

"[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

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

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

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

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

"Bill Knott is a genius." —Tom Andrews, *Ohio Review* (1997)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE BALLOON THAT LIVED ON THE MOON AND
OTHER NEW POEMS

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 Note

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A selection of new work from around 2004 to the present.

I have not included quatorzains or shorts: these can be found in the Lulu.com publications devoted to those forms.

(And some other new ones were put into the "(Acting) Poems" collection, also at Lulu.com . . .)

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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.

(CRIBSONG)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.

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 step-sound of his unknown
father's cane tap tap nearing

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 place

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 lilypad 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!)

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

(stanza break)

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

*

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:
they may have already gone up there
and stole the things I carried in before.

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

THOSE PILLOWS

Those pillows lovers keep
adjusting beneath themselves to find
the right slant (that of a man
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 when you've come

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

IMMUNE

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

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

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

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.

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

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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.

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.

TOGETHER OR APART AS OUR FAVORS CARRY US

someone to pause and take pills with
during the act of coitus
or the fact of cosmos

the days remain pain punctual
their numerals cracked exactly
at noon and night

they fall in a noise of wings
who's talking who's talking who's talking
each phonecall designer begs

where a sleep of engines calms
the horizon we puff
on its halo's last cigarette

in v's we leave we leave we leave
wherever
our favors have carried us

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.

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.

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

*

STRUNG

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

THE 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,
or worse than that I knew
that if a day ever did come
when I could obtain them,
gee, I'd be too old to read
them then, I'd be him, dad.

EPITAPHS

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

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

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

THE ONE

If gravity's angel is
the unfallen one,
the only one
aloft, if.

It's paper I write on, page
you read, but is it ever
pagge? That
unpronounceable

is where
the sacrifice
occurs, the merge—
Like Sylvia in Leopardi's lament

we fall, in fact we flop:
our slack hands helpfully point
out the inadvertent
directions of death—

the right a tomb in the air,
the left a mausolith,
the one I write with.
And now all

the others recto verso show
their distance the one,
the only one
I live with, if.

THE FUTILIST

Is there a single inch—
one square millimeter
on the face of our planet
which some animal
human or otherwise
has not shit on?

Is there anywhere even a
pore's-worth of ground—
earth that has never
(not once in its eons)
been covered by what
golgotha of dung?

If such a place exists,
I want to go there
and stand there
at that site
in that spot, truly
and purely for an instant.

Note:
Futilist to dream of an edenic site untainted by waste
and decay. As the last line indicates, even if he found
that mythical speckpoint, in one instant his mere
presence would defile it for ever.

POEM

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

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

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

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

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

(stanza break)

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

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

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

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

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

up into the sky goes
two lungs worth
of earth

(no stanza break)

unstrung
unloosed
the exhaled
soul of a boy a girl

alloonaloft
aloftalloon
lost

THE SILO

The silo
longs to feel itself full,
if only for an interval—

Its ribs expand once yearly as
the host of harvest
enters a space
unbearable to the nil,
painfully utopian in its display
of plenty.

But soon after that sate
moment slowly
each ear of corn is paid out
over the days until
only empty shucks
and echoes fill the crib-cage,
its grasp lies
reduced to wisps, to waste.

Mice round the slats of its walls
without pausing because
nothing's there
on the floor. Nothing and all
of nothing's needs.
Modest winds brush through.

Circumspect as someone
retracing their signature
on a death certificate,
going over each letter
a second, unnecessary time.

AN INSTRUCTOR'S DREAM

Many decades after graduation
the students sneak back onto
the school-grounds at night
and within the pane-lit windows
catch me their teacher at the desk
or blackboard cradling a chalk:
someone has erased their youth,
and as they crouch closer to see
more it grows darker and quieter
than they have known in their lives,
the lesson never learned surrounds
them; why have they come? Is
there any more to memorize now
at the end than there was then—
What is it they peer at through shades
of time to hear, X times X repeated,
my vain efforts to corner a room's
snickers? Do they mock me? Forever?
Out there my past has risen in
the eyes of all my former pupils but
I wonder if behind them others
younger and younger stretch away
to a day whose dawn will never
ring its end, its commencement bell.

SALON POEM IN LEAFGRAVURE

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

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

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

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

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

SNOWS AND SNATCHES

Hurry for heaven's favorite
paperweight descends to press
the verses down that long to lift
us off within their endless draft,
away before its story ends.

Go bind in blind that white sheet-write
or let its stray-sleet countercloud
stay the fables that come to light
unfastening their thrust on. There

are no drifts a man of it might
survive unless he melts every less
word that seams our pupilpane in
streams dividing day's span with
what its windownight withstands.

Now dawn strands his snows and
snatches in fall from all he's lost
unless that book once caught his
page wedged in both its hands.

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,

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'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 teetertoed his

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

toward the devouring bless
this coldsnap moment's incised

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

grail incarnations of slush
frail trail we fugitives mashed

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

palls in the mornings' stale mess
of luminescence. Sunrise

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

versus some thumbed thesaurus)
this polar-stamped dirt contrasts

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

extinguished glimmer glimpses
shattered all their gleams I guess—"

Stoic, lone, those shine-lines cast
to show no magnificence

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

critters croaked, varmints vanished
species extinct or deathwish—

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

on church-prayers' lack-response.

Their trek unlike ours abounds.

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

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

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

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

Before the snow's blind expanse
blunders every further fence

a walk may stop precipice
top this fierce fenestrate lens

but what happens then depends
on some lost, glossed over sense.

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

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

(Let elf and unicorn dash
climate at its timeliest

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

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

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

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

*

A Brief on the Great Pyramid

The Great Pyramid has been spared the ruining incursions of storm, rain and winter (imagine it in Norway or Brazil). But some say its interior is filled with millenia of showers, snowmelt, hailstones in flood. And that if that granary of water was ever released it would inundate the desert. An ocean would occur. Formless endless waves, enveloping and barren, the sole exception being the GP's peak, that lone, irreproachable island. Others say this sea inside is simply the sweat of the slaves who built it, hidden teardrops repressed in the daily cloud of submission, sobs that ebbed before they were born.

CAESAR LEARNING TO JUMP ON CHESSMEN'S BACKS

Why he'd have to be taught what comes
so normally to male-kind is puzzling,
unless inbreeding of noble strains has
left him esthetic, less stoic, timorous—
a child, his toes babyfat, his bare soles
poised in the approved Colossus-of-Rhodes
at the count of three jump up and down;
while his tutors applaud young gods
the fragments are brushed away by slaves,
the black-and-white pieces crushed
bloodily together form a tragic alternate
ideal society where the kings queens
etcetera are indistinguishable from
the pawns, and maybe that's the fun—
no rival to the Rome where the scum
who whisk away the grey-by-defeat shards
are neutered or both and made so
at birth, representative of the mass:
consigned to bear their broken brethen
down past the intuitive, the dirt that heaps
their dirt beyond lowest dungeons and
to bury there the chess-bits that spoiled
the boyking's heels, his small insteps
and ankles, indeed the entire tootsies
of the six-year-old Emperor must then
be amputated just below the shin, be
replaced after every lesson by the royal
transplant surgeons. Which could explain
that curious adage (that Cretan riddle),
“Where do our plebs go without feet?”

MYSTERY MOVIE

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

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

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-cthonic 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 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.
But 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.

DREAMTIDE

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

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

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

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

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

THE MALL-TIQUE ESTHETIC

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 superfluous.

*

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.

APPLE

Pack your bathtub with humankind.
Your closet with animaldom.
Let grassmost spill from your shelves.

Cram the world into your house,
overlooking no cubbyhole
no corner. Surrender your personal

to matter external,
privacy to plethora,
fill each space with all.

Leave no room for yourself, though—
how foolish that would be.
For, as the fruit is a little

recantation on the part of bitterness,
a letting up of its overkill reign,
so this surfeit will solve

for a while your null.

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?

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

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

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 card-dealt 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

ride out the rims of, our souls plow-low
so none of them neither else can share
what, except for that single instance of
sidelong, that helpless avoidance, that
glimpse of other lives we might have
shared a respite with on this junctured
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.

DOLLY THE EWE FIRST CLONE OF THE WORLD

Turflods 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,

no wonder it injects my replicant's
empties over trashcan allah horizon:
I innoculate that termongrel daily
until he has his waste's worth of it
or till 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.

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—
until each pried segpiece tells
our foretell, go on, 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.

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 would 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.

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

DRAMA

Tiresias's fingers trace the scars
on the ankles of Oedipus
to map out the blind routes
he will advise us not to follow

Newtonisms cling
like crumbs to his mouth
each distance is aimed straight
plumblines measure these murders

the crowd gathers in the square
fruit plucked from keyholes
fill their hands while
plague-winds surge through them to make aisles

upstairs alone the artist
leans over carefully
and blots her watercolor
with camels to dry it

ANTICIPATION

Before the bell rings,
let's put on our uniforms,
pre-don and suit-up prior,
prepared in proper attire,
occasion-costumed.

If a comic alarmclock frowns
its brow to get set to let go,
stick on a mask, a face-circle
whose eyelashes tick
from numeral to numeral.

Say it's a tall church steeple
and it takes a deep well of a breath,
an inhale-heave readying to ring,
drape yourself in the smudgy fringes
of sermons and elegies.

If it's only a bicycle huffing
and puffing to expel
its tiny pedally peal,
pull on your shorties and shifts
until they tuck your knees.

A dinner-gong, you must
tie up your bib-knot in huge swaths,
large lashings of effort. It should
always go flourished thus
ruffs and fluffs for the feed.

Prepare yourself for the tolling
of time, don't be caught without

the proper clothing
for clang, tinkle, or teaspout.
But sadly if it's the bell that tells

your day has fled and flit,
your poem needs an edit,
don't bother looking through the closet
for that outfit,
you don't have it.

CONTINUOUS SHOWINGS

The days all drawn to December
can't remember their own
though every shopwindow offers
24 hour plus. It is precisely this
excess of time, this hyperhoopla
extolled by even the smallest streets,
their torturous emporia, tedium
temples that fly the boxoffice flag
higher each weekend, or towers
with clocks that would love to stick
their hands like neckticktockties
down into the traffic, that's the stuff
that stabs me in stride. No wonder

I run to take cover before the FX
kick in, witness en masse to those
of us who crouch in our pockets
trying to conceal the serial killer
zopcams we use to chop ourselves up
for camouflage, face snaps and shots
which hide us inside our wallets.
How beamingly we blend in with
our A-Z via the usual ID charade.
Isn't that me we quiz the sentry
who scans our cards with laser
razors while we bleed the answer,
fearing that most bandages lack
those panacea, those superpowers

(no stanza break)

evinced most and emblemized by
the youth-roles of film, the skilled
portrayals of its hero-informal mold.

It is the movies have made me old.
Looking up struck at the blankgaze
screen I see that I too must suffer
that knowledge which the brow
burrows beneath its furrows to show
the visible effort an idea creates
if nothing else. All else is else.

Surface the mind repeats as pure,
hear my TV mirrormode: I can always
remote a world's particulars, my
closeups can quell-control the quick
extinctions of your soul in oceanroll
or twig miniscule; lens can always
find a puddle to push around or
a forest to erase from a woodcut,
but Jan-to-Nov, now it's gone, no.

TAROT PORTRAIT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ORPHEAD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

stray now he sights
dame straightway at last.

Late now Europe-land
has eured 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.

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 fidgeiter

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

ITCH

too many words but
if you could pare
them down to what
your fingernails scratch
over 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
fleshparchment
so is that spot
virgin reserved for
Mallarmé perhaps
untouched till god or
devil autopist writes
theirs there

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

(stanza break)

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

APARTNESS

They placed the sky
in birds instead
of inside themselves.

Now from pane to pane the sun
must depend
on the clarity of elsewhere.

An expanse of please,
the day regained,
its goodness land.

But there are mondotrash
who still war and waste
in border disputes
brave Procrustes' realm.

They let their gods debate
the measure mete,
the counterfeit of zeroes.

Hell's lepidopteral heirs,
heap dragons.

They are lost.
They are blind, they are shoeless
as an orchestra of exits.

They are us.

We place the bird in skies
who have misplaced it
inside ourselves.

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

ISLANDS

Garden hoses on horseback
gallop through the desert
to fill up the gulfs
that surround us.

Born of the birds who leave
their eggs on the rim
of volcanoes, then fly off
never to return:
that urging warmth
erupts us into form.

Lava solidifies the sea
for binoculars of hourly ships
whose cruel captains allow
the stowaway days
no shore, no leave.

But the wisdom of archipelago,
how one must stop sometimes
to meet one's feet
on sites prepared for none.

Over each beach
senior sand and junior dune
establish their shifty dynasty.

Meanwhile look at all the water.

The waves
are swimmers no-one saves.

NO

If only no-man's-land
were not nomadic; if
that disarmistice place

were meant to be mapped
and did not constantly
waver between us shifting

reserves; if there were a cease
in which to find peace,
a lull to sing among,

to sing our bye to: a site
in whose endless sign
genesis could be lost.

POEM

1

the same face peered from both our eyes
but not to say goodbye

the scene rejects your precious how-to

pervaded by dripping moments
notice the immobility of one

see enemies free of their graves finally

2

more born than alive
too born to be alive
the penis rides

through a bullet palace

(aboard the meow express
or the purr local

even a snowfall
unveils its air
of sole percussions

on wielderwings

3

He found in lapse
his body's solo data—

it left him whole
without the halve-of-love.

4

I was eager to play place,
to bet the the blue racetracks
that run beneath my skin—
and even to dare win.

5

I swept the mirror under the rug,
the rug under the house,
only now I have no floor.

And still the scene insists
there be no secrets,
no distance cloaked in Ithaca.

Too late—
its gates are hung on bars,
ledges blindfold all its windows.

In the past, in youth's nether,
how fast they climb
the steps of my tailspin.

NOVADOOR

To bear the light
as it grows ever

is no way unless
I want to waste

the ease of what
stays but the feet

won't let me. I
exist by repeating

I immediately
even though my

insistent rent of
past-tense has

close-focus cursed
what's left of this

redundant
page, contagious

singularity. They
try to spread the key.

SUMMER PARAPHRASE

Sweeping the floor and mopping
the laptop, these are my chores,—
my household daily quest for darkness,
the evil clustering in the dust
under the bed, behind the couch,
(see that laugh-jag on the ceiling—)
wrath's detritus. The past pleads
goodbye, but our verdict is why.
I roam to clean, feeling over-welcomed
by the amount of clutter the air
accumulates just being itself; added
to the mess I make it's enough
to fill one's life, that pile of totalities
which counts prize days from those
average and therefore desolate,
seeing out the window how leaves
can't even lift their own branches
from the downward that loves them.
Turning back to this backlit page,
I find the sun has picked it out,—
through its links of shade I see
the motes floating in each sunbeam
seem more etched, more stable
than these I've set my margins for.

CONTRARY

Dawn leaks consequence. Where it will,
hovering over appletree or railroad, all
bright angles, letting the hopes happen.

Maybe the day is blue, meaning south,
meaning drought can find a path in it,
lack can offer it reasons for not being—

But if the day were gray, would plenitude
negate it? These eithers make a laugh.
They do not consider my health, how

it depends on neitherness neutrality,
on tepid clemencies and staling bread,
room temperature always preferred.

My armchair sits beneath a glowing
antenna which even hums a little to ease
what I concern. Twilight, chores done,

the overflow of panting elevators appears
frayed, decayed, despite ferocious washing;
a wasteland imposes grateful ants. Some

say the afterlife will console our taste
for communism: faraway docility, dog-boy,
can you restore such douceur? Transitory

commeasurate, the body's border throws
that origin an old lens stained with
the remoteness of incest. Tilled bare,

ground mutes me, bored rascal ill;
I maladministrate the war of handshakes:
sweet rain nets too much pit. Covert

holes perforate air. Then hints of dark
guidance—are sky's ways unsullied by
route or is it all pre-mapped, programmed

by fate? Here you and I are loath: we
conspire with appears, coy counterfeits,
zeroing in on the spoils that fill spoons

daily with hesitation while intention
awaits all festivity. All reception. Or else.
I'd sink sulkwise if it weren't such regress.

PATIENCE

Snapshots rot first at the edges,
little cracks like escape routes
point beyond
the frame home.

Silhouette stabbed
by a treeleaf, night
at the window. Gushers
of headlights, cars
that chase the blinds
across the ceiling.

The face always expects
to perform
its own innocence.
Beyond question.

Just squint into the sun
until the camera calms down.

VITAL SIGNS

Suicides are the pulse of time.
Its BP and temp are not, however,
Births and weddings respectively.

I respect all three, though;
I even regulate myself accordingly—
Because hours, even instants,

Require our belief or else
They will become forever;
The transitory needs us to pledge

Ourselves to its exit, yet this is a typically
Poetic phhft-thought, a whish of words,
A Rilkemilky blancmange.

The ground breaks off a bit of dust
To give to us, a little crust
For the lips of the lost.

PICTURE

Meadow of matchsticks,
soon to be rekindled
by Spring the incendiary.

The exact flame of your blossoms
will ignite the passions
happily sapped by time—

Dripdrop their excess went
and now miners' hats
light up like love before

your vein, the frame of which
is there to depict the drift,
the waste when I painted

all the review copies
they sent me. But those books
open to polar pages where you

and I weigh the ends of this
teeter totem down, you
at the head and nadir me;

there where postmortem is
the aura of self-portrait,
its other half regained at last.

MEANING LOSS

Imagine a world disguised as art,
or one in which art masquerades
as you, so your face is just a portrait,
your legs a landscape. Your hair
abstract expressionism. And when
you go to the window each morning
you glimpse in each transfiguring pane
a streak of the vein source of things:
that your eyelashes remain nothing
but brushstrokes, that your feet
beneath it all are woodcuts. And when
you open the door to inquire how
a rose can limp between the breasts
of the dawn, you feel like a collage
snipped from the pages of a novel
whose words have always remained
immune to meaning, whose plot is
not subject to that mute truthserum.

EXTINCTSPHINX

Underline these half-written words as
if to say their incompleteness increases—
italicizes my meaning. Similar such
those partials out of which

dinosaurologists construe
that overpowering, that overtowering—
that propped up by the very worship
it yearns to bite in two.

*

In selfswamp submerged then
to breathe through reeds of piss
that gold god's evening panes
barely adumbrate: they know how

to improve the ceiling by
removing the floor.

*

Birthdays having leapt their children,
hesitation of candle, endless fugitive.
A shudder emptied itself into your eyes.

*

Goodbye now,
for my coat is changing hands upon me.

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.

SETTLERS (MICHIGAN MEMORY #6)

a child careening evening
to intersect with his hands
his so-lending touch underlining the offense

the field's blinding surrounds them
binds them where formerly
the eye was pronounced

fenced in by freezeframes
marshcupids frogjacuzzis
dawn pushing a whiff of whitecaps

acrobats portraying smoke
what horizons hold
the hammock's voluptuous veto

wasteland where nails love
to discipline our house
its noise drinks the little names

may eagles guard your grave
is this a blessing or a curse
hunchback crushed to a hunchfoot

what face without finding its lips has kissed me
fountain whose yield is field is fall
a white animal edits our cradle

ALL OF THE WORDS

I know the days ahead
are the days I had given
up on before but when
were there ever any more.

Like waves that sleeve the sand
thoughts ruffle my forehead
until I must push driftwood
into facades of fortitude.

They sold their courage to gain
my fear. The fathers, I mean.

Time is thin in the arms of a machine.

Why are there more of us
waiting like this.
Eyelids mark the place
where sleep was always thinnest.

Even in the streets one is voiceless mute.
Listen. Wheels call by name
each passerby to blame.

What crybone schism, what night
is still trying to onsite
all of the words I ergo forgot.

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.

MYTHICAL RITUALS

Every day another roc moults,
every feather crushing
another town where
Notnose and Shyeye
and Wrontongue
are conspiring.

As always the blood
of martyrs drips
straight to hell:
a purple plumb-line,
a Tyre-wire true.

The hundred-husked heartvalve
tries to find hope
in these instances.
But each day brings more.

Each day we open
a door whose keyhole
shrinks around us.

INTENT

Stalactites can hang their mangy lava
anywhere, but I have to cling to these arms
that descend into hands. Nights I probe

the walls for guidance to the cave
they're hiding in there. Ordinary house
on any street with huge divestitures

of hope above it, the soul I was saving
for rapture. And so I have to adhere
to this doorless expanse scattering birds

its bareness. This sky is why I cannot pry
myself loose from certain caresses I gave
years ago; their tentacle strands leave

ampukisses on limp horizons. These
tendernesses dispensed in my wake
constantly plant tendrils around my intent.

AGAIN

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

if I found that aperture
whose verge protests
at my constant

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

promises to restore
the tender sill its
welcome mat violates;

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

if I only knew
why it alone
amongst the millions

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

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

PLUNGE

at night one drop of rain
falls from each star
as if it were being lowered
on a string

and yet that storm of plummets
is never enough
to wet any of the planets
that pass through it

only the blackness the space
between us is washed
away by these singular
lettings-down of water

distance is washed away
all the worlds merge
for a liquid moment
our island eyes

and suddenly we understand
why umbrellas love
to dive
into clouds

POEM

barbershop in the desert
where I shave
the cacti daily
so carefully that no
pearl of their water
is spilled by my razor

come closingtime
the needles I've sheared
cover the floor so
I sweep them all
into the closet
to fructify the feet
of my secret cactus
which I keep
to replace the barberpole
who defected
up into the hills
out into the aisles
of my clientele

my virility my male
principle I'll
trim so bare
and never a drop
of its sperm
will I spare

WHAT

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

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

WISHINGWELL

I weigh the coin in my hand
against the water's clarity
that shines up at my shadow—
what wealth to smash apart that
gleaming calm with my claim
on the future, my need to be
rewarded with all I owe.

I stand above the well wondering
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-perhaps' deepest ore,
there where the end gathers
will my silver ever bring me
any of the gold it shatters?

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 airs enjoyed by the eyed.

RECONCILIATIONS

To be married while sleepwalking
and wake up on your honeymoon
abandoned by the prankster pals who
led you both in blind steps through
the nuptial rites that culminate here
in what-the-hell: to wake with lewd
glowing rings glued to your fingers,
the hotel bed unmade around you—

Outside your bridal suite what resort
explodes with ennui, its white tropical
walls will yield that one photograph
that shows you shining, your eyes
aimed shut by the sun. Natives wave
bandannas that flaunt their unstorebought
power. Your pockets pacified by beggars,
that day is almost over. The night awaits.

And then you're home again, but oh
it's so hard to restore the routines
that are a now of the old, the remote
control too big for two who hold hands,
noting how the pattern of the crimes
seems to shift from channel to channel,
but always that financier has fled
the country, has found his freedom where

you lost yours. Soon in the freezer section
fate may feed your fingertips, or taking
out the trash becomes an expedition:
for the accomplished somnambulist
escape is easy everywhere. But even
that land whose lack of extradition
has followed you throughout this farce
will fail to exile the happy couple.

SNUFFED

The candle's leaf
is what we call those drops
that cling solidified
up along its length
after it's been blown out—

We switch on the overheads. Outside,
branches bode, bode, bode.
What
do they predict?

Descent is all,
they're not specific, unlike
our phrase
for this froze ooze
(which beads the bole)
(and which is more like sap than leaf)
this effluvium, this sheaf
that trickled from a flame we lit once
days or years ago.

Time, our sentence, is specific.
Memory, its syntax, vague.
The melt is where they meet—
inksoil syllables dribbling down a page.

FLEDGLINGS OF THE CYMBAL

Dawn, the ledge of day, is where
every dreamer's reflexes are tested;
one misstep is enough. Each waking
is a fall from that high surefootedness,

a descent from grace. All sleepers
thread their beds with this steadiest
of paths that they may arrive at last
in the plunge, the giddiness of worlds grasp—

Now who shall lift his hands to show
an hourglass in each armpit: birds emerge
screeching, we devour his wormgroin.
His moist declivities scour our habits.

When evening empties the buildings of
what is tall in them, we will return
each to his roost, ledging and listening
to a percussionist lapping against lily pads.

WAIT TILL TONIGHT

Sometimes a dream will show me the words I need to begin and end and then take them away and leave just one word or, like last night, three or four: "the arms of care." That's all. There were lots more but they vanished when my eyes opened; they were of course the words I need here now to justify this. How can I forgive myself for forgetting them, forgetting that which might have made me whole for a while holding you all in my arms of care??

REFLECTION

Some are afraid of the deep;
me, of the shallows.

It's not possible to drown in it,
but it is possible to delve in it;
which is worse?

I lean over a mudpuddle,
bend to a pane-drop.

The shallows
is where I sight myself;
the abyss
shows all you others.

Which is worse?

ENCOUNTER

Is there truly no secret
I may forget for you?
No, you answer, others have already
forgotten all my secrets for me, thank you.
You're polite about it.
A shrug says sorry.
Those others, they are obviously your true companions,
whereas I—
Now you go back intent to what you were doing,
before my insane interruption.
I crackle my cigarette pack.
I look at you sideways.
I don't want to intrude, I'm discrete.
I sit and drink my capuccino. Will we ever meet?
I doubt it and besides,
I've already forgotten what it was
I bothered you with in the first place.
Whatever it was I said,
it's your secret now.
I'll never know.

EVICTION PROCESS

Wreckball all the highrises:
then use the cornerstones of those
leveled towers to create my castle:
composed solely of foundationstones,
each one of which was blessed
with a ceremony, a literal
groundbreaking and therefore whole;
each block unique,
inscribed with ritual aggrandisements;
each planted solemnly:
each underpin-laid as the bedrock
its lesser brothers would rest on:
use only those rootstones to raise
the walls of my eyrie house hideaway
whose forbidding frame will have
no real infrastructure, whose form
will be a spiritual suspension
(cradle crux kernel hub core)
wherein each establishingstone
must cohere solid with the weight
of its having once been named
in salutation as such—but surely
when these maidenstones these
consecratalstones are placed
together to make home my dream
my ideal occupancy, then surely
due to the baseless act
of imagining this acme of architecture
I will not be allowed to live here.

AN UNDERSTANDING UNNATURALLY PROLONGED

Someone was talking on the telephone marked for hello while at the opposite end of the café the phone for goodbye was free: we couldn't hear her voice at our equidistant midway table crowded with standup toasts shouted down, our congrats visible in the confidence with which napkins surged from loose collars: at the booth across from us sat a party crying, shaking their faces out of their hair. They stayed our share with such contrast—hours went by, days; we feasted, they lamented. On our exit finally we went past the hello phone still in use, she was still talking there and we were amused, amazed at her persistence until, peering way down towards the goodbye phone still on its hook, suddenly we understood the boothful who wept in our wake. How we continue in hello though there is none to go goodbye. How we live while they die. And as we did we were often struck by how long that understanding took to pass, yes, how unnaturally it seemed to linger.

PANE PERHAPS

I bear the bulb that never burns out
so why do I change it daily, discarding
every light as if it were dark—is this
how I try to extinguish doubt? If
all the face I hold to its lips outshines
and shapes each path my steps ape:
fills each millisecond socket with
such purpose that the stray-goer gaunt
with desire for that glow no other
mirror gyred into my eye can descry
finds himself most of lost, most of past—
resentful he soars toward that mirage.
By now his staircase is replaceless in
this house of spiral pursuant maze,
told to a secret code deciphered by
coincidence but aren't they all: in rooms
where our waits wilt like the heart
of a coffee-vend machine dripping
time, moments for an hourglass where
intonations of high tide trip one's tongue.

Day the sky takes up its task of wings,
night the way we lay down ours.

TRICKLEMAN, TRICKLEMAN, WASH ME AWAY

Is it habit, is it human,
clinging to a pet wheel,
to make me his last, his breast heir?

Yet how valiant the fish are to trace
the blood of each worm
back to him.

Anybody can play the hero
to etymology's silence: each of us
can bruise that pre-amphibian, that ooze.

That's why I must forget this man
whose past is fresh
from being abolished . . .

But why bare words, why threadwater thin—
just to fill gnarls up,
just to replete the studious ceiling?

AIM

I have arrived but
Have I, have I really—

Maybe to say that I
Have arrived is wrong.

Maybe I have instead
Merely uncovered,

Bared for myself
A destination that

Was here all along,
Till now concealed,

Till now not found.

(—But have I really gone?)

APRIL AFTERNOON

From barberpoles the white
should be stripped to bandage
all the bypassers' wounds.

Their clothing seems to consist
of tickets brandished to the theater;
every kiosk's counter is bare.

These shapes are assumed
out of fidelity to the mask
that covers them with less and less.

And yet there is always the danger
of excess. Naked, the street
might lie prey to a merchant's

deliberating broom: birds
and categorical pushcarts might tie
cherrystems to our eyelashes.

Spring imposes its pomp, its priorities.
In the middle of this effortless palace
an orgy takes off its socks.

PROOF

If time is relative,
so that it might be 12 AM
in 1966 for me,
12 PM in 3002 for you,
and for everyone else
another when-ever;
and if each person exists
within this own moment,
then, since there can exist only
one true time, one of us
is alone on this earth.

It's theirs by right,
because theirs is the exact present
and ours isn't.
The rest of us are like nowhere.

Imagine the rest of us
just haunting around,
pounding upon the walls of
that one person, pleading
with him or her
to please let us in, please,
but will they ever hear our cries.

POEM: AS IF THE AT-TOUCH WERE SOUGHT

I know there is something lost
in the palm of my right hand,
and perhaps I shouldn't look
for it, but through weakness I do—
or is it duty drives me? Whatever
it is that has gone astray here
escapes me as I scrape and peer
at what seems so utter placid
insipid a place. Or is my vision
superficial:—hasn't this skin
struggled against the invasion
of interfering ulterior—alien
hubristic objects—items—elements—
contents of any kind—: don't
its lines over-hint at the strain
it must have suffered to try and
maintain that emptiness, that
apparent void which stares back
as if to say, what I have least
misplaced there's me? Refusing
the fortunes which palmreaders
boast of, should the palm insist
on its innocence in this case,
indemnified against all loss—
(could any future who dared to
trespass here, bear that cost?)
Vacant, perfect, such purity
grows normal: what an ordinance
between my grasp and the poor
things I grasp!—albeit dollars, kisses
or others' hands, hands always
wishing they could unyield world's

toehold. For in whose cause would I
commit that sin and rip open,
vacate this veil that might conceal
every fate its surface traces
clearly as a false demure of lust—
already else, how can this lack
elusive mask occupy me wrist
downwards, and beyond that
unawares as it were, in thought
only, or has it covered most
of that too. And isn't this just what
the thumb is searching for (or
is it checking up on—testing
the snugness, the smug resilience
of such a consummate, ingrained
transparency) when, absentmindedly,
automatically, without finding
anything but that which is lost,
it rubs itself amongst the rest,
those strangers known as fingers?

REPLICA DAYS

A statue disguised
as the lines in your palm
longs to love you
though still you resist
its endless caresses.

Just as the smoke
of burnt portraits
clings to mirrors.
Similarly ashes of dolls fill up
a child's footprints.

Rain also, in the event
an iceberg's
mourning-clothes.

Dawn drapes you:
you put your arm in one sleeve
and the other sleeve
begins to bleed.

PERSPECTIVE

I must look down to see
the things that fall
into the well

(coins
teardrops
stopsigns

sunsets
planets
etcets)

because when I don't
look down to see
them suddenly

they all
start to fall
on me

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