

THE BALLOON THAT
LIVED ON THE MOON
AND OTHER NEW
POEMS

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 Note

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A selection of new work from around 2003 to the present.

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I've priced the book to cover the cost of its printing etcet, with no profit margin.

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The order of the poems is random, neither thematic or chronological.

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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.

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.

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LEAD

If I could fill these lines
up with pencils instead
of letters I would. Less

metaphor meaning or
superstition might adhere
to those writing-sticks

than this. Let the tool be
a substitute for the work;
the eraser for the point.

WHEN THE TIME COMES

there is no alleviation
from the pain
there is no balm

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

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

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

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

STRAND

Poured transparent by water I enter,
the minutiae find me whole again,
the small storms that attend my pores,
the closest fears. I enter my room,

the space I must disrobe to occupy: I see
the coathangers shrug off my timid gesture
of solidarity, of consolation
for their intrinsic aloneness, their

bone forms never quite covered
each time the waves heave these clothes
upon our strand. I stand in front
of this convenient nakedness,

this open door of the moment knowing
every closet longs to be unique in its disorder,
a shambles of mothholes and outworn forms
donating itself daily to the space

I must parse to the point of empathy,
knowing that as true its brunt breeze
intends to condense all I contain of sea,
and as always succeeds. Yes,

it rains my ocean empty.

FROGPRINCE

Presence had its stay with me,
and even if only for a time
it came in the brief of love—

I used to whisper in her ear's
idyl. She was so treat, so could.
I mostly was worse. Now

the unkind years of peace
strand me here, where the lamp
studies pain with impunity.

The dust etched in its trance
seems a core the air can't share,
overwhelming the eye which

itself is plus-sulked with themes
of sight, beyond-borne. Imagine
a lily pad pregnant with eyelids,

lapping the light with its lashes.
Diffused to me the outward lies
as motes to the beam that bears

them. So what I see carries me
somehow, I cannot stand apart
subject and object observer

though as always I desire to.
I prefer to view than act, and
reflect upon the pond I appear.

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.

HAIRBRUSH POEM

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE BALLOON THAT LIVED ON THE MOON

The lower gravity was kind to it
It could bounce and soar higher
Than Earth allows
So the balloon was happier
By far
And soon forgot the puncture culture
We perpetuate down here
Where the hate-pins of our eyes skewer
The frailest inflation
The beadiest bubble is not safe
But up there
The bleak unpeopled landscape
Mirrors more faithfully
A balloon's own sterility and
Essential snootiness
Consider
What a round object by its perfect nature
Excludes
How its boundaries segregate the in from the out
And show what is enough
And what is less
So when you think of the balloon
That lived on the moon you might wonder
Why all its brothers and sisters
Because can't you feel how
When one tugs your hand
Deft with that upward urge how much
It resists your touch
How endlessly
You are not a part of it

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.

LOVE POEM

Because you have set your lips in my life
like an event, the date
I had missed and longed for
unknowing if it had passed,
day dull as diaries
that wait for wonders—

Love, error of the unique,
rare-offering the one
moment
that will never share itself with
the dishwasher chores,

the drab demands of normal
life that line up pending to be
faced with nothing required of me
but an absent askance quality:
the cat and mop et al.

Love
on your heights
on the crest of a kiss
can you ever know the comfort
of these doldrum dole duties,
these small acts of repeat.

Against their duliness
your beauties dull.
I bend to their boredom
which after all remain home

and I find relief alone
and release
and solace
each time
I press my mouth against them.

POSTCOITAL

time to scratch
though nothing can itch
like the beard
of her breasts

she can feel his blood
being injected
back into the grape
it gushed from

beneath this dead calm
the bed bends like
a sail bellied out
with distance

(may mallarméans
not regret
the white erased
from these sheets)

only a shiver
covers them now
a snowflake pinned
to their bones

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 here in the stake
Of cards she pays out now into their own
Dead-end deft-hand. Do you know who's downthrown

In the rows of this slow shuffle? And no
Matter where you haled from or where you'll go
Next-lost round the dark town's confinements
One must leave this encounter with a sense

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

Urging you to share its peer. 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.

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POEM

Here in town the sound
of bells must compete with
me for room, but out
over the waves can zoom
alone. Across the sea
bells travel unimpededly.

MISHAP MESSAGE

I bandage my wristwatch
to stop the bleeding
of time but time
is perforce the wound
out of which space empties
Einstein's bag of marbles

the greenie I shoot at its sister the moon
the purey I bury with a note saying no
the blue one weighs in my hand
as light as sky minus earth
earth of course is the last marble

I like to hear it roll
around my showerstall
before I fall into the drain
into that distillate of distance we call
ocean

whitecaps whitecaps
beneath each of which
a nurse bobs up and down

cold fingers hold my wrist
cold toes probe my throat
is that my pulse I ask
sisters is that my life

(stanza break)

is that the onomatopoeia of the waves
words that jumble space with time
laughter tumbling down a telescope

words that turn to marble all I say
white as my years they bleed
they bleed away
white but white as only Einstein's hair is white
or a note slipped under drowning doors

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[poem]

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

[prosepoem]

In school kids would stand in back of me and stick two fingers up behind my head to make the class laugh. Or so I was told. I took their word for what had occurred and that it was universal. Due to its process, I could not witness what had really happened or what it meant, what made it funny. And I still don't know today: but I can feel them back there, forefinger, middlefinger, ready to poke their putdown up for the world to jeer me. That V looms always, that rabbit-ears or peace-sign or whatever scourge stigmata I pledge it to represent; but what hurts most is, I know that victorious viciousness only by inference, only by report: I can never spin fast enough to catch a glimpse of it. I've never been able not once to see this joke my entire life has suffered the hands of. That's the worst part of this humiliation: that I have to take it on trust, that I have to believe in it blindly.

HARVEST

clouds which stand still
to pose downward
their event

in the church
a cookie is wedged
up the Virgin's plaster skirt

now days attend the sun
and all the other futures
before they crop our feasts and wither

the four points
of a pitchfork
become harder to define

eyes measuring to means
the distance dust
plants along the sill

chasing each other the children
combine the wisdom
of freckles and fire-engines

in the end we flow
like thirst above stones
like hunger above air

AN ORIGAMI CLOCK

Never fast, never slow, this horologue
seems to work via the exactitude
its folds embrace, a geometric
reinforcement of shapes that entwine
the present in the past, emerged
from a pulpmill, a sheet
gnarled not by lovers' meshings,
but by the origamist's fingers.
Page which is also a maze.
Book of nothing but dog-ears.
In which one reads the vertical
crease vis-a-vis the horizontal crease—
until each pried seppiece tells
our foretell to peel it deeper
like a nest which involutes
wings in tinier and tinier tucks.
Tuck tick tock, can our end
be tighter tied than this? What a twist
to the then; what a knot to the now.
Conundrum of time. Watchworks
ultrawhorled. Outward stemmed, hour
that is midmost. Day that must
be wound up daily in woundabout.
Always its paper petals are shown
tolled by the whole it introjects.

POEM

They stole all the belongings I left
on the sidewalk because I could only
lug part of my stuff into my new home;
and so I cried screaming at the cars
that shrieked by, sobbing on my knees.
Seems all I could do to calm myself
was rub my thumb along the clawpoints
of the strange key which would open
the door of my new place, if, that is,
I had indeed locked it behind me:
so they may have already gone up
and stole the things I carried in before!

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POEM

I heard the abide.

How low it was.
How loud it was.

How soon it ended.
And what it said.

I heard its words
poured, pouring
from the sky.

The clouds were frauds.

The froth lost its mind in an ear.

THE MALL-TIQUE FALCON

Often a flower tries to befriend your shirt,
but you must shun its minor transcendence
and remain in transit afterwards then later forward,

nor stop along any ground lure to wield
an egg balanced on a T-square and declaim
how grateful you are for whatever cameo roles

your film noir killers and thieves can still assume,
though the thrill of closing your eyes in witness
leitmotifs the fear they show account to.

Earth-surface seems to support this with evasions
which, if difference did deliver, might
grant monkey unanimity to time's isolation

and overcome your capacity for reason among
vined gardens of origin, desperate media
which litter the floor with florabunda

whose come-ons to your clothing are due
to their desperate desire to be real somehow:
how sad nature is in its entourage stage,

its stalker nazi strategems to stay relevant,
the way it mimics us. Its simulacra swarm
almost human in their gaudiness of thorn

or leaf though of course they lack our essential
say nay qua. Yet here you are among their
units of ubiquity as if they were the one you

should escape and run to hide beneath a sundial,
while your windmills pump water to a stalled
starting-block; your bread sops up the clouds.

Hey each day don't you see on the screen
a comedian's teeth battle the lava of his own lips.
Doesn't that scene render Vesuvius superflous.

ITCH

too many words but
if you could pare
them down to what
your fingernails scratch
onto every pore
of skin on your body
except for a certain
portion of the back
below the blades above
the small of it sits
that singular patch
your hands cannot reach
to inscribe the lines
that cover all the other
fleshparts is that spot
virgin reserved for
Mallarmé perhaps
untouched till god or
devil autopist writes
theirs there

ASSASSIN

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

ORPHEAD

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

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

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

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

Are there none to nurse
his neck where pegasi
nest their reins of 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.

SIGHT

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

said I have removed from the sky the blue
which is darkness but his saying this did not
result in the sky being stripped of its blue
to leave only immense endless sunlight

surrounding us from horizon to horizon
fire on fire encompassing gorging the eye
no in fact in spite of his assertion the blue
which is darkness stayed it remained bright

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IMMUNE

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

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

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

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 ipod
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 you instead
of the one on your head

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 your spree.

EACH TIME

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

at "the world's center," the 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 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

that 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 we might term a zero.

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 entire 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.
Where they are dispelled completely

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 testcase-concerned

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.

DUNCE RHYMES (FOR THE MOMENT)

and if this poem
has made you a hearer
of ghosted voices
that fade when you get nearer
and everytime you look
into the rearview mirror
you scream and clutch
at your hands in fear
at what those futures show

and then will you cry out
for all to hear
the cripple the promqueen
and the seer
don't you think that now's
a good time to be freer
than you were
a second ago

POEM

how to remain mienous
as you face
the mirror's worst

I who scorned the house
unto its rafters

a self-finished man with all
his comforts I offered
my soul to the dust
that I tossed onto others

money poured
from my halo

now the limp repeats
what the stride said
when it ran in full pell toward
the meld of flight

too late the salt

bare as the way north
where they lade the gates
with the way south

to repeat the instances
as hands pinned
upon the target
may applaud when hit
your aim

trued to its shoot
why do I stay
stage-left of my exit

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

your Energizer Rabbits
breakfast lions and leopets

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

with latent emptiness poised
to bolt free, vain, hopeless wish:

prison whose prism-units
drown you in crystal cubits

and 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

and 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—
jimjammed here that 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's veer. Steer-squished

leap-lobes laned below this sluice
this rapacious avalanche—

this meander labyrinth's
constellated those 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.)

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

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

EXCHANGE

My love is torture
But no one attends my screams
My whimpers die out
Fade out the charmed windows
Fall unheard along the streets
Where couples walk in touch lightly
Exchanging pet phrases
Oh fortunate language whose meaning
Is confined to two
Who need no dictionary:
There goes another fingernail: see
They shove the fingernail into
My face as if
To show me this is a serious
Business we aren't kidding around
Here:
We want the truth you scum
Out with it tell us what
Their names are: who
Have you poisoned who have you
Defiled with the ugly
Gaze of your longing
What innocents have you left
Stricken by the sight of your
Adoring
Face tell us who who have you dared
To desecrate with love?

(stanza break)

But I, I have never confessed—
I have never revealed your names
Whoever you are
Whoever you are out there
Embracing in touch lightly
Exchanging those phrases
Which only you understand
Those coos those moans those
Hoarse unmeanings
That sound so much at times
Like my screams my whimpers here

FIRST WARM DAY

When the world belongs to toss-up.

Balloons whose footprints
sting the air with soft occasion;
clouds, whose streamers strain for
the horizons denied them now
by these new slow winds.

Even children relinquish the stoicism that
kept us safe from the cold, even they
succumb to a sudden cuddleness, weak
as the first spindly crocus. Seneca
is sent once more to silence.

Two plus two begins to crack before
the picnic logic of Summer.

The reign of the same. Difference
is banished here; outside and inside are
made equal in temperament, doors
left open declare armistice.

Winter's wars wane. Vintners verse their vines.

AUTHORIAL

to leap off a diving board
and land on a divining rod
is out of the question

to hope for petite glimpses
of smoke-tipped throats
in the streets below Help Murder Highrise

why did I try to rub my thoughts
on vocab-zero
on word-none

oval toes
toes are sort of oval aren't they
I trust they're not cyclical

to wish that stones had gloated at my birth
and flowers and firstbooks fell
from snowcliff avenues

I was probably in session
watching my face contend
with someone else's closeup

laborious syllables what
inverted bulleyes line
the mime's white cage

WRITLESS WRATNOT

my flaw can't find its fit
am I an anomalous llama
or a truncate of death

a horsekerchief
a motionless hope atop a propjet
a prophet stream

an instrument
for cutting cheekbones out of ancestral portraits
ephem-human or rodent-endless

will I die clutching in my hand
missives all meant for myself and
yet somehow never sent

my plow can't plod its pit
my knots all miss their knit
without its slot the rat rots

CROSSROADS

A crossroads is a solely human place— animals in their time have created paths through jungle, woods or plain, wearing down the grass with hooves and paws, but roads that intersect are necessities which only we respect. The junction of two lines laid in the earth serves to focus our steps in ways which crazed disparate fleerings of herds to and from their waterholes and feedgrounds can't come flock or follow. Beyond those mad meanders lies the nearest need to greet a configuration of fates we recognize indigenous to us: hostile purposes, aims in antipathy: two destinies that disagree at every point except one, pure opposites who meet just once, whose encounter is over before the moment can swerve, the transient turn untrue. Forever lost (like chessmen in a labyrinth) we must impose our cartography upon this dirt, whose undealt corrosive tracings deny our thoroughfare thought, our dream of achieving that beckon-cathect, that act which will prove by evil increasing daily acts of horsepower steadfastness that our choice of trek was correct, since a crossroads alone can show us the way we didn't take, lunging there at right angles to our progress: its ninety degree option runs so counter to our own that it endorses the unique course we each now ride the rim of, our souls plow-low so none of them neither else can share what, except for that single instance of sidelong, that helpless recognition of others in their foolish course, that hurrythrough, is a solely human place.

VERTIGO

All prisons were quiet where I walked,
yet my way was limited
as buried in my tread I made rounds
that threw up barricade.
Rivers can flow with no sense of advance,
no anticipation of arc, but I must know
what my steps seek, thrust
thumbs into my belt for navigation
or find an emptiness between
the possible routes, a stay
to steer me through the faceless confetti
my mouth scatters in front.

Like kisses clocked by scars
my days were overt in their intent
to pass these words
through unison to you.
And even though the disguises by which
you have not known me
still wield flagell-eyelids
that haunt me with rainbow seepage
I have yet to mourn for signs
that I am here, and I refuse to mime
the verities that crest your view
in dread of drops.

Does my anonymous know me
or am I alone here in the night
where I guide myself down
via kite-strings.

POEM

As I walk into town I notice
on the sidewalk the leaves have
fallen mostly bright side down,

the colorful-wonderful side,
i.e. the dying-decaying, hides
below the still-greenish half

which hunches over as if
to protect its fairer twin, to
save the frail waste of loveliness

from our pending feet. This
upward face is the obverse,
the unloved: yet on the tree it

was obviously the underpart,
untoasted by the sun, tree-slice
half-done. If I step on one

it flattens and perhaps some
of the color crumbles up through
to dye the skyward-displayed

sheaf-shield, something bleeds
into the drained mask it offers
to the world's uncurious shoed

glance. Virgil cites a myth that
false dreams cling beneath each leaf,
numberless: that's why the under

stays rare, unmarred by hectic—

its unstained purity portrays
a lottery win, a moviestar kiss.

Its perfection is a fantasy rays
have not darkened to day. It stays
asleep in its top-sheet of hope.

I love this un-lived side of the leaf,
it is in turn my life, pale-safe
and fraught with no urge to wake,

to exert its own naif enough—
my raw state resists sophistudy,
(anterior antibody of beauty)

its rootless evil nice beneath
the garish one's reign of dare and
flare, he who exalts the warmth

on his skin, Mister surface, Herr
hero. I am the lesser here, the low.
Yes: but after the fall I will show

my face toward any sole, no longer
subferior to tanned specimans
of transcendized TV glory, riper

hunks who now sprawl shrivel
and hug the pavement while their
earlier cursed teencarnations bare

out to be me, me, the bove-boy—
So what if I'm the false, the dream
none can depend on or look to

for their vacuous autumn viewing,
foolishly believing those goldshed
scarlets are a sight extolled, a sign.

They ignore my sap hue, my true
expression of the void that lies
so splendid-blazed before their eyes.

*

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SAY TO SAY

Say ten snowflakes light on your fingertips,
one on each, the ten snowflakes that match
your ten fingerprints in pattern the most,
the closest it's possible to get and yet remain
a similie, since similies like M-and-M's melt
not in your hand but in your mouth say.

STRUNG

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

*

*

IN ORDER

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

(CRIBSONG)

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

if baby brain breaks fragile
shall butterfingers refrain
to un-fontanelle that eden
all it takes is one fall

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

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

which creature cuddly come
makes 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

THE VINDICATION (prosepoem)

If it were only possible to launch enough satellites up, one apiece for each of us down here on earth, billions of spysats programmed to monitor us all individually, that's the important thing: that each one of us would have his or her own personal private skysat; and then, when our (our!) specially-designated sole-focussed fetish-trained mysat was finally and totally locked onto us, what secrets could we exchange with it, how confide its include-codes could grow, how large its zoom would contain us: each unique DNA traced and zeroed in on to find us, to separate us out, tell us apart from all the space trash next door to us. Unfortunately that many satellites in the sky at once would form a hatchshell shield surrounding the planet like a renewal of Ptolemy's cosmos and would cut off all solar energy resulting in the pandeath of vegetation and terrestrial life itself, a small price to pay, a minor consequence aftermath of having satisfied if only for one brief interval the universal desire to go recognized, singled out and beamed upon; of having appeased our deepest need, to be known.

NOBLESSE OBLIGE

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

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

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

TO YOU

If I were gravity I would
increase my grip exactly
at noon, knowing then the sun
is furthest away and least

able to help you resist
the urge to slacken all
and to fall down still
into death's ergo siesta.

I would ease up gradually
throughout the day until,
post-midnight, freed a bit
from that bright counter-tug,

I might even doze
briefly if I were gravity;
as long as I knew you
were asleep, too, that is.

DOLLY THE EWE FIRST CLONE OF THE
WORLD

Turfcloids kicked at me by Dollyherds
are d'oh-kay, but when her sheepmates
slur my name that way it grates me,
though I know from Bill to Baa
is not so far. Distance yearns for more.

So many ways to go, no wonder
hotels converge sobbing, heaving why
why is he leaving me, I want to die—
understandably. I myself feel that way
often, I who found a bird so small

it was shed by its own feathers,
and fed it to my cat. All these wild
creatures in the world and they
have no place to stay, no ark can
hold the moult-might of their DNA,

and then time it injects my replicant's
empties at trashcan allah horizon:
I inoculate that termongrel daily
until he has his waste's worth of it
or its pit omega-emits enough to fit

the one clone I lack the mod cons for.
The only one I'll never be anymore.
A convention of them or a conference
attended with name-tags of the extinct
is where my cage waits, kicked at by kids.

DREAMTIDE

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

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

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

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

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

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please visit my blog:
billknott.typepad.com