

Collected Poems

Volume I

Edward Locke

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TO MAE WEST, WHOSE HOUR-GLASS FIGURE HAS RUN
ITS TIME in *LYNX EYE*
TRAVERSE in *ECHOES*
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FOR ELISABETH AND JANET

FOR DAVID

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A VOICE FROM PORK CHOP HILL

The shrapneled speak
Like dolphins to one another, miles off,
Something inside them beyond them. The language
Is sea perfection. As if through the medium,
There is some
Tripwave of goodbye.
Borges says the ocean is the effigy of Poseidon.
But what the wounded symbolize,
They will sink into.

The pierced die
On battlefields like red dust floating out of sunlight.
What seems clear air never is,
Yet the nullified
Even on cooler mountain slopes
Fill those gaps where nothing rushes down.

A dead seaman, riding dolphins in erotic dreams,
Dead privates in the bunker, trench and beach,
A dead airman falling, bemedalling a fleck of mud,
All gentlemen of wounds and tightlipped tourniquets,
And nurses blood-drenched, the day-dutied in early bedding
The way microorganisms atop the Pacific
Drain at night from the sun as far as the end of life allows.

Two intricately grenaded.
It was as if my sweat ran in streams inside his stomach,
And sweet as Alexander to the flies.
Where it poured in my helmet, each drop
Drowned six bugs unlisted
By the American Museum of Natural History.

The blasted in the foxholes are hit as on early earth
When meteors landed. A part of the planet shakes,
flesh-heaved

From the crater.
The hole eventually
Takes cover as, paradoxically,
Things in trauma spread toward the center.

Who'll die in the next war, that is, the next universe?
Children, certainly, and mites in the air.
What is finitely tender but cannot recover.
Unselected targets bellycrashed, in the way of precision.
Ravens will nibble on radiation, starlings in infrared reel.

Bury me here, in these dark hills.
Here I shall watch eternity made visible
Into the solemn solid state where I set ideals to rest,
Hear the last trumpet which is not Taps but a melancholy
cornet,
A shofar, a bugle, cupped hands, all grunting the chords
Of an innocent music. Here I shall breathe oblivion
And place it on stones.

Now I have abandoned disgust. Nothing about my body
Repels. Nothing in morality prevents. There is such excess
of forgiveness
That forgiveness spends its seed. Malice has outlived its
children and gone howling
Into the wilderness, past Lincoln. I am alone, a
Taos-disbeliever.
I disbelieve in god-adorned buttes, enchanted mesas, legends
of saved mothers,
Dough embodying. I hear with Neruda a red noise of bones.
With Singer I see the power of darkness mimic the power of
light.
But like a Navajo, I count my wealth in songs.

RAPID FIRE

I want to stare further show me more film
Documentaries, clips, stolen German archives,
Freelance photos, more of the war
The Second World War with no color, but stunning
Allies the Germans fatigue with fatigue the
 contours of hostility
Prints of necks, buttocks, hanging legs, bridges blown,
The reality of battle that shifts except for the buried – fill me
 with film,
Pour into me, a crater overflowing,
A celluloid sea rolling with the shots of action,
Screens, screams, I want to be immense with war,
With dogfights, even Allied loss, camera clichés,
The Spitfire rollercoasting downward, the smoking carrier,
 montaged lifeboats,
Grim barges splattered with grime, puffs, exploring shells,
Brim me with expectations of artillery, closeups of Nazi
 armies advancing,
Smirking SS, Jews rounded up, Stars of David protruding
 from their bones,
Their arms raised, bring me the Jews of Amsterdam, Prague,
The naked pile like an atomic chain: move one and the
 dead's energy
Dashes into another into another camouflage me
 railroads
Bombs plunging, scattering, waddling into invisibility, the
 so-silent bursts,
I wish to see more Germans saluting, the rallies opening
Like huge fields of poppies, peonies, lilies,
Till the whole of each field is one roar of unfolding,
Possess me with that movie with the fearing and the
 carbonized
Give me pictures of tanks in flotillas tanks smoldering
 uphill
 platoons bracketed mortar rounds

Airmen sprinting to their cockpits, thumbs up, run me the
flick
Of captured cities of the mediocre of the everyday
trying the lines
I want to live every death, each egregious horror, each error,
Victims the victim
Fill me with footage, I need more
More pitchfork farmers searching for parachutists,
The prancing Hitler, the saltimbanqued soldier twisted in the
wave and gazing as if for applause
Mussolini entrained near Paris, the Russians regrouped with
music,
Snowbounds lies and truths mixed like leftover weapons,
Polish children surrendering, hands raised,
Boys dug up like worms in the forest near Stalingrad
Jews jumping into gravesites, descending
I must see the cinema of the dead private, tight lips grained
with silver
I will behold cannon show me the carried
flamethrower
Filling the wombs of enemy women with ashes
Shrapnel the rubble of open eyes in the streets
The refugees like tumbled buildings sitting in streets
Soup and blood in the gutters diggings the beautiful
landings
In the face of batteries the clean-shaven gas
chambers
The war only the war let me have peace even like
war
Peace that runs before my eyes in one illusion
Tying the separate dying

THE STAMPED

When dusk's letter is dropped each p.m.
Into the slot of my undeliverable life,
I wrap it further with tape, never slitting its edge.
Peer into day if that's your custom, but the habit of night
Must fold its information, hidden;

So I sleep sealed, ignorant of body classifications
Slipping from one tension and scale onto another,
And the horrors dawn confines, though as on a silver tray.

I know Copernicus predicted for me, Galileo wirepulled,
While Bruno in twilight
Rose to a fiery end like stars he cross-connected –

Neglect's a poor word, and so is threnody,
But heralds must live with those post-facts in me.
I turn then offhand from arduous labor and ardor,

Searing for a man consumed in blazings of *Mein Kampf*
And the blackened titles of flaming files
In small Nazi offices sucking in bombs
Who wishes, having licked Dachau,
A brief rest, a brief belief in rest.

CLEAN THROUGH

Why wasn't the living room selected? The porch in back,
Two sides screened, where dogwoods might shadow him
From morning sun? But instead he lies, a ghost on the
bathroom floor,
Invisible to my wife who cleans through him.
The black and vanilla tile form a difficult bed.
He lies, not my older brother, in the uniform of a soldier of
a war
Twenty years old. And he seems the same age.
Nothing like my brother who was blonde, thinner, shorter,
Who alone on a South Pacific atoll surrendered
On a reef, his helmet miffed with one hole,
The mica of jutting rocks silently watching an American
stink
Near a huge palm, as I have imagined it, with purple birds,
Bowers of papaya bliss, the madrepores in moonlight like
a choir
Of children clinging to the enchanting stained-grass light,
And nearby, a little indigene – I don't know how brown –
Peering through leaves nearly as broad as she is tall at
the soldier
On his back kissed by ordinary combers. And now this body
Who looks as if he may grab my heel when I shave.
He wears the medal of the South Pacific theater
Of operations, and holds his mien as dignified
As a chief actor, other-related, yet lonely.
But after the shower, his stare is damp. When I urinate,
Does it remind him of the grave? This morning my wife
enters.
She washes through him. She wipes the mirror
With a towel so old it is mostly waving fronds,
But the dead private with the dark hair cannot speak
Or resemble anyone. He is below his image.

AUSCHWITZ

He never, like adults, had eaten grass,
Though at Auschwitz he saw no cake, or toy.
There had been no time to mark his arm.
He grabbed her hand as they walked toward the shower
of gas
And whispered, watching her, “But I was a good boy.”

GÖRING IN HIS CELL

Tubby or not tubby: a gourmand groan.
What dignity for an unmastered race?

I drank elk's blood and fed my fatso face
On Rembrandt grapes, but nothing to the Allied
Repulses more than outlaw suicide –
The deep-thirst German moment of my own.

Some claim there's no togetherness in dying –
It's all propeller rip, the bullet's tune
Into your gauge or cheek, one wingtip sighing,
Outbursts of flaps, a pilot's glory strewn;
Far lonelier the English gallows scene
Where herring-folk judge me absurd: between
Defeat and pudginess, posterity
Hangs me upon the cross of irony.

UNDER THE SOIL OF FRANCE

Since 1916, the Somme war ditch
Reveals at mounds of rage-spent shells
Many fist-hatchet tools Europeans,
Outgrowing caves, learned to notch.

Mires of debris and trenches wither
Haphazard archaeology
Where shards from that misfired campaign
Show odd alliances together.

Here filaments of honed flint smother
Burned meteors of bombs. Both births
Were bursts of eras; now dates
Of death fall into one another.

**AFTER AN EVENING WITH AN ARMENIAN
FRIEND**

When you crack an adjective, what lies inside?
Rubies? When a verb spills its guts, was it all
Pretentious crystals, was it exaggeratedly aberrant?
She portrayed the massacre, the Young Turks
 pistol-whipping
And snidely insinuating the barrels inside her ancestors'
 mouths,
The report which shatters windows today. Her idea was
 witness,
For she was a seer with her grandmother's nouns. I said,
That is remote. The language is shelled and won't break
 open,
The costumes are oversimple, and the names –
Varoujan, Siamanto – as theatrical and richly deliberate
As the passion of St. Matthew genius Bachs testify to.
Besides, my father's anecdotes of Cossacks toasting Jews
Was exoticism enough. But she appealed, How can I tell it
 in rational language?
And I followed her tears. Her tissue tumbled to the floor,
A fallen vigil. So I dropped to my knees.
I took her hand. Dig your nails into my palm, I urged.
She dug sharply, sharper, until I noticed my blood
Rush to the door as if in Picasso's *Guernica*,
Wondering what caused the explosion and horror
Inside. Stronger, I said. Her nails pushed sideways toward
 her Anatolian eyes,
And searched deeper. Deeper. Ah, finally, I said. Now
 I remember.

SPANISH SERENADE

General Milan Astray...an invalid who
lacks the spiritual grandeur of Cervantes....
– Unamuno

Unamuno of Salamanca
Looked at the moon and cried the blueshirts
Closed my class but like the moonrise
We shall loom again in Salamanca,
In Salamanca we shall study windmills,
And one night by inner hellfire
Iron-heeled Astray will find us gathered
In open classrooms and speaking non-death
From Malaga to Santiago –
And he'll know us most convincing
And outlasting falange and bootlick
When he's cheek-slapped by Cervantes.

After Toledo, Francisco Franco
Crossed in triumph to Salamanca,
To Salamanca where snipers kneeled eager
To propel their generalissimo
To the pulpit of el supremo
From Mallorca to Santiago –
While a paladin named Eric Blair fought
Past red factions of Catalonia
And who then fled from Barcelona
To warn in England's bombarded future
How to not salute the tasseled bombast,
How our world shreds into big brothers.

While in Spain the poet Machado
With his sculptured ears of rapture
Ran to exile before the last shatter

Where he heard how Garcia Lorca
From Granada to New York City
Roamed the nighttime in his *duende*
With a murdered face of fascist bullets,
Yet through students brought Spain poems
Which they read for him in Santiago
And Salamanca's major plaza
And Granada and Barcelona
By the light of Unamuno.

ADVANCING BACK

I suspect Plato wrongs us. Thoughts
Can't be cataracts spilling into life
From river effigies above the forest floor,

Rapids and cliff misted, a Victoria Falls
Of mystic enterprise. No acacia spreads
In a suprahuman idea of trees; no vultures park

On the clean pickings of abstract themes.
Time, space, causality, the forms
Of the creative mind, give reality meaning

And meaning its reality; surely there are forms,
But they escape to the factual and seize actuality
Like young Maasai warriors in the Kenyan dawn

Who, in spite of Britishing laws, on the plains
Where parched grass rolls back history,
Ambush the nibbling, shortsighted rhino

By jumping on top, grasping its few hairs,
Riding the shocked beast fast and thunderously
Toward the horizon of its twisting horn,

As from Miletus one early morning
Across the Aegean, mind-breaking Athena
Leaped on the peaceful, unsaddled Athenian hills.

TRAVERSE

The great blue heron lifts with invisible winches her wings,
And with them, the year. The year drifts against the evening
With a slow dipping and rising
And alights,
A blue melisma in the plainsheet sky,
On a cypress wraith standing in the mind of its own image
In the stream. On the crackliest branch, the fork against
the moon,
The year rests utterly, in folded shadow-rimmed wings.

From the faded tree, the year-heron's bill pierces a planet in
the night
While he muses how roots will deeply sog
And the trunk peel like December thirty-first
For a new age
As branches tumble their instants into the water.
After, the creature flies peaceably in the direction
Of a humid somewhere,
Its legs exclamation points in the mist, the emphatic language
Marking the year's first day with the reality of a crested
wader,
While downstream the phantom tree falls,
Cognitive of the bird, wailful at the first touch of the year,
And serenading bitterly, though in better voice than the heron,
The mechanisms of earth which lift things from the earth.

THE MOTHER GOOSE COWBOY

Instructions: The teacher is to recite stanzas marked A.
The children are to recite in unison,
singsong, the stanzas marked Echo.

A I am a cowboy come from the east.
I am a cowboy riding the beast
Of mythic import, gallop and trot.
Yippee-I-O and all that rot.

Echo This is the Jack with the silver eye
Which, like his bullet, is never shy
To targets he claims won't behave.
His mind's a shotgun, smile's a grave.

A I am the bugger with chaps and vest
Bringing the Iron Horse into the West,
To Santa Fe grass from Boston stable.
Stop it if you're able.

Echo This is the gigolo new to the West.
He has a face he carries undressed,
Ugly as sin – that is, ugly as men.
Trust him once, not again.

A I am the man surrendering college.
I am a hero with new-found knowledge:
Drink it down; take no lip;
Shoot from the hip.

Echo This is the villain smothered in grace
Whose card from below the deck is ace.
His shirt is black, and his pants white:
His sex is day, his heart night.

- A I am the guy out of Plato's cave
Who found what the boys in the front will have:
Poker and whiskey, slut and slime –
Boys in the front, have a good time!
- Echo This is the clown common men sense
Lives bookish days of sheer pretense.
Fake! They know he can only think
(Though he claims he has bawled in his drink).
- A I am a hand like Aristotle
Swilling schooling out of a bottle.
Cash at the bar. The tarts stir.
I am the man you wish you were.
- Echo This is the dude, it's true, it's true,
Who brought too much for the West to view,
Riding the beast of mythic import,
His *logos* – taken by all for sport.
- A I am the natural straight from Rousseau.
I'm the free Locke of long ago,
Spilling your guts out, dead in the plaza.
Even your past's a tabula rasa.
- Echo How could his youth which devoured Nietzsche
And lived ideals of that teacher,
Not see that honor and grace have fled,
And all the tragic gods are dead?
- A I am the cowpoke under the stare
Of those mistrusting eastern flare:
I had said I came for those new herds
Of cattle who boast wings like birds.

Echo This is the cowboy all forlorn.
This is the cowboy newly born
Where learning and enlightenment
Is a darkness that the noon has sent.

A I am the maverick, hurt and reeling,
People accuse of lack of feeling,
But I have, beating inside my breast,
A wish to die in the West.

Echo This is the maverick, hurt and reeling,
People accuse of lack of feeling,
But he has, beating inside his breast,
The fastest heart in the West.

A I am the cowboy all forlorn.
I am the cowboy battered and born
To loneliness my side of grief.
Yippee-I-O and all that stuff.

MAASAI

...among the leaves were white flowers with petals half unfolded like the lips of people smiling at their own thoughts. “They are called Yugao, *Evening Faces*,” one of his servants told him....

– The Tale of Genji

Proposition One: God gave the Maasai
The cattle and grass, entitling Maasai
To dung, blood, flies, rustling,
No planting of their nestling earth
Ready to take wing and fly for them. And milk.

Proposition Two: God who is Enkai,
The sky, gives each moran, a warrior
Apprentice, animal fat and ochre
For braided hair, olduvai for spear-practice.
“Chosenness,” says a moran, “is there, just there.”

Supposition One: Three elders sit
In a white man’s home, the fireplace Africa-
Alive with lit charcoal. “Preposterous, though neat,”
Says one elder. “In our huts, we sit *around*,
And all sides of the blaze are useful and used.”

Imposition One: Germanic lady, huge-busted,
Ogles the dancing moran, jumping higher
Than his friends. He sings a non-Germanic tongue,
“O how we wish our cattle had breasts like that;
What milk would we get, what treasures of milk.”

Decomposition One: The visitor records
Everything as if a final word. But speaks little Maasai.
We squeeze as from soft tubes these last minds, for our

inspection.

We are the legitimates always on our last poach.
Some print a book, the Kikuyu take the land.

Proposition Three: When Maasai fire the grass,
Innumerable storks wing down to grasp the mites,
As we, indeed, snap at escaping Maasai talk –
As Enkai, in turn, surveils us near our burned hopes
For Maasai, with their evening faces smiling at their
thoughts.

PHOTO OPPORTUNITY

Why should I confine myself to the U. S. when in Peru
I find such a yam-brown tear, an altiplano brow,
This cactus in a bit of snow, this orchid of volcanoes,
This red and yellow shawl bursting with poverty
In raveled, twinkling colors? *Tourist, photograph my llama*
For two hundred inti, tiny demonstrative arms say.
Once perhaps a Monday morning across Lake Titicaca,
Manco Capac and Mama Occlo rowed to this simple island
On the waves' prophetic underglow. Lakewater,
Pure as Inca symbols strained through our incognizance,
Takes us to the isle of the birth of Inca
Where tribes have disappeared into something other
Like biodegradable patterns on silver cups caught
In the flames of the Spaniards. Now half-toothless women
And toothless half-women and rag-overwrapped children
With cheeks like ore gone pastel, amble with llamas on small
trails.
Tourist, their hands yell, I'll pose. Photograph me and the
llama.
And they point to their posture, the lucky ones, whose
straight language
Hasn't folded for the dollar. Child, strut with your Andean
camel,
Orient to my lens. Two hundred inti is an underflow
of profit,
Demand five as in other markets, offer the service of your
heritage
From this inland sea, if only on the reeds of lashed history,
If only because abounding bacteria swallowed noxious
deposits
To bequeath old and spectacular clarity, camera-ready,
to the Titicaca ebbing.
I see this girl has gulped down begging; may the gods
Flick gold in her eyes.

IT IS THE OCTAVE WONDER OF THE WORLD

– from a Peruvian brochure

It is Machu Picchu
described by a writer who believes he writes English.
Translations must be body into body as well
as tongue into tongue,
and even when the mind incubates twin languages,
some sibling rivalry smites the junior.
Perhaps he's right,
that above the Urubamba river
come chords sung by ruins to the drifting llamas.

There also in woody cathedrals,
amid the quiet chapels of supplicating heliconia
and high griffins overvined
where windows stuffed with bracts pass light
only if, ethnocentrically, it will tint toward green,
the prayer, the chauvinism and the falsetto of Spanish
imperialism
linger: the remnants-to-be listen to Atahualpa's hymn –
lying he is a Christian so he may fly to Quechua heaven.
And then, garroted, the voice loses its register
just where leaf-choked hills continue to echo it.

The Spanish melted Incas to ingots;
they bellowed their divine song.

On peaks of unkempt turquoise, something of the
past life-longs:
walled stones perfect and suave – notes by Massenet
notched into one another with an elegant sameness,
mummies in the matinee sun,
trapezoid apertures with no panes
where we are serenaded by infrared-intimate angles,

villages invisible to looting conquistadors –
from the bow belly of a thousand events
true or imagined, but unheard,
the forest's arias soar sharp and tipped with poison.

VERTICAL REACH

Before Asoka,
Earlier than Gilgamesh's loss,
 Before the birch of Eden catkin'd,
One out-of-moment axletree,
Like a quill
 In a hubristic scriptorium, designed
Upper as heaven, gods, holism, health,
Lower as fallen, devil, evil, villain.

When sapiens came,
The skyward-looking ones tossed noun grenades.
 They brush-fired their roots into reverence
And shattered the vatic *privatest* into *priest*
And, like smoke
 Of after-sex cigarettes, their princes rose
Screened from the slang of death, and wafted
Toward precious buds their bodacious prayer.

Till comes through
A summer of such fecklessness,
 Such inner shepherding fleeing
Winter and its brutally barycentric frost,
Isaac can follow
 Circuitous butterflies in sightline
Bare black-rimmed orange, and in the rims, pale eyes,
And whose flights, for who can read,

Autograph in air
The Hebrew name of what they land on next.
 So Abraham, watching Isaac aleph-mouthed,
With a voice now a silence of four wings,
Drops his knife
 To the root of a wild olive. He gapes
At the migration from treetops of a thousand monarchs
Intuitively flashing downward, blazing into a scrubby bush.

MEDITERRANEAN TOUR

We sleep in the same direction
Even those toward Allah sleep –
East or west, our limbs awry on wrinkled cottons,
And toes
Like small hyraxes that peek across the plains
Of ruined Knossos. The shards of Linear B are we that
 waken,
Decoded, and rise and speak
Of jumping over mad bulls' horns
Acro-
Batically, and bow to applause. Our muscles
Relax and fall into our bodies
Like a child expecting to be kissed goodnight, who is.
And in the evening, ah,
Our fresco-lashes fade and suddenly
In dozing off we're Linear A, intriguing,
Unilluminated, and as ancient as brittle ash
Around us. All the same direction,
The sleepers point to the indecipherable.

A JAGGED LINE OF RISING EXTENSION

I

Here, high on the Palisades,
These Shawangunk cliffs surrounded once
A time when no anachronism would come to light,
Even though circuses of maturing climates
Dizzied the crests
And strata laid out their lives with magical patience.

Rose quartz flowered on the plateaus;
Here the frangible shales of children's open minds
Hugged every day;
Whatever tribal wars transpired
Altered nothing of rivers that fell
To their rightful nets, the springs.

II

The Hudson flows its trance under the sway and pull
Of the slow trapeze
Of the moon's rays.

Diversity here had fathered
A singleness carrying the family name of earth,
But our exposed natures are dying on an unforgiving hill
Among credos flickering like mica
In the schist of sky.
Here without admission,
We conceive the fundament of our world
Encircled in its own crust.
A stone dust we have come to.

III

If we are carny,
We are the larger fantastics
Packed into those tiny cars we travel in
And bubbling out to everyone's surprise,
Surprise

There is the tent for tentativeness:
Let us beetle under.

Tra-la ladies Be a lamb
I wonder, when philosophers spun
Through a hoop
When arc over spiral circumscribed each thinker
Plotinus to his spheres, even Yeats to his gyres
Did they think they might douse all fires?
What the blazes
A session in Darwin shows procession:
Many atingle the spectacular arrowed progression
Shall hit the bull's eye

O Infinite Perfectibility sat on a wall
Infinite Perfectibility had a great fall
All the King's horses and all the King's men
Put him together again
Now and then

Yes dear The speaker expressed many fine sediments
Lovers, we are planning a beautiful marshmallow toast
Under the necromantic moon

Carve us a totem.
The last burned in the rites.

IV

So, always the after-hours sandmen
Sprinkling the end of the act,
The pinch of disillusion;
Tired danced-out eyes
Now stumble over
Emptiness
Except as they follow a few leapers
And twisters
Toward air as untethered
As that headwaying at present
Over our Hudson tumbling from its source –
Like fame-bound Nijinski who,
Clad in shredded roses,
Beating gravity back,
Hurtled over nothings dense as obsidian
And in the finale
Dug at the vapor's edge
His roots in the jagged rock.

WHERE WE PARK

Las Vegas to Zion,
casinos to chasms
fettered to concepts like the ace of spades
or swaths of minerals
cut in hot, chance glades
(both decks layered, for good luck grooms in spasms),

we cross to Zion
fleeing restaurants
more garish than their wine, and one-armed bandits
that squeeze lemons
to clutter us with pits
or show their cherries our unfruitful trance –
where they serve kindness
as through spiracles
while losses tumble to huge gaps of wrath.

We drive the miles,
not on religion's path,
but for sandstones and fresh flimsy miracles,
for we must have,
like Mars near no great star,
a little *rouge* to place beside the *noir*.

I MYSELF AM A SAVAGE

For Melville

I myself am a savage.
In my heart, I eat my heart.
Pale pearls dance at a sea's edge,
The marlin scuffs grime on the foam,
Morays lurk in the coral's anchorage,
A sailor coils lean ropes
With seven shipmates, but stands apart.

This gem, this fish, this eel, these ensigns,
Fathom vengefully and endlessly
Down aboriginal waters of their veins
For frames for shreds, for forms of shore –
While on board, I chart
How the deaf tides orchestrate their bones.
In my heart, I eat your heart.

THE AGES DESIGN OUR SILENCE

Downpour on Sixth Avenue.
Who left these dummies in the lip-wet rain?
The gutter drips with hardship, ragged black men
Wield wheeled cargoes of plastic-sheeted suits
To the innards of gaunt buildings.
Which carter dropped these dummies who can't get in
Out of the cloudburst? Gyrate them inside.
They should be oriel-viewed, garmented
In garnet, robed in rubies, chic as pearls of foam
Spraying the neck of the svelte, incoming Aphrodite
To the beachclub cocktail party.
Bring them inside.

Though each has been forced into a special pleading,
They are no Iphigenias
Tear-strained in windy Aulis, mute at last –
They are not sacrificially vibrant
In the knowledge that destiny is beyond childbearing
And remembers no lineal love.
No placental past.
These mannequins, forlorn of all our deathless, dying
daughters,
Need drying, to worship at the hearth
Of the window dresser, oracular
Holy bejeweler
Who speaks in ideograms. He costumes varnished women
Who snob us imperturbably,
Bespangedly, irrefragable in prophesying
One season's fashions,
Who stare at us as at our future as anti-priestesses,
Like them too laminate, unwrinkled
In the show windows of the rain-pelted city,
As anti-sibyls who have forgotten to ask to grow old.
Pausing,
Dawn wakens us through filtering glass.
The ages know our silence.

MY BIBLE

Books mentioned in the Bible now lost or unknown.
– C. C. Bombaugh

I. THE PROPHECY OF ENOCH

My Bible begins with the black swan.
Though it is one now and the mid-sun breaks against his
shape,
His contour holds to the white afternoon like a toeprint in the
world's wildness.
Ever since visibility, he has lived his blackness.
At the world's end, the trumpet will be his singing,
And he will blend best when darkest matter comes.

II. THE BOOK OF THE WARS OF THE LORD

Out of original squalls, the choir of flesh came
Applauding, at two, heaven's reflective hues.
But the hidden stars, seeing how humans pale,
Sang with sorrow the traces of the mire's tarnish;
The golden-pointed constellation Cygnus wept
That on earth its counterpart was black.

III. THE PROPHETICAL GOSPEL OF EVE WHICH RELATES TO THE AMOURS OF THE SONS OF GODS WITH THE DAUGHTERS OF MEN

It was mid-afternoon, and Eve knew no distinctions.
Her dream in the garden was a continuation
Of the fires and the lands and the converging waters
Where, in the pre-figuration of a black swan,
The god descended to the woman Leda
With the wingspread of all men ever to be born.

IV. THE BOOK OF JASHER

When the creation ran out of colors, it made the black swan,
Who, at the fourth hour, sidles toward paradise
Back to Adam and the remembrance of himself
In the eyes of his god's image. It was the snake-like neck of
that swan
Held promise of grace through knowing,
And the easy afternoon of the gliding past creation.

V. THE BOOK OF IDDO THE SEER

In the late afternoon the shadows of trees
Coast with the swan for a short while.
The day cannot make up its mind to close,
Nor normality make up its mind to end it.
So, drifting with the black swan,
As on quiet feathers, the world rests.

VI. THE BOOK OF NATHAN THE PROPHET

Will chaos return through the form of the swan?
At six, the swan and Adam strain dayshine
Into their minds, sensing it is leaving,
Not knowing it can return. Locked in their brains,
The sun is burning through to ride out again,
And with it the swan's thoughts before there was light.

VII. THE PROPHECIES OF AHIJAH, THE SHILONITE

It is the era of the swan in twilight.
Adam is somber. What is the moon?
Why doesn't Eve speak? The mute swan goes to the bank,
And the webbed feet show. Slow moon, merging swan,
Eve silent in the rib of changing night –
Adam turns toward Adam who turns toward Adam.

VIII. THE ACTS OF REHOBOAM, IN BOOK OF SHEMAIAH

Three things sleep at eight – the sun, the child, the swan.
But the sun is gone, no child has yet been born,
And the swan alone under the cover of grass
Nods in the grass's wind. Does Eve fear the gentle swan
She would pet if Adam allowed? She fears
Not touching, and the smudge of the swan's not touching.

IX. THE BOOK OF JEHU THE SON OF HANANI

What woke the swan? It was the first sobbing of Eve
Who looked for Adam, captured by night,
Behind a trunk. Young trees, tall in the paradox
Of the garden's age, resembled Adam leaning against
the tree,
Wondering at the stars where no Eve was.
Eve noticed the swan begin to move toward her.

X. THE FIVE BOOKS OF SOLOMON, TREATING OF THE NATURE OF TREES, BEASTS, FOWL, SERPENTS, AND FISHES

The tree in paradise is the black oak;
The beast in paradise is the black fox;
The fowl in paradise is the black swan;
The serpent in paradise is the black adder;
The fish in paradise is the black angel;
At ten, the swan, accepting the night, offers it to Eve.

XI. THE 151ST PSALM

My Bible never went beyond its genesis,
And the story of its lost-link race. Discontinuity alive.

Stretched in the warm bed, I go to sleep, leaving the Bible
To its own findings – registering me, perhaps, as I,
At the time of eleven, half-awake, quibbling, half-asleep,
dreaming,
Prepare toward the midnight of the black swan.

CHRIST'S RICKETY RESPONSE

I prefer Brooklynese, said God to his Son,
With its carefreeness easy to judge,
But to you I must speak low-class Aramaic,
A job I'm beginning to begrudge,

Caving in to your hayseed locale, said God.

And you get the chain-sloughing sermons while I
Give commandments with no tambourining,
Though your parables, mystic, pretending complexity,
Do not touch me in power and left-leaning.

Do not touch me, said Jesus.

I do the supporting, said God, counting shekels –
You grab every fish, every loaf, for exposure
As Superman the miraculous guy, yet you never
Take me out for a dish of ambrosia.

Take me out of my body, said Jesus.

I envy your wild lifetime status, my Son,
Your brassy humanity hopeful and blissable;
I plan for the ages while you raise your profile,
Put me down, make me abstract, unkissable.

Put me down from the cross, said Jesus.

To you Brooklynese seems twaddle, said God,
But our trinity harmony stuff's too lenient –
Up yours, idolaters! Son, I AM first!
And I am not saccharine, I am not convenient.

Careworn, I am the covenant, said Jesus.

SONG

In the circus of Eden, Eve, terrified,
Let go the wrists of her gripping God;
Pulse wet,
She fell from the trapeze –
Of a spiritual disease
And broken utmosts, she would have died
Had not the serpent spread his net.

AS SMALL DUST UPON THE BALANCE

Atheist ingrate that I am, a joke
Who thinks of God as a lit pumpkin
On Halloween, casting its burning face
Upon the earth, frightening children,
While merely vegetable stuff, and smoke,
Pray to Anubis, bend to Osiris' mace,
Unmummify your new ideas you think so sharp
While simply words which, like canopic jars,
Preserve the central part of you the world
Can quick thumb through, and will, till there's no trace.
Leave movies in the dust, and sports cars,
Dishonored books that pimp for scholars' raises,
And memories of women in the sack –
Answer, how stop adoring the belief
Belief is weakness, self-love that death mars,
A kind of caramel on crackerjack,
As if your own crunch wasn't somewhere syrup'd.
Is impiousness anger's converse boast,
Foxhole bravado, or a boyhood rebel
Knocking his obdurate father on his back
Who lodged behind him like a hallowed ghost?
If these insult, mocking our atheist case,
Dance with devout friends, though it hurt the utmost,
Where strengths, like lanterns in a dark space,
Attribute nothing but contribute grace.

DUTCH ENGRAVING

for Richard Douglas

They pose around the table: Calvin and Wycliffe and Hus,
Luther and Zwingli and Knox and Melancthon,
Among others, each in his costume, beards thick
With sagacity, but each figure a sourpuss.
Yet they are lit by a slender candle and candlestick,
Which stands for gospel, and whose baring illumination

Grants them a sad holiness. On our side, monk and pope
Inscribe their animus; Satan basks in the same stain.
These are they whose care for plainfolk is so indulgent
As to cancel ten thousand days in purgatory and give hope
To all – who donate a farthing or its equivalent.
They quack, Against knot-hideousness we smooth the grain.

Truth is, the career of every Christian is always incomplete:
He travels, a pilgrim through time where he can never win,
While the reformers (anxious about depravity they deserve
Not at all, and suspended in fears), because they cannot greet
Their amours and attainments with largess and verve,
Little understand they have trivialized sin.

SHADES

Thirty-seven parasols, count them.
How the Buddha was self-involved
In the desert at high noon!
He must cross. His perspiration in anticipation
Irrigated dunes.
His yellow clothes hung like dirty clustered yucca
Vased for the sixth day.
He began his trek.
But above in the thirty-seven heavens,
Thirty-seven devas
Vowed to aid Siddhartha,
And in rainbows thirty-seven parasols
Descended, as after cheering rain
Upon the sand-eyed Buddha,
Each their gift of relief.
Poor saint, poor stranded one,
How could he not accept,
And how could he employ all?
Thusly he composed his prodigy
Until the edge of our deserving:
He adumbrated into thirty-seven
Precise bodies of Buddha, each with its parasol,
While each god viewed only his beneficence
Mantling his loved peregrinator
Across the heat-repulsed desert.
For what is a miracle if not Hume's thinking it
Science awaiting explication
Unto the edge of our observing,
And what is a nimbus if not the Buddha's nurture
Even of the unnecessary gods?

ON THE ROAD

A wren is a soft-hearted touch.
I was visiting grandfather at Brindisi
And picking cherries with a laugh of my bill
While sweet granddad snored, as life was easy,

When this human kneeled in the orchard. Granddad
Quickly winged down, sharp eye on me. I strutted
Virilely on the branch, but finally, embarrassed
And ignorant, following grandpa, I fluttered

To the ground. We were threescore birds sunning –
Titmice, robins, even a larger jay –
While high, like nests of endless travertine,
Clouds blew whiter than any speck wrens display

Or the religious own. The brown-robed man reasoned
At boring length, but grandfather respectfully
Twisted his head, nodded his feathers, chinned
To his breast, ruffed his tail, all heedingly

Till the word was over. No one translated the monk,
And when he left, granddad made me vow
If ever in heaven or earth I confronted
This man Francis, politely I should bow

From the limb and drift to his knees. It seems
He was bound in some invisible prison
And his unfathomable speech was just man's way
Of breaking out, and the least we could do was listen.

FOUR POEMS FOR THE PRICE OF ONE

(The action takes place near the top of an imaginary tree in an imaginary forest. On a high branch on the right side, looking out at the other trees, stands the philosopher John Dewey. On a branch on the left side, same level, is St. Francis of Assisi. In the center, also on the same level, stands Harlequin, the clown.)

John Dewey speaks:

No god desists for his own sake.
From a spark of forethought I rose
To set thought afire, to take
My place and place my rise.
All days I rode my heart
Past village, mountain and cloud
With my books' vapping heat,
Through winds where pure beings corrode,
At such speed of opposition
To the blindness to degrees,
Stars kept their mystic motion,
But their nights dissolved to days.

I stopped then, for no reason,
Suddenly not remote;
I helped in the autumn season
An old man don his coat.
And ever since I am bound
To pavement as well as peak, never
To not flee no man's land
And, though eagles pluck my liver,
Make the practical word
America's spiritual portion.

And I will bend unfurled
The chain-texts of distortion

Till rhetorics split, and the world
Turns love – by definition.

I am here, and for whose sake?
What most calms the rebutter
In a moment of give and take?
I judged that it would matter
Whatever we stumbled on, received –
Conclusions were never bitter,
The instruments, I perceived,
Were proper – of some worth
Were materials of exchange,
So I spread upon the earth
Senses in recoverable range
And the openness of my mind,
While in each test the prelude
I worked for was a meant
Glance, and my riding blood.

This process was the content
Of a full life's experiment.
Yet, what can a person attain
If he is not bereft
Of cloth as well as brain,
And he have something left?
Stranger, why I didn't offer my all
To the ill-provided mired, and why
I kept both coat and shawl,
I never will resolve, or justify.

St. Francis speaks:

In the white thigh-like gleaming (near the music-man moon)
Of stars like revved up jeweled gypsies that kiss
And prance upon the altar of night – too soon
Extinguished in the lordly sun, I sway, for this

Mount Subasio is,
Or so it appears once more. I filch the lamb
In all its glands, hormones and warmth, nor miss
My lady the ewe, my father the joyous ram –
O brother birds and trees, what I renounce, I am.

I will not blaspheme and say that had there been
No engine of Christ, I would have fueled what I
Have fueled: this was God's spark, God's will – the sin
Would be to cast in God's teeth His and my
True souls, as to a space-junked sky,
Were I to launch humility before
This bit of plenum. I am the crust of humble pie.
I did not give that coat of mine to a poor
And starving man so I could, to gratify
Donors into sainthood, pass through heaven's door.

As ill-times Mary'd in the renaissance of spring,
My medieval arms' blood thawed, embraced
The flesh of all new-born, and every budding thing
Flowered forth its love, which still was chaste,
And winter's snow unlaced;
I gleaned (unfolding from my mind's rerun
Of praise allowed to set in dogma's waste)
That even in the nowhere of oblivion
I might have done what I have done.
Works of faith are clockwork works, nevertheless –
Leper that I was, or nearly so,
Did you seek gratitude, or could you guess
A pet-like fame would follow as you'd go?
A half was otherwise, though,
Since beggars turn absurd (unless they appall)
By hugging much hyperbole, and this I know
Invests my shrine: the world's made Puritan by the fall
From dirt – ground floor for grit, ground zero
For me – and I, the greatest comedian of them all.

Harlequin speaks:

Well, here I am, as usual, up a tree,
out on a limb. Tush, tush.

She was a professor of logic, so I made her a proposition.
She had been so clever, saying in my flat,
“Your premises are dark.”

(O Francis a sissy, with his kierkegaardian, tub-of-lardian)
I put my limbs around her, to make things clear.

Do you know what she did? She cried.

(Between man and God there is a slow leak.
That is why neither has ever found the other.)

She said, “I will run away.”

I said, “All running away is a search.”

(O sis boom bah, we don’t want Dewey, do we?)

She sat down on the bed, and cried.

So I sat down beside her, and we both shed leers.

(Yet, friends, as we pass from childhoodery into adultery)

I said to myself, “If I do, I have neither humanity nor
integrity.

I would be too sensual.”

Which I was, so I did.

(The round of our lives turns flattery)

Then I gave her fur coat to a shoeless man.

Then I gave him one cream pie in the face.

What I got is what I deserved, and that’s nothing.

(The trouble with those fellows is this:

they aren’t mature enough to be youthful;
all wool and a yahoo wide).

Yet, and yet no illness: myrrh and frankincense
will never feed my voice’s flame
when I leap, saying, seeming, "I am neither tragic
nor comic. They are only sides of this coin,
a penny's worth."

For me, for me, on every verdant hill,
each copse lies like a woman’s face. I lift her chin

and view her mouth, her eyes – discerning truth
by processes of faith and wile;
for me, my gracious city lies like a woman's face
won by experiencing glance and smile
step by uncovered step.
Each moment is a lifting of the veil.

(The three men suddenly find themselves standing on the
ground. John Dewey looks at himself, and finds that he is
dressed in the clothes of a medieval saint. St. Francis has on
the white mask and costume of a clown. Harlequin is dressed
in a twentieth-century business suit.

Each looks at the tree, smiles, and goes his separate way,
chorusing:)

Never has grass grown
Grasping the extent of its green,
Never has a warbler in soaring's fashion
Traced the limits of a bird's vision,
And what young oaks, rooted, have murmured the further
life
Trembling at each edge of a leaf?

HOMAGE TO JOHN DEWEY

C: The cold stained windows waiting for the dawn
Seem leaded, gravid, dusky and opaque
At dusk. Flamboyant matins merge their power
Symbolically to the climbing sun, the streak
That steers the tale. Watch Mary poise in flight:
Deep reds seep through, rise true. They blood her
mainstream bright.

L: Friend Chesterton: you say that Sophocles
And Shakespeare levied worth on congeries
Of charnel houses, the low huts of peat,
Spring English gardens mounted by Greek bees,
And to the lost or ugly, purpose such
As dare convince a soulful poet he mattered much.

The Greeks, you state, collected nobleness:
They bottled it and, in a world of coughs
And wheezing headaches, pitched their medicine –
Till Shakespeare added just the brio, laughs
And sundered past which kept realities
From dying both of plague and gorgeous, grand disease.

Now churched and churchless, tigers of fierce charms,
Ambit each other with such circling skill,
Our games go rapt and melt to buttered tails –
Whereon devout C. and persistent L.
Fear childish shake-ups of our verbal fray
Till, down art's centrifuge, we curios spin away!

Yet I, that nastiness, that tester-out,
Acclaimed John Dewey's bluish bunsen flame,
And vowed I'd add the sulphur, fan his torch
When dangers equal to the pleasures came

As by experiential paradox
I rocket through the perilous readings of your books.

What you starved into creed and catechism,
You fed me like an underside of flame,
Though all your recondite beliefs, spite free
Where inquest equal to the radiance came,
Have never parried Dewey's radical awe
That testified that if gods wish, they may withdraw,

As he relit that blind you deprecate,
Those fireworks searing luster to alarm:
Each lifetime's branding from his well-placed match
Melds draw-free hearths when warclouds threaten
 storm;
Then, should the cataclysmic darkness hold,
We'll watch how diffidence and dissidence grow bold.

The Chestertonian courage is not in doubt,
But doctrines rather than the means of probe
Are. Dewey fleshed out trial-and-error's gleam,
Exposing how, though our charred ends describe
A falling arc, their quests are versatile –
And so all black, all light, show for a human while.

ENGELS TO HIS FATHER

Father: By the time you read this, I
Will be read. The fifty strong, oppressed,
Weakly-liberated denizens of the industrial life
Of Paris, Manchester and other gutters, read
My articles and think my time well spent.
It is a Prussian blue of night comes over the rooftops
When the light surrenders: workers meander home
Too tired to eat, and they go to bed like fish and chips
Wrapped in yesterday's paper. My friend, the same.
It is true my partner's your enemy, father.
His Jenny gulps the little she has
From funds tendered by me from you; if that shock rubs salt
Into your wound, it is a seablow spray freshening the piers
From which we unload our social cargos;
It knocks black from the tumbling housewalls
Chipped and London-shadowed where the warming noon
Locks into his whirlwind of words struck alive,
Struck wet, struck shining in a dayspring
From the page to our thoughts.

Father, it is true your enemy's my cohort.
Where must we stand? On supple chamois skins or simple
wood?
Are there pulled webbed lines between our faces that
our cheeks
Caress no longer, and our galaxy,
A wrinkle in the forehead of the universe,
Takes no note of one mere child and parent more?
But father, my friend's forehead juts out
Among the heads of cabalistic men careening in
From all possible prophecies, like Golem rays
Unseen among us, changing our very atoms in ways
unknown.
This was the governance, and loneliness, I chose.
We run, publish, give names coded for co-conspirators

But alias to our mothers. And the rash thinker you deny –
He stands alone in the sighs of a cosmic sorrow
So heaving, it seems the rocking of the flung nebulae
Too far, too annulling, from the time they touched.

He grinds alone, poor, unacquisitive not through beliefs,
But by a shrugging, as if all furniture were superfluous,
Though he values his chair. It gives him a lap for books.
Returning one evening from the library,
Harsh-eyed, exhausted, he saw Jenny in the street
Crying, overwhelmed, their family treasures wrapped for
moving

And the landlady surly.

The children ran around the cart like just-minted planets,
Upset yet refreshed in their tears, how wobbly was hard
to determine.

My demigod becalmed the landlady

Without paying, held Jenny, settled

The new gravity of the children with a joke, that now
they circled

Him. Tomorrow was time enough for rent.

Inside, among the greasy walls of a room

Filled with journals, smoke, wrappers, shared obscurities

And scary, rude letters, Karl wrote:

Today was the time to consider abstractions

Tearing men apart in Le Havre, Cologne, Manchester,

Everywhere – but in a slum flat in London

Which must take care of itself, as my comrade

Understands, rates, takes care of a creation that you,

Father, and I together divagate through – wealthily.

With what test score? With what integrity?

He is the highroad on which we advance, trampling him.

For the unequal unequaled world advances, father:

It is the star the dedicated sun out-brilliances by climbing,

Like my dialectician, with a steep logic,

Yet soon setting the star freer
For a burst of time to go on terrifying intended journeys
Toward the bravest serenity –
The distribution, finally, of promise –
And where of that progress, love is our own inevitable idea.

APOGOSHES AND PERIGOLLIES

The Apogosh and Perigolly
Walked through the night, but it was folly.
The muggers of the moon displayed
Short patience in the alley shade.
So, zooming Capricorn to Cancer,
No zodiac traces any answer;
Each star might be a Christmas holly
For all it cares to pinpoint folly.

O you who would in danger play
Through Milky routes, stroll, loll post-day,
Or round the imaginary sine
Of Cassiopeia strut the line,
Beware the scorpion and crab
Who in short darkness, flail and stab,
But more your heart that can't, to stray,
Wait for inevitable day.

SHUT IN

Is this the metaphor we wreak, the mind
As a steel trap?
Have ruthless hinges privilege and appeal
Because loose clips
Hold no amour, just slack, no crushing straddle,
No argument of an excluded middle
Where terror draws a bead: a gila's bind,
Lockjaw, a zap
With clinching arguments, with poisoned sips?

All arteries in embryos search far
For thigh, for lung,
For implicated prototypes to pulse,
Distend, shape;
Then love and magic (*Logic's* outer bounds)
Fail childhood where alluring wildness ends
As, snagged, restrained by a deceptive bar,
Even the young
Gnaw through their blood-sweet forelegs to escape.

APSLEY CHERRY-GARRARD RETURNING

During the winter of 1911...Bowers and Wilson took six [penguin] eggs, three of which were broken during the tortuous climb....

– Antarctica: Great Stories From The Frozen Continent

Rattle the elements to Cape Crozier –
What blizzards tear we sew with nerves on edge –
And never fold to peace: Bill's motto, mine
And Birdie's hauling sledges. Dawn's sunshine
Deserts the flesh. Stiff sleeping bags defer
To body warmth and melt to a liquid bruise,
So we doze off wet through, and wake to freeze.
We howl at gales shrieking to ice our beds
When mercury less plunges than goes blind
And, stumbling through tent pores, skin pores, vein pores,
Sinks down inside your character, resigned.
Gale mouth-parts chew our lips to azure shreds,
That on the scrabblings, eyes must make each pledge.

Days late, the forced march round the glacier drift,
Tearful for seals whose blubber we should use –
Then, orange-yellow ruffs! Our shuffles stir
Eight black and white serrations coasting shores –
We're not those orcas rampaging the seas
In food lust; we bring silence as our sign.

For what remains their sole Antarctic hug –
Egg on unfrozen toes – male emperors
Lose inner fats heating their outside yolk.
For us, hereafter means three eggs to lug
To base, to scholarship, what natty joke
Or slight will follow. After death's firm rift,
We live in the world that lives within our gift.

A NOTE ON HART CRANE

Astir with winds, and languid days,
He sensed the world as it might be known.
Why say more than the poet says?
He lived for our sake, and died for his own.

MISCOUNTING

Il faut, voyez-vous, nous pardonner les choses.
– Verlaine

Now all I do is polish the old, like an arthritic silversmith
Deserted in his shop. Some of the metal's run out;
Night welds itself to the walls. A common-law tin
Nestles in the bed of aging silver.
So these attributes of a man of sixty-five:
What shame to be cooled by retirement into a brittle stone;
What cowardice in amusement, yellow-belly in diet,
Crap in exercise, fool's gold in pension,
Blithering blathering cuckooiness in a scaffold of limp
whiskers,
In the thinness of a grinning grandchild's love.

What in my rough heart is burnished? Let it stand fenced in
a resentful corner.
Which of my friends is on strike? Let my devotion join his
picket.
When Tolstoy over the edge of eighty fled to the station
maddened,
He silently subtracted his beats, like a wordsmith:
He had crafted himself scrupulously, bent and pounding;
Now he was slimmer than his shortest story.
Death was his last four-letter word to the world, do you see?
It replaced his aunts,
His kasha, his novels. It became the adopted father
He longed for and a cancer of a grandson he showed off.
His too-pondered shearing to freedom was an insult to death
Curving back, like unused beaver's teeth, into the face.
He had become old, do you see?

A DISSERTATION UPON ROAST POET

His dashing knavery
The world said was savory,

Till, oh dear, his truculence
Spoiled his succulence.

ON THE DEATH OF JAMES THURBER

Curba Thurber nurba? Querba difurba herba.
Superba swurba in durba urba,
Jerba, cherba, pleasurba
Garalurba malaburba manirurba.

Disturba Thurber nurba? Blurba, spurba grachurba;
O werba curba acerba
In zurba trurba dexurba murba?
In sturba obserba plurba,
Verba, Thurber.
Verba.
Verba.

TROCHAIC EPITAPHS

When staid Emily had died,
An angel spinster from her side
Climbed, and with one wingtip free,
Dusted off eternity.
When shot Wilfred Owen died,
An angel doctor rose his bride;
Bodiless, both sit marooned.
Still, she cannot sew his wound.
When Garcia Lorca died,
An angel fascist thrust aside
His books which, opened, fell toward me.
The unborn had tinged his poetry.
Even Auden, when he died,
An angel Helen of Troy who cried
Squeezed from clouds her closest kin
Just to let creased Auden in.
When I, Edward Locke, shall die,
Let no angel pry, or sigh,
“Like Yeats’ horseman, he had pride;
Unlike Yeats’, his poems died.”
Simply let these lines apply:
Each bestows his heaven’s worth.
Gifts this human offered earth
Possess him until angels die.

ROMANCE

...the superstition of conception via the ears, frequently depicted in paintings of the Annunciation as a ray of light piercing the ear of the Virgin. – Edward I. Selig

God of the doorways and erotic entrances,
The world seems an invisible allegory, and my Cordelia
Announces she contains, consists of,
Corrupts
Several special openings other than nostrils:
She boasts of Shelley capsizing in her mouth,
Dunking below her tongue and squalling
Near the cave spit,
Questioning Aeolus:
What berth comes after winter's breath?
In her right ear, the near-bow lip of an urn
Metamorphosizes to her lipshape; there Keats
Leans over a heifer
As Pasteur will a germ, in a non-abattoir image,
Studiously, in spontaneously generated awe.
Wordsworth, no doubt, for the left ear;
In that orotund tube,
He lounges to the drumbeat of Coleridge who,
Cordelia smirks, strongly “Germanates”
While Wordsworth is pollinated.
Then, pondering the remainder, she grows simple
And covered
And cushioned in the body,
Holy as a nun clambering from Wordsworth's sonnet,
But – viewing no silent order nearby,
Gliding back in tears.
Now Cordelia in modesty of evening
Has shut her possibilities;
Listen, innocent Janus – what of the other orifices?
Which poet might fill them to capacity?

FOR WINSLOW HOMER

It was a holy imagining, his natural wave,
Spume, driftwood, fisherman's net,
One very grave
To a young thought, for an old heart.
Thoreau and Whitman, though in dying's debt,
Left legacies like snowfall on his budding art
That rooted, and is yet.

Woodland, shore, America's expansion,
Busy hands and minds, busy grief,
Canoe for mansion,
All subjects out of Maine as from the tight coil
Of a stream's whirlpool: dizzily brief
Draggings to the bed, risings slowly to soil,
The root, the leaf.

Who can speak of Troy? It is something else.
Yet when Winslow Homer, as he munched his fruit,
The classic pulse
Of the sea before him, lifted a wind-damp brush
To salty canvas, and performed the sea, his boot
Washed in Athens' shot spray, the same unlush
Rock and slips of root.

So naked a native contribution
Must be universal; near the sea's
Cold elocution,
He fathomed a history in the sounds of men
Being lost, lost, to be lost. For wives on the quays
He painted waiting. And westering again,
Uprooted, with their destinies.

O'KEEFFE

The mother, when pregnant, was frightened by a whorl.
A chambered nautilus crossed her path in a white desert
She was dreaming. She was surprised at her pelvis,
Her narrow skull, her snaky ankle,
Which she gazed at in the closest mirror in a flat perspective.
The lunar patterns in the curve of streetlight
Crawled through the window up the bed's legs into
her womb
And lay beside the child, like a twin sleeping.
When the fetus unveiled into Georgia, the girl
Turned toward the stages of evolution and knotting and
zygote splitting
And the precision of eye-placement she had just endured,
And something in her hand, something about her hand,
Drew more insight than mother about the chambered nautilus
Segmented like multiple closed eyes.
And as for color, she had a conception of pureness,
Not from an artless baby stenciling Wordsworthian ages
Onto her present prescient mind, but from ore experienced,
Past horrors of merely pellucid gray, clear brown,
Producing inventions the planet arrived at when it painted
With its initial palette
Eventually intensity of atmosphere over icy fragmented
space.
And the solidifying of forms into ribbons and arcs,
Crosses, petals or bone, city lights obscured by the nimbus
Of the sun's contiguous dying –
It was as if the Navajo with grains of earth
Had painted myth, but Georgia with grains of myth had
painted earth.

In old age, Georgia perdured upon the mesa
Without Stieglitz, buried under the interrupted silhouettes

Of the northeast's hapless towers. As love, like a good
 photograph, lights
To reproduce what is left inside the shadow,
Childless Georgia continued as ever
To inspire the arroyos, clouds, sand cliffs and moon.
The moon would creep into her canvas to be born.

THE BEDCHAMBER OF TIME AND TRUTH

on seeing Tiepolo's "Time Revealing Truth"

I long swore truth so prim and womanly,
And felt the parrot, luxury, was vain,
How Cupid seemed a youth
And time a silver-brown-haired, brawny man,
But not how scythes lie on the bedroom floors,
How time undresses truth.

I long held urns were born of earth and ash,
And knew that mirrors slouch on bedroom floors,
How painters share their prime
And blend their youth and age as we cannot,
But not, as the globe lies with bric-a-brac,
How truth redresses time.

DIRECTING THE FUTURE

This new year shall be shot without Fellini.

The whips and scorns
Of daydreamed husband-tyrants over many
Congenitally love-mad slaves, all thorns
Monogamy impales on, Juliet's bag
Of feudal wifely subjugation, may
Argue Fellini could conscript, conspire
With Shakespeare, but I doubt that facile tag –
Except, some burnt-out nights both were, I'd say,
Breathed on by Falstaffs exiled and afire.

For both, a twin afflatus seemed to hatch

Indelicate
Asides, as if each stole the other's watch,
As if some desiccated neuron got
Their spleens in thrall, as if, at times, they spoke
In run-on tears, charred semi-colons where
Fresh periods were craved. Each breathed a rose
The color of ideas. But now, the break
Arrives – death was not dubbed. The theater
Main reel is blank, though round and round she goes.

Fellini shall not patch such scenes again.

That's understood.
No one shall enter Cinecittà to gain
An eidolon with welds of gold and wood –
The cruising ship so large two thousand lights
Could not unsecret all its fogbound decks.
Paisans of Rossellini bless his sighs
Who underscores the wounds he underwrites;
His heartbreaks resurrect De Sica's bikes
And shoeshine urchins with their white-maned joys.

What of the midnight and its special need

For fantasy?

That decadence Fellini makes the screed
Before resolving to sobriety,
Assessment, cinematic ode – the twirl
And end of dance in fountains evening favors,
The burning creature monstrous on the pyre,
Frail blousy meadows of the spring, spa girl
In white who walks with waters, serving lovers
Where crucified will touch the crucifier –

Denouements that give from orgied lawns
 To opened veins
Their room on screen, the Vitelloni dawns
Where youth sparks sex, but little else remains,
Balloons, perhaps, and memories of parades –
Then later arts, hermaphroditic tease
And gorgeous sluts in cabins in high trees –
The overwhelming tints, like masquerades
Turned riot, hide vast, wild identities:
What shall imagination do with these?

And with Fellini's loss – are we prepared
 To overhear
Our faintness, lose the cutting edge he dared,
The pan to caricatures born of real fear?
We must learn music more processional,
Wherein we join at twilight the long trend
Of our filmed past: dead dads who won't stay down,
Childhood we trot behind and, lonely, call.
Now this year's eve with no wisecrack friend –
It's the last time we shall not play the clown.

FUNERAL IN AUTUMN

in memory of Dick Wathen

One half of spring curls up in autumn's doubt.
Though push-pulled leaves drift mid-November on,
This wintry death must let the summer out.

Those perishings are greatly small which flout
The flash of solstice we are strung upon.
Here half of spring curls up in autumn's doubt.

Leaves dive to windswept pews like thin devout
Capuchin monks, each vein a pantheon
Whose wintry death must let the summer out.

Cooled bark joins in acclaim it cannot shout:
So all fall leaves peel down their antiphon
When half of spring curls up in autumn's doubt.

Late beams of sunlight in their shifting clout
Beatify with grief the dust they don
Where wintry death must let the summer out.

Friends in eclipse, old rites observed, hold on
For tenderer passage than the clock gives out.
One half of spring curls up in autumn's doubt.
Each wintry death must let the summer out.

IN THE RAIN

I once read my fame in the volumes of the wind,
Slowly moved the sky through every stanza;
From the dying spray of the waves' rising,
"Tell me," said the earth, done with surmising,
"Which of us, time out of mind,
Will envelop the other?"
I replied, "Mother,
I have no answer.
Death in my eyes moves like a dancer."

I SHALL CONTINUE TO THE RHYTHM I GO

I shall continue to the rhythm I go –
The gravitas I shall have, and the weathered gravemark –
Ranting the consequences of the marathon work
Of making myself, which are the poems to follow –
The next poem and next, the start with the upstart,
Vectors squared into a radical flow,
Sea-chart without borders bordering a chart,
Almost a return migration by Arctic terns
Going for, on the wind's path along longest lines,
The last wild refuge of the remembering heart.

THE SEA-GUEST

The murre drops its crustacean
On the flat sea bluff, to dine
Viciously in sunlight.
Lying nearby, I observe.
I'm hungry.
How I wish I were in livery
Butlering the murre,
Preparing a plate of urchin
On porcelain rock pale with squid
And a napkin of jewelweed
To unobtrusively wipe the corners
Of the murre's beak.
Then, as the bird flies from its servant,
Scrape my heart clean.

CROSSING THE HEIGHTS

It is queer that the unhappiness of the world is so often brought on by small men...They are mostly confounded little martinets. – Remarque

Alack for shorties!
It's in our genes
To attain our ends
By gruesome means.

Our complex is such,
We boast our zest,
Like the column of Trajan,
For continual conquest.

We're Lenin and Stalin
And Napoleon
And Genghis Khan
Rolled into one.

Yet that's old hat –
That's science creaking.
Moderns determine
By statistically speaking.

So for terrible Ivan
And tyrant Peron
And Louis' enemy,
Ottoman Suleiman,

Each high official
And military clone,

It is obvious they,
Not by birth alone

Or education, rose
To their stature:
For Saladin, Haman –
All's nomenclature!

Yes, martinets stem
From the race of men
Whose common name ends
With the letter *N*.

FAMILY

Each Sunday five a. m., my peppermint-stick son,
Glowcheeked as if baked in breadcrumbs,
Looms in the bedroom doorway in red-striped
Pajamas – sleepful and four years full of daddy-dreams,
Or maybe grown from father, breaking prison.
Though even there my bandage shouldn't be scraped,
I beckon him to bed, saluting; gripped
By flagwaving, he leaps, a cherry meringue
Of sprites propelled on their torpedo's wave,
And under sheets dividing *Sturm* from *Drang*,
We sink the British merchants, then yell, "Dive."

Often we herd a group of Poles along
A moon-drawn road, and watch for saboteurs,
And when we reach the coastline, strip the Poles.
We round up filthy Jews like tops – each wobbles,
Then like a depth charge bursts where no one hears.
Flinging our Gothic German tales to song,
We save Parisian paintings, we connoisseurs!
When our Group motto *Deepest plunges win*
Tires us of warring games, we hug and talk
Till mother calls – no, that we must imagine.
She died amid the bombings. I must cook.

I'M AS UNHURRIED AS NATURE

The Argus-rock north coast:
the sun, a little eye
for lack of sleep
settling, a wisp of red.

My wife and boy on a tiny island
finish sandwiches,
and I cover the jam
while the cocoa-hued sailboat, a brow
anchoring in the immense forehead of sky,
bobs up in surprise
and down in understanding.

Bay water and breeze have welcomed us.
On a quiet, good-sailing day,
we have unlidded love
and spread it to the edge of Maine.

THE RIDER

Silver the horse toward sunless larch,
To hushing fir – the awaiting wood;
No neigh, no neigh. She stood
Enchanted to the ears and knew
Such sounds as in a march,

Or hunters scampering for their food,
But rarely hoofs so low.
The emblemed palace listened, too.

Emerald grass toward the lifting moon
The springing earth, ecstatic, bore –
No neigh, no neigh – but tore
The highborn mood of evening's blue
To shreds that vanished soon,

For hoofs approaching near her door
Left no marks on dawn's dew.
The purblind palace listened, too.

Pearl-primed in the next night's towers,
The maiden sobbed but dare not speak.
No neigh, no neigh. Oblique
Through windowed fog she stretched to view
What stranger rode those hours:

And a burning scar on his left cheek
Was all she glimpsed askew.
The guessing palace listened, too.

Golden light on a silent man
And silver horse so slowly dimmed –
No neigh, no neigh. She trimmed

The candle without rest, and knew
The distant hoofbeats ran

To hardier woods where no hawks skimmed,
And vines too thickly grew.
The fearful palace listened, too.

Ruby ruffs of birds were still.
The maiden by the tree lay hid.
No neigh, no neigh. She did
Not leap; as he rode by she threw
Her heart upon her will,

Walked surely, steadily amid
Her echo retinue.
The grieving palace listened, too.

Garnered with no smiles or sighs,
He swooped her to his saddle bar,
No neigh, no neigh, and far
As deep can be reflected through,
She pondered, in his eyes,

On her left cheek a burning scar,
And heard the owls whoo.
The lonely palace listened, too.

A TALE

Oon mornyng as I wende throughe the wode,
Hardely the dawne was come, the crickets stode
Entranced with the soun of new-broke lyght,
And al the constellaciouns of the nyght
Tucked in hir imaginarie lines, for slepe,
I passed a lake that semed not verray depe,
Outespred with water-lilyes balancyng
The courrent – where smalle spiders clinge –
Pale were the petales in the lakes reflexioun,
But scarlet the stamenes, and the brode leaves were green.
And as I gazed on the sondry floures
It semed as if the erly mornyng houres
Hadde witchcraft in hir sonds, or ellis unknown
To me, I swevenid on the banke alon,
For in thatte lake on a water-lilye pad
I saugh a sparowe, broken-wynged and sad,
Who spak to me thus: Vysitor of the mornyng miste,
Ye stare in swich amazement as I wiste
Ye want som explanacioun I shold make,
For wondre of a sparowe in a lake.
Two nyghts agoon, I flewe like ony byrde
Thatte evere teased the trees, or evere herde
The wilde and distant moanyng where wynds die,
And rudderlesse clouds drift endelessly,
Whanne on a suddene, a rore, somthyng ygrazed
My wyng, and a-doun throughe the starres I fell amazed.
This is al I know. I wold have drowned
Hadde not the water-lilye ben my ground.
And now, in slow starvacioun, I see
Anothre deth (stire not, it is too late for me);

I am prepared, my sparowe strengthe is sapt,
Bet for byrde to die in beauty wrapt.

Thus quod the tendre beste, and I arose
To walk an othre direcioun, thoghe myn herte froze,
And I wondred, lemman, since thatte loud cracke
Of knowyng ye cold not love me threwe me backe,
Since I did not droun, how now, with this byrdes last crie,
In youre water-lilyed armes I slowly die.

A GOODNIGHT STORY

Child of trail's frost and the wintered heart,
Told all the fairy grimness of kings
Felled in the wood till the young girl comes
Game in the wind and game in the body –

Having kissed his lips, hers lie congealed,
Chilled in snow under the crowned head's trees –

Grieve for that king where the covering firs
Stilled in the hush of a few birds watching –
Give up his shadow to the numb skies
Cruel in the moment of his kiss and death.

Hold what his thoughts were before you leave:
Love never graven, love without child.

Grieve, too, for the girl where the rimed boughs
Live green in the seeming sleep of the wood,
Beside her his grounds, vast yet small:
Cold the king's realm and the king's body.

Child, in one legend all meanings strive –
Prove whatever you wish from what they willed;
Wild, snows write over their deepening love.

**IN AUTUMN'S WEATHER, ALL THE WORLD'S A
WONDER**

In autumn's weather, all the world's a wonder.
A quilt of red leaves tucks the world under.
My love dances on these
Leaves.

In summer's thunder, slight as any feather,
My love dances like light hail on the meadow.
Her nudge delights
Violets.

I dance in spring, dressed in green bravado,
Past summer, autumn, till, together,
Winter walks us over the low
Snow.

TO JANET, DOING A CROSSWORD PUZZLE

How is it that bodily beauty
When, in the lamplight, she is bending
Toward a magazine and the draping short hairs of her neck
Glisten like hummingbird eyes, deep-corolla eyes,
Seems nothing less than moral perfection?
What are red lips contrasted with nine letters downward:
Courage undaunted; or eight letters furrowing her forehead:
Honing toward kindness? Do shawled shoulders
Call for sacrifice, ten vertical,
Or an integrity of profile
Imply keeping of a word? Yet as she is resting
As for a Gilbert Stuart stiff portrait,
I still in the sometimes Valley Forge
Of marriage, authenticate my life
In hers. In spite of verbal indiscipline –
Raw recruit braggadocio –
Every wintry night I salute
Her skin magic and translucent
As a child's story, the point
Of her pencil well taken,
As she guesses in unerasable knowledge
The limits of language. On the couch I spy
Her time divided into obedient squares
Below the inquisitive imperativeness of her brows,
And detect at her hand five black-and-white
Warblers cross and flit, disappear
Into black holes to migrate again
Nested, numbered and measurable,
As she sits as silent as the faint click
Of an adjective turned in place, and refusing to be
Wholly defined, and her mind glittering
Five letters all directions, honor,
And fifteen deep, trustworthiness.

DISCOVERY

for Janet

It was as if I, an infant, floated
In a palmleaf crib without nails,
On water with no name or goodbye,
And presumed the moon my mother,
And the mute bulrushes, nodding,
Her implicit lullaby,

And you, an Egyptian princess
Jinglejangling to the boat
Bumping into the strand,
Who, between papyrus and lily,
Scooped me from the child bed,
Handed me the promised land.

A SUMMER ROWING

Wife, I summoned you from totterings past,
Webbed you between my growing limbs of needs –
From the dyes of morning and my dark spinnerets,
Weaved in the rampant wind to songs of linnets
And early awakenings of the still weeds
The silk which holds its own creators fast.

Your turn to row. I'll dip my hand in water,
Reflecting my arm, my face, my absolutist
Images. Dear, observe the lonely frog –
His ebony eyes dilate in ceaseless fog,
He lives to seven years, and is never kissed,
His tongue strikes out continually for slaughter:

I see a fraction only, my age cries out
For warmth, my tongue reveals in the night.
Consider the wooden oar: it rises, but the force
Starts in my dip. When, rowing the stream's course,
As in a French painting, the sun's prismatic light
At the hour of day to question beyond a doubt

The striate rock, the frog's perpetual stare,
The shadowed radii of tilted jonquils,
Just then, I conjure spectacles which tell
Configurings of my life. I am the shell
Of what I see. Almost, what the boat wills.
And the path of my vision knows you everywhere.

Wife, you are time future, sitting across
This rowboat. Led by my life to this, I find
Residuums of verse heard over the oars
Which crawl their biped way between the shores
Of things to think of, while winds, deaf and blind,
Summon the evening and the evening's loss.

THE WING AND THE TALON

All deaths are one, and they are my wife's.
Take Niebuhr's life-taking – within the year,
Whichever blind bird death is, with a simple quiet coming
to rest

Clawed through their lives.

Niebuhr, with his hawk's fierce intellectual eye,

Ravenous with insight –

His thought was, one might say, a glider out for prey,

Giving in the taking. It had ideas about ideas;

It shaped whatever was of feathers and bone;

It rode a confluence;

It made a mind.

And she, small sparrow, chipping away – her mind made me.

Together, they join me when evening wishes to come,

When the bird of death sings twice, though all deaths
are one.

MY CUP RUNNETH OVER

Into the Baltimore cafe
Where bigotry dined uglily,
I sashayed mutely with my black cohort;
To the counter's grandiloquence
We floated, two mere innocents,
Simple guys from them thar hills, that sort.
Nor did we speak to one another,
No hint of freedom-riding brother –
Separate but equal, each on his conformist stool.
The sun at noon-plus-one re-notched:
Inside, the lion *Danger* stretched;
We yawned and spread our limbs that things stay cool.

Our move began (sooner than later):
Coffee, my pal said to the waiter,
No sugar, black (his coffee segregated purely).
And so, relaxed, we waited calmly.
Were we naïve, or were we balmy?
We don't serve colored, smirked the waiter, surly,
Not willfully commandingly –
A southern gent upstandingly
Asserting civil rites – and so no serving,
For in the world of the white man's burden,
Mansions abound to be absurd in,
But little room for custom to be swerving.
Then popped I up in a quiet voice,
Coffee, black. Identical choice,
Then shut my eyes for inner strains to sup to,
And when it came without a flair,
I saw the waiter's puzzled stare,
For it seemed it was a Negro I gave my cup to.

No choral curse, no sorrow spoken –
The waiter overcome! Heartbroken?

My friend and I looked stupidly at the ceiling.
No one smoking, no one blinking,
And there was, damn, a Negro drinking
A coffee, black (yet with no guilty feeling).
That youthful waiter turned, concerned,
His scornful glare inwardly turned –
At least no foaming at his gaping mouth.
There had arrived a breeze, a blast,
A blow for the heretofore outcast:
We northerners had tinily opened the south.

To show I was still at my ease,
I ordered another coffee, please,
And, yes, I got it, and paid the usual way.
So Negro, white, two thirsty guys,
As if it couldn't be otherwise,
Prolonged their sipping into the midst of day –
The lesson being, this side of pride,
When law is on the horrible side
And there's divorce before there's human wedding,
Disharmonize, waste time, dismay,
Dirty, distract and disarray,
Go backward into where you'll change your heading,
Query as if the village fool,
Make every legal slip your tool,
Peruse, confuse, defuse, give humble hell,
Punch no one though you're packed with puissance,
Stay bloodless, yet a bloody nuisance,
Yes, smile and smile and be a villanelle.

Our bit broke up routine a bit,
And if it broke a bit more than that,
They'd have to live with sights a bit unsightly,
But we had more collapse to flow to,
Baltimore's other cafes to go to –
We finished gently and we fled politely.

WHEN I WAS A BOY PAST TWELVE

When I was a boy past twelve, the sea of my age
Went green and tossing
With the wide wind as I and my father sailed
Each day in a gullwhite ship, far from the blue shore
And surf-whipped rock to the tuna tide
And swordfish-setting
Sun. Every fish that swam through waving water
And the dying foam that loves the rainbow
Swam through our fishermen's lives.

My father drowned one starry evening (ropes
Were hurled – grief only
Intertwined with grief) but till that going
Down, my heart looked up, to the schools of speckled clouds
Pursuing their way across the night
And the constellations
Of the dancing minnows; my heart looked round, and was
silvery
With the world's reflection; my mind drank sea
In the thirsty time of twelve

Until that hour we left for darkening land.
The day had been sailed
And we skimmed toward home with the topdeck wet and
shining,
Our arms and closing eyelids slack and barely heard
In the seadrift night of the white egret
And the petrel calling
Until my father answered. There I doffed my cap
To the sun that blushed at its early leave and left
A reddening of the waves

Like voyaging roses. Then an empty boat
By a man struggling,
My father's plunge – these elemental doings

Were their moments' dyings, covered by a foam of flowers
Which was their death and decoration;
And the day was sailed
But I returned alone (O weep for the goingdown men
The tears of our descent) while now the stormy
Petrel hears no answer.

Stranger, that you took my father with
You, do not mourn
Nor set up gratitude for his unwinning
Try; each dying man bequeaths his meaning to
The world, yet also finds it with
Him. You merely took
A little more. While my inheritance will be
This ship that sails his grave and makes, perhaps,
The finest touch of all.

Spindrift is sea-wide, larger than land (reach
For the dying men
Enmeshed in each other's arms but undone alone),
Wider than wind and cold; throughout the seablown year
It meets my roiled fisherman's face
(O sing for my father
The ocean of your voice to give his brined lungs space)
And calls each man the way of his boyhood heart
And the stranger of himself

He seeks. Long in a deep sleep lies my father
Who died in water.
No wife to kiss the ivory of his bones,
No daughter to snap the seaweed from his arms. Quiet
And unspoken as the rescue
He did not do –
When the sunlight drowns for a day, only me to speak
To the listening petrel and the rose-crowded wave
His act of immediate love.

INSTRUCTIONS TO MY SON

David, after my death, if anyone at all
Should print or read even a line or so
Of my poetry, within your lifetime,
Wake me up, and let me know.

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