

"[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 (Chicago) 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 (Chicago) Magazine*, Feb 2005

"[Bill Knott is] malignant. . . ."—Christopher Ricks, *The Massachusetts Review*, Spring 1970

"[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 work] 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

"Consider Bill Knott, a poet who writes lots of very short poems that are nothing but bombast." –Josh Hanson, *Livejournal*, 28/06/07: <http://josh-hanson.livejournal.com/26249.html>

"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 is] incompetent . . ." –Alicia Ostriker, *Partisan Review* (date? 1972?)

"Bill Knott, the crown prince of bad judgment." –Ron Silliman, *Silliman's Blog*, June 26, 2007

"[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, [Knott is] unethical."

—Marc Pietrzykowski, Contemporary Poetry Review, 2006

(<http://www.cprw.com/Pietrzykowski/beats.htm>)

"Bill Knott's [poetry is the equivalent of] scrimshaw. . . . [He'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[']s ancient, academic ramblings are part of what's wrong with poetry today. Ignore the old bastard." —Collin Kelley (from "They Shoot Poets Don't They" blog, August 08, 2006)

"Bill Knott bores me to tears." —Curtis Faville, <http://compassrosebooks.blogspot.com/2009/05/moore-formalism-post-avant-part-three.html>

"Bill Knott . . . is so bad one can only groan in response." —Peter Stitt, Georgia Review, Winter 1983

"[Bill Knott's books are] filled with venom. . . . Knott seems to hate himself . . . and he seems to hate his readers." –Kirk Robinson, ACM (date?)

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

"People claim Bill Knott was the inspiration for punk." –Eileen Myles, p. 69, Inferno, 2010

"Bill Knott's a prissy little moron."
–Matthew Henriksen,
<http://hyacinthlosers.blogspot.com/>, March 23, 2009

"Bill Knott should be beaten with a flail."
–Tomaz Salamun, Snow, 1973

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I could quote many other lovenotes like the ones above, but thought I'd leave some space here for write-in consensus:

SELECTED SYLLABIC VERSE

/

Bill Knott

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

INTRO NOTES

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I've done many syllabic poems over the years.

Obviously, in addition to all my other faults as a poet, I have a tin-ear and no skill in writing metrically . . .

It's that particular shortcoming which led to this counting and curtailing of lines as a means of measure.

Many if not all of these are rhymed—as Elizabeth Daryush in her 'Note on Syllabic Metres' advises:

"Rhyme is almost indispensable, but since it can be unaccented need be neither over-obvious nor monotonous."

Of course some poets have written fine syllabic poems without rhyme.

It seems odd that there has never been (to my knowledge) an anthology of syllabic verse by poets writing in English.

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I think my interest in syllabics began when I started writing sonnets—they seemed to demand a rigor I was not capable of, and in my need for a work-method of composition, I found that restricting each line to ten syllables often helped the process. This became a deliberate strategy at times.

So probably most of the syllabic poems I've written are sonnets, some of which are included in this selection.

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Where there are variant lines, I note them.

*

The order is random, neither chronological or thematic.

*

OFFENSE OF THE MIST (hendecasyllabics)

Stamp inside my bathroom mirror the flesh steams
Pout with desire that must fade awake to find
Adonises never fairer fauned than mine
Whose handsomeness waits just wisps away it seems

To him shivering over the sheenshed glass
Or is he sheer suppressing the emergence
Of many gods who would have succored presence
Once affront such fallen minor forms unless

The vapor kissing this razorblade purepours
Sure its shorebank will brook no pollutant face
Unlookly as that streamyfaux Narcissus
If gendered beauty can fountain up more source

Cognizant as such should any boy grown old
Still feel his tepid tap run its course to cold.

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.

(octosyllabics, with a variant last line)

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 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.

POEM

You'd have us compare madness in a glass
and then for contrast's sake strike one face from
that frame, one name off that list just to see
who's left. But all the asylum I am,

that whole alpha-non-grata of heads torn
from the page can't disengage your veil slur
stare where I sit, I wait, I browse my state,
I collate these collected offlurks of.

To attain the state each stark strives for, all
that sill is unevolved, a thumbless clone
halfway home, desiring these threshold scenes
be furthest strand. These never near at hand.

To die in a once sense, once in a sense.
My necktie longs to rise and tongue my brow.

(decasyllabics)

MIDDAY WORKBREAK (after Montale)

Lunch to forget the morning's sweat
Against a wall along whose top
Broken glass has been set to stop
Thieves' incursions: sit back and let

Each limb find ease in dream beyond
A rest-time undisturbed by cries
From highest nests when summer tries
To place entire its days upon

The hour we swelter in down here—
Even those nearest earth, the ants,
Even they can't span more distance,
Or map one noon-nap's short career:

None of us can orienteer
The maze sun sees in that mirror
This wall uplifts in rifts of shards
Wherein our lives all labor towards
Their end and never quite get there.

Note:

transversion of Eugenio Montale's
"Meriggiare Pallido E Assorto," from his
first book *Ossi de sepià* (1925).

(octosyllabics)

GETTOGETHER

backyard barbecue
I repeat over the heat
what my doctor said
to anyone who'll listen
juice oozes from the red meat

(tanka)

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[HAIKU]

raindrops windowpane
I can't see myself wearing
more daring outfits

PUTATIVE POEM FROM SAMURAI ERA

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

(tanka)

*

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.

INSTRUCTIONS TO A MAP

Approach, map; let me spread your lats out here
and shape them to that abject attitude
conducive to embarkation: lie square
while my coarsest cartographies intrude

with plumbines cast that fourways force embrace
newground boundaries as I toss more throngs
of tapemeasures in loops across your longs
and leave them involuted there to trace

fix each secret breach of all our borders
so dumbfound for terra incognitas
where my lost flesh enrobes your erasures:
underfoot I will track these meanders

and stamp down every territory town
till none can ever drive outside my own.

(decasyllabics)

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.

(decasyllabics)

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 eenyumywhile
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?

(decasyllabics)

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?

(decasyllabics)

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.

(dodecasyllabics)

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.

(decasyllabics, line 12 variant)

31 SYLLABLES

even the wisest
(even the esteemed poets
who when I was young
acclaimed me as promising)
have at times been proven wrong

(tanka)

*

LOW-ROOT THOUGHT

beyond reign
of human
songs remain
Celan says
meaning his
if not mine

(trissyllabics)

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.

(decasyllabics)

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

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

(tanka)

[UNTITLED]

a jet zooming by
may see climbers on a cliff
and never know if
those souls ascend or descend—
to the fast slow has no end

(tanka)

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.

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.

(octosyllabics)

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.)

(decasyllabics)

TO MYSELF

Poetry
can be
the magic
carpet

which you say
you want,
but only
if you

stand willing
to pull
that rug out

from under
your own
feet, daily.

(alternating trisyllabic/bisyllabic, with a variant
last stanza which reverses the pattern of this
weave to trip up the toe a sprawl or two)

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.

(decasyllabics)

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.

(octosyllabics)

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?

(decasyllabics)

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

have skreak-skreak addicts ever quit
yea though it blinds us we find it
when I unearth that undead stash
each toke burns choked through a neck-gash

bat-weed bleeds me butts and gobbets
should switch to cygnet cigarets
get righteous off swan-white filt-tips

but it's not bad this bite-throat smoke
I can brag gloat after I croak
Vlad the Inhaler loved my lips

Note:

Line 14: a pun on Vlad the Impaler, medieval prince legendary for cruelty and evil deeds, inspiration for the vampire in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

(octosyllabics)

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 dormitory orchard 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.

(decasyllabics)

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 your own quest: its shadow bids us toward

the stead path still, sticking out over the brow
like some penile spitecurl: 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).

(hendecasyllabics, with a variant last line)

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.

(decasyllabics)

LAST ON EVERY LIST

Each schoolroom tells them who they are,
But rollcall always goes too far

So what boy listens any more
Beyond his own responsive roar—

If names get lost in roster blur
The zed lad's shout may not occur:

Throughout that endless classmate choir
One final voice will still aspire.

Like him the poet waits aware
He'll harken heed all others there

While he of course remains obscure,
His word ignored and ergo pure:

Unheard it screams in every ear
Its absent claim of being "Here!"

(octosyllabics)

GRANT PROPOSAL (Category: Performance Arts)

I want to go out each day at noon and stand
On top of our Capitol's highest highrise,
Where aircurrents stack, where storms restore
 themselves,
Where the crossroads of sky are swept by radar,

Up there, buffeted, stand, cupping in my hands
A gleam of gold-dust, a handful of gold-dust
Doled out to me each day by our State, by you
The modest mandarins of its Arts Council,

Trustees all, you whose grace I must stand for there
And being thus empowered begin to pour
The gold-dust back and forth, pour it in sifts from

Hand to hand until the wind has left my palms
Bare, please note that length of project will vary
Daily, at noon, and not one grain remains.

Note:

Line 2: Capitol with an 'o'—meaning "the citadel of government" (OED), its cloistered towers, atop the tallest of which the applicant desires to venture. Line 6: maybe "gleam" should be "flash"? I associate the former with earth, the latter, sky. "In the things that arise [buildings or structures of any sort], earth is present as the sheltering agent," Heidegger avers in 'The Origin of the Work of Art.'

(Hendecasyllabics, with a variant last line.)

RODIN'S THINKER (pentasyllabics)

To reduce my thought
to none is my aim
to spite the trite name
that bit chisel brought

me knee elbow bound
thick fist to forehead
pedestal pasted
nicked on no good ground.

Even Rilke was
caught by the craft craze
of this forger, this

make god. May steeples
hoist up our pure souls
to people their walls.

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.

(decasyllabics)

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.

(octosyllabics)

ADMAS (ORBIT)

The comet whose path is contentment
shall seldom appear: compared to it
Halley's daily. What eye flared to it
can spy that rarest speck in the spent

of space debris—moonspat asteroid
magi GPS Bethlehem by,
bauble the Hubble holds in gem-high
illumination. What vocation void

I have to pray for that view ray caught
by truer poets, whose verse converts
at first sight. What may they sing as sought
in such light, but I will not pay church

no matter how witchburn-bright that tailsphere
nails our night with its sales pitch Christ Here.

(Enneasyllabics, line 13 variant.)

SUBURBAN PASTORAL

If all the way you believe is beside,
skewed and unaligned to the great faiths that
guide others on their propitious courses,
if your guard-rail gives to the gorge they all
avoid with digital ease, car-carpets
sweeping them home. Their path is like a spear
whose tip gives birth to what it pierces; their
wound configurates whatever flesh is,
(stalemate of space, pale unmeant moment in
the moon's phase when every owl attains each
speck of sight it needs for the night, the hunt)—
Only the path of the predator's true.
Only you are left with no way to go,
no eye to see the prey they endow with
that brevity heaped upon lives before
their cease, brave dispersal into air or
bright inversion which delays the day by
our global habit of turning over
in sleep's subside; your bed orbit caught for
a pause abide in which your dreams contend
with siege weapons snatched away by those once
shunned: past sunlapse, past the semi-earthen
yield of relics flying released from hands
that have not yet forsaken the normal
verities your merit refuses to
acknowledge. Until you are scorned or like
a sacrifice being racked in heaven,
bound upon churn altars the heart ripped out,
dumb and certain to what those desires bring;
tickled teaspoons in backyards, where the tree
ties wheels to its thanatopsis topleteness.

(Decasyllabics, last line variant.)

THE SINGULAR (enneasyllabics)

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—?

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.

A MEDIUM TO DOUBTERS

How can I make you sit
Beneath the clairvoyant's
High-table at seance,
And, while her tongue transmits
Some tremulant spirit's
Long-withheld voice in trance,
Make you tongue her clit,
You true communicants?

(hexasyllabics, line 7 variant)

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. Ubiq-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?*

(decasyllabics, line 11 variant)

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.

(decasyllabics)

BELLTOWER (octosyllabics)

stentor contemptuous of rhymes
tin-ear deliberately flat
day out chimes immetrical times
echoing fate with its that's that

thrown here under what thunder spire
pray our course lies off some ways else
how resist this hourly gongfire
lead us not into numerals

ultra stopless birth death it rains
baptisms funerals weddings
shower high teardrops fly ricegrains
tolling controllably more rings

even if bells themselves all crack
once they peal there's no appeal back

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

(decasyllabics, with a variant last line)

*

EVERY RIFT WITH ORE

How fiercely foilsome the facial knife shivs
its two blades up to where the forehead ends
in 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.

(decasyllabics)

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—

Just our luck those heavenstruck distractions
From final test results grow dull and show
As adults—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:

(stanza break)

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

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

(decasyllabics)

DAS LIED (octosyllabics)

Should I have ear-pods cued ready
to shove in my head when I die
Beethoven maybe or Mahler,
share of what ultimate encore;
shall I prepare as death's due rite
a soundtrack: background tunes? too late—
dare I page my old days through now,
meager-all merit music; no
date among them stays worth raising
from its quantum of occasion
with any en passant popchant,
much less symphonic revival:
so why the hell would this final
event warrant accomplishment.

OVERNIGHT FREEZE (heptasyllabics)

Window-glints of ice glaze fast
what last night flashed the mudflats,

down in which dawn has found pressed
small animal tracks: inch-niched

skylights affix these quick paths—
Each step is trapped beneath slats

of translucency attached
rime to rim: they sit there ditched,

puttied into glare hatches—
All around the ground looks patched

and spattered with puddle-thatch,
but note rather this etched stretch

where a late trotter's tread's latched
with pondgild on its ledge trench:

how glitter-together cached;
incandescently encased.

Not bins or barns' coiled harvest,
glozen molds hold placed this trace,

bold encroachments caught across:
each hoof-, paw-, claw- mark's embossed

by its lunge run: each rut crests

to extend its range, end-launched—

it must hate these lit nimbus
lids, must wince beneath such frost—

sun has tamed them flame of squints
yet some after-image haunts:

Lands on every side lie creased
with spoor that mars their hard crust

and floorflares most summer's waste
imagination, that pinch

not worth pittance, that thin purse
clutching what breast abundance

of flurry foliage tossed, prize
profligate with years' penance

whose cease has summoned what peace—
tarp white winter's carapace

tries to hide that mislaid dust
carrion in graneries

and bury deeper what grace
war's jarrior deifies—

what Troy, what toy's sacrifice
leaks justification, beast

whose Homered oathwraths can't match

this farmstead's secular crafts—

Beyond the coop's chickenhatch
pieces of a greenhouse burst

up from the clays as ghosts pass
to implant sole-sills for what's

still clear to me—I approach
each glimpsy-glaziered gapgulch

afraid my galoshes squelch
break their skittery sketches

or skidheel slide a childprance
puncturing every damn sash

I can smash, whatever blanched
and specious glow my outstanced

kick can dislodge idolfest
haloes those pit-portholes hoist

from lamb-trample slaughterous
gods displayed bad raptor hosts—

herds of ape they pasture-traipse
bestial cattlecats who scratch

paved prowess in the dirt splotch
like border-dots on mapwatch

or liens miser ledgers clutch

feral figures for our debts

predator prey pays poets
that panther pads our wallets

Ted Hughes' cunning hawk-pastiche
plugs its parrot author rich

this savage extravagance
animates each TV pitch

breakfast lions and leopets
mad advertiser rabbits

like easter eggs and christ creche
exist to rake in the cash

as you sit and clicker switch
from Tiger Attack stabsites

to Martyred Bible Prophets
can you diff any difference

in sanguinary scams which
verse-ho's popes and other shits

exchange/exploit for lootplits
getcher *guts* getcher *spirits*

festering fetish lame wish
goldgash wildpack "religious"

imperious dazzlements

its screen between me unleashed

shall I plain idealize
the sight. Pitter pattered glitz

the poorest field-rat can task:
"Trance entombed, my forage-struts?

strangely crowned with iciclets,
thaw-askance in silver nets

that snag some Nixnaut banished
from huge spook-lakes diminished

to these mini: spangle-splashed
and scaly his mermarsh face

is damming yours to a drowse:
your powers sod, your earth cursed,

bear null this lair's fatal laze—
bide its nether-tide enclosed,

its potent emptiness poised
to bolt free, vain, hopeless wish:

train of hymen's bridal dress,
heil flower drowned mire and mess

in this fecal foul recess—
delusional any parse

that aspires to soar from smutch

or scat escape its burnished

prison-urned prism-units
lathed and locked, crystal cubits

where spot-carpeted carets—
pools, flood-scummed with gem, facets

unstrung-flung diamond pendants
it strangles you, chain necklaced.

Immured your murder-led bents
that followed friendly bloodscents

till fangs throat-fonts firmly drenched
and feast fell anticlimax—

till: cycle lay established,
again. Eternal matrix,

your game's destined accidents
choreograph each pounce once

but here they're preserved in twice:
cryocrypts halt their advance,

vaults for phantom enpassants—
stabatjammed their rhythm dance.

Here stands this clearing's essence,
filmed upon fillspace distance—

oh hear its car-crash score-scants:

sharkshrieks stilled, prowl-growls silenced.

Look: its slope grows near scar grazed
with overtook veer. Fear-crazed

leap-lobes, laned below this sluice
raid, rapacious avalanche—

this meander labyrinth's
constellated your hunt-sprints.

Star-quenched in lurid casements
what vent revives these vagrants.

Plunged in pent, your harms unhitched.
Sprawled for sleep's random ambush—

hibernate, die! sink finished
along this blank fishtank maze

or wake, with mindblink ablaze—
see your scintillant depths catch

magic from the mimic glance
of this mirror while it lasts—

how soon noon will melt to mush
your hoar hour which Eskimos

have more words for than I, mouse
Michigander, verminous

mite of this sheer terminus

the Knott brat teetertoed his

trespass at. He has spare choice
and careless proceed he must

toward the devouring bless
this coldsnap moment's incised

in his own flesh. Oedipus
ankled. Pale autumn's glozes

grail incarnations of slush
frail trail we fugitives mashed

in the wet soil till chill lashed
it tight with glacier paces

palls in the mornings' stale mess
of luminescence. Sunrise

et al. Against its bright best
(nature's norm-channel brilliance

versus some thumbed thesaurus)
this polar-stamped dirt contrasts

my feet in a fret of froze
silly syllabic sets of rows

extinguished glimmer glimpses
shattered all their gleams I guess—"

Stoic, lone, those shine-lines cast

to show no magnificence

or quests quixotic-thrust, just
folk stalked by their hungriness,

critters croaked, varmints vanished
species extinct or deathwish—

Theirs is not an innocence
chosen, their hands are not clenched

on church-prayers' lack-response.
Their trek unlike ours abounds.

Under gait-grates it waits wise
in its ways portrayed saycheese—

Carnivore, killer-corps seized;
poacher captured, frozenchase.

Mid-stride taken, frigid paste
haste-hail jails this trodden caste.

Roadcage for an arctic race;
shod-zoo stocked with dull dreambrates.

Before the snow's blind expanse
blunders every further fence

a walk may stop precipice
top this fierce fenestrate lens

but what happens then depends

on some lost, glossed over sense.

One might pause to muse that post
or else forget, astonished.

Or kneel to urge weathers worse
come seal his brr-brief life's course—

(Let elf and unicorn dash
climate at its timeliest

congeals their furtive crevasse
strayhorde stayed for a nor' rest.)

Spurts of rhyme, suicide-sparse
for obvious sake. Because

it all seems so colorless.
The past and everything since.

But our chameleon's footprints—
have they been paned with stained glass?

(there is one variant line here—perhaps you
spotted it?—: "silly syllabic sets of rows" . . .)

*

Afternote:

Poets schooled in the tried-and-trite verities of
Romanticism are of course suspicious

of any form which is not "organic."

So when MacArthur Genius Fellow Edward Hirsch
reviewed my last book,

among his many condescending remarks and insults,

one in particular sticks in my mind:—

as if to declare that my heinous habit

of writing in syllabics

was indeed an ultimate folly, the worst sin of all,

Hirsch sneeringly noted that

"Knott likes to . . . count syllables."

this edition: 02/07/11

“[T]he remarkable poet Bill Knott is not the type to win prizes, become the pet of academic critics or cultivate acolytes. But this thorny genius has added to the art of poetry.” –Robert Pinsky, *Washington Post*, 2005

“Bill Knott is our contemporary e.e. cummings . . . Like cummings, he is brilliant at both micro and macro.” –Cindra Halm, *Rain Taxi*, Fall 2004

“For the past thirty-five years Bill Knott has shown himself to be one of our very best poets and perhaps the most original. . . . I think he is one of the few poets of my generation who will remain with us.” –Stephen Dobyns, *Harvard Review* (Spring 2002)

“Bill Knott is a meld between Gerard Manley Hopkins and MTV, producing poems with the former’s violent beauty and the latter’s largely ironic postmodern presence.” –Mary Jo Bang, *Lingua Franca* (May 2000)

“Knott was an incredibly important poet to me and still is; I think Bill Knott is a genius and probably the least known great poet in America. It’s really kind of pathetic that he’s not as well known as he was even thirty years ago because he’s even better now.” –Thomas Lux, *The Cortland Review* (August 1999)

“Bill Knott is one of the best poets writing in America. Without question, he is the most original.” –Kurt Brown, *Harvard Review* (Spring 1999)

“Bill Knott is a genius.” –Tom Andrews, *Ohio Review* (1997)

"It is no accident that the major British and American poets of the 19th and 20th century were outsiders. . . . The most original poet of my generation, Bill Knott, is also the greatest outsider." –Stephen Dobyns, *AWP Chronicle* (1995)

"Bill Knott is the secret hero of a lot of poets. . . . [P]oets who differ radically from Knott look to his work for the shock of recognizing themselves." –David Kirby, *American Book Review* (1991)

"Bill Knott's poems . . . are the poems Beckett's Gogo would write if he were among us." –Sharon Dunn, *Massachusetts Review* (1990)

"[Knott's 'Poems 1963-1988' is] a powerful and original book, a record of one of the most disturbing imaginations of our times. Few people can create a world so completely and concisely as Knott does time and time again." –Kevin Hart, *Overland* (1990)

"Knott is no parlor poet. His work is the most sharply original of any poet in his generation." –Jim Elledge, *Booklist* (1989)

"Among people who know his work, Bill Knott is regarded as one of the most original voices in American poetry." –Charles Simic, blurb for *Poems 1963-1988* (1989)

"Knott sets up principles far outside most of those we know, and he always writes up to and beyond those standards." –Sandra McPherson, blurb for *Outremer* (1989)

"Bill Knott is an American original. No one else could have imagined what James Wright once referred to as Bill Knott's 'indispensable poems.'" —Stuart Dischell, Harvard Book Review (1989)

"I think Bill Knott is *the* best poet in America right now." —Thomas Lux, Emerson Review (1983)

"Bill Knott's first book, 'The Naomi Poems,' published in 1968, established him instantaneously as one of the finest poets in America. Subsequent publications deepened and reinforced that reputation." —Andrei Codrescu, The Baltimore Sun (1983)

"[Knott's poems are] shrouded almost always in the glaring and polluted light William Burroughs foresaw with such brilliance in 'Naked Lunch.' In fact, Knott, Poet of Interzone, is the poet Burroughs seemed to call for in his seminal novel. . . . Knott is one of a handful of original poets working today. His genius suits the times better than any poet I've read . . ." —Robert Peters, Los Angeles Times (1983)

"With the death of Berryman, Knott seems to me to be the chief embodiment in language today of Mallarmé's spirit. . . ." —John Vernon, Western Humanities Review (1976)

". . . Knott's originality as a poet: he is absurd and classical and surrealist all at once. A marvelously impossible animal." —Paul Zweig, Contemporary Poetry in America (1974)

"At his best, Knott is a kind of surreal classicist. . . . He is already a formidable poet." —Karl Malkoff, *Crowell's Handbook of Contemporary American Poetry* (1974)

"[Knott's] images are astonishing. Whatever you may think of Knott's poems, they have not been written before by anyone else. . . . Poetry such as this strikes me as extending our awareness." —Louis Simpson, *New York Times Book Review* (1969)

"Bill Knott is one of the most remarkable poets to appear since James Wright and James Dickey." —Ralph J. Mills, Jr., *Poetry* (1969)

"I think [Bill Knott] is one of the best poets I know." —James Wright, blurb for *The Naomi Poems* (1968)

"I think the most significant group of young poets are those published in *Choice* and *The Sixties*, and the most impressive of these is certainly William Knott." —Kenneth Rexroth, *Harper's Magazine* (June 1965)