

**FREEDOM
AND OTHER
TIMES**



Robert L. Carothers



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ROBERT L. CAROTHERS

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For Robert Kennedy Carothers

FREEDOM

MUSKRAT

The trick was to trap them in deep water.
Let them drown themselves.

Yet often, stumbling up our run,
Still sleepy and shivering in the night before morning,
My high boots shattering the night's new ice
That glazed the still pools between the bigger rocks,
I'd find one in the faint search of my light,
His rich coat smeared with mud and ice,
Twisting in the steel I laid for him,
Praying in his last need that I might accept
The long lamented lamb his father left me,
The splintered bone crying clean and white
His love from the hung matted flesh
In another night.

Too late, too late,
For sharp black eyes and long yellowed teeth,
Under my reigning foot in the rushing waters,
The bubbles of those days rising in silence;
And I looked away, impatient,
Shivering under the stars.

CHARLIE NO-FACE

In a shack up Crow's Run hollow
Charlie No-Face sleeps the days,
then, coat high and cap low,
he walks the roads til dawn.

Kenneth Taylor has seen him, and Theron Durr.
In the lights of cars his scars flash
like the phantoms of all our dark dreams:
he has said nothing, not curse nor prayer
since flame fat on his face
burned in his brain words not heard
we ran from.

Summer evenings
we planned to go to him, but never went
Yet I have seen him in Omaha, and
in Kentucky, and once, in fog,
along the Kennebec River in Maine.
In rain he slouches through my mind
and pinned by pain of horror I face that face:
neither question nor answer
but some black fact that lies in us beneath words:
the hush of snow, a whimper in wind,
a lone soul on a country road.

BETRAYAL

To Local Lodge 417, B. of L. E.

I came to your meeting to hear old John Lorne,
Still straight in his seventy years you told me,
A legend over oil drum fires along the picket lines,
The white head you remembered
Appearing out of the dark to explain
Once again why you were there,
Shivering in that slow drizzle.

I came to hear him tell
How you stood against the Pinkertons at Homestead,
Or how you drove off the Cossacks
At Conway with bricks and blasting caps,
Or of the barricades yet to be thrown up
In the streets and alleyways.

I came early to watch him enter,
To see you in his faith,
To hear the songs of stormbirds.
But you came late, in wide Pontiacs and
Buicks, and the shining knobs of
Trailer hitches sung your anthem.
And John Lorne spoke of three months vacation,
 Like the Steelworkers,
And of the threat of the Black conspiracy.

A TIME AMONG TOMBSTONES

Whirling and purring through the sweet green grass,
Slicing the full wet stalks
Laid out over those that were,
A wind-born wisp rose,
brown and belly-white,
And I stopped in time, walking
Ahead to look at what squirmed
In a warm nest, pulled from a
New night's thumping lover,
Laid living among the dead,
The eyes turned toward the earth,
Unwilling to see me, knowing
In first and final blindness to
Ignore what came whirling
Through the grass, even on
Bright summer mornings.

THE QUARRY

In the morning
The quarry thunders silence.
Gashed granite moans for the moon,
A lost and dying brother;
The sandstone too splits and swirls,
Whimpers, whispers, collapses and contracts
In a time beyond mere sense.

It is I who am the stranger here,
Like the moon a thing apart.
I lay my hand on a bold chunk
Of this life-charged earth
And wait, and wait to watch them thickly merge,
The irons and acids of my soul
Crying to their first father.
My blood begs, boils to roll and seep
Back by crevices, by the grains of you,
To know in elemental oneness
The essence of all timeless, deathless things.

In the morning
The quarry thunders silence,
And a fierce old love sings.

GRANDFATHER

Nineteen he was, when the Wobblies wooed him
With the love of the working wonder,
A decade of the black dust of his death deep in his lungs,
After the soot-smoked sun in Bulger, Pennsylvania.

Welsh, bred under the world's wheel, he rose
In the white-walled night, past the sleeping pits,
Blind with the ache, and the all-bountiful
Thirteen sticks of the great earth mover,
To his hate of haunt of hunger, where the thin yellow scrip
Buried the man before his birth,
He planted his pain, near the stone leg of the
Yellow-stained clapboard of the iron-meshed window.

I cannot speak to him, long back from Lewisburg,
For I have tried to ask him of that night;
But he walks down by the Ohio, coughing up his blood,
Spitting it in to a red rag.

CARIBOU

The music, too fine to fill up all this space,
Shrills thin out over the tundra,
Rocks, scrubs, ridges and passes
Shedding this short spring the slabbing
Ice of their winters, running in trickles
Unthinkably pure, meeting again and again,
Recalling a stream in the land
Waiting for this day to rise again.

We wait for them to come,
Circling, clouded brown swirl of
Hooves, horns and hair, snorting, wild
At the smell of spring, up from the
Low pastures. It is a time,
I am told, of joy and song,
And the women and girls shine
And sway in the rhythm of the flutes.

The food of the feast, rich and plenty,
Lies beyond the morning fires,
A promise for the night, and the tempo
Rises with the sun in an ancient chant
Rehearsed on this plateau like the flow
Of the stream, or the coming herd,
The black-eyed men in their fur boots and
Their white-skinned blinding, blinding girls.

The earth awakening remembers now:
A rumbling swells the air, boys beating on drums whoop,
And they come, rushing and swerving,
Up through the pass; they are great
In their winter coats, their heads high,

Eyes wide and white, a little mad so
Thrust against each other, proud I think
To have survived another winter.

We whistle, shout, wave our arms
As they enter the log corrals,
Run at them, and cows leap sideways,
Hammering out their fear on the ground
In a quick hard time. But it is
The bucks, the young ones, we look for,
And the boys cut them out, turn them
To smaller pens whose walls they cannot yet see.

They do not know how it is with
Caribou; it is their first spring,
And they run stiff-legged from fence
To fence for the cows they have followed.
It is their time, and three boys
Set one off from his brothers, crowd
Him into yet a smaller ring,
Move in about him in a corner.

The girls watch; the running has made
Their cheeks red, they stand together,
They smile to each other, and at
The boys who smile back and dive
At the caribou, one on his neck,
Another at his haunches, the third
Pulling his front legs from under him
In a frantic jerking heap on the ground.

They roll him back, the eyes all white,
A shoulder in his throat, hard hands
On the pumping legs, across
His bulk, forcing the hind quarters

Apart, the white hair of his belly
Like the snow, and she runs to her place
Quick and lean, a prism of festival
Color, the blond, blond hair blowing about her face.

I watch her go in under the
Boy's arms, bury her face in the
Fur of the spring of the caribou,

The blond hair loose, running over his belly,
Weaving itself into one, her toes
Dug into the dirt, pushing, one leg
Straight, the other pulled up underneath
Her, her buttocks low, she presses

The ground, the brown hands around his shanks,
Her fingers digging, pulling, he writhes,
Snorts, kicks, and her blond head goes deep,
Deep in him, shakes hard, and shakes again.
She slides back, away, on her knees,
Spits into a hide bucket, and smiles,
Smiles to the boys and to me, and
We think she is very beautiful.

I hear the music again; it
Is almost a polka; the boys
Have turned to other caribou.
This one is driven out of the pen,
Runs off by himself, stands alone
But does not lick himself, bawls once
At nothing, at the spring, at a
Dream he cannot quite remember.

Later, there is dancing. I see them
Turning, throwing their arms about
Each other, eating meat, and cheese,
And drinking a kind of red wine.
She goes off with one of the boys;
I see them melt into the night beyond
The fire. She is very beautiful; her
Eyes are bright and blue, her legs are
Light, long and straight, her hair is thick,
Blond and long, her cheeks are red from
The dancing and the wine. I think,
It is the spring; it is his time.

AFTER THE FUNERAL

Back at the house
I had nothing to say to her, to offer her.
Yet she, tall in proper black and shaking, slipped
from the solicitude of sisters, daughters and nieces
to find me, away from the other sons-in-law and uncles,
tired and bearded, sucking on the edge of bourbon and ice,
watching the wet snow fall from a grey sky
to tell me how on the last day
she had gone to him:

And when I saw his pain, she said,
I went down to the lobby, and
I got down on my knees and I said
Jesus you take him now
I give him up to you Jesus
You take him now
You take him home
And when I went back to the room
he was gone.
And you mean to tell me, she said
 through the winter afternoon,
you mean to tell me that Jesus doesn't hear
 our prayers,
that Jesus doesn't come when we call him?

The eyes were grey and wide,
looking not at me but, bent on some divine vision,
took in the white world beyond the large window

as if one, the world and I, we would be at last sullied.
And I kept waiting for her stare to break, the force of
her will to fade and send her back to her children,
nervously watching us from across the room,
until, the strain at last too much, my wife
 came to her side
and led her back to the couch and talk more suited.

Away from their glances
I fought for myself.
But the snow had covered the apple trees, the pond,
the many cars in the lane, and all our footprints passed.
And, hard against my heart, the snow kept falling,
and the snow kept falling, and the snow kept falling,
and the snow kept falling.

HOMECOMING

It has been miles since I saw you, Freedom.
You have grown old.
Your stone houses above the river are thin,
The doors to foreign widows
Who have not learned the language.
Your steep streets too are smaller,
The bricks heaved up,
Kicked carelessly to the gutters
Like the timbers rotted and loose
In the half-hid mines up your dark hollows.

We are some years apart, Freedom.
When I drove down to the square
You do not know me; your strange
Eyes stare hard at my beard,
Your lean faces call me the stranger.
And even my grandmother
Does not want me on the porch bench,
Asks me inside, runs to brush her thin hairs
Before we sit down to talk about the dying.

On the hill above the town
I walk over the graves I have dug,
See the names still there, and
The new ones, clean grey granite
Freshly blasted, and wish those men living.
They are the monuments to my dying,
They rise to meet me in Freedom,
Their widows keen for me.

**SEMINAR: KENT AND
THE KENNEBEC**

POEM FOR THE END OF SOMETHING I

Mistah Eliot, he dead.

Unspoken, a wind caught our words,
Like fog they are gone in the light.

Today each one is a thing molded of yellow plastic,
Brightly decaled in local color, marked made.

In our times, O Lord,
Archangels sneer at tears,
And fenders are built
Of inferior tin.

To you, my love, I give this nothing.
It is the thing I have been left to give.

This one and that one.
Morning and night.
Who reads maps here,
Where miles are hours?

It grows worse and worse, I said,
Soon I will not speak at all.

It grows worse and worse, she said,
Soon we will check our watches when we pass.

It is as it has been, they said,
Did you think it could be otherwise?

WOD A CODAKING EVE

Tree-fleeing, skydying padified shiek
Leaks off to sleeping lubbers fallen
Among mangoes, cooing and mourning
Limp the nautical nights nantucketest
Notions, while weathering, feathering
Fountains of flam lipped and lapped
The heat of a hunkie —
Ripclip his watery wings, ladybug, ladybug!

Gleeft cuspidorial mandequins
Grate aspirisial operins, while
Arced portraits of californicationists
Slur peninsulas proud of prancing
On ronald reagans regal rump
Bump and grump it lov, as
The slop it slips, boutomly, the she.

Kneek, Kneek, Kneek (ado!)
Flame towel and fern tar
Wheelbabbles knob and warmongers dough:
Oran the leaf bogs — minx, wagons
and chooplings fugue (Chopin!) for (glugamugafuga)
A lifelaw rises pupiling, purpling.
Rapponzo, Rapponzo
Macies the Mutt
Biles the bananas
Nickles the nit
And cunnings the funt, til
livering lips, slushing and sucking
Salted the wombing welcomeless wagon
Pitching and piping the glistening organ
(Angels or Angles? Hashish or Harpies?)

Acrux the black worst bent (sip the tip, nip the dip)
Iceters sizters and boneblushing blotters
Bigitis, bangitin, boutigin, since
Davinely Janus coupled the coup,
Recking the ream of the rod as
Sterling a kerr as ron a racist
(a dexentential choice, as pound by pound
they cantoed him out) asp porms
Call anus, asp porms
cull outus, burned of a blubbling sheman
Sugged in the see,
The rectal of us all
Befuns, blug and bun, a gain.

When she left at last
he was alone with
the clean white paper,
staring into it
as if reflections
of his mind somehow
might sort themselves out,
as if the black ink
flowed up the pen from
the paper, entering
his blood in the hands,
then back to the brain,
jarring him with the
hard fact of the word.

There are times you frighten me,
 Leaning over the edge of your mind,
Your eyes choosing not to see
 Me, not hearing words of my kind,
Refined you say beyond meaning.

I have seen this Bartleby in you,
 The night beyond a widow's keening,
The silent center clear through
 Your dumb "I would prefer not to."

THE VISIT

I am allowed to see you at three.
At two I come through traffic
across the city, park in the lot
and walk quickly the long way round
to the main entrance, past the officer.
It is two-fifteen. In the lobby
everyone is alone, with Time or Life.
An old woman in a fur wanders through the gift shop.
Two black children sit up very straight in leather chairs.
I ask the nurse where is the restroom.
She says turn right at the first ...
I know already.

Bells and voices
a doctor with a thin mustache at two-thirty.
A man in a bowling jacket stares at cars
passing outside.

I should eat, a fish sandwich maybe,
but no coffee, nothing to jar control
achieved of will too taut for touch.
Are you putting on a bra,
or combing out your hair?
Crying, or walking in a white hall?

In Vietnam the bombing continues,
a new shopping plaza on Howard Street,
Kennedy campaigns in Indiana;

weddings, weddings, the dead —
machinists, salesmen,
three bedrooms and two baths!

Pittsburgh loses five in a row.

twelve before three

twelve before three

It is still

twelve before

eleven before

three.

The pass, yellow, is

your name, my name.

I put it in my pocket

and walk at last to you:

the brass bed, the sea, the kitchen wallpaper,

the horses in the barn below the house, the cats,

desperate talk, whine and scream, a dream of witches,

spread and dig, probe and pinch, dark water, blood rage —

yes, yes, oh yes.

POEM FOR THE END OF SOMETHING II

“she says things that ought not be said”

And what am I to say,
Now that you are come?
Shall I say, I have missed you,
Seeing you are no abstraction,
But real and somewhat as you were?

Or should I sit upon the rocks
And study the pods of seaweeds,
Break clamshells with a rusty nail,
Keeping my back to the house
As if it were yesterday.

And what am I to say,
And how speak the languages of ghosts?

Shall I say, you must see this or this:
A tern diving for herring,
Or the rhythm of that line,
Or will you walk in blueberries
Until your skin is stained as mine?

Or should I sail down to the mouth
Of the river, sit on the wharf
With old men eyeing the
Lobsterboats coming from the ledges,
Handle the ropes and taste the salt
Off my fingers because it
Is always there and would be now.

And what am I to say,
Now that you are come?

Shall we start again
To fill the spaces with dead phrases,
To open doors, fabricate compliments,
And feign concern, thinking the cumulative
Effort enough to build again of words what was broken
Mind and body?

Or should we go again,
Each to each, pretending
When we meet on streets or in hallways
That we cannot quite remember the name,
Though, to be sure, there is something familiar
In the face?

How shall we laugh?
And how look at each other's eyes?
How sit in the dark without speaking?
And how keen this loss without voice?

And what am I to say,
Now that you are come?

NIGHT TALK

For Orrin Winn

He sprawled in the wooden rocking chair
Twisting out stories of Cuba when
Castro came down out of the Camberras,
And Maine when frigates sailed up the Kennebec;
About Thoreau's fireplace, Sunnybrook Farm,
The airplane of the soul, Lurleen Wallace,
Franco and the elections, the territorial imperative,
Muskrats in the swamps of Maryland,
The sidewalk galleries off Washington Square,
Alexei Kosygin, General Knox, Herman Melville,
Ronald Reagan, Winslow Homer, his grandpa,
A worn-out widow from Tampa, the surfers
At Acapulco, Douglas aircraft,
His friends who said God was a real God
And Jesus Christ was his prophet,
The Audobon Society, the 19th Maine
Volunteers at the Little Round-Top,
His wife dying of cancer in Alabama,
The nests of cormorants, his Volkswagen bus,
Visits to the Smithsonian, throwing beer
Bottles at the picadors in Barcelona,
Potboiler seascapes, his leaking aluminum boat,
The buoys going out in the tide below my window, and
About a death that came even to old trappers
With that finality he knew no longer a question.

They say a man's allowed a
Second childhood, he said, pointing
To the red Yamaha in the yard.

Why not a third or a fourth? my wife smiled.
The gulls banked and hung over a school
Of stripers in the bay above the channel
And fog gathered in the distance,
Blocking out the church steeple at Squirrel Point,
Coming inevitably across and nearer our talk as

We sat in the dark on through the interminate evening
Until the words failed altogether, and he got up
Very tired at last and slumped to the door,
 out and then gone,
The little motor yammering in the blackness.

POPHAM

When the ship came back from England
In the spring there was no sign on the shore
But the stumps of spruce already budding again.
John Denham walked up through the rocks
Looking for the scars of fires or feet but
Found only snails and once an otter slide.
The moss gave beneath his boots but rose again
Strong and sure when he had gone on by.

Thirty men cannot go without a mark,
He said to the mate on the edge of the sea.
But if George Popham saw those masts
In pine or birch or burned-out log canoe
Before the fog blew in to end thought,
He pressed against the wind or turned
 to salmon in the riffles,
And walked or paddled inland, up the Kennebec,
A man who had wintered with a new world.

BATTLE SONG

I

“Purpose shall be the bolder.”

People gather in the park
to listen to a speaker talk of war.
Young men pass out pamphlets.
The people read the pamphlets, quickly,
listen and go home.

At home they talk of what
they will do if it comes to that.
They put the pamphlets on the kitchen table.
They watch the city from a window
for a long time in the dark.

Saturday they walk in the March,
The March is finished, they listen to speakers,
they drink beer in small bars,
they go home and watch the city
for a long time in the dark.

On Sunday they walk through the park,
through bits of paper and patches of snow.
A cop talks to a priest.
Pigeons flap away from the wet brick streets.
Everywhere the sky is an empty grey.

II

“Heart the keener”

And will you play the last night home boy?
And will you make these bushes tremble?
And can you make the cock birds blush?

And, in chorus lads,

“Come again,” she said, “Promise you will.”
Slow fog. Mist to be wiped from the windshield.
“Of course I do! Need I tell you again
That last night — there — when I saw you ...”
Stumbling down the dawn grey steps,
The last light blown out among the men
In mocking mirrors, the cheering last night home
Crowds of sailors and sons of the civil service
Spitting peanuts at weary, smiling
Girls on swings above the bars.

Pigeons flap away from the wet brick streets.
Everywhere the morning sky is an empty grey.

III

“Spirit shall be the greater.”

I have only this one life,
He said across the table at dinner.
I live on this earth once ...
And the silence sounded his words.

“A certain contradiction in terms ...
A semantical problem ...
The intellectual’s dilemma ...
A well-considered, carefully calculated
Appraisal of the validity of human endeavor
in the face of ...”

Does anyone want more coffee?
Tea, Beverly?

The individual’s sense of morality must
in all instances take precedence over the official
policies of the state as the dictate of individual action.”

I believe it, Howard; it’s given me
the ground I walk on, the air I breathe ...
What am I, beside the idea of America?

From the green lawn the pigeons flap away
To circle in the grey evening sky.

IV

“As our strength grows less”

The steady mesh of slide and hook
becomes the pride of people,
the gearing and girding for battle.
The principle of justice flies
on the staff of tanks whining through the streets.

Love holds its tongue,
words are mere repetitions
of the blood beat of the many.
Green heroes march in ranks hearts
wide through the ache of women.
The words of songs of elder days
return to the minds of widows,
and their faces turned up toward the sky
blister black and flake to dust.
The generals wilt under their stars,
The president is a boiling hiss
 on the White House marble.
The professors are one blaze with their books,
and the Marchers are as flaming leaves blown
in autumn to spread the general terror.

No man stands to face himself here.
No poets take this subject.
Even this midnight scarlet sky is no more than interlude
in the empty grey.

PEACE BOY

peace boy

delivered up,
that long dreamed
swarm of dark faces and hard hands
welcomes your more private parts.

here

how tell them of resistance
give to the hard pressing people
your self to their need
stone mad for an inner you.

say

who they are
comes with each thrust or
blood rage humps your flesh.

say

then they are
your father's sons or
driven deep by endless pain.

and crawl away from
shadows and your own wound
to lie hurt in your cells
lastly alone in the first long
night of your searing soul.

peace boy, peace boy,
born in your fall,
can you, can you,
can you swallow them all?

LETTER TO THE GHOST OF ALLISON KRAUSE

The times change, Allison.

Where there was the clenched fist
there is the needle,
there is the cross.
The times change.

Your dreams seem strange
just two years to the day later.
But you will be pleased to know
the troops are coming home now.
Missiles that smell flesh
hunt out the small ones
hiding in the caves and tunnels of their own land.
We pull the trigger in Okinawa
in a convergence of computer blips.
Now no one is to blame, Allison.
Even Richard Nixon wants peace.

So we really don't want to see
photos of you and your friends,
of blood running in spring grass.
You are too painful for us
hitching the interstates
to rock concerts,
trying to score some good stuff
or saving our immortal souls.

I'm sorry it turned out this way, Allison.
You couldn't have known.
We both thought the revolution was coming.

But you walked out on a bright May day
to see the sun burst orange in your head,
the terrible truth come home.

God bless you, Allison Krause.
You died for all of us.
In prayer meetings we thank
you for the lesson learned well.
In dark corners we smoke magic
to dispel the last of fears and fury
you taught us to forget.

I cannot ask you to forgive us for it.

AND EDINBORO

NANCY KLINS IN EDINBORO

Because I have seen Nancy Klins on the grass
beside Loveland Hall
Playing chess and rolling in the sun
And because there is grass in front of Loveland Hall and
grass in front of the library and
grass along the lake and
grass in my yard beside the church
And because there is grass in Cuba and Berlin
and along the sidewalks in Coventry

Nancy Klins has been in Coventry all its life
rolling in the grass and playing chess
in a formal park where old people watch
men in working clothes coming from
the Rootes factory where they put cars together.
She has been listening to the whistles.
She has been watching the grey smoke.
She does not much care if she loses the game.

I SEE YOU NANCY KLINS! Don't pretend with me.
Chess is not your game — Cuba is your game
Green birds not seen in Pennsylvania
Green birds singing (if you want to call it that)
I want to call it that. Nancy Klins
wants to call it reality.
I have no quarrel with that. I will call Cuba reality,
I will call the green bird Nancy Klins,
eating small hopping green
grasshoppers of a Cuban variety,

Nancy Klins eating grasshoppers
on the grass in front of Loveland Hall,
Nancy Klins combing her
hair, Nancy Klins getting dressed in a
blue skirt and pink blouse
with ruffles and sitting in a Buick at the traffic light
at the corner of Meadville Street and Normal Street.

It wasn't something else. Nancy Klins is. Is
a girl in Uganda with a mosquito bite on her ass
a girl in Rome whose sandal has rubbed
a callous on her toe
a girl in Mexico smelling the pepper she
spreads on her dough
a girl in Pennsylvania changing the tire
on her blue Volkswagen

Is Is Is
as green birds as red birds as black birds
as girls as shoestrings as windowsills
as mops as willow trees as can-openers
(not as tether-hooks)
as a baby rapping his head against the floor
against the chair leg
against my shoulder, against the grass outside
against Nancy Klins (Nancy Klins is
shadowed by babies)
against the edges, the limits
Mind, flesh, the plea of words.

OH, OH, OH, NANCY KLINS!

Oh great green bird
eater of Cuban grasshoppers
with a bite on your ass
riding in Buicks, on mules, on sidewalks
carrying dough for tacos, carrying clothes to change
carrying babies and poems by French symbolists
and novels by Russian naturalists and
religious books by Hindu holy men who sat
in the jungle rain to dictate to their students
who should have seen you in your moving in the air,
the air against you, Nancy Klins against the air,
Nancy Klins in space, in the space of earth,
in the time of now
on the grain of the concrete, you
its meaning and my meaning and Nancy Klins and
the stain of grass as deep as heart can push.

THE NORMAL SCHOOL

on its burning

Here, the wires worn bare at last,
the walls collapse in brick and smoke
as if, without reason walls could know, they would not be
allowed,
as if, by sheer weight of will
the age would have them / gone.

For me it is no objective building.
Rather, the form of our minds,
of long-dried fiber and bad connections,
the shape of our coming:
wall and wall,
the high ceiling,
a series of stairways
 leading today up
into nothing.

We have been a long time here,
so I try to say something to what is left —
but they are useless words to a distant father.
I would try to explain,
but he would look away from me
and I would know his mind.

So I turn my back on
the ash still smoking,
the paternal minds in cremation,
having said my prayer for their
souls of wall and stairway
in some historical Purgatorio,
and walk to my class with a vision
and say to my friends —

we are not these walls of brick
we are not men to climb stairwells.
we are sweet free human flesh
wild with space and without time!
We are the phoenix rising,
the Aquarian spirit, the new people!

The flames are the tremors of our birth,
and the bright heat feeds our bodies
expanding, extending, merging into
one, the one holy human being that knows neither
wall nor hierarchy nor rule,
and I say today we have become
ourselves.

I wake at three
to my son's cry,
carry him warm from his bed
down the hall to the window,
look out at the street

the moon lights
the lawn, the laurel
beneath the window,
the one-year boy
looks into the street

eyes, skin
clear, alert
and back to me.

I am full of wonder,
then despair.

PAST MIDNIGHT

For H. D. Gramley

The mind defines itself
on the thought not to be thought.

Have it your way:
a good dream but wrong,
wrong from the start. ..

yet tonight levy saying
saying while he lived that
as the bullfighter flirts
with death
so the poet flirts
with madness,
brings himself to the brink of it
and knows himself there,
a mad knowing
of a mad self that is the self.

levy at 26 is dead,
his brains spattered on the ceiling
of some tenement in Cleveland.

How did his life feel to him
in the park at University Circle,
in the coffeehouses and bars,
in the Cleveland jails? Did he
taste it like the burnt taste
of the steel in his mouth? Did he
see it as he saw that final room,
the line of wall, the chair, his fingers?
When did he take his life as his own,
apart from rabbi, cop or even friends,
if not then, dizzy with choice?

So, the white whale, the child-woman,
bombs for General Dynamics, the
bright terror itself

Define, render, for once, something:
the me of me, you of you,
the necessary edges of the world.

ON MYTH

For Carl Hirsch

I have heard that some girls,
startled or seized by spasm
in the backseat squirm of love,
will lock loins like some blacksnake's bite
not to be broken by twist or pry,
pull or prayer, will catch at full stroke
their sweet-tongued boys as if to hold
what comes and goes by soft promise and last gasp
in some mad, unchanging embrace:

'In a dream of the river road
I know the grind of flesh shift,
the long plunge turn to terror.

A frantic dance begins.

eyes lost in the pump of blood
are all white, wild with writhe and roll,
contortion of gut, thrash of limbs.
Her skin grows cold and sleek (a plan! a plot!)
and I am lost in her.

Now fathers and elders hover about the car.
Faces flash in the windows.
(My flesh withers that they should see
me caught in the bill of blame,
my best self gripped in the pinch of fear).
Their long tongues lash my back,
leave limp, undone me on her long bones.
They lead my mother to look,
teachers, neighbors, two aunts from Jersey
leer and loom away, prophecy fulfilled.

It is too much.

Shame burying shame I am set free.
Dying, I am filled with fury at their presence,
rise up in wrath, drive deep my pain,
and, lo, ram my love in the ghost-ridden groin,
roar in the rage of my hero's nerve,
split the cock-swallowing crab like thunder,
my bolt crackling, the long night broke in flame.'

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Carothers was blessed by his mother reading poetry to him at the earliest age. The most productive period of his own writing was in the 1960s and 70s. He studied under Donald Washburn at Edinboro and Jacob Leed at Kent State. He lives today with his wife Jayne in Wakefield, RI, after a long tenure as president of the University of Rhode Island.

His small books include *Poems for the End of Something* (1969), *Freedom and Other Times* (1972), *John Calvin's Favorite Son* (1980) and *Winter Poems* (2008). Individual poems have appeared in many small magazines.

Carothers acknowledges the influence of Dylan Thomas on his work, as well as the storytelling of miners, railroaders, fishermen, and decades of his students.



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ABOUT THIS BOOK

The body text for this book is Plantin. Several attractive modern fonts, including Galliard and Plantin, are based on typefaces originally designed by Robert Granjon (1513-1589), a prolific type designer and founder active in Paris, in the shop of Christoph Plantin, and later in Rome at the Vatican. In 1913, Monotype issued several versions of Plantin, based on some of Granjon's designs. Section and main titles are set in Showcard Gothic and Newcastle Base. Poem titles are set in Schneidler Black.

The front cover photo and author photo are by Thom Tamaro.

