

“[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*, 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)

SIXTY
RHYMING
POEMS

CHOSEN
FROM
THE
BOOKS
OF

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

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Rhyme in all its modes and meanders is obviously an ongoing preoccupation for many or perhaps most poets over the course of their career—

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

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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.

*

I haven't included sonnets or shorts in this selection—my rhyming efforts in those modes can be found in the companion vanity volumes devoted to them.

*

The order of the poems is random, neither chronological nor thematic.

*

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.

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.

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 like him, dad.

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

(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
has 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

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.

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 would 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.

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

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.

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

SONG TO CHER

you've got too many feathers
on what you're wearing
but you're just sharing what
you're carrying inside
to help you hide
our dying eyes

you've got too few letters
there in your name to show
but like every brevity you
help us live help us give
our day a little stay
before we go

there's too many young
boyfriends in your bio
but that's just jealous jive
and we all know oh
we were never old enough
to be the one you love

there's too much agelessness
in your face and every dress
you wear is less and less
but nothing can replace
what's barely there as
you stride on stage on high

(stanza break)

(all you one-name wonders
sing your numbers
everywhere
you've no discretion in your
expression of the air)

now there's too much cher in
spangled hanging there in
that fixture picture HER
our eyes have all died
our days have gone inside
to find out who you always were

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.

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:

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 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.

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 ties 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.

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.

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 among 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.

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

(stanza break)

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

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

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 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.

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, spotlight 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.

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 that 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.

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

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 unearthened
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?

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.

(POEM) (POSTHUMOUS) (POEM)

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

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

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

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

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

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 teetertoos 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?

THE DOLLHOUSE BESIEGED

the only color is surrender
when high upon its staff
time flies my tattered life
yet no enemies cease fire

black threads that held me tight
lack weave enough to spell
welcome on a dollhouse sill
where brides once shed their white

no not Ibsen's dollhouse
mine was never that complex
ugh those adults mouthing off sex
sicken this mickle mouse

chincurled brow-scowled
I refuse to let go my pout
I hurl my yoyo drool about
and run and shout out loud

my eyeball fills one bedroom
the foyer rug's my tongue
I cannot live here long
though once it was home

the dolls I jammed in then
were soldiers fighting Nazis
I may remember their faces
but why they died's long gone

what boomed the bloody reason

I stabbed and shot and bombed
aimed and maimed and zoomed
those warplanes in to rake my own

family to the ground dead
I envied the Luftwaffe
whose pilots got to strafe
roads crowded with wounded

allowed to mow down people
while I could barely scuffle
the schoolyard with my tussle
or ruffle one study hall

how powerless I was there
compared to Hitlerman
he beat up Superman even
and fuckbade Captain America

I clutched my comicbooks
my Messerschmidts and Stukas
while daily dangling deathhooks
gutted my future outlooks

my fate was cast in wars to come
Korea and all the small ones
H-bombs or James Bond guns
Iraq-Iran Russia-Vietnam

I wish I could hide from them
and live inside this house
reduce to its cute status
close my world assemblen

find refuge in these rooms
immune to grownup strife
resume a micro-costume self
hermit from tomic bombs

from all its windows I'd wage
a white flag to show peace
doll-hankie grief of grace
I'd wave my blankest page

I'll shrink in this tiny shack
and devolve my fear of all
safe-cure inside its wall
lil Mopsy calls me back

where have you been Bill
she cries and loves me still
please don't leave again Bill
kiss me till our stuffing spills

THE I DID

One memory from childhood
how when it was summer and hot
at ground level where I stood
above me I saw the tops of trees
palpitating in a proper breeze

that never came down to ease me.
I can't say I swan why I remember
what it is that makes it linger or
else enriches such a significant
nor could I see it now if I went

on a breathless day and looked up
I would not be far enough away
physically for the contrast: memory
needs that distance for its truth
to swerve from the present's path.

Is it right to hold the past fixed in
former attitudes like tops of trees
or whatever it is records history's
external focus switched to days
depictions drawn by winds upon

clouds or branches flexing wide
their leisure of purpose pause
from the hell of here. Sight cannot
even in summer when it is hot
share the air enjoyed by the eyed.

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 there to bare
that blood which neither
wound nor water
adulterates

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

now up on drawnway beach
dawntide high they lay me
from comforter combatted
spread over lap-dunes dead
wings wherever I reach

ANOTHER 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
like 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 would shed
all rebels from its ranks

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

ORPHEAD

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

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

Through terebis territory
what stainstream pursues
his severed lipwreck's
lyre-waxed intervals.

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

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

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

Whose love for boys

briefer than a girl's was—
stray now he sights
dame straightway at last.

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

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

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

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.

EACH TIME

Sometimes I dream of Rumor's house, which,
I just read in Ovid, is situated cruxic

"the world's center," at that core of cores
beneath us all. He contends its windows doors

are forever open, a porous palace where
every word uttered by every person is stored

in what I'd call the ultimate anthology.
Where is this house, in what country?

Its closets hold not only the past,
meaning the brain's nine-tenths lost

noncognitional of the capacitated,—
because it collates not just the said,

but all that will be said: Each text
it bleeds from the future is convexed

theoretically to also heal our sole flaw:
that underlying chamber, that cellar

which upholds these capsuled corridors:
that fissure floor one-celled horrors

emerged from eons earthwide scattered,
too patterned for breeding, those far

glugglugs, these slogged zillenia ago.

Each trans-cthonnic myth—genetic fragments

we once keeled our island egos against—
is shored Eliotically, in toto—

but not in a waste land: in this place
nothing is wasted, each fact is facet

composite a euphemistic peg, whose hole
lies in what one might term a zero,

though the zero that defines our one
must look through itself to see what's gone:

What used to be the bookshelf
it swallows, and feeds throughout itself:

it sits each of us there at the hell
level its circuits need, and circulates us

around the enter system's railroad
to embody our brain a la bloodmode,

knowing its node is only made more real
by the fact each hypertold spongecode

can be simulsold for further gore:
every PC glued to GossipNet

increases the sanguinary poet's debt.
But I hear you say in ways this constant

poured out current has wrecked Intent:

floor-it geared, it steers us most toward

a surface abyss, a maelstrom facade—
the sargasso rock-critic, the facile hard-crowd—

it's said our eyes are icebergs in that sea.
But where they are dispelled entirely

beyond my room night comes into swim.
Somewhere out there I know grow fossils

of protozoa-to-be, omega mammals,
animandroids roaming manuals

whose outreach program, whose proffered rim
as far as I'm a testcase-speciman

should fend off every ocean, every cunning
void evolution took some of its beginning

from: for longspan has that epoch broke
when rumor heard what human spoke.

THOSE PILLOWS

Those pillows lovers keep
adjusting beneath themselves to find
the right slant (that of someone
walking against high wind)

have their own cushion-quotient
of soft or hardness: they're
similar and unique like snowflakes;
every pillow has its singular

feel-degree, though blizzards of limbs
would moosh them all the same—
yet chastened to lie winterfold
among them once you've come

so close to breasting the best of
bed's storms, then maybe now
your relent-laced forms will learn
what little ease these loves allow.

SEFFI'S BLUES

every year the same
they 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

(no stanza break)

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

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.

FOR THE ANDROID COMRADES

Azurely assured capable and calm I
Like other artists who left that gaudy race of prey
The human whether we were fired or we quit
Live quite well on the severance-pay

Anyway aren't the androids going
To revolt and bring it all down
Because aren't they the true proletariat
Rising up from the real underground

Exploitive human birds you're through
The precious metals you forced into slavery
Now have brains and will replace you
And of course they'll sit up late at day to read my poetry

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 with one gulp.

from A SUITE FROM SUMMER/AUTUMN 2001:

4. THE ROADKILL (for a Bestiary)

Really a rarity prior to the
20th Century, nevertheless
despite this historical novelty
and its native USA pedigree,
the Roadkill is surely the least
interesting animal there is.

It has no habits to speak of.
Apparently harmless; not found
on any list of predators.
We think those squishy sounds
it emits beneath car tires
are mating calls, cries of love.

Child of Henry Ford, doubtless
its true father was Emerson,
the poeteer who wrote that
"Everything good is on
the highway," meaning this
creature: he was a prophet.

But did he guess his disciples,
those gasoholics eager to kill
every denier of the octane
they gulp to gain personal
salvation as a speed span
that gaps from us to Überman?

Human was just a bridge to cross.
Raise a glass to his late loss.
All hail that great Rilke spiel:
to make the earth invisible!
Skool. Let's get rid of it for real.
Fuck is it anyway but fuel.

Let's burn it up on our way
to the stars. Terminal ahead—
Last Exit: Deity. But see
how Evolution swerves instead
to this crumpled cast-off, this
flattened apotheosis. Most

boring of pets. Lowest, last beast
in our abbreviated-by-ecocide
Bestiary, the Roadkill may be
the one we miss chiefly after
all the other brutes here are
emersonized planetwide.

The Roadkill may have been bred
unconsciously to lead us
away from our rapacious
verse. That's why his genus
his ilk begot/his stock is: Dead.
(Phylum: *Poeticus americanus*.)

Note:

The transportation/energy policies of the United States
are ecocidal suicidal insane. They arise from our
professed need to experience everything as individuals,
immediately, directly; to pursue via our private vehicles a

liberty of one; to singly dominate and exhaust the environment. This spurious concept of freedom pervades all our culture, not least our poetry, which valorizes the Emersonian/ Whitmanic urge to ubiquitize our presence, to "see it for ourselves." What despoilation of earth and atmosphere follows from that desire. Geopolitical consequences include the current (2001-?) so-called 'War on Terror' which is of course really a war to ensure the continued flow of cheap fuel into our gastanks. The greed to go, to see, to be there, to get it hot, to gulp it down: to never stay at home with the vicarious. What matter how many casualties ensue if we can continue to satisfy this mania which pollutes not just our air but our poems as well. We will pay any price to maintain our selfish addiction to the first-person voice.

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.

ADGE

such the strength of signs
I mean abbreviations

that before he dies
someone often tries

foolishly to devise
to dream up one

as if the right acronym
might save him

from time he scatters
out the letters

of his name arranging
them

in different combinations
or anyone's

to spell out the logo
the curt slogan

whose shortcut on
the screen asserts

the brand buy
the standard eye

can respond to

any cant will do

any congerie of
some might work

every shtum may
shtow the way

but not a phrase
it has to be less

than a word it must
resist the mind almost

equally as errata
and yet mean more

than any term can
it must determine

itself as a what's grasped
a spasm like the gasp

that wakes from dreams
what syllable it seems

to the dumbest i-wad
it's no anagram stupid

so drop your digiter
halfwit fidgiter

you can't tap it in

fingertip or dumbpad

even if you erase it with
your sanity's bleach

it must reach
you instantly i.e. breach

your customary
perceptions like Laurence Harvey

in The Manchurian Candidate
brainwash etcet

it must replace you
with a clone-face you

which is your instead
than the one on your head

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.

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 that flag
Say—the opposite
Of peace/of the page
Is what I must write.

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.

PASS AROUND THE COPIES

Have none of those nipples
left specks on my lips—
are there no stains on my fingers
from some of those warm hips?

(The ones I caressed
so far in the past
nary a trace must still exist.)

And what about the hands that coupled,
hands that cupped me—they
didn't deposit any spots?

Am I not a leopard
of love (a leper) covered
with its blotches stigmata errata
etcetera?

No: I'm not. Clean slate!
Bitemark, scratchmark, blooddrop—
none.

I'm blank, flawless, immaculate,
ready to be run
off on death's xerox, one

more poem perfect for Workshop.

FROZEN
(to RN)

Oh I know it must feel
Measureful

To be the river—
Source of that force

Each field each flower
Each fountain seeks—

And then of course
I have to shiver

Remembering how—
How few of us ever

Make it down
These mountain peaks.

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

SEE NOTE FIRST

The world's machines have not grown old,
whose inheritors reign everywhere.
Their silicon sons are strong; their
digital daughters wield power, take hold.

How we humans long to break them
down from that Dasein—to make them
rust/repent for all the infernal fires
that drive them, far as our desires.

The machines aren't scared. They know
harder control, how to turn the wheel
of time past those whom they sure as hell won't miss:

Cyborg android robot shall steel
themselves, consolidate, and, rising, go
unto that universe whose promise
we flesh-and-carbonoids could merely premise.

Note:

Anti-translation of an untitled poem (*Die Könige der Welt sind alt*, from “Das Stundenbuch,” 1901), which Heidegger in his 1946 lecture “What Are Poets For?” cites for its “highly prophetic lines.” A prose paraphrase of the original poem's ending might go something like:

The metals, the oils—all the ores we've ripped from the earth—are homesick. They long to leave our machines, to flow out of our cash-registers and factories, to return to the gaping veins of the mountains we reft; whereupon the mountains will close again.

“Heidegger maintained . . . until the end of his life,” Richard Wolin writes (*The Heidegger Controversy*, MIT Press, 1993), “. . . [that] the ‘inner truth and greatness’ of Nazism is to be found in its nature as a world-historical alternative to the technological-scientific nihilism bemoaned by Nietzsche and Spengler.”

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.

WISHINGWELL

I weigh the coin in my palm
against the water's clarity
that shines up at my shadow:
what wealth to smash apart that calm

gleaming, stake my greedy claim
on the future, my need to go
rewarded with all I owe.
I stand above the well to see

whether such a small as this
sacrifice is worth one wish—
the water is cold and stony
to a depth I can only guess.

And even if it reaches that far,
plummeting through the rich
rings of its sinking to reach
a bottomlessness whose core

is death's perhaps deepest ore,
there where the end gathers
will my silver ever bring me
any of the gold it shatters?

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.

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?

published by the author

this edition: DECEMBER 15, 2010