb-tail taste of a bile blueplate—
Its word surge bitters too gorged to digest—
Even my critics' deaths won't renovate

An appetite for this: acid reflux
My poems have all become, which in their prime
Fed vanity's veins and pain's glut stomachs
Enough to fodder a second lifetime . . .

My heart? Is Heartburnsville. Landfill palace
Leveled ever since my fellow poets
Chewed its dumpster pews into prose-pellets.

Come share their bard-fare, their warmth and fireplace—
Eyes blazing like a holiday barrage,
They char my offal flesh long past garbage.

HAIRBRUSH POEM

the hairbrush can hardly breathe
it suffocates in strands
it snarls as tense as teeth
biting an enemy's hands

the things we tame are what
entangle and turn us wild
every parent grows ragged tugged
disciplining their child

pity the year-old hairbrush
its stems all split its roots bare
a field that's tilled too much
now a hoarbrush blooms there

hairbrush hairbrush have you
any tufts to spare today
now that I'm bald and cannot comb
please give back my gray

the hairbrush yanks and yanks
stubborn curl that won't lie dead
even a poorbrush must shed
such rebels from its ranks

(so try not to cry and just say thanks
when it hauls you off your head!)

DEPOSITIONING

so billions of humans for millennia looked
at the blue sky of a summer day and saw it as
bright until one day the boy Rimbaud looked
and saw that shining normal blue as darkness

and said I have removed from the sky the blue
which is darkness but his saying so did not
result in heaven being stripped clean of blue
to leave only immense endless light and hot

sun nothing but sun from horizon to horizon
allpoints eye-encompassing gorging our view
no and in fact and amazingly his sly vision
or petition proved to have been only a sight

true and all despite his deposition the blue
which is darkness stayed it remained bright

ON A DRAWING BY CHARLES TOMLINSON

By a swath of inks the eye
thinks it sees solidities
which alter with the watercolor
way his brush washes its dye

in distance, though even this
finds a faraway fixed not
by the surveyor's plumb but
by the action of the thumb

delaying all the fingers meant
to draw out of the paper,
splashed dry. The clean grain

catches what it should retain
if enough pressure pleasure
is applied to the stain to lie.

Note:

Tomlinson is not only a distinctive poet, but a visual artist of repute. His graphics grace the covers of many of his books. This Homage attempts to imitate his verse style, or one of his verse styles.

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 incursor 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
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:
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 keeping held in front of us, the wrists ache splay
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.*

CO-STARRING OSCAR WILDE AS MADAME
SOSOSTRIS

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

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

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

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

MOONSHOT

Stalwart Gagarin's
(or is it stout
Cortez's)
cosmonautboot
quashes
the tender
rays that engender
Selene's
poetic praxises and
phases—
Yuri, what you do
imposing the siberian shoe
on its silver sand
just to be
the first man
to land there as John
Keats said stranded
on his peak in
Darien may ruin
our poems' home.
Please leave the moon
untouched
by any voyage but
our verses.
Bring
that Soyuz spacebus
back to earth and sing
quest-else to come—
Tuned lunar time
how pacifically
we'll praise
the usual discoveries.

DE-EVOLUTION OF THE POET IN RUMOR'S HOUSE

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

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

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

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

a few MOVIE-Q's:

*

Ben Lyons was typically blunt
in *I Cover the Waterfront*—
his cute co-star Claudette Colbert
could have frenched it: 'Ze waterfront, I co-vair.'

*

Basic Instinct 2 avoids the great esthetic error of the first one
by not having any Moviestars appear but the sheer Sharon:
its other no-name actors fade to shadows in this Dantean
vision of the heavenly ("Eat me!") Stone alone up there on
the screen.

*

How many of you gazeekoids went yumyum
Watching that transmuted geek Jeff Goldblum
Rip off his own ear and eat it? *The Fly* was great!
(And if he'd unzipped his fly, ripped *that* off, and ate?)

*

Where Garbo got the great John Barrymore
To play the part of her perfect paramour,
Poor Joan Crawford was stuck with brother Lionel:
Life is c'est la vie at der *Grand Hotel*.

*

It's a crime shame that that scene where
Sean Penn tied his wife Madonna to a chair
and then put on her dress and licked her thighs
got like totally cut out of *Shanghai Surprise*.

published by the author

this edition: April 19, 2009

INTERIM

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Box 455034
Las Vegas, Nevada 89154-5034

Thanks very much for thinking of us.

Claudia Keelan
Editor

The Georgia Review

The University of Georgia
Athens, Georgia 30602-9009

We are sorry to report that the work you submitted has not been selected for publication.

FAULTLINE

Journal of Art & Literature

The editors of *Faultline* are writers themselves, and have received many letters just like this one. There's no easy way to say no. Thanks for

TWO RIVERS REVIEW

P.O. Box 158 Clinton, NY 13323

↑ NOTE OUR NEW ADDRESS ↑

Thank you for the opportunity to review your poems. We regret that your work does not suit our present needs, and wish

GLOBAL CITY REVIEW EDITORIAL

Thank you for sending your work. *Global City Review* is a truly small publication, and the number of pieces we can accept per issue is limited to only a few dozen. We regret declining your submission, but wish

Green Mountains Review

Johnson State College Johnson, Vermont 05656

Dear Contributor:

Thank you for your submission to the *Green Mountains Review*. Unfortunately, we will be unable to use your manuscript for our

Quarterly West

etry, Fiction, Creative Nonfiction & Rev

Thank you for letting us consider your work. We have read and decided we can't use it at the present time. Good luck in placing it elsewhere. We apologize for the delay in response.

THE KENTON REVIEW

Dear Author:

We regret that we are unable to use your manuscript.

It has received careful consideration which sometimes means a response less prompt than we would wish. Unfortunately, the large number of submissions prevents us from commenting on many worthy manuscripts.



The Bridge
A JOURNAL OF FICTION AND POETRY

Thank you for sending your manuscript to THE BRIDGE. We regret that at present we cannot publish it.

91423

North American Review

Poetry for the 21st Century

RATTLE

Stellatus Lee / Poetry Editor

May 14, 2002

Dear Bill:

The editors regret that the enclosed contribution is not adapted to the particular needs

BELLINGHAM



REVIEW

Thank you for submitting your work to RATTLE. This particular work will not fit in our next issue.

Thank you for allowing us to consider your work. At the present time, your submission does not fit our needs. We wish you the best in placing it elsewhere.

Maelstrom

Prairie Schooner

P. O. Box 880334, University of Nebraska
Lincoln, NE 68588-0334

We thank you for submitting the enclosed manuscript for our consideration. We regret that we are unable to accept it for publication.

Hilda Raz, Editor

Thank you for your submission to Maelstrom. We have not selected anything for

VERSE

Thank you for your submission to Verse. We appreciate the opportunity to review your work. Unfortunately, your submission does not meet our needs at this time.

MAR
Mid-American Review

Department of English
Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, OH 43403
www.bgsu.edu/midamericanreview

We appreciate that you think enough of Mid-American Review to want your work to appear in it. We have read your submission with interest, and

OBERLIN COLLEGE PRESS

Rice Hall, Oberlin College
Oberlin, Ohio 44074-1095

Thank you for your submission to FIELD. Although there is no true consolation for rejection, we would like

DENVER QUARTERLY

Bin Ramke, Editor

Dear Bill Knott:

Thank you for allowing us to consider your work for the Denver Quarterly. We are unable to use it now, but please consider this journal again in the future.

Dear Friend,

Thank you for letting us read your work. We have read your submission carefully but regret that we will not be able to publish it.

Thank you for allowing us to consider your manuscript. We hope that you will continue to be interested in Tampa Review, and that this rejection will not discourage you from sending us future work.

Tampa Review

The University of Tampa
Kennedy Blvd.

Many Mountains Moving