



**AFTER HOURS
IN BOHEMIA**

**BARBARA A.
HOLLAND**

**LOST POEMS
FROM NOTEBOOKS,
MANUSCRIPTS
& LITTLE MAGAZINES**



Also by BARBARA A. HOLLAND

POETRY

- Autumn Wizard* (1973)
Crises of Rejuvenation (1974, 1985, 2006)
Burrs (1977, 1981)
Autumn Numbers (1980)
In the Shadows (1984)
Collected Poems, Volume 1 (1980)
Running Backwards (Warthog Press, 1983)
Medusa: The Lost Chapbook (2019)
The Secret Agent (2019)
Out of Avernus (2019)
The Shipping on the Styx (2020)
The Beckoning Eye (2019)
Selected Poems (2 volumes, 2020)



AFTER HOURS IN BOHEMIA

**LOST POEMS
FROM NOTEBOOKS,
MANUSCRIPTS
& MAGAZINES**

BARBARA A. HOLLAND

**Edited by
BRETT RUTHERFORD**

THE POET'S PRESS
PITTSBURGH, PA

Copyright © 2020 by The Poet's Press
All Rights Reserved

Poems provided to
The Poet's Press by
The Estate of Barbara A. Holland,
from printed magazines and journals,
notebooks, and typed manuscripts.

Rev 1.4

This is the 289th publication of
THE POET'S PRESS
2209 Murray Avenue #3/ Pittsburgh, PA 15217
www.poetspress.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 13

POEMS FROM MAGAZINES

Gilt Youth and Golden Age	21
Listening In	22
Tenebrae	23
The Invisible Man: In Memoriam	24
The Duende	25
For A Dead Lady	26
In Playtime Territory	28
Distant Thunder	29
No One So Exquisite	30
The Mystery of Night	31
The Release	31
The Wheel Comes Round Again	32
Enter by Way of A Cannon	33
Serious Business	34
With the Aid of the Moors	35
A Christmas Dream	36
A Study in Post Office Art	37
A Test of Strength	38
And Finally the Moon	38
At the Heart of the Universe	39
Cock Crow for City Sleep	40
Day of Wrath	41
December Beginning	42
Demon Weather	43
Dust-Devil Man	45
Flute Song	46
Mediatrix	47
Our Roots Are One	48
Poseidon	49
Indic Astrology	50
Mushrooms	50
Little One	51
Northward Riding	52
Two Who Got Away	52
What's Here	53
Senescence	53
Church Spire	54
Negatives	55
In Defense of Shiva VIII	56

Canticle for the Holy Innocents	57
Fog Horn in Retrospect	59
Translation	60
Stampede	61
Those Who Perish By the Sword	62
The Beetle-Browed Neighborhood	63
Remembering the King of Darkness	64
Shifting Gears	65
Suspense	66
The Dybbuk	67
The Self-Made Song	68
The House of Ice	69
The Rhythm of All Conundrums	71
Life Story	72
Lady of Consolation	73

THE QUEEN OF SWORDS

1 Ilse, Molder of Destiny	77
2 A Glimpse from Monday	78
3 Somewhere In Another City	79
4 At the Occultist's Door	80
5 An Expert At Home	81
6 Optimism	82
7 Guess Who Crashed the Party	83
8 Penance for Convenience	85
9 The Shadow of Kundry	86
10 Seeking Work With Ilse	87
11 Ilse, The Queen of Swords	89
12 Reaction to the Fortune Teller	91

POEMS FROM TYPED MANUSCRIPTS

Ceres	95
Early Morning in July	96
In Darkest Love	97
A Full Red Rose	98
A Tease is an Almost Moon	100
Inmate Suicide	101
Karma	102
Vinegar Cruet	103
The Din of a Country Summer	104
Otter Island	105
Then Heigh Ho the Holly	106
An Omen for the Better	107
The Dancing Master	108

The Swinging Song	109
Shadow of the Meadowhawk	111
The Ruin of St. John's Churchyard	113
The Aerialist	114
At Saco Falls	115
Break Dancing, Washington Square	116
A Cat Weathers the Sermon	117
Cryonic Age	117
A Dream of Baked Potatoes	118
The Gambit of the Round-Trip Man	119
The Land Mower	120
The Little Spell	121
Peekskill, New York	121
Merlin	122
The Minotaur Awakened	123
Wrong Alloy	124
Not Quite Farewell	125
Of Time and Space	126
Strange Berries	126
The Queen of Shemakhan	127
If Unidentified, Still They Fly	128
To Keep It Going	129
When Once You Served Me Music	129
The Running Stranger	130

FROM "THE EDWARDIAN POEMS"

Dumbstruck	133
Dedication Is A Dirty Word	135
Name the Instigator	136
Rebirth Is A Fact of Life	137
Knossos	138
Graduate Lounge: A Dream	139
The Screen	140
No Secrets	141
The Riddle Called Home	142
The Language of Windows	143
Once More, Your Lighted Window	145
Uneasy Contract	146
Better Not to Walk Down That Street	147
All This Talk of Living	148

POEMS FROM NOTEBOOKS

The Parting Theft	151
Thread Almost Without End	152
Form and Function	153
The Warning Bugle	152
The Lingerin Fog	154
Sea Fog	155
Heathen Justice	155
A Patch of Activity	156
I Am Deafened by Songs	156
Bird of the Southern Swamps	157
The Vigil	157
Do It Again, Prometheus	158
Waxing Crescent in the Alley	158
A Warning to Archaeologists	159
Small Invaders	160
The Haunted Courtyard	161
The Flying Cat	162
The Knowing Eggs	163
<i>Dies Irae</i>	163
The Other Light	164
Nitre and Ouzo	164
Witchcraft	165
Blackmail	166
At the Museum	166
The Escaped Leopard	167
Rent Rituals	168
I Can Remember	168
Child Sorceress	169
The Hilarious Obits	170
Death to the Rats	170
Going Back There	171
No One to Storm At	172
The Weather Inside the Castle	173
These Dark and Intimate Hours	174
He Who Sits on Mount Kailasa	175
A Timely Death	176
Shadows Glued On	177
The Lost Goblet	178
Where Is My Pen?	179
Thirsting After the Limelight	180
The Oboe, Unexpected	180
Marching	181
The Plutonium Worker	182

The Garden Eater	184
Purse Snatcher	185
The Dancing Virgin	185
Just Before Dawn, Brooklyn	186
One and the Same	187
Needles and Pins	188
Weather In Its Place	189
Reverie	189
Stars and Ladders	190
At Mission Dolores	191
The Caller	192
Old Gold	193
With White Hair Streaming	194
Manger Scene	195
None of Us Ever Knew	196
The Palladium	196
Going to the Witch to Get Her Back	197
The Thing Loved	198
The Comforts of City Living	199
Personal Rites	199
The Summer House	200
Poemello of Seven Fingers	200
The Pharaoh Is Not at Home	201
Date Palm	202
She'll Be the Death of Us	202
Bicycles	203
The Coming Storm	204
Your Mentor	204
Old Floors	205
In the Forest of the Wendigo	206
The Admonition	208
Cave of the Piper	209
Façade	210
Night Writing	211
Swimmer from Atlantis	212
The Tree, the Woman, Earth Shaking	213
New Moon	214
Cathood	215
The Levitator	216
What Became of Father	217
If You See Your Father	218
The Baby-Head Angels	219
At Brighton Beach	222
A Scream in the Night	223
The Small Voice	224

Niobe at the Beach	225
The Mountain Titan	226
Shards of Isolde	227
Not Reading Alone	228
A Sudden Scream	228
Our Hero in Two Dimensions	229
Who Comes Back	230
<i>Dies Irae</i> II	231
Twin Peaks	232
Dolorosa Palms	233
Hill Vertigo	236
Golden Gate Disillusion	237
Earth Tremor	239
Muscles, Canine Antique	240
Bohemian in San Francisco	241
Man on Drums	241
July Fourth	242
Things Spun in Silk and Steel	243
Waiting for the Fog	244
Through the Keyhole	245
Fear on the Land	246
Those Greenwich Village Garden Restaurants	246
August on Morton Street	247
Haunted, They Say	247
Secret Origins	248
The Rope Ladder	249
Transit in Magritte's Belgium	250
The Hand	250
Witches on Parade	251
Heavy Shadows	251
The Papers in the Locked Room	252
The Waving Fingers	253
Cat Calls	254

ON READING FROM MEMORY 255

HOLLAND AT AGE 42 257

SMALL PRESS SYMPOSIUM: THE POET 259

A POET AND HER NEMESSES 261

BOOK REVIEWS 263

LOST MANUSCRIPTS 266

CRITICAL RESPONSE

- Running Backwards with the Chthonic Goddess
Ivan Argüelles 268
- Toward A Visionary Resonance: Barbara A. Holland's
Collected Poems *Stephen-Paul Martin* 271
- Singing Her Own Song *Claudia Dobkins-Dikinis* 283
- The Interview: Exorcising Poetry 285
- A Welsh Rarebit, A Martini & A Gray Rainy Afternoon
Maurice Kenny 293
- A Feminist Voice in Poetry *Olga Cabral* 297
- Recollections of a Poet *Kirby Congdon* 304
- Transcending Mediocrity *Brett Rutherford* 309
- Running Backwards: A Review *A. D. Sullivan* 312
- Review of *Collected Poems, Volume 1* *Robert Kramer* 316
- The Poetry of Barbara Holland *Robert Kramer* 318
- Poet to Read Her Village Verse *Michael Redmond* 323
- Out-Takes from an Interview with Barbara A. Holland
Michael Redmond 325
- Miscellaneous Quotes 327

POEMS IN THIS VOLUME, BY TITLE 328

PUBLICATION CREDITS 336

ABOUT THE AUTHOR 347

ABOUT THIS BOOK 350

INTRODUCTION

Barbara A. Holland died in 1988. For most of the years between 1973 and her death, I was her principal book publisher (under the imprints of The Poet's Press, Grim Reaper Books, and B. Rutherford Books). During the intervening years, I have kept most of her chapbooks and books available, some in print and some on-line.

After 31 years in the keeping of the McAllister family in Philadelphia, the poet's notebooks and papers have been transferred to The Poet's Press. The objective is to find an archive that will maintain the Barbara Holland Papers, whether in physical form, or in digital form. The present volume is the eighth and final product of this project.

The trove of Holland's typed manuscripts included five book-length poetry manuscripts which, although containing some familiar "war-horses," were largely made up of poems no one had seen outside of their appearance in obscure magazines. These separate manuscripts were edited and published in 2019-2020 as:

Medusa: The Lost First Chapbook

Out of Avernus: The Exiled Sorceress & The Fallen Priestess

The Secret Agent

The Shipping on The Styx

The Songs of Light and Darkness (in Shipping on the Styx)

For another volume, *The Beckoning Eye* (2019), I turned to approximately 200 printed magazines containing Holland's poems from the 1970s-1980s. While a few of these poems are familiar from the poet's later collections, most had never seen print since their magazine appearance. Since no manuscripts survive for most of those poems, they were presented as printed by their respective magazines, with silent corrections of obvious typographical errors. Holland published, by her own account, in more than 1,000 small press and literary journals, making her one of the nation's most prolific published poets, so this modest collection of "unknowns" was only a sampler of her magazine publications.

About 50 more unique magazine publications of Holland's work came to light in early 2020 from an online archive of small press magazines, and those poems are included here, transcribed from the original magazines. No manuscripts exist for most of these poems.

Two additional books in this series did *not* come from the Barbara A. Holland papers, but from The Poet's Press's own archives. Returning to books I published in the 1970s and 1980s, I prepared two new volumes that represent Holland's own selection of her works from 1980, 1983, and 1986. *Selected Poems, Volume 1* reprints a 1980 book that was ambitiously titled *Collected Poems, Volume 1*, adding to it poems she selected in 1983 for another collection (*Running Backwards*) issued by Warthog Press.

For the record, that volume also incorporated all the poems from her chapbooks, *A Game of Scraps*; *Penny Arcana*; *Melusine Discovered*; *On This High Hill*; *Lens, Light and Sound*, and *You Could Die Laughing*; plus an unpublished chapbook, *East From Here*.

The inclusions from the 1983 *Running Backwards* also fold into *Selected Poems, Volume 1*, items which had earlier appeared in Poet's Press chapbooks, *Burrs*, *In the Shadows*, and *Autumn Numbers*.

Selected Poems, Volume 2 consists of all of Holland's poems that revolve around the imagery and concepts of the paintings of Belgian Surrealist painter René Magritte. This had been published as *Crises of Rejuvenation* in two volumes in 1974-1975, and then reissued in 1986 as a single volume. This new version, with annotations and illustrations, is the definitive version of the large Magritte cycle. (To further clarify the bibliography, a twice-printed chapbook titled *Autumn Wizard* consisted of excerpts from the Magritte cycle, a teaser for the two-volume edition.)

Thus it will be seen that *Selected Poems* is Holland's own choice of her important poems, a necessary starting point for her readers. The Holland papers — from magazine publications, type manuscripts, and hand-written notebooks — did not include all or even most of these poems, and she had no "master set" of her works. They are literally "everything else." The overlaps with the "warhorses," her most-read and most-known poems, is that she used those repeatedly, in her book manuscripts and proposals.

A posthumous chapbook from 1991, issued by Contact/II in New York, with the permission of Holland's literary estate, was titled *The Edwardian Poems & The Queen of Swords*. I held this production off till last in my editorial deliberations. The "Edwardian Poems" left me completely baffled, the only Holland work I could make no sense of. Barbara was extremely devoted to the young poet Edward de Pasquale, and when he served a prison term after being entrapped into a drug transaction, she loyally visited him in prison every week for several years. They exchanged poems, and De Pasquale asserts that Holland wrote these poems "to" him in response to poems he sent her. We do not have his side of the correspondence, but it is clear that the poems do not make

sense as a set, nor are they addressed to anyone in particular. What seems to be the case is that she sent him whatever she happened to be working on at the moment. If there are echoes of lines he sent her, we shall never know. Some of the poems are revisions of her older works. Clearly the set was precious to its recipient, and its availability as unpublished Holland was tempting to a publisher already devoted to her work, but it did not serve her posthumous reputation very well.

“The Queen of Swords,” on the other hand, is brilliant, a one-off production and a break-through in Holland’s work. It is a sharp portrayal of a blackmailing occultist, the type of charlatan who transcends the store-front fortune-teller and moves in for the kill with file cabinets full of dirt about real and potential clients. Here the poet assembles a suite of poems with an investigative journalist’s eye, but with her own wit in place and aimed at a target suitable for our outrage.

“The Queen of Swords” is included in full in this volume. From “The Edwardian Poems,” I have selected only the poems which have not appeared elsewhere in any of these books.

The Holland papers include an enormous folder of typed “Old Poems” spanning from the late 1960s up to as late as 1987, and there was another folder of early poems and student productions. These folders gradually diminished in size as duplicates were removed, and as items were selected for *The Secret Agent* and *The Beckoning Eye*. The remainder of the unique typed manuscript poems are included in this volume. For a few poems, I have combined the best of alternate drafts.

Barbara A. Holland’s notebooks are 16 spiral-bound journals, none of them dated, but most dateable from references to events in the text. A great deal of the notebooks are workaday materials: lists of publishers, schedules for readings at The New York Poets’ Cooperative, names and addresses including the member roster for the Cooperative. Some notebooks contain no poems at all. Items not within the scope of this publication were some prose filler materials she apparently submitted to magazines, and an abandoned, lengthy essay on Hindu religion that was either a subject of personal study, or perhaps a commissioned work that never came to fruition. It dates to the time of her flirtation with the Hare Krishna movement on the Lower East Side. It is the work of a studious devotee, but of no interest to scholars.

The prose pages seem to have been lined to match her typewriter, so that she was attempting to make one notebook page equal to one typewritten page. The only other oddity in the notebooks is the sketch for her flying cat cycle of poems, interspersed with blank pages, which I

edited and completed as “Buster, or The Unclaimed Urn” in *The Secret Agent*.

Holland’s hand-written autograph poems in the other notebooks are mostly preliminary sketches, often a dense block of lines, not yet broken up in any kind of meter or breath-phrasing. The same lines might appear on several successive pages, re-ordered but still with little hint of what might become a typed poem for submission to a magazine. Those which were coherent and polished enough to edit, I have lineated, and I included installments of them in the volumes *Medusa*, *The Beckoning Eye*, and *The Secret Agent*.

In the present volume, I have added the remainder of my edits/completions from the poet’s hand-written sketches. It possible that some of these, in some later form, appeared in magazines, in which case posterity can scold me.

As I noted in the earlier volumes, I have “constructed” these notebook poems. Some needed only lineation and punctuation, and since I often worked with the poet on the final appearance of her poems in print, I did what I always did. I know her style and her voice. Where they were untitled, I invented suitable titles.

Throughout all these books, I have silently added numerous commas, most particularly where the syntax of the sentence seemed to demand them. This is what I routinely do in editing living poets, and I usually, though not always, prevail. Poets and editors alike were very indifferent to the use of punctuation in the 1960s and 1970s, still under the spell of e e cummings and the looseness of Beat-era writing. I believe that poems are meant to be read aloud; line endings alone are not a reliable guide; and punctuation can and should serve that end.

Here and there I have also added footnotes with place- and name-references, mythological allusions, and definitions of obscure words.

I have been asked why I have devoted a year of my time to this project, issuing books that few will ever read, the more so since so many of Holland’s contemporaries are gone. I know only a handful of people who remember Barbara Holland.

It comes to this: in 1975, I took Barbara out to lunch at a Thai restaurant at the edge of Chinatown. We were celebrating her 50th birthday; I was 28 years old. I told Barbara that afternoon, “I will keep your work alive.”

It was a promise, and I have kept it.

— *Brett Rutherford*
Pittsburgh, PA.
June 9, 2020



POEMS FROM MAGAZINES

GILT YOUTH AND GOLDEN AGE

Surrounded, but not embattled nor besieged,
the cottage crouches, bleak-faced in banks of shrubbery,
aproned with lawn, spotted with reclining chairs
and vine-encrusted settlees.

There old age keeps its fragile flower at prime
with circling films of water, makes believe, plays cards,
clatters the ice in sundown gold of cider.

Every evening comes alive in calico and scented lace,
enjoys the breeze in drip-dry shirts and cotton slacks
throughout the evenings of the summer shared
by the chamois vests and streaked jeans that mope
by a motorcycle
with a roach completed and hidden for an unwatched hour.

Quintets of cavaliers on unemployment compensation
spice up an old belief gone stale.
A ragged lout walks a mastiff-sized contempt around the block,
examining all visitors as if they were exotic birds,
thinking to make a pay-off of their feathers.

Heated coals hiss *shashlik* to a pungency
that teases nostrils close behind the sidewalk stall
where Tarot and *I Ching* sum up experience
for due rewards in price of hashish and a sack of salted nuts.
On sidewalks, make-believe and unbelief. Upon the lawn,
strawberry festival, mah-jongg.

LISTENING IN

Sit quietly
with your spine erect
and your palms spread
out upon your thighs.

Feel the pressure
of your hands with the flesh
of your thighs;

their solid pushing up
against your palms
and the fabric between
your thighs and hands.

Listen to them talking;
their conversation
will be heard by every muscle
as the dark earth
singing in your veins.

Our one root
stirs. Your leaves, like mine,
must tingle,

licking the air alive
somewhere
to cries for help.

THE INVISIBLE MAN: IN MEMORIAM

He was such a quiet man
that his silences
ate up all his colors.

His hair and his beard
were of the hue of nothing,
as was his shirt,

which was of such a red
that everybody noticed it
save I, [whose hook-nose
trawls the air at eye-tail,]¹
completely missed it.

He was always quick and early
in his departures from this room,
as when he vanished from this world,
an absence
in my web of recollections.

¹ save I ... The poem appeared in print with these incomprehensible lines: "save I, whose hook/ that trawls the air at eyetail." I believe the intent is to describe the act of trying to glance across one's own nose, a kind of blind spot that the vision compensates for.

THE DUENDE

He stands at the nub end
of the promontory
with his long, bony finger
pointing out to sea;
that tall man, full of figure
with the great dark beard
taken as a storm of hair,

as the swarm, all dressed
in orange,¹ raises eyes
to the pointing finger,
takes to its heels and commences
running to the edge
of the cliff and over.

Some clutch at my sleeve
with an urgency to be off
with me their running
but I am not moved by their prophet
nor by his boss in India;

I merely let myself
be tossed about by the *duende*,²
that deep call from the marrow
and the dark voice
that informs my bones.

¹ *Dressed in orange*, the costume of the Hare Krishna cult.

² *Duende*. a heightened state of emotion, expression and authenticity, sometimes personified as a spirit, elf or goblin.

FOR A DEAD LADY

in memoriam Ree Dragonette (1918-1979)

You have come to be here
on the sidewalks
between tall buildings
as the rose dyed into
their late afternoons
shall always warm them,

as it does in the comfort
of small houses in rows
with their fluttering
braces of door lamps
and in the tall nobility
with its lofty windows
allowing us glimpses
of chandeliers and mahogany tables.

You have come to be here
to set the floor boards creaking
at the crack between
night and morning
claiming that I never understood
the nature of your fear,
that I was a brave blank
who let herself be filled in
for erasure for too many
times in a series,

that you needed help
desperately in doing those things
that cried out for doing
because you still feared
to do them and upbraided anyone
who could, because you could not.

You have come to be here;
you have not gone
anywhere at all, lady. You are here,
embarrassingly naked under
your parasol on Bank Street,
confronted by a new-born
crescent moon and wondering
which door to open.

IN PLAYTIME TERRITORY

Narrowness of streets which run as tunnels
roofed over by familial secrets, nocturnal growls,
common to neighbors, crystallize on ragged walls
in overlapping rivalry of posters.¹ Paste-pot, print,
and competition in fields of shared jokes,
compulsory loyalties, as smeared and tattered substitutes
for ceremonial crumbs imprison us accidentally in unison
of individual discord. Same concept of design
and like expression,
whirled to hysteria, celebrate irruptions of solo
irritations cast into a common mould.

Through brush-trailed glass, light raves,
a savage cry of jungle minds worn to exasperation
by inarticulate sounds. Even the will to play
makes fun a war cry of the preposterous
against the daily tear and grind of servitude
rasping up the monthly need for rent, enabling us
to keep the back and forth of stationary surge
still at the same pace and as meaningless.

We leave our zero-shaped trajectory and take
our off hours fighting it by sitting out
our soreness in disorder, which is just as meaningless
under bravado of chaotic rage in jagged playtime hurt.

¹ *Rivalry of posters*. In New York in the 1970s, any length of fencing, brick wall, or construction plywood sheathing was covered with posters for rick concerts, political events, gallery shows, and graffiti. This poem seems to have been provoked by the chaotic posters and writings on the walls of a nearby playground.

DISTANT THUNDER

Through the warm cloud
surrounding the softness
of its settling down to business

your mouth applied
its skill to my tensions
by messaging the muscle
at the juncture
of my neck and shoulder

starting up waves
of overlapping rhythms.

Through my slitted eyelids
I watched the ocean
drink the beach
and shuddered.

NO ONE SO EXQUISITE

Is it your brittleness of bone
or aristocracy which craves
assistance in digging you
out of your car; another's arm
for your bundle, your coat;
a door held open;

the hesitancy of your lifted foot
to meet with pavement,
as if the impact
impending might alter
your mechanism,
your precision adjustment?

Your skin flakes its years
away in layers; the banister
coarsens with hair beneath
the moth weight of your hand,
across which trickles
an illegible script
of veins.

THE MYSTERY OF NIGHT

Upward and into itself
the dome of night
builds up its arches
above the fields in secrecy
save for the silvering
above a mountain.

This is no time for moon,
or the place for reflected neon.

So what is it?

Pay no attention to it,
but go the accustomed
way of humankind,
filling the hours with clutter.

We are not strong enough
to withstand such reality.
We leave it to its privacy,
the provenance of special eyes.

THE RELEASE

Scrape the mud
from the knife
and let it cut
down past the tissue
of the working heart
to the chamber
in which *it* lives
and let it out.

THE WHEEL COMES ROUND AGAIN

This little town of ours
hides in its cup
of irregular hills

at night
when the bar closes
when the cinema
ends its fluting in Outer Space
when the ladies drift home
with their choir practice over
and the men wallow
in beer and television.

Then as a car slips
from the town like a tear
from an eye and down the highway
young folks sigh their envy
of that person who
will have their portion
of the City with its lights
all night and its garbage,

but here the day is done.
The clock tower in the church
on the Green grinds out
the hours and drops them
one by one the night long
as through the day the people
busy with this and that
push each day in its turn
from their shops and desks
while weeks pile up into months
and years until the City car returns
like a tear wept back
into the eye where first it welled
when it was wept before.

ENTER BY WAY OF A CANNON

This is the only true route
to greatness: die. Drink down
the posset of rum
and ground glass; you got it;
no more pinching
and fretting over monthly bills
while greatness eludes your slap
like an agile mosquito. You got it!

Professors who pick your brains
from litter baskets. Flea markets
of your correspondence
in the bookstores, and the tease
of *why* in every upcoming
vulture study. You got it all
in one set without abrasive feedback.

Your verse? Who cares!
Your publishers have their gimmick.
You secured it for them
with rum and ground glass
in the Devil's chalice.

SERIOUS BUSINESS

for Jack Veasey

So you have seen it:
that insatiable arc of talon
plunged deep in my fur and hooked
in the hide beneath it.
Serious business, this!

Seen it, you say,
and guessed perhaps its further explorations
of scapula, gristle and muscle
or an anchoring rib?

The shank strains and tugs
agonizingly at my weight. It is almost
impossible to adjust one's neck
and shoulders to this condition,
but it occurs
quite frequently. Much too often,
I would say! There is no use telling me
to take something for it.

There is no drug
that eliminates the shadow
of that wingspread from what I write,
its flattening across my ceiling,
the dotting of dung
on the linoleum, the showers
of feathers falling
across the corner of my eye.

If you can really see it,
tell me if an axe-bite
across the shank is worth the trouble,
and a broken handle.

WITH THE AID OF THE MOORS

Hordes of Saracens
swarming in circles like fragments
of leaves on autumn air
between one's head and the ceiling.

White plumes
spouting upwards
like forced jets of water
from the brows of turbans.

Burnooses whipping at ankles,
scimitars
breaking up light as space
gasps wounded.

Calligraphy
carved by Caliphs from the night
curls down
in inky ringlets
on paper,
at the whim of one's ancestors,

Fallen in poems
astounding the sunrise.

— An amplification and expansion of “Arabescando”
by Harold de Campos
Chicago Review. Vol. 27 No. 2, Autumn 1975.

A CHRISTMAS DREAM

Here in this lofty cavern
among the pines where boughs
barely hide the lonely little
lights of red and green or blue
that wink both in and out
between the needles, save
for the distant sound of voices singing of shepherds
in the fields, as when entranced
by Angels and the Heavenly
Energy from Bethlehem,

You walk alone
for my footsteps are all
but swallowed by the spongy ground,

I am not at all excited
by this Christmas scene
in department store decor
with the promise of encounter
with the Magi, Arabs all, costumed
in gold lamé and sweating rhinestones.

Even were all this dressing
whisked away and all the deep
and silver sky stripped bare,
peace would come only when
that great star there shall fall
from his desolate condition
among the others, and walk human
through the snow with me.

A STUDY IN POST OFFICE ART

Down hill
and into hugeness,
the road lurches
out from underneath the flying
buttresses of viaducts:

Cathedral arches, holding up
the twin harps
of the bridge, stand, supervisors.
Under their vigilance,
the road's denouement widens
while its forwardness extends
in stainless steel to granite crystals
on the farther
shore, clustering support
to clouds. And I, poured down there,
into this hugeness, keep on walking
to where the eagerness
of concrete turns to steel.

Here I can set my visions upright,
each without alteration,
unflawed in all their answers
to those towering choirs.

A TEST OF STRENGTH

Now let me meet this joy
that marches toward me,
strutting upon me, vibrant,
as if bound upon collision.
I swerve, and not because
I save myself, but all because of gladness
which my brain might shatter,

or which might bruise its luster
on my thorns and spikes,
unless its high notes break me.

AND FINALLY THE MOON

Tonight it blossoms, almost too strong
for the hiding
of the clouds that hold it
in an obstinate maternal grip.

At last,
it melts them,
breaks away from them,
arrogant, silent,
out on its empty own.

AT THE HEART OF THE UNIVERSE

Her gown glowed with the deep
blue of velvet, stung in places
with the prickling stars.

Her veil hung barely visible,
a white mist recently solidified
beneath a crown
of ringing silver,

while all about her
in receding throngs that filled
vast reaches into space
rank upon rank of trumpet voices,
piccolos, flutes and oboes
almost audible, came tingling
to the ear from over
a thousand human generations,

signaled back and forth
to one another across
unimaginable distances
as if hoping to understand,

while her face still
as small and pallid
as a fingernail almost
seemed to open in a smile
fainter than the calling
of a star.

COCK CROW FOR CITY SLEEP

Morning tore the shreds of night away
with sound that swept the last soot from the sky.
Time after time, it froze us,
as with cold well-water memory
shocked our skin awake, and worked a squealing protest
from the kitchen pump.

The day attacked us, young, invincible.
The summons sent a tremor through the morning star
which fattened as if it were to break away and fall,
drowning, in a single drop, the staggering world
as all the gold-soaked morning washed us
out of sleep.

Cockcrow on city Monday
with the garbage vans, newspaper trucks
and lunch-pail carriers, invaded, sweet on the smell
of new mown, dawn damp grass,
knife-scented spruce and imminence of ringing scythes.
While several job-bound engines cleared their throats,
a rooster, pet-raised in a different yard,
ripped through exhaust, and tore us to our feet
with icy water and the smell of sound.

DAY OF WRATH

Once more the ring-monster
cracks a whip
and spatters buckshot orders
at subordinates.

Snap!

I am all at once awake
while the voice
of the superintendent's wife
continues with her chestnut
vendor's whistle of command.

"It's Con Edison,
let him in," she screams. The door bulges
with the volley of blows
it has to take. I wrench it
open to preserve a panel.

Constantine Edison,¹

his ectoplasm, as yet
indeterminate, forces words
through a walrus moustache,

"Pardon me,
but do you have the keys?" he asks.

"The keys to what?"

I have no keys to anything,"
I answer, making short work
of my autobiography.

"Let him read
the meter, stupid!"
shrieks the Fury, dancing
her passion,
barefoot,
in a mini-nightgown.

¹ *Constantine Edison*. A play on the actual name of New York's energy provider, Consolidated Edison.

It is six A.M.
in the house of Mars.
No possible hope of getting back
to sleep.

I must dress
for a day of convalescence.

DECEMBER BEGINNING

My scout eye opens,
fastens upon the clock.
How many hours or minutes
have I to linger away?
Do I dare to sleep or doze?

The air tinkles like money
stirred by impatient fingers in
the pockets. The sunlight
weights to one side
then the other. The clouds
shake out their feathers,
move onward with time.

This is the day which dawdled so
long before arrival.
My feet touch the cold in the floor.
My legs bounce to stand me straight
up to face the newness
of a sackful of questions,
ravenous for breakfast answers.

DEMON WEATHER

The thinness of the window sill
reminds me that there is not much wall
between the wind
and me.

The sash dances
with castanets.

The bare glass
crackles with the light
of a candle. I stifle
the dance with rags.

Who strides
through the orchard
in jeans and boots,
an ancient and wizened
baby on her shoulders
and under her hair,

which almost strangles her
with chicken-bone arms,
and drives hard heels
into her armpits?

She raises clenched fists
against the moon. Her mouth shrieks,
wider than the fullness of the moon,
the mouth
of the child yet wider.

A branch dips,
snags at the skin-bag
of bone and gristle,
clearing her shoulders,
lifts it.

The bough nods,
burdened
with unnatural weight.

Two arms,
two legs,
a skin-gloved skull
 protrude
 through hoarded leaves,
I see my demon
also,
 staring skyward
through the surface of a pond,
curses climbing
from its mouth
through the water.

I suffocate
the sash with rags.

The window dances.

DUST-DEVIL MAN

News photo of the fallen RFK

Steel in the gut at kick of breath
from back of diaphragm, the lightning stuck
at hilt, locked under ribs
when dust-devil man collapsed, teetotum tumbled
from his pivot, struck from thunder and his flesh.

Discarded, sprawled
in rag-doll ruin on a kitchen floor, he echoed me
from stark astonished eyes. Gone slack, gone innocent.

This was the cyclone catcall of the year:
whirled to a steady sting
then soaking in on itself, the coil
oiled cone-down hollow, and swallowed itself
into a greasy drain
as a devil dispensed with dust.

Dust-devil man,
this tasteless halt still nauseates
the swaggering sprig
that crooks from my basic bone,
strains taut at my heart stem through tightening days
and stalks me from star to star
while the evil eye steel takes root.

FLUTE SONG

There is no defense
but this,

which is ineffectual.
A glance can split the armor plate
and often does.

Space frequently
reverberates with the detonation
of snapping steel,

while intransigence
slithers out from underneath
the wreckage and continues in the practice
of impudence
with everything to hide —

Habit does it
keeps spine aloft,
indulges a syncopation of the hip,

drips citric acid
on even the best intended phrases
and slides off

leaving a gully
smoking in the floor
behind it

and then collapses
out of sight

as easily reduced to ash
as any ember.

MEDIATRIX

I am the woman
standing behind you who tossed
my face in your soup

Plunge your spoon
through my cheekbone and dip
out a bit of my brain
as a reminder,

a tangled
dripping wad of slime
not worth the bother.

Better to dump
out all the contents
of the cup

and see
only a whirlpool driving downwards
to your source of self.
Then look behind you.

I shall be waiting for you.

OUR ROOTS ARE ONE

I am all clenched now
against your insufferable tenderness,
knotted to stave off
the warmth of your breath
on which my thoughts are transported.

I have now become so hardened
by drawing inward
and downward
that I am brittle.

Kiss me once unexpectedly
and I shall thereupon crumble
into self-darkness
at my original source
for which I hunger.

POSEIDON

Poseidon,
slack, flat and sullen,
pallid in patches above the jawbones of reefs —

You whose rhythms were once
my support, curdle your foam
around your bruise-dark beauty
when my empty eyes
threaten to fill with you.

You rumble softly
at the roots of the cliffs
through and around shaled-off crag-flakes,
beg me to tumble more to you
but if I tip some over
on your prickling tide

you roll inward
upon yourself and heap up
all your weight against the rock
in a shelter of exasperation.

No wonder the trees at the rim
of the cliff are limbed to one side
away from you against your petulance,
their weathers,
your sunken motives,
and their gladdening green,

remembered.

INDIC ASTROLOGY

The planets bully us,
stamp their wills
on our faces.
The sun lights us up
for the eyes of others,
and the moon
makes the ocean
wink with our desires.

[MUSHROOMS]

Like ventilators
of the earth, mushrooms lifting
their ivory domes.

LITTLE ONE

Today is different.
Last night the moon kept tabs on you
as you muffled your footsteps
by shuffling behind me.

Today, plate glass
refuses your reflection
even though you breathe hard back there
pressing my haste
and projecting the heat of your palm
on a basking spot
on my shoulder.

You are there,
extracted from a half-dozen
mirrors, informed
by a pip squeak energy
as an astral habit.

Have I never occurred
to you as rooted
in your tracks
in abrupt about-face

while you clear
your head of your countenance
and plant it on someone else?

No?

Well,
let your equivocal features
burn there, baby,
when it happens

and watch me vanish.

WHAT'S HERE

Whatever you see here
looking up at you
as if in retort
to something you had said;

as if with eyes filling
with an intent so serious
that it might as well
have spoken with a voice,

consider this:
that these swirlings of ink,
these dances of print
retain something,
however little, of someone
who stopped talking.

SENESCENCE

The crisp of the full moon
wilts
 out of context
in the boldness of the afternoon
 conserving still
a bleat withstanding
the brass-band of the sun,

yet there is sadness
in the limpness of a soggy wafer
slipped but this much
from perfection.

CHURCH SPIRE

Can you see something
on the top of the church spire today?
Yesterday it was an ornate cross
with a blister at its heart,
and the day before, a fish
which stood up upon its tail.
Before that a simple figure eight
that lay upon its side, and long ago
a pointing fist, pointing to something
beyond the clouds, and beyond that
and beyond, but the mist is thick today.

Do you see an emaciated lady
with her foot cocked up behind her
looking down to see who is looking
for that is what I see, or do you
see but a spire, drilling persistently
into the clouds to the blue
and after the blue to the sun?

NEGATIVES

A distillate of evil
seldom found

save for the threat
of the Swastika,
that spider obscenity
with right-angled joints

that swims in blood;

save for the bloated beads
that writhe on their cord
from the mantelpiece
before the fire

the twisted human figure
bristling knives

the sun
rolling widdershins;¹
the ten of swords.

¹ *Widdershins*. Backwards, counter-clockwise, opposite to the sun's normal path.

CANTICLE FOR THE HOLY INNOCENTS

In Rachel's memory a scroll unwinds.
Rachel is grief and pain from century to minute.
The clock ticks out each line. Humiliation climbs
one level down before the one descending.
Hours rub the outlines of our pride away, until misshapen,
we are no more than undigested chyme¹
accreted in the gorge of Chronos.

You lie, who claim the script to be illegible.
Your courage cannot follow letters formed
by lust of knife in acid on the backs of hours.
Cassandra cries aloud, proclaims the end
for captives, sees her death in conflagration,
in gasp of collapsing beams and walls of citadels,
her tomb banked in the embers of their captor's fall.

Only Cassandra knows what roads go where,
how many thorns maintain some portion of Rachel's gown
torn from her at every inch along her pilgrimage:
slaughter in Piedmont, live flesh on pyres, and cattle cars,
gas chambers, crematoria: the cannon force of hoses,
fangs of dogs;
whips, chains, and clubs; the knout, the knife.

A voice in Rama, Rachel weeping for her children
in the alleyways, hung from rust weary fire escapes
that fail as ladders, fail before retreat,
crumble between six story charnel structures, and let their load
drop bones, rags, angry eyes and hopelessness
against the mortuary slabs and bottle-jagged floors
of air shafts, playgrounds, and a century of streets.
Pray for the innocents which Herod history has gored
in heart-thrust for God's image: regicide
in slum, in farms demolished by the surplus bombs
dropped at a mission's end for quick disposal;

¹ *Chyme*. Undigested food between the stomach and the small intestine.

Deicide in ambush sniping; thunder motorcade
strafing the twilight at the edge of town;
roads dangerous to riders in mountain cairns of skulls
tumbled and scattered by Bucephalos.

Vox in Rama. Rachel weeping for her children
because they were dead, and would not be comforted
throughout the ages, throughout all the length,
breadth, heights and hollows of the world.

The blood of Thy Saints
they have shed like water, O Lord,
and there was no one to bury them. In these
she mourns her Son, mourns for the Crucified.

FOG HORN IN RETROSPECT

Manana¹ moans. The rocks are restless.
Prometheus heaves, strains ancient shoulders underneath
these woods whose spruces are heroes wasted
by voyages, worn to washboard ribs, their garments torn,
their skins scabrous, scalded with salt, their beards
a straggled snarl of refuse.

Again Manana wakes a message in the earth,
burdens my ears with humming. I have seen
fire slowly squeezed thick running from the rocks
and dripping down, escaping from the brands
Prometheus dropped at capture, his once wild signet flung
behind when sunset Zeus turned up the palms
of alder leaves.

Manana crawls along my limbs uneasily.
I walk where ragged sailor trees stand sparse,
where woods lie avenues in all directions. Fog muses,
slow welling froth at lip of day. Manana fills
primeval lungs and sets the woods on fire.

The trees are winched up from the soil like ropes
quick turned to weather-relished pillars, wart-ridden staves
on which the ravelings of fog are reeled,
caught as they feel the forest out. The foghorn creeps
footless on pine sleek saddened ground to find
how hair-damp helplessly Prometheus failed.

¹ *Manana*. The foghorn at Manana Island, Maine.

TRANSLATION

Speech that is but percussion under melody,
is bones to music. I do not understand
a word you say, and yet you tell me in your rhythms,
your harmonies, and richness of their structure.

I breathe your singing into blood
which charges all its channels to the dance, the bend
and bow, that melts me to kneeling and prostration,
cries to tense my limbs to rising, cries
a flight of angels from my throat, and sends them wide
on the ever-present dawns that lift their choirs
above the patience of supernal oceans.

Drench me with blood of suns exfoliate
in grape fat clustering of dawns on every minute.
A corncob ribbed with rows of causes on each pulse
is bomb burst life upon a second.

You sing, and I obey,
whether the music is interpreter, translates
you word for word or paraphrases, whether words
and music are set on branching roads.
I cannot understand your language, but you sing
my altar from its shrine, sing what I am.

STAMPEDE

A crush of centaurs beats the sky to foam.
Gasp, pant, and snort the air to urgency
of recollection and retention! I clutter yesterday
between my hands. Today and each day following
reduce these few short hours to order,
compressing them, and every hour shall see a condensation,
strengthened to clarity in direct proportion
to each degree of waning. What then is left glows with the energy
created in the act of preservation.

The evening bubbles on the brink of loss.
Centaurs fit arrows to my nerves, to concentration
stuttering upon coercion to reversal of vision. Strings
become an agony to curve of bow. A fortnight past
is winter twilight blown-glass frail, hangs overhead
upon the hoof-beat bursting of desire.
It must not go. If this faint artifact is worth its manufacture,
somehow it will have to be maintained
until the shoulder weakens under the ache of bow.

Centaurs trot homeward, and the sky is mud
worried to ruts and ridges under the press of hoofs
tamping endurance down to snow gone black and coarse,
at roadbed weak beneath the centaur pack,
tantrum, blood beaten gravel as the tide runs out.

THOSE WHO PERISH BY THE SWORD

According to a folk belief commonly held in Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and Viet Nam, those who die by violence expect a daily tribute of rice from the living. Refusal of this propitiatory gift results in catastrophe for the stingy one who refuses it. Now, in our day, the amount of rice owed is overpowering.

No matter what your store of rice may be,
give it, give all of it. The seething fields
blossom with beggars' bowls. Up to each wasted face
from farthest corners underneath the earth
to which you forced them, they come home, ascend to eyes
along the passages that climb to skulls,
and beat against the cornea until it breaks
before the blazing knuckles of the murdered dead.

Is all your rice enough? Will they be fed
sufficient to their dulling that satiety
may numb them long enough for your reprieve?
They fade away in dusk of sleepy amity,
but still the night will stir,
waking in hunger till the dawn shall bring
their bowls, wide wooden mouths, agape for more.

When all your rice is gone,
how will you fight the evil that invades your house?
So many, and so many more you killed,
even with such a jostling at your door,
you know, yet fail to recognize yourselves.

THE BEETLE-BROWED NEIGHBORHOOD

The houses with their fists on their hips
and their shoulders hunched,
ready to launch accusations that never come,
but hang in grime on the air.

They call it air pollution,
but even worse, it is hatred for those who hate back
and abuse
hallways to stricture, façades to a lowering scowl
that hangs overhead, creates ceilings too low
for straight standing, and hence; a like hunch, a like stance
and a drawing of brows that resembles the leaves
curled up about soot under window ledges,
until men resemble their homes, and their children
react as the houses would surely react
if they knew of a quick way to kill.

The houses know nothing
and the children know too much.

REMEMBERING THE KING OF DARKNESS

It was like taking a portion
of night in the curve
of an arm. It was a moment
lodged under an armpit
and pressed lightly against
a chorus of spinnings.

It was bracing a tired head
against a rib
of the universe when the dark
thickened an inch away
from an ear and settled
its weight of intimacy
on a shoulder.

SHIFTING GEARS

The dawn had caught up with us,
long before we had planned
to dispense with the riffs,
the wine, the beer,

and after the floor
had conspired with the benches
against our bodies;

when the streets
were not yet ready for morning
excursions, being loyal still
to late-hour strays, as foolish now
in appearance
as unextinguished street lamps.

We dug our claws deep
into the metamorphic calm, as if
in the entanglement
that tousles the pelt of duty,

even though our eyes
hung from their sockets at the ends
of exhausted thongs,

even though the bones
in our legs were too soft to support
the weight and aging
of the last eight hours.

The day yawned,
dim and empty as we climbed the upward
tilt of cross-town streets to bed,
while inside our stomachs
brass-knuckled hunger
triumphed over wreckage
from the night's abuse.

SUSPENSE

No bell has sounded yet,
leaving its sonority to fill the nave
after it has tasted the cold
of metal in the darkness
in the highest vaults.

No tremors underneath
the aisles. No inbreath
presaging a long drawn sigh.

No waving of the pampas grasses
in monumental vases
to each side of the altar.
Not yet, but the time is coming.

THE DYBBUK

Dry jaws and nether face,
bleached into chalk by air,
desiccated in an attic voice and matted
with the residue of years before my birth,
before inception of my guilt,
now I shall blow you hollow,
leave you without the cabled lint to roll in words
and coat my brain.

Once you were skull enough with ingest eyes
to catch whatever moats the sun might pour
into your mindless shell,
that you might gum them with the granite
of your age-starved fear
and let them seep out, poisoned,
a culture of impotence and void,
that gut and gristle might droop flaccid,
that I might be bog to the tread weight of my feet.

Now cranium collapses.
Since I ceased
sifting your silt-fall, you have worn away.
All that remains of you is mandible, and bite
clamped on my back in wrench of muscle,
lurch and torsion of outrage, anger and deformity;
bruised will, sprained hope, incisors clenched
on tissues singeing time and scorching sleep.

At last, I lose you,
fallen into time from disembodied clatter
in the airless hold beneath reality and ego, echoing
stilt stutter of twigs that hold the surplus leaf,
meatless as a ghost, crisp to the sky,
radulant¹ in protest, in grasp of flaking mulch,
brandished at the insolence of snow.

¹ *Radulant*. Meaning uncertain. A *radula* is an instrument used to scrape and clean bones.

Now you are gone;
jaws masticating without hunger,
words without motivation clothing voice,
anachronistic and synthetic,
mouth, talk, and teeth divorced from face
feeding upon acceptance without understanding,
eaten by the friction
of time in motion, as I was eaten
by time preserved beyond its point of passing.

THE SELF-MADE SONG

To what tune
shall I sing it?

What tune
will tell me
in an easy tongue,

tell it before it tells me
anything

tell it
so that I may take
the talking out?

THE HOUSE OF ICE

You tighten me to share your silence.
You twist with your lifted lip my newly emptied prison,
curling uprooted bars with iron fingers
curved in a frozen grasp upon your voice.

I know the chambered ice, ton thick and green
in front of eyes that strain against its pain, its hardening
upon the face stretched taut across the skull
torn by the [...] cry within the cold
caked to the vocal cords, the gauche demeanor.

I know the cheap stone cut of elegance
fitted upon defiance, scorn and sneer,
the sleek ascent of eyebrow and the beggar feed of words
dropped to the floor, for only such a ploy
would bend a back or knee in front of you.
I know the tension and the anger,
knowing your hollow house.

Is it fair to call upon me
in such a fashion? Baksheesh eyes await my coin, withdraw.
Hands clutch my garment and an out-thrust foot
trips and tumbles me upon your level of abuse.
I rise and walk away, spine tense and tall,
my purse a loneliness, my mind a dungeon for your voice.
I am not rich enough to keep the key
while castled beneath your snow.

Oil-drum empty anger of your feet
inside the vaulted walls that multiply and wrench your words
to tortured blades, that march me away from you in tetanus
left from the slashes which the silences
have forced upon us both. Is there no way
to dig you out? You beat warmth from the sky
and weaken hands that must, yet cannot turn
the octave teeth to tongues.

I turn my back. Your stare retrieves me.
Incoherence takes its toll of grace
and cuts the mooring rope of kindness. I wither in
this fog that walks my face and never finds response.
It sinks on skin like cobwebs, and it haunts my house.
The darkness trembles in its blindness, cannot see
your rain-worn figure in the corner.
Wood settles, intercedes.

I hear your moth touch flutter at the glass.
At every contact with the window something claws
inside my rib cage, and lungs flatten as small fists
batter the skybone strips to blankness stripped with ivory
in futile siege of anguish, and my whole husk yells
the boreal reality of your imprisonment,
and buckles walls.

Now I must melt your life environment,
give you to sun and air. North crystals form
along the blood sheathes of my steaming veins.
If I refuse to let you out, the glacier
hardening, core caught to skeleton,
will pry my bones apart
until they break.

THE RHYTHM OF ALL CONUNDRUMS

A question in her eye;
in her ear, the two-beat ticking
of a watch.

A *Why*
a *How-Come*, or a *What*
imprinted on whatever
her surroundings,
as projection
of an interrogative
scar inside her eyeball.

Too deeply embedded
there for cure
or removal, physicians say,
thereby,
leaving all
visual phenomena subject
to skeptical
scrutiny,

and the perpetual
clock a squatter
in her ear,
which publishes
the threat of Time,
unchallenged.

LIFE STORY

Bone licked to a lean wail curved
in cicatrice¹ on purple. Sickle sound
rounded on void, jaw set against the long rise
and the slow ride up and over, honed
for hard press at the bull throat
of inevitable change until rebellion
floods in fever and the wail reddens to bellow,
sore, swollen to anger, and a monster steams
a gradual progression into freedom, treads
the trees down in its climbing melts out stars
until maturity has schooled malevolence
to ice and armor over nard of bone,
bold with the frost-blight hard inside and shrinks
with rock-lust on a vacuum,
to wait and paper off, remaindered, pale
crumpled moon abandoned to the trash-cart dawn.

¹ *Cicatrice*. The scar left after a healed wound.

LADY OF CONSOLATION

for Consuelo Hassett

Monstrance behind your face
in a flowering of candles in votive dance.
You weep diamonds with the Virgin,
and the rubies moved imperceptible on threads
are Christ blood on a carven face,
are wounds in your hands,
carnation crimson in the moss dark of altars
in caves of buried sanctuaries, unmouthed,
where no scripture adds gold leaf to sunbeams,
where Penitentes turn thorns into roses,
make attar of sin.

If you had need to bury God in draperies,
encase him in carving,
you would lose faith, who have seen His veins
run secret in polished board.

Who else has seen you at prayer,
by noon,
leaning on silence,
your hand on the sun?

THE QUEEN OF SWORDS

THE QUEEN OF SWORDS

Reversed: She is devious, underhanded, an expert in the use of the half-truth and quiet slander. Her subtlety and the keenness of her intellect make her a dangerous enemy.
(Alfred Douglas, *The Tarot*).

1

ILSE, MOLDER OF DESTINY

She was diminutive,
all her potential for domination
screwed down to a concentrate of greed,
and skewered in place
like the knot to the back of her head,
the mask of marble
fitted tight to it by muscles.

She was exactly tailored
in gun-metal gray.
The polish on her pumps
gleamed danger,
her earrings dripping fiery swords.
I should have known.

Without the dignity of a contract
she frisked my fortune from me
lifted it from underneath
the currency on my palm

before she spat it out
as inferior goods
promising reluctantly to make it over
throughout an elaborate year
of chant and ritual,

heathen and Catholic at once
personalized
and all at \$500 per month
in a chapel
in a city called Jerusalem

in India!

2

A GLIMPSE FROM MONDAY

She was outside in the yard today
beating the dust from a weary Shiraz
too worn to retaliate.

By noon she had bolted back inside
braced the front door open
with an andiron, and, drawn to the full
of her four feet ten,
was knocking out instructions
to the Queen of Heaven
in her shrine beneath the china cupboard.

3

SOMEWHERE IN ANOTHER CITY

I once passed a window
geared for that trade.
Dark curtains hung at some three-foot depth
behind the glass.
Stars peeked through a peppering
of holes poked in them,
pulsing softly on and off
on an automatic system.
A crystal ball centered the sill
between two Eucharistic candles.

I rang the bell,
but no one answered.
I twisted at the knob
and leaned on the frame; it gave
and opened to my urgency of shoulder
on an empty room
with a spotless floor.
Broom and soot dustpan
teetered against the wall.
A torn, green window shade
flapped against a rainy service yard
and nothing happened.

4

AT THE OCCULTIST'S DOOR

Only the ignorant and fools, they say
are likely to enter. They will be desperate.
They will allow no self-conscious alarm
to turn in its sleep
when they tap at the door;

and the curious
seeking the exotic and adventure,
questing after an explanation,
challenging validity;

those who expect the worst
dreaming of husky men in shirtsleeves
with fat moustaches
caught in hoarse conversation
under an unshaded light, plotting
while fingering revolvers
and a night's haul of stolen goods,

a scant musk of taboo,
a whore. Fragmentary notions
of Romany lifestyles. A sensation
that someone somewhere is snickering.

And off they go
each to his destination
rewarded, cheated, or merely bored
thrilled perhaps by exposure
to a display of such audacity
or shocked by an insult
to sophisticated intelligence
and maybe one day ready to return
to make sure that it really happened
while still nagging at the wisdom of it.

5

AN EXPERT AT HOME

Edward Hopper would have loved
the wide bay-window of her parlor
from which she cast for clients.

Swags and ribbed pots
coated with decades of paint
clogged into chain formation rows
across the top, and at its base
a monstrous goblet
as if for a year's ration
for Benedictine monks,

encrusted with scales
or shingles giving way to a stem
that melted in with the brick
of the wall below. and ivy.

Up there on the sill
you could barely distinguish
a potted fern, an aspidistra
catching at a sash-curtain by the corner
with a split blade:
to the right of a decorous sign
reading

OCCULTIST AND CONSULTANT
although it might well have been
oculist on this block
but only a back page in the daily paper
connects this address with Ilse.

Up there, a face as hard
and tight as the full
of a midnight moon in winter,
My Lady Meade, the Medieval counterpart
of the almighty finrif.¹

6 OPTIMISM

Somewhere tonight,
behind a coarse fringe of beaded strings,
the tape-measure whip
of Fraulein von Eisenhertz's spine
is raised to the zenith;
plump, expectant and alert.

Her nostrils twitch.
Ears, more than two
at the sides of her head,
sit up through her hair
and swivel at a wisp of sound.

Her belief hollows
to the bulge of her greed
for in this City there must walk some
in costumes of elegance
whose innocence
sips at the practice
of primitive religion
in times of crisis

and who can well afford
an exorbitant bribe for God
at her commission.

¹ *Finnif*. Variant of *finrif*, slang for a five-dollar bill.

GUESS WHO CRASHED THE PARTY

The first two dollars
 which I asked you to hold
 when you made your wish —
 An appetizer!

The meat course comes
 for only fifty dollars
 when I promise you
 through a special bargain
 which I shall make with God
 that you may be spared
 from imminent ruin
 which I read in your palm.

The lines in it say nothing else
 I tell the truth.

Yes, only fifty dollars
 but more than fifty dollars once;
 two times a week for three months
 while the Holy Candle
 gutters and burns down
 to a puddle in its holder

while the ribbon soaked
 in Consecrated Oil in your name
 marks a chapter and verse
 in the Holy Bible
 written just for you,

while a silver bell is shaken
 in Jerusalem throughout
 a powerful prayer.

Many people in your threatened position
 have offered their bodies
 for the services which I have planned

for you. I am asking nothing of you,
but you still sit on the edge
of your chair grasping a miserable
scrap of paper in your hand, or twenty four
more of them in your head,
while your livelihood is lost,
your security disintegrates,
and all the people who are counting
on your failure, rejoice.

You are a wise and cautious individual.
I am sure that some serious consideration
will bring you to return to me.
I shall be looking for you
at the same hour
of the same day of the week
in the week to come
with fifty dollars.

Good luck,
and the Lord go with you.

8

PENANCE FOR CONVENIENCE

Thou shalt not apprehend a suspect
in the House of God, even if she looks
like Ilse von Eisenhertz,
although the police would gladly
give their thumbs to do it,
for every time they prepare
to raid her house, she is in Church
and at the Stations of the Cross.

It would seem that she had confused
her rosary with an abacus.
They hear the calculations
of the talk of her tall heels
as she clatters from panel to panel,
an antimacassar on her head
and nothing to hide
but a heart which God
once wound up in a moment,
which embarrasses Him to this day,
especially when he hears
its monotonous ticking as regulated
forever by a ratchet and a durable spring.

10

SEEKING WORK WITH ILSE

She functions without the usual props
being a practical Occultist
and consultant
who hires meticulous help

with her back to the applicant
since she is planted
on a fragile Victorian chair
pushed to the dropped lip
of a period desk.

She refuses to look at her visitor,
whose eyes are left to investigate
a slender strait between
two continents of hair
gathered with punishing tension
into a pair of lumpy
and emaciated braids.

Your answer?? she barks.
So far she has said nothing
to answer.

*You enter double
the books, ja?? File?
keep in the folders
compelling facts about the clients?*

The answer "Yes"
comes out colored "No."

*You Catholic?
This is most important.*

It all goes down
in a graceful Bavarian hand.

Even if the walls
are all glowing in mellow bone
battered with sunlight
the leather hands of a philodendron
stranded like a shipwrecked mariner
in the middle of the floor
signal *no*.

In there you find all of it,
she mutters indicating a closed door
with her hand. Behind it
you discover piles of heavy books
 awaiting a probable cooking
 files fattening
 on the grist of blackmail.

Not a cubicle
shrouded in black velvet
clinking with talismans and emblems,
but a sterile surgery
of an office with banks of file cabinets
 shelves of ledgers
 Selectric typewriter
 Friden calculator
 Xerox copier

and you feel quite as sullied
as you had expected,
but more as on the premises
of a business-like bookie,
and for different reasons.

ILSE, THE QUEEN OF SWORDS

Taut little Queen of Swords,
 you have tendered paranoia
 to your neighbors;
 as if you had sold them pits agape,
 at your convenience,
 for their filling
 with premises and silver bells
 paid for in harsh percentages
 of meager incomes.

Extortionist!

Here in your realm;
 a comfortable living
 which you credit to the Grace of God,
 and for which you have labored
 throughout starveling hours,
 that they might grant you
 bountiful progressions
 of the sun while you do nothing.

No!

Even the watchful servants of the Law
 despise you.

Save for your monthly
 cash commitments
 in good faith
 for their protections,
 they leave you gloating in your ivory parlor

while others all about you
suffer from being tricked
into doing what they otherwise
would not have done.

Hide, then,
as custodian of shadowed wealth
in safety. Be cautious
lest the sick ones find you.

12

REACTION TO THE FORTUNE TELLER

Not hatred;
dread;

which drips a cold and muddy ill-will
from the gutters of her porch.

Even though the ivy glitters,
I chill in the sunlight
which peeks through the crack
which she keeps in the door,
which she never closes.

She needs no more
taboo than this, which everyone
observes and no one mentions,
and not the sickly reticence
draped about ridicule,
but hatred?
No!

I experience her
only by observation, and not involvement.
The day when that occurs
I shall probably break her in two
without intention.

For claiming to alter events
before they happen,
she is barely tolerable
in the sight of the Law,
like most illusions.
Dread strengthens on a deeper evil.

**POEMS FROM TYPED
MANUSCRIPTS**

CERES

When we exchange eyes,
my daughter and I; in a glance
we know
how the bank of the meadow-hawk
in the Autumn carves a message
of sombre promise on the air
as it chills a second
stolen from her shoulders

what it means to her
when the shade of my consort
steals from her crust
of sun and escapes
with its contents
beneath a mountain
where far from the reach of eyes
ears and stars he tucks her
in under him into his embrace
for six of the months
to come and there
renews her lost vitality
with the surge, retreat
and return of his tides
through the inlet
between her upraised knees

their charges tingle as a joy
brought to life in my bones
at our moment of eyes.

EARLY MORNING IN JULY

The morning to be came up Monday,
and there you were,
huddled between your shoulders
over coffee. The toast was of the consistency
of dried steel wool.

I smelled your hostility
upon the air and then retired
behind the morning news.

It was summer,
and worse than ever!

Your head rose
petulantly and slowly
like the early sun.

Your eyelids hung listlessly
above their secrets until
I dislodged the heavy pitcher
of orange juice
and it spat at you.

All of a flash
you were glaring at me,
your lashes framed the leaden roll
of sullen seas, gathering power,
heaving steadily,
then suddenly breaking
in a spatter of broken glass.

IN DARKEST LOVE

I am counting the minutes
since the departure
of three dimensions.
There were only two of you
in front of that oak tree
when I last saw you,

for you were flat,
a scarce shaken-out outline
as the morning grew in the strength
of the sun, sapping your energy.

You cannot long endure it,
but as the shadows fatten,
you will become a man
whom I can walk around,

and the hole that you left
in my neck will be waiting
to fit the size of your tongue,
which shall caress
with the coldness
of the skin around it.

Then come out, and let your hair
shine silvery throughout the grove,
and let the blood flow downward
into your collar. I am here.
I am ready to feel the sweep
of your great wing cover me
in your embrace, as you feed
further on that which you had begun.

A FULL RED ROSE

He was dead; he was sure of it.
The world was gray. Gray light
leaked into the windows, but the room
was not his room. The walls seemed
to have been fashioned of gray stone.
He would not examine it till later.

He went to take a shower and twisted
the knob. The shower head spat sand
at him. Strange! He would seek
for water to mix with the sand, but there
was no faucet except the one
which controlled the shower.

He put on his clothes and grabbed
for his boots, but now they were soft
leather like kidskin gloves,
and like gloves they had separate
compartments for the toes.
Still, he managed to get into them
despite the discomfort.

Now for a bite. The table was set
for a meal on a slab of stone
set upon four heaps of boulders.
There was a thin plate with pebbles
on it. He tried to pick one up,
but it remained on its raw, makeshift plate.
A bottle of wine! He picked it up.
It was also stone. He poured it
into a handle-less cup and a gust
of dust charged from it.

He was beginning to be perturbed.
He looked at the hand that grasped the bottle.
It was not there. He kicked at the table leg.
His foot felt nothing. In desperation
he strode to the mirror. It showed him
no face. Nothing to shave.

Well, he had dressed *something*.
He had feet for his boots.
He looked in the mirror and saw
a neat black business suit
with nothing above it but a bowler hat.
He broke out laughing. The whole
scene was René Magritte through and through.

He was Magritte's faceless, solid
citizen in his stone habitat,
which was all illusion,
as was his body. This must be Limbo.

He walked over to the table and saw
a full red rose, growing
from a crooked crack. He could wait
now until he saw a blinding radiance
in the mirror to show that he was chosen.

A TEASE IS AN ALMOST MOON

He carved that crescent on the sky.
His flute-spare mind took edge to darkness, grooved
with wire-wit one bold sweep, and curved a grin
beginning to erupt in laughter,
yet fearful for the moorings of the stars,
tight-kept in Puritan restraint.

He comes me waiting till his silence
cuts the harness of my outburst. I shall flush
the shock singe of the sweetness
of that grin in hiss of cloth,
snapped to the hair-taunt brightness
of an almost moon.

INMATE SUICIDE

He is doing easy time
sits beneath the reach of change
under a window in a wall
of sallow bricks
until he becomes
a dingy polo shirt
that scoffs at cleaning
sagging from sloped
uncaring shoulders.

He has learned
not to mind and that is all,
but the learning
demanded dedication.

Suns pass; nights clutter,
nights flicker off and on
intrusive lightnings blink
rains hiss and dribble
snows drop and thunders
wheel across the roof;

it makes no difference.

KARMA

In no particular
did it resemble him.
Rather it looked
like one of the ancestors
in an old portrait lost
among later variants
of its kind.

This signature of his surname
stamped on its features
as it had appeared
on all the faces
in previous generations

which waited even now
to reappear on a tombstone
and out of context

as it did
when he was living.

VINEGAR CRUET

Perpendicular authority
affronted. Glass stopped
in the execution of a minuet
maintaining immutable defiance,

dips obeisance within rigidity
of posture and glorying
in the clear gold of vinegar,
challenges any alteration
of position from outside,
threatened by thumb and finger.

Elegance holds court
over all else on white
and crimson squares. There are
no other players on this board.
I hesitate to touch it.

THE DIN OF A COUNTRY SUMMER

The hillside grinds
with the manic churning
of competitive machines ticking
through fevers of polyrhythms
racketing to a steady
and extended scream that drops
snuffed by the fallen hair of pines.
The meadow roars.
as noon gets down to business.

A saw mill occurs there
in the thicket. Late in the afternoon
a grass herd takes to hoofs
and plummets headlong
down the meadow, remaining
rooted still in the soil which incited
that plunge for freedom.

OTTER ISLAND

There are times
when peering straight down
through layers of dingy plastic
stained green in a rock-walled cove

into those ominous regions
where the fleshy ruffles
of the giant kelp
finger the shadows in green
dark green
and nightmares

when watching her who once
was Minoan Crete; tall,
high-breasted and flounced
behind from waist to heels in cataracts
ascending the steep diagonal
of the rock face,
at each step upward
a replica of herself
repeated behind her,

sun tossed from ripples
on the rhythms of preceding spirits
awakened by reflection
from the water
until she runs out of rock,
melts into a band of woods
and dissolves
among the spruce and balsam.

THEN HEIGH HO THE HOLLY

painting on a tavern door

Nerves cry to the bitter moon
which tenses still,
shrills its thin and quavering refrain
that shatters all the stars,
which, tumbled,
break and tinkle
on the armored earth.

So, who stands anyhow
in the shelter of a doorway,
warming the softness of her neck
as if under crow-span spread of wings
beneath a rush of hair?

Who, taut in a crimson gown
invites and accepts embraces
and caresses from a flower
while fondling its blossom
against her shoulder?

Only a crafty King winks
leerful knowledge of her
as he prowls through the snow
in the lee of a high brick wall
and, with unsteady hand,
shakes from a cognac bottle
some few drops of liquor
as libation to the Goddess.

Knives curve to the bitter moon
and into the iron air,
which lifts the monarch's palace
on its winds above pale puffs of clouds,
replete with fluttering expectation
to the moon's dead eye
in its own dim-lit empyrean
as if for examination
if not for answers.

AN OMEN FOR THE BETTER

We shall remain the composite
that we are, for now
the curse dissolves
above the concrete apron
at the gate.

 The sky sting
lifting triumphant arcs
of gulls on its curve to the zenith

sidelong to freedom
and into the years
ahead.

THE DANCING MASTER

With his brow smeared across
with the Ash of Shiva,
the thread of payer, and the spot
of all-seeing crimson
set between his eyes beneath
the headband of his ski cap,
he softens the everywhere
of his knowledge with his smile,
this ever sprightly dancing man.

The insistent singing
of a Mantra behind his face
makes sure that God stand ready
behind the magic of promise,
that those which are true
for now eventually must flower
while the Master sits
 metaphorically snapping
the rhythms of the dancing Shiva
with educated fingers.

THE SWINGING SONG

Getting my knees down
to the floor and into the lotus position
only mirrored the attitude
of my mind which had refused
to accept the Guru, and considered
the daily repetition of the mantra
as only the basest element
of primitive magic,

but when I dreamed that the Guru
had pointed at me
with his skinny finger
and told me “to do it,”
omitting to tell me what
in was that I was supposed to do,
and how it was to be accomplished,

I will not tell anyone
how I feel the ringing
through my chest
at the rising of the mantra,

or how I struggle
with my most unusual behavior,
learning how to reach the wealth
that is my heritage within me,

or how I long to quell the battle
of my refusal with the Shakti
that works fantastic miracles
throughout my weekly being.

I noticed that my intuition
had been steadily growing larger
and that now it had reached
the size of a hefty watermelon.

I therefore cracked it
slightly, and it fell apart,
and I felt that I could see the Guru,
and now I want to see
if the watermelon spoils
or if it ferments and effervesces.

Meanwhile, chanting the mantra
over and over might work the last
and greatest of the miracles
and maybe with Shiva
and the Blessed Virgin Mary
(an unusual combination), I might
just get my house together
and present the Guru
with the fruit of my meditation.

The Guru said, “do it,”
but what it was
and how to do it
he was not about to tell me,

and now I retreat
into my devotion,
go to the Blessed Virgin Mary,
for my piety rejoiceth
in the Self, My Savior.

— *[A combination of two typescript drafts.]*

SHADOW OF THE MEADOWHAWK

Shade of the meadowhawk
your passage through the notches
in the mountains frightens
our braves, so quick with arrows,
with thoughts of their sudden deaths.

Fear races down their limbs
when your eyes surface
from the networks of wrinkles
in which age has snared them
when your mouth trembles
with the ferocity of the ghost
of your smile, which dangles
between your hanging cheeks,

but all we, your daughters,
understand you, how the moon
has shaped you to carrier
of her spirit, which facilitates
birth, insure the health in childhood,
comes every month with the powers
of menses, end blesses the love
between a man and a woman.

Can a man control the power
in himself; is he helped as a woman
is aided by the changes of the moon?
Does he strengthen with it at minutes
when the fire springs upwards,
[in the] breaking off of arrowheads
that beam your face in the quick
heat of a God-appointed person?

[The time comes] when you stand, solitary
on a high rock above the assembled tribes
and the smoke seems to lift you
into the depths of a night that shudders,
loosens a golden pebble,
tosses it and settles down.

[Then] we acknowledge you as the Shadow
of the Meadowhawk, our Mother.

THE RUIN OF ST. JOHN'S CHURCHYARD

The shallow arch of alcove
in the eastward wall, where once
a slim and soaring Christ
hung like a hummingbird,

could be all ruffled laughter
from the dark of ivy;
water might come, a tingle
from a sparkling shelf,

and where two doors, once exits
from the gallery, at second story
height, serve only angels,

there would be no locked cupboard
panels, but twin balconies,
bearded with hanging vines,
sprung white with statues.

Such might not come to pass,
and yet might well. The high grids
of the mullions now are roosts
for stars. The backdrop rears
through sunlight in stark majesty.
This is the house of God,
the gate of Heaven.

THE AERIALIST

High in the air
above the stage and far
above the assembled heads
of the audience,

flutings
presences

inviting him to leap
and catch at hands

rings
bars

all in violent agitation,

to spring from one
and to grasp another in the pattern
prearranged among so many,

and never to loosen
his hold on one,
nor be bewildered,

to fall

He fastens his face
in position
on the front of his skull,

waits and watches,
then dives off
while the audience tenses
to the peak of hunger.

AT SACO FALLS

Not on a bridge
or even on a tightrope
but on the air, unaided,
did she cross the gorge
with the water carousing rocks
way down below her feet.

I turned my gaze to the forest
and when I looked back again,
she was there on the opposite
side of the gorge with her bare foot
lifted as if she boarded
a subway train on the long trip back.

A scream stuck in my throat
half way. I could hardly bear
to see it twice, and she was singing.

BREAK DANCING, WASHINGTON SQUARE

He was only as tall
as the length of his arms
would let him be with both legs
draped over his shoulders, dancing
alone on the pavement there
in the park with his head
thrust forth and his wide grin
bragging that he could do it
while his face was framed
by the soles of his shoes.

Then his body snapped back.
We never knew how, and he stood up
straight and taunted another boy
challenged him to dance on his head
but he only lay flat on his stomach
and used it to propel himself

and the others sweated. It was great. Five brothers
break dancing in Washington Square.

A CAT WEATHERS THE SERMON

Motion in the church.
Flurry among the pews,
along the floor.
Sunlight spots nothing.

A twitch in the gray
of the walls, plaster released
or chips of granite falling.

Whiskers. White flourish.
Paw prints left carelessly
on the skin of the air,
a vision of a white foot
lifted as if in high-stepping
as if to push open a door
into the light green sparkle
of a Sunday morning.

CRYONIC AGE

Clean and sterile.
 Quiet! Art must
not be disrupted
by motion.
 Project
no feeling
in this capsule
of an empty decade.

A DREAM OF BAKED POTATOES

I dream of baked potatoes
sweating melted butter, the brashness
of the Autumn sunlight on my plate.

No need for wine, but the bitter
edge of coffee; chicken parting
from the bones; string beans
and no immediate duties.

I would wonder idly
why children always scream
and most especially
at times for baked potatoes.

On a small town street at noon
the Autumn standing on a pedestal,
flaunting a bright hued banner
for a festival, presented
by the town's police
with boiled potatoes
and with weeping willows
flowing down the wind.

THE GAMBIT OF A ROUND-TRIP MAN

In your arrival
I can see departure. Your suitcase,
almost emptied, could
so easily be barely packed,
prematurely layered to spark
the promise of return,

in anticipation
of the gray months when the clockwork
of routine shall click old welcomes
back into the strong
young arms of welcomes beckoning
ahead from invitations
questioning how long and when.
Therefore, in the ice clot
of this new departure, the burnt
ends of a subsequent arrival and departure
pierce through your sworn denials
of your next arrival.

I shall not have seen
the last of you this time, since every
last of you retains your first.

THE LAND MOWER

When you fell to the sidewalk
in a jumble of limbs and crutches
we gathered your crutches up,
set them side and supported you,
who then, having shaken the shock
of the fall from your body
slipped crutches under armpits
and sailed off with stabs to the street.

With every bite they took
you rode them, swinging all
your weight ahead of you while whistling
a popular rag from Scott Joplin.

You were poling yourself so fast
that I ran to keep up with you,
puffing with my effort while your tune
made me almost envy you,
your speed, and your oarsman's grace.

MERLIN

You bend to your task
at your desk, writing
something.

Your lashes lift,
freeing the vicious blue
of your eyes. Their cold stare
rings through the stillness.

You look at me wherever
I am in the world.

I can remember when
you stood up to your full height
like an eagle. Then your eyes
were fixed on the pulse of the sun.
You soared off to the top
of a mountain
and sat there for centuries,
brooding on whatever
had captured your interest —

no time for anything else! —

and you raised your shoulders
which gushed forth sand,
and your knees creaked.

Whatever was in you
wore down underneath
the robes of a hero. Your eyes
spilled over with everything
that they had collected
and you stretched out your claw to me.

What could I do with it?

THE MINOTAUR AWAKENED

No one had ever seen him
when he had not looked pert and trim,
when his smile was not bursting
from the tan on his face,
his hair not looking
as if painted on his head,
every strand of it not held in place
with glue; his shirt not
recently laundered and his tie
not a reinforcement for the color
that came from his eyes in answer to it.

Now he stood in the corner
before the men who had found him
with the gray of his suit
seeming to be powdered over with ash,
and a balding area blossoming
from the crown of his head,
as they stared him down to almost
three quarters of his usual height,
as they had stared down many others.

None of the hostages had heard
the groans that had run down
through the ground beneath their feet,
as that bull-roaring engine
built by the gadgeteer, Daedalus,
bawled out again, demanding sacrifice
of more young people, to be sent out
to die once more for spurious reasons.

WRONG ALLOY

Your eyes turn pewter.
Neither of us can see through that.
We both guess,

and our guesses
are quite as worthless
as the gleam of the counterfeit coins
in the pinch of their lids.

Please let me help you
peel them from that blue or green
with nothing in it

as if once more
they lay open
to my reflection.

NOT QUITE FAREWELL

Beacon, New York,
 you dying town,
trying out a weak smile
on your agonized face,
I miss you sometimes when evening
shoots the pastels of your houses
into a vivid rejoicing, bringing out
the hardness of their edges
against the sky, and when the snow
persists in its seemingly endless
downing of its veils against the landscape.

When the trees lift up
their pale green breathing
along their branches and when
the hills roar yellow at you,
or when the bay should be excited,
I miss you, Beacon;

your crumbling main street,
the stretch of your meadows
easing themselves on a hillside,
and the sentinel tree at the bend
in the track that looks like
a train which is stalled there
when no train is coming,
I sometimes miss you, Beacon.¹

¹ *Beacon*. For several years, Holland traveled weekly through Beacon to visit an imprisoned poet at Fishkill.

OF TIME AND SPACE

How elsewhere and unreal
it is to me;
 that vast yawn
of the untrammeled sky
drinking in gaseous gulps of cold
with clouds turned out from somewhere,
which, by afternoon,
shove one another
 into thick overcast
 as here
 right now
and as the long arm
of the searching moon
reaching about for some one
who just spoke to me.

STRANGE BERRIES

Strange berries
these little words in husks
so hard they hurt the winds!

Their flesh gleams
water in fat drops.

Watch out
for their waste
of seeds.

THE QUEEN OF SHEMAKHAN

Night is imperial
anywhere when the moon
shoves all of the stars aside,
leaving ample room for all
its clean, cold splendor,

even when city streets
in their commonplace clutter
of blushing lamps cannot ignore
the sun's white mirror
after the swollen redness
of its rising has dwindled
and left it naked.

I walk home
worshipfully, knowing once more
the goddess, how her tambourine
hangs upon the air
before the dark blue
of her tall pavilion
deepening its shadows.

She speaks of nothing,
offers no promises,
save, wryly, that when I dragged
down the Avenue on saffron ropes
which hauled at the late
for Summer Solstice sun,
I earned my mite for gratitude

now hidden
in the moon's tight fist,
which the sun must open.

IF UNIDENTIFIED, STILL THEY FLY

I consider the curiosity
of the owners of those machines,
by whom driven

whence

how

or why

as inordinately vulgar,

even as I do the triteness
of Science Fiction plots
with their nickel-plate cowboys
armed with ray guns
who may yet enmesh us
in their lifestyles
with incomprehensible explanations.

The vastness of outer space
I could ignore, but how
can this be done when nearly innumerable
inhabited planets beset us
with flame-spitting, humming tops
like fireflies on a summer evening?

Even though all of this
may prove distasteful, my repetitious
“No, thank you!” will not resolve
the problem, nor dissolve
the culprits, whatever they are,
by disguising itself in disbelief.

TO KEEP IT GOING

Here beside a giant wheel
another year has turned, as I
stride on intermingling colors
the nudge of drum, the urgency of chanting
and the come-along of clapping cymbals.

I walk on a flood of sound
as hauling hands on ropes encourage
the Northern pivot of the nurturing sun
to keep this dark earth turning.

WHEN ONCE YOU SERVED ME MUSIC

Was it you whose face
became resplendent
with the failing sun?

Was it your body
which became translucent
as if the sun glowed through it?

Was it you with the gray-green eyes
that shoved the gold and silver
from your gaze
upon the distant mountains?

And whose but the narrow
toes of your boots that scrambled
up the rock face to the gazebo
where I laid up messages
among the clouds for you
while the silk of your moustache
was a breeze on the back of my neck
when you served me music?

THE RUNNING STRANGER

I suppose he was real;
he looked it;
somewhat strange, but believable.

He hurtled from the shadows,
a tall young man,
 and respectable,
although bent over
 with a hand
to each side of his head.

He was wearing tan trousers
which matched his hair,
and an aching whiteness
of sport shirt, and so,

crouched down, he bolted
across the sidewalk and into the wall,
[a sure collision to where
my footsteps were going,] if he had not
melted against it like a snowflake.

Who he was and why he ran,
I could not say, nor will I swear
that he was an impression of running
left there to be picked up
and figured out by one too tired
to be unaware, for otherwise,
how could he have been transparent?

FROM
"THE EDWARDIAN POEMS"

A Posthumous Selection, 1991, Contact/II Publications

DUMBSTRUCK

You caught me this morning
in the near paralysis
of mute admiration.

 You wanted me to talk
wake up, take an interest
in something
 when I had one:
 you!

For that a slip of candle flame
budded through the hair
at the crown of my head
and idled

 somewhat lamely
in the light of an overcast morning
leaning against cloudy plastic
on the porch

 dim
 beyond small talk
the pitfalls of betting on politicians
beyond any kind of banter.

I wanted to clear
the restaurant of everyone
and darken the windows
letting you see the almost
transparent globule of light
taking root in my head
 heart
somewhere back of my eyes,
but custom swung its truncheon.

If you were other
than you are I would tell you
even though words are discordant
in such a chorus
and refuse to harmonize
on such a theme

as what you are
and the emanation of it
in your eyes
 their inward drift
 perception and its precision
or the manifestation
of homely well-being in your presence
clarified
by the still core of brightness
in the heart of a flame.

NAME THE INSTIGATOR

Who is behind it all,
I often wonder,

Some Who
trapped in an illusion
of being unpersoned

or fearing it must stage
an extravaganza
of any kind
and collect reviews

favorable or not,
even indifferent, the requirement
of any reaction whatsoever
demands them,

for without them
disintegration into air
is certain.

Is that where this Who is
when solitary: Where does the light
go when it is extinguished

and Who, whirled downwards
into this vacuum
still being Who?

REBIRTH IS A FACT OF LIFE

If I am created
by every urge that compels me
to petrify,
tame, set in order, give name
to that urge and define it

over and over,

then must I suffer
a new birth
with every production

stepping from the self
into another incarnation

at each encounter
with the darkness
and silence
throughout their several
issues

of parent emotions.

Do you wonder
that I am fanatic?

GRADUATE LOUNGE: A DREAM

There is no telling what you would do
if you peeled yourself clear of the paint
and broke out of the canvas;
the heavy frame empty behind you
agape with outrage.

Now with those eyes
casting their blue with javelin aim
through the gold dusk of an Autumn afternoon;
a grin, ripe with the knowledge
of cooking mischief; hair slicked
but creeping back to forehead,
and a shirt of a red that scandalizes the dead
and sallow faces of other portraits
who, with mortarboards on their knees,
barely tolerate the unseemly
interference of the sun
with pseudo-Tudor solemnity
and tradition.

Nevertheless
you are determined. The red
awakens in triumph above a carved slab
of mantelpiece: Gift of the Class of Smudge;
name of the brashly treated subject
vanishing from brass
in clouded code. Red shouts in unison
with a blue and green
tattoo on arm;
“Hey gang, I have the last word
in epistemology, and if most
of the gentlemen, here assembled
on these walls have still enough
sleep in them to prevent them
from interrupting, I shall tell you
all about it,
and bill you later ...”

NO SECRETS

Some people prefer
to wear themselves
on their skins;

pinned to their collars,
poked in their pockets
or perched on their fingers,

everything which usually
encloses, clothes
or packages

is backdrop

and looming
behind all of that

a vast and gloomy cavern
unsuspected

by even the busy engravers
of the rock outside.

This to their perpetual
embarrassment
who have

no secrets.

THE RIDDLE CALLED HOME

Rock settled instantly
inside me, stopped
surfacing almost short of breaking
the skin. You called
this condition home; this armoring
against invasion,
Home?

Not if that name means belonging,
casual relaxation,
the recognizably organized.

Mars would have been much more
home than this. The familiar
was as far removed
as that mysterious planet,

even more, when you winged off
and all that was predictable
rose with you, taking shapes,
sizes, colors, and quantities
out of this world

which roosted
in orderly domesticated quiet
back in all their appointed locations,
when you had once again
yourself returned.

You are not home,
not by the most violent
wrench of the imagination,
but you are able
to remove it and return it
when the notion excites you.

THE LANGUAGE OF WINDOWS

Some day I shall learn
the language of windows;
yours purrs,

inciting the luminous leaves
against the peach glow
of the city lamp

to comment
failing some response of mine.

Three flights down,
on the corner across the park,
my glance accepts
the climb;

 this
every evening after dark

 Hey up there,
I acknowledge you
because the stretch of my ego
is nearly infinite

and snaps
on your possible communication.

I hear you
pulling in the two valves
of that casement

in your silence.

As you do whatever you do
up there
 behind your window,

are you aware
that you are dropping pebbles
day by day

among the rhythms
of your neighbors, each
the instigator of a ring
and its concentric fellows;

each swimming out
to take me
by surprise

as if it had been
the very first
ever to touch me?

ONCE MORE, YOUR LIGHTED WINDOW

By coming home
you have translated an uncommon dialect
into the language
I have always known,

transformed exotic customs
to predictable actions,

restored the size
and weight of sins,

diminished the scale
of buildings, trees, the lengths
of city blocks,
the height of fences
to that which was normal,

awakened the knowledgeable
wink of a window

to conspiracy
with the leaves in the park
and me.

BETTER NOT TO WALK DOWN THAT STREET

Not to walk
under that window,

to allow yourself
to be caught by the light
that feels for you

and draws you

up into a room,
on the rug
in front of the fire.

With all your darkness
outside,

will they let you bring
your darkness in?

No.

Better to take
another street and wrap
the darkness like a scarf
around your shoulders.

POEMS FROM NOTEBOOKS

*Edited from Hand-Written Notebooks
And Completed by Brett Rutherford*

THE PARTING THEFT

The key clanged
from the floor at the bottom
of the stairwell,
bouncing the tone back
upward to me.
So you had planned
to leave and to take
the grating from the fireplace
with you. Splendid. I have
no need of it this August weather
but when the temperature
stands at attention at twenty degrees
I shall look in the empty
fireplace, and shall miss you
and the absent grate.

FORM AND FUNCTION

The scythe sings through the grass
at the morning, propelled
by the weight of the traveling metal.
The downward hunch
of the antlers of a bicycle
speak of the rider's lust for speed.
The shape of the scissors
is determined by what
it is intended to cut. Now all other
functional sculptures made
for everyday partake of like
curves to make them things of beauty.

THE WARNING BUGLE

It dangles from her fingers,
that bugle, sounding its beams of brass.
The sun squawks in the sky
of its glaring bell, awakening
warnings from its gleaming throat.
She does not have to blow it.
The sheen of its brilliance announces
a fight, gunshots, a military band,
all fitted for a coming battle
fought for no practical reason.
The bugle blazes in the sun.
The sun squawks back.
Its presence announces battle,
calls forth a cauliflower in the sky
and the subsequent rain of death.

SEA FOG

Fog loiters out to sea
making the sleekness
of the floor boards of this house
furry with vibrations

of the half-heard purr
of a distant fog-horn moaning
for the sailors lost at sea,
for the pillow of canvas
which the wind has filled
no more slipping inward to the shore
with spices and Barbados rum
no more, nor more. The rocks
are filling with it underneath
and I feel the cry of my city grieving.

HEATHEN JUSTICE

They tapped his head
with a length of lead pipe
and kept a Hand of Glory¹ lighted,
forced cotton up both his nostrils,
taped shut his mouth, then
bound his hands securely behind him

and left him on the baldest
island to drown in blacked space
upon dry land. This was his execution.

He sailed off to the region
where he got what he was promised
for raping the farmer's daughter.

¹ *Hand of Glory*. A candelabra made from a corpse hand.

A PATCH OF ACTIVITY

A certain restiveness
troubles the serenity at one corner
of my window. From one long dead
so many million miles away
comes this jingling, this incessant
jingling of a tiny bell in the palest
of blue. The life thrown away
by something out there,
perhaps as a mass of energy
which will give out finally
when it fills my room with trembling.
Then I in my turn shall have to go away.
Right now, I keep my curtains drawn.

I AM DEAFENED BY SONGS

I am deafened by songs
of the moon in my fingers
on a winter night. When I knock
at your door, their tune
breaks up like the moon in the water.
If *you* open the door,
they all scream together,
combining in a frightful roar.

BIRD OF THE SOUTHERN SWAMPS

In the corner, poring over
Memories of Evangeline Booth,²
my Bird of the Bayou sips
her coffee. Her felt hat shadows
her face. Turtle-necked and trousered
in riding breeches and booted
as for walking Indian trails,
she closes her book and gazes
at a bearded Shaman, somewhere.
Then she is off through
the brambles of explication
telling of the volumes of Cotton Mather
who brought the tenets of his faith,
Puritan-printed for the Iroquois.
She who was once a nun
shies a bit at chastity. She practices
obedience, but the vow of silence
is taken by the bugle which lies
glistening in her lap, unsounded.

THE VIGIL

This I have never told
anyone before. Some summer evening
go to Coney Island and start
walking down the boardwalk
toward Brighton Beach. You will see
by the boardwalk a battered shack
and on it written, FOR LIFEGODS ONLY.
Go out there, I repeat,
with a lighted candle and stand
before the shack, keeping the flame alive,
and something is bound to happen,
I promise you.

² *Evangeline Booth* (1865-1950). First female leader of the Salvation Army.

DO IT AGAIN, PROMETHEUS

Prometheus raised himself
on one elbow and looked
at the darkening sky. He rose
from the ground and paced westward
where the sun stuck
on the top of a mountain
crimson. Later he returned
with a stick in flames
with some scrapings of the sun,
but not enough. Night grew heavy.
The birds were quiet. Prometheus
had barely skimmed the sun.
The stick burned with a thickening
smoke which would soon go out.
His efforts would be in vain.
Prometheus brought us
the gift of fire, but not enough.
Prometheus brought us light,
but the light went out.
We know what became of *him*.

WAXING CRESCENT IN THE ALLEY

Only a crumpled remnant
of the moon, thrown out
after a night
of reigning glory,
celestial rubbish.

A WARNING TO ARCHAEOLOGISTS

If in centuries to come
some archaeologists in the process
of digging should come across
cases of lead, they are advised
not to touch them and by no means
ever to open them; always to go forth
with Geiger counters, for these
are not containers of treasure,
but receptacles of nuclear garbage
which should never have been buried,
sunk in the ocean, or fired out
into intergalactic space.
We now pray that they be not
disinterred and carried to cities,
that they not be taken to museums
for examination, for all the good doctors
will thereupon fall victims
of radiation and die and the great
institutions in which they labored
will become temples of a lingering
death, even though the cities close them.
Better it were that none
should continue digging!

SMALL INVADERS

A rustling behind that bit
of board that stands upright
from the floor to meet
that downward reach of gable
in the attic. Could it be field-mice,
or something else?
Stretching or shrinking
of the planks upon the studs
across the floor,
an excitement of the small lock
in the window, barely
keeping the casement shut
and the moon chasing
tufts of dust and silvering
them through and through
with stationary wind —
What does the house expect
of the chaotic clutter
among the stars,
a stippling of ancient laughter,
setting the slim sash swaying?

THE HAUNTED COURTYARD

Strange that from my street
a little drive curved inward
away from the traffic and the noise,
in a semicircle where six houses
huddled to share their inner secrets.

They were short and squat,
each with its bulging bay,
its little tower with its finial.
A little boy always entered
the western house and came out
of the eastern one, and how
he did it was anybody's guess.
In one toward the middle,
the oldest son threatened
to set himself on fire
on Thursdays. Thursdays hove
into sight and garden hoses
poked their snouts out every window.
He never had a chance.

And it came May Eve and all
the men walked single-file
around the fountain in the middle
which long since had ceased
to give a drop. They did this every
April 30, hoping it would work again.

My neighbors never spoke
of those six houses, the pranks
the children played, the annual
May Eve ritual, and every year
copied its predecessors.

Until one night that was not
a Thursday, the eldest son
from the middle house ran
rapidly out of his blazing clothes,
and until *that* May Eve
the fountain kicked, and sent
a high jet upward. It bounced
for an hour, to the delight
of birds, and then collapsed.

The houses went on about
their secret commerce.
The fountain was, and is,
as dry as ever.

THE FLYING CAT

The cat on my windowsill
has knotted himself
while licking down the long fur
on his wings. Wings! Well, what
is so curious about a winged cat,
when everyone knows
that canaries have two wheels.
Look at them — they are really
good as landing gears.
But to get back to my cat.
He is upright now, his dress suit
sprinkled with salt
of the sunlight, immaculate
dress shirt causing spectacular
headaches from looking at him,
and off he flies! He will touch down
neatly on four little feet
which he tucks in close to his underside,
much more manageable than the legs
of any human angel,
flailing in flapping sheets!

THE KNOWING EGGS

On the crest of the mountain
there is a hut.
In it, nine eggs
are boiling. They chatter
with one another.
Perhaps they are talking
about you. Better let them boil
until they have hardened
about their secrets,
until all their talk is gone;
but make sure the steam
has gone out the window.
Then you can rest easier
in the presence of those eggs.

DIES IRAE

Quiet! Do not disturb
the air. Your noisy jostling
is hardly fitting for this night
through which we wait
to hear that sound, sent
beyond the highest stem of smoke;
for we would hear the high clean
trumpet in its final communication
after which we feel the coming down
into our daily preoccupation.
The stars are all gathered
on this midnight gleaming.
It will come piercing
like the sharpest needle.
Quiet! The world wakes. Listen!

THE OTHER LIGHT

So many summer evenings
when a farm goes slowly black
in silhouette as corn crib and scarecrow
stand threatening an empty sky
and the farmhouse is nothing
but a single light somewhere
in an upper window,
when as a slender wire
the brand-new moon
screams of its whetting
which I cannot hear, and the stars
come out in pairs and singles,
another light
comes on in me as if a switch
were pressed and I know only
that these happenings take place.

NITRE AND OUZO

The sharp taste underneath
the sweetness in the savor
of nitre mixed with ouzo
rides on the wind of your breath

The shadow of wind
and the shape of water are all
I can see of you. Transparent, gigantic,
your face is compounded of every one
of your visions. I try to see it
and am lost. What are you

without these various disguises,
for under ancient panoplies
you cower in the stillness,
your little spark trembling, until
it swells, then breaks and disappears.

WITCHCRAFT

*At the sight of Patty Hearst, captive
of the Symbionese Liberation Army.*

The morning newspaper
surveyed me with fourteen eyes in seven
stubbed and hooded heads
branching from the thickening
of body, splayed like the palm
of a monstrous hand
above the loose
knot in the coils
of Narajana.

Nightlong, jolts
of current had raced
the course of my arm,
crackling to hand
from elbow,
inflaming fingers.

Now, from page four
an awakening of machine-gun fire
splits that arm
from its shoulder,
and as I fold
the paper out of sight,
my elbow shatters.

BLACKMAIL

A sneeze, forced back inside
the head to quiet it
prowls the interior on feet of sparks
incising rude remarks upon
the inside of the face.
Better to let it out! Graffiti
prove poor substitutes
for gun-shots. And even though
confronted for an instant
by the gasp of death,
would you risk a writing
of such libelous intent,
bleeding its scald
through tissue to inscribe your cheeks
even for the blast-length of a sneeze?
You would?
Then live a sneeze-stop fully
while the truth comes out,
uncensored,
as twin captions for your eyes.

AT THE MUSEUM

Mother praised the goddess Sekhet
with the lion's head because
her spine was eternally
as straight as the pole that held up
our clothesline. Doubly she sat,
guardian statues in the museum,
her legs clamped together and her hands
grasping the ankh and the flail
on her thighs. Later I read
how Sekhet drank red beer
to the flagon's dreg bottom.
Mother would never have approved
of that. The goddess was not
the proper lady she appeared to be.

THE ESCAPED LEOPARD

Tawny, black and white,
a leopard lay on a heap
of lettuce leaves, surrounded
by beer cans, a shattered
baseball bat, and other debris
in a vacant lot where everyone
left old fur coats and frying pans.
Was he asleep, or dead,
this predator who lay there
staring with agate eyes at nothing?
He seemed bored, even by
the spectral single wheel
of an upended bicycle.
Flying, I looked down
from the city's August sky,
so high I could barely
see him, or see if he
was regarding me.
A seagull soared
in the blistering sun,
calling no attention
to the leopard's freedom.

RENT RITUALS

At the ending of the month
my parents paid the rent. They would
march to the landlord's house
carrying a solid gold dollar,
a peppercorn (both of these
on white handkerchiefs), and a check
for the rent itself. According to English
law, an eagle was required,
but Father, having no eagle, substituted
the bird on the coin. The landlord
was not sure what the peppercorn was,
and was sure my father didn't know, either.

I CAN REMEMBER

I can remember those days when
I thought that "celery"
was what one worked so hard for;
and the lifeguard at the beach
seated in a large high chair
was someone whom people
felt they ought to worship;
and the ships replacing a nun buoy
were pulling out the plug
that let the ocean out;
that dolphins were sturdy
human swimmers beating at the tide.

CHILD SORCERESS

When I first tried to put
a spell on my sister, she was frightened
but nothing serious had happened.
My mother came out of the house
when she heard the shrieks
and saw the fear of Evil. I heard
my sister say the word,
and I was also frightened.
Evil is too large a word
to balance on your thumb. You are
seldom in contact with it.
The things we do to others are often
mean, spiteful, or depraved,
but Evil moves among absolutes
and like Good gone overgrown,
is unduly horrifying. My sister
had not lost a tooth or sprouted wings.
I had failed in my endeavor.
I was lucky.

THE HILARIOUS OBITS

At my father's death, Mother
was to be found at a table in Horn & Hardarts
surrounded by all the local papers
and sometimes bursting into laughter.
From the obituaries she learned
that her architect-archaeologist husband
was a Professor of Agriculture, who often
contributed articles to the *AfoA*, a "trade journal,"
and of certain other spurious attainments.
She poked me and I jumped from
my nearly catatonic position, dabbing my eyes.
What would the neighbors be saying
of the widow who laughed in the automat
over her husband's obituaries? I looked
around. There was absolutely no one in sight.

DEATH TO THE RATS

Mother was concerned about
rats in the house and when she had
invited some ladies to tea,
it was to her consternation that
the Irish maid came in among them,
and dropping a vestigial curtsy
asked, "Madam, shall I lay out the *pizen*?"
She gasped a hurried "Yes," and fled.
The guests regarded me; I, them,
and I fled, too.

GOING BACK THERE

Instead of window blinds
these heavy drapes, fringed
along the edges, and gathered in swags,
are almost breathing. The sconces
on the walls challenge the gold
with motionless electric light
too stark in the room for candles
and for fake brocade.
My papers stacked
upon a little table with a marble top
promise me no salvage
for my withered pride. I walk
on memories of sugar on the floor,
conscious that my breath
might break something expensive
and original, something the owner prizes.

NO ONE TO STORM AT

Divorce, and the absence
of someone there. No one
to storm at, no one to thunder back.
No one to heap blame upon,
not even the children.
She remembered them
when they were small and she was
so huge she could
scatter them like small crumbs
on the kitchen table.
But now she was like England
without its colonies. No one
to take the pain of her failing fortunes,
no one to make her bigger
through her denial of help
for them, only her small self
suffering under delusions of rebellion,
and now they were as big as she
and all of them of equal size,
so now she was left
with the memory of her husband,
and that door was closed forever
mercilessly upon her,
on her, and her little dog.

THE WEATHER INSIDE THE CASTLE

A little cloud of pearl gray
had entered a window
way up there and oozed in slowly,
floated above the great hall
far above the roof beams
and made its exit from a window
on the other side. “Fantastic,”
I said, “and quite exciting.”
Then from the shadows
in the enormous fireplace, a tendril
of fog exuded, and with it others
rose and twisted, braided themselves
with still more others until
that far side of the room had vanished.
“Spectacular!” he said, “and utterly effective.”
I nodded and rubbed my eyes.
“Now if it is going to rain in here,
we’d better go outside.” We did.
The sun was in service in the meadow.
We looked back at the castle
and its blossoming of tower, each one
with a collar of crenelations. The sky
burned a brilliant blue. The grass
was sweet. We found the car, got in it
down by the entrance gate. “I liked it,”
he said, and then, “but I was disappointed.”
He was a set designer who admired
perfection in his work, and anything less
than that for him had meant that he had failed.
I found it difficult to agree with him.
We rolled off down the driveway
and into town, “If you really
believe what you saw in the castle,
do not berate me if you think
that I saw differently. Keep
your pleasure to yourself.” — I did.

THESE DARK AND INTIMATE HOURS

I love these dark
and intimate hours when the right
words lodge in the nib of my pen
when all the phrases
of different lengths fit together
as they should have in the morning
but they did not. They lay
like jig-saw pieces which would
never slide into place. So like
a Christmas pressed underneath
the fragrant boughs of spruce
they will sing in chorus
tomorrow morning, harmonizing
with a choir of angels, blessing
these intimate hours
be being the ultimate whole they are
without perceptible sutures.

HE WHO SITS ON MOUNT KAILASA

Does he see on the Himalayas
from his window something private
and far in the tops of snow,
something secret, and altogether sacred,
or something which most of us
had long expected there? Some twinkling
in the darkness underneath the cliffs.
The movement of a thigh, a finger raised.
The sinuous heft of gigantic shoulders
freeing themselves from the bondage
of a Yogic trance, the shudder of mass
of dark and heavy hair. The Watcher
is looking; his eyes strain over
the curve of the horizon to where
like great teeth grinning the Himalayas
keep the eternal mirth glittering
as the world fusses with the wrappings
of ominous packages, one of which
may be opened too soon, and he
who sits on Mt. Kailasa will at last stand up.

A TIMELY DEATH

Not until everything was in order,
not until the final bill was paid,
not until the financial report
had been completed, and notes written
for the guidance of his wife;
not until all these things were ship-shape
and the laundry stacked,
was he going to finish
his completely patterned life,
and not until the minute
was ripe, could they close the coffin,
nor even then could they lock it,
not until the cats were fed
and the flowers watered,
was he willing to die briskly
and efficiently with no question
left unanswered or unresolved.

SHADOWS GLUED ON

I have left my shadow
on the wall of this house.
It filters there on the ivy
and on the stones beneath it.
I have come back this afternoon
to get it back. I cannot
take it by the edge and peel it,
nor would I scrape and destroy it,
for now, I have grown
a healthy, bouncing one
which lies there clinging to the old one,
and I am stuck here,
twice by two shadows,
to this wall like crusted paint,
waving my frustration
with futile fingers.

THE LOST GOBLET

The statue of a Franciscan monk
stands small upon the spice-shelf,
cradling in the bend of his elbow
the Baby Jesus.

Rain spatters
fretfully at the window.
The goblet of wine I held
in my hand, I hold no longer.

Wake up woman,
are you losing your mind?

I wander around and about
in search of the goblet.
The refrigerator? The oven?
I looked in both those places.
Gone, and so also had gone my mind.
Winds in the north,
now rising higher in pitch.
I become panicked, distracted,
then looking down,
I find myself clutching the goblet
which I had failed to find —

Saint Anthony,
are you playing another game
with me to test my faith?

If so, will you take the Little Boy
back to his parents
who sought him, sorrowing?

WHERE IS MY PEN?

My pen was gone. I laid it on the desk
in front of me, but when I returned
from the bathroom it had disappeared,

gone. Not on the floor, not on the chair,
not on the shelf. Gone, and the white paper
lay waiting for it, yawning. I glanced at the paper
until I could almost visualize
the smiling Saint in his brown habit.
I said, *Please*, and I saw his tonsure.³
Please, then his sincture,⁴ and another
Please brought forth his smile and the [...]

The pen by then must be crawling
somewhere among trivialities: paper-clips,
Scotch tape, and rubber bands. I suddenly
saw it lying idle on the paper.

I grabbed at it, and it backed away from me.
Then it rose on its point and spelled out
THERE IS NOTHING TO SAY.
Again it lay flat on the paper.
What it wrote, I could agree with.
There was nothing more to say.

³ *Tonsure*. The shaved head of a monk.

⁴ *Sincture*. Belt of a monk's robe.

THIRSTING AFTER THE LIMELIGHT

I will put up no longer
with those drunken delphiniums,
those women whose hands
claw the microphone as if power
were incubated behind its grille.
It is as if that old tree,
the big guy out there by the barn,
should grip the cold curved
smoothness of the hair-thin
crescent moon with two twiggy fingers,
Of if one of those alcoholic maniacs
should shout a speech from the Eiffel Tower,
not that whatever they have grabbed
is as permanent as the moon or tower,
but here, now, that equipment
was on loan to me,
and I return it,
as should you. This minute.

THE OBOE, UNEXPECTED

A bald frailty,
the crescent moon so thin
it seems to *sound*, more
than appear: a note from an oboe,
high, oblique, and sharp,
the perfect slender sharing,
cutting the twilight over clumps
of discarded clouds.
So coldly carved into a spine,
so brittle I can hardly breathe.
I call out to someone:
I would drink cold water.

MARCHING

Marching has overtaken the land.
The trees march by the river
in the best of formation.
The meadows try, but fail miserably:
see where they crawl
to the water's edge while the river
goes marching on, and the hills
are all mustered to march.
The rattle in company warehouses
may be more than deliveries of oil
in the night after the men have gone.
The marching sounds beneath
the threshold of your hearing.
If you visit a corseted institution
you never notice,
since you too are marching.
But on the railway platform
you wait eagerly for the train,
for otherwise you'd march
 the night away.
In a land that does not want you,
you hear the click of rifles,
and you want to go.

THE PLUTONIUM WORKER

*Karen Silkwood (1946-1974),
Nuclear factory whistleblower,
poisoned with plutonium,
run off the highway to her death
to stop her giving evidence.*

She was a young woman
of 28 years,
a young woman with many
springs and summers lying in wait for her,
and as many falls and winters
luring with promises,
and then she was sheered off
like a branch of a tree in storm,
and left with some leaves
waving from the wreck of her car,
the best of them having been
bundled up and stolen.

Karen with the fear
of the cancer which was growing
in her body. They planted it there.
Karen who would tell the nation
how they handle plutonium
as if it were china cups
and leave the broken pieces
of it anywhere.

Karen the lone spirit,
fearing for herself and humankind,
they turned into a radical-fanatic.
The media, the politicians,
the CIA and the FBI — all
of them in greater fear knowing
the guilt that had grown
from their fear a virulent cancer,
the fear that their millions
might cease to flourish —
lied and demeaned her
for what she was. She has been

THE GARDEN EATER

It crawled out
from underneath the porch,
a paw here, the top of the head,
a tip of tail. It crawled out
and stopped to see if anything
was missing, then stepped out
and into a flowerbed
to gaze at the moon.
Then it re-assembled itself,
got everything in order,
and jangled all around the house
to the uttermost wear and tear
upon my nerves,
glistening at times,
then all a-glitter,
it plucked at my bean rows
and having finished
its hour of fun,
oozed back
to where it slept all year.
I expect it again at the Winter Solstice,
and will have some cabbage for it,
and a bit of something for my nerves
if it rattles its load of hardware.

PURSE SNATCHER

He sneaked up behind her
and drew out his knife.
Quickly he severed the fabric handles
of her bag. When the fact
of the deed registered upon her,
with a haste every bit as short
and sharp as his, she reached
down to grab her bag,
and he chopped off her hand.
He picked up the bloody bag
and left her fallen forward.
Blood gushed out rhythmically
from the severed vessel in her arm,
and there he was under the street-lamp
with the bag beneath his coat.
Two policeman passed him
without looking, and the woman
lay thrown away and dead,
as victim of his urgent greed.

THE DANCING VIRGIN

She is a proud minx
and dances after so many
problems, so many harrowing griefs,
but they pertained to another person.
They ravaged another body,
and so she dances in freedom,
and delights with the stars.
She is no one's handmaid
and yet she serves us all.
She would as soon milk a Guernsey
as to dub a soldier to knighthood,
this virgin in the fields of Shiva.

JUST BEFORE DAWN, BROOKLYN

The streets waited;
taut, silent, and abandoned,
they stretched out to every side
going into more emptiness
where plastic wreaths
winked through incredible silence.
Then on a moment
there was a humming in my ears.
It was as if I were walking
on the back of a giant cat
purring his sleek contentment to the stars.
The half moon faded
in competition as gold filled
the air and I saw high up
above the street I walked,
the window-portrait
 of a lovely woman,
moving and talking to someone
out of the frame
of my restricted vision
and from whom the radiance
flooded in her face. A flush!
And nothing more.
It was gone between two footsteps
and the great thrum of cosmic energy
spangled with the random tinkles
of tiny bells. And out there
in the darkness a little peeper
came alive to alert the ships.
A foggy morning waited
 beyond the Narrows.

ONE AND THE SAME

A writer unknown to me
sends me a mountain of manuscripts.
I read them over and ask him
what I am to do with them.
He curtly answers, "Nothing."
I do not write back.
His editor writes to tell me
that the author of these works is dead.
He informs me in minute detail
of his suicide.
He asks me to send back the manuscripts
for posthumous publication.
I imagine like manuscripts
coming from many writers with their
tears and too-late praises.
The editor sends part of the manuscript
along with the blurbs and post-mortems
to the magazines. The editors accept them,
mourning the author's untimely end,
regretting, perhaps, their past rejections.
Then someone notices
the editor writes with the poet's penmanship.
The "dead author" is interviewed
in a literary newspaper.
He is not dead. He has merely gone mad,
and taken another name.

NEEDLES AND PINS

Needles, pins
in the big upholstered chair
dug in at moments of distraction.
She could never find them
and left their stings,
their pinchings to torment
my arms, to wiggle their ways
in the hem of my skirt.
The former resident
of this house would stick
a needle in the wallpaper.
A black-headed hat-pin
rammed through my thumb
from a plastic
tablecloth.
I feared to bury
my face in the roses
that bloomed in her small back yard.

WEATHER IN ITS PLACE

Keep your wet fingertips
off my neck! Their constant dripping
rings like small bells summoning
some instant action, and what can I
do for you? Keep the rain outside,
the leaves flapping in the outer wind,
or flying on the breeze beyond the house,
the fog squatting in the bay,
the minding its luminous business.
But I cannot do these things.
I wish the snow in many layers
of hurry-and-pile-up quietness
in which I can forget the patterns
of wickedness your clever fingers wove,
the growl of evil underneath
the sugar in your voice.

REVERIE

Drift off to sleep during a lecture
for a couple of seconds
to yourself and in that
limited span of time, have yourself
an argument, a love affair,
inherit one million, lose everything
you have and then get an idea
in which it all comes back to you,
wake up, and find all of it
false, the bowl empty, and the lecture
pretty much where you left it
but still muddling on.

STARS AND LADDERS

The men were out
on their tallest ladders
unscrewing the stars and cleaning them
before letting them back in place.
Have you noticed the used rags
in your trees and hedges
recently flung down upon them
when they were full of holes?
And when the stars
were put back carelessly,
some of them were screwed too loosely
and fell to the ground
where they silently exploded.
Did a blast of light awaken you
from your dreams this morning
while the sky was turning to Swiss cheese?
So now the government
is working on another tax
to pay off bounties for all the people
who find stars fallen in their flowerbeds,
and who will give them back again
to the men on their ladders,
so that they can fill the holes
and brighten the sky on nights
when the moon is off-duty.

AT MISSION DOLORES

Nobody knows about
the pain of San Francisco.
Nobody speaks of it, maintains
a heavy silence about the palms
which dance their ritual
over several miles, wringing
their hands, and heaving
their shoulders in deep sorrow
past the Mission and the church
Dolores. The high and bitter
wailing to which they dance,
the faces peering from between
their fronds are glazed with fear
of death, which all religion
seeks to calm. Even the fluffy
pine trees stand as timid soldiers.
The palm trees remember the deaths
in the Mexican War. Right now
they writhe with weeping
when the wind is chill, when fog
of morning spatters from the hills.
There is grieving in San Francisco.

THE CALLER

Hello. This is she.
This is she. Yes, that is my name,
which so enthralls you.
I am here. Yes, you are talking to me.
Come on. I have identified myself,
and who are you? Will you tell me that?

Speaking.
No, I am not asleep.
Do I sound as if I am sleeping?
Yes, I have been asleep.
I have been asleep quite a number of times,
but what does that have to do
with this telephone call?

Yes, of course, I am listening.
Will you please tell me
what this is all about?

Am I busy? Yes, indeed,
I am busy, too busy to let you
eat up the whole morning
with small talk about nothing.

No. There is no necessity for that.
I said there is no need for it.

Hanging up will not improve my temper.
All I want to know is what
were you thinking about when
you punched those keys or put
your finger in the hole in the dial
and turned it to those digits
which comprise my number?

What number? My telephone number.
Put the receiver to your ear
and let it talk.

How am I? Normal.
No, there is nothing about normal
but nothing phenomenal.
Neither good or bad, you know.
Normal. Exactly that.
Neither more nor less.

What did you want to tell me?
Will you tell me now, please?
She hung up. She never said
“Goodbye.” She must have had something
on her mind. Perhaps she forgot.

Maybe she was going to say something
which she was better advised
not to divulge,
but that is paranoid.

After all her inquisition
she merely backed down, or could
not face her problem,
and I am not her therapist.
She hung up,
leaving me none the wiser.

OLD GOLD

Old Gold, the deep orange
in the taste of apple cider.
Old Gold, the low slant
of the sun at afternoon that stains
the bark of trees and makes
the breath leap out of you in snatches
with the knowledge of Autumn on the way.
Old Gold that shimmers in remembrance
like a creek-bed under water.

WITH WHITE HAIR STREAMING

With white hair streaming
back upon the wind, why are you
standing high above the ocean,
waving your arm to clustering sea birds?
Is your cottage not enough
for you, warmed by the embers
from last night's fire, that you
must go out in this wrathful weather?
Are you remembering your husband
when his ship split in two
and the great waves tossed him
and he disappeared? Do you expect
that you will see him coming
from the foam to walk on the beach,
singing with gray blasts
of this angry day? Come on, Granny,
lest your embers abandon you,
the sea witch calling for one
whom the hungry sea devoured!

MANGER SCENE

It was I who was shaken
and wrung out with labor.
I was my body thrown about
on the straw, no longer concerned
about the start of this anguish
which my husband had not planted,
no more than the man
who had lights in his hair,
no one at all —
but still there was something growing
as here in this stable
with the scents of the animals
all overladen with the presence
of dung, I gave birth to my first-born
before it was morning. Joseph
looked down at the straw and saw
that baby who stared right back
at him with wonder in his eyes.
A person got up off the floor
and stretched his arms in blessing,
went out, and never troubled to return.
Thick perspiration bathed my face.
If this was the very special baby
that prophets had long spoken of,
and I was conduit for him, well,
he had to walk on two legs first,
and speak some language
before he could do miracles,
even as his God commanded.

NONE OF US EVER KNEW

None of us ever knew how the story ended,
so we had to make up endings for ourselves.
My brother always ended with a barrellful of questions.
My sister always thought of practical solutions.
I always killed everyone off,
but that was not the reason why
I was called Miss Funeral Parlor of the Year.
I always wore black because it was dignified
and it made you look older
even when you were not very young.
Mother, who was very much interested
in beauty, liked me to dress in red.

THE PALLADIUM

She kept something hidden
in her cottage. People were never
invited to enter. Talk went about
of ferocious dogs. She never
went out to do shopping. Deliveries
were made and the men
who made them came back
to town with worry in their eyes.
On night I passed along
that road with two companions.
We tried to look in through the crack
between the side of the window
and the shade. A splinter of light
struck each of us in the eye
so bright, so blinding that we staggered
and we were none the wiser for it.

GOING TO THE WITCH TO GET HER BACK

She has been storing up
a reservoir of power there,
back in the woods. Go carefully,
taking your sacrifice with you,
and plant it where the stars
shine on it, and let no one else
help you in this madcap endeavor.
Remember that what you
have prayed for will follow you
out of the earth, broken
and angry to some degree.
Sister to her crazy laughter,
she mocks you, but be not afraid.
Try not to take anything
that has not been fully transformed,
lest you come home with something
not fully living, which its dying
half endeavors to spoil,
and usually does. Wait
for the right moment,
take its hand
and run like hell.

THE THING LOVED

Something borne on shoulders
in parade; something exhibited
before the crowd; something
toward which arms extend,
something for which voices sing,
something from which glories
climb through depths of waters,
something glowing on the deepest
shadows of the forest, something
for which pilgrimage is made,
something we can never ignore
that terrifies us, that draw us
through all our days.

THE COMFORTS OF CITY LIVING

The last time I was alone
in the woods, two amber eyes
fixed me with an unwinking stare
from where the boughs were high
and underbrush no longer grew.
My foot snagged beneath a root,
so sure was I that the owner
of those eyes would pounce on me,
that I projected a crescent moon
caught in the branches of an elm,
and thus distracted, regained my foot
and hobbled home to dream
of the day to come, and my return
to the comforts of the city.

PERSONAL RITES

The cup, that will be offered
to you, will stand in the center
of a silver tray clustered about
by candles that will dent it
with spots that dazzle high
in the dark, too high for you to reach.
It will sink as you draw near,
pulled out of your near-paralysis,
and it will be understood
that you will approach it
with your lips and not your hands,
that you will slip easily over
the rim, all of you, into that stream
of bubbles rising from the stem.

THE SUMMER HOUSE

The somber, mysterious, or threatening
ghosts of the men
that wander throughout this house
and the diaphanous gowns
of the women who wail
into the garden windows
are enough to terminate
my dwelling here, but in the summers
the eddies of ice-cold air
in the parlor and the freezing
little puffs that infest the hall
make air conditioning unnecessary.
Feel free to join me when August
comes to wear you down.

POEMELLO OF SEVEN FINGERS

Today I find myself in possession
of seven extra fingers
left to me in the will
of my late maternal aunt. I do not
know what to do with them,
or where to put them. I feel strongly
that I should be capable
of performing more useful tasks
but I am an essentially clumsy person
and will be only almost twice
as clumsy. If I had three more,
I would have twice my natural
number, but I do not intend
to sound as if I were ungrateful.

THE PHARAOH IS NOT AT HOME

In the dimness
of an eating place
two blocks from the King Tut
exhibit on tour,
Nobody stands at attention
in a mummy case, gilded
with both hands
pretending business
with the flail and the *ankh*.
This temporal and spiritual
Something with a stiff face,
watches from its rigid beauty
empty tables in white shrouds
dotted with cups and glasses,
from which napkins folded
to the semblance of bishops'
mitres, caps of the Isis priests,
poke up in the scented air.
Does anyone come here to eat?

DATE PALM

In a meadow
where you are an interloper
you draw up your shoulders
and turn your eyes on me.
Through your density
of having fronds of bronze
and green, you are complacent,
save when a wind
toys with your fingers
and your mop writhes and mimics
wringing hands, the desperate
reaching of the poor,
then dies and leaves you
still weeping but with orange
anger rising from your trunk.

SHE'LL BE THE DEATH OF US

She took Death by both its handles,
heaving it upward
over her head until
she had it on her back
and carried it all around the country,
tiring herself with its weight,
and shouting all the blame on us.

BICYCLES

Bicycles, graceful skeletons
on two wheels speeding past
the laws made for other vehicles
go any which way regardless —

Regardless of what?
Of what the police might think
if they had given any
attention to it.

Like needles they dart
in and out against the traffic,
their riders with whistles
in their teeth that utter no warning
and no lights to signal
their coming after sundown.

If automobiles were forbidden,
the city streets would be a panic
of water-bugs skittering
on the surface of a pond.

THE COMING STORM

When the trees flip their tops
against the leadening of sky,
turning small leaves inside out
in savage whiteness and the growling
has yet to become thunder,
better hasten home
as scattered drops command
with sudden nudges,
better retreat into a shop
when the clans of the drops
congregate into a drizzle
or even retreat to the shelter
of an awning unless you can take
your drenching with equanimity,
your unplanned soaking
without immediate complaint.

YOUR MENTOR

Where the walls meet in the garden
of your house, they make a pinched corner
the sun never penetrates, yet that tree,
that ominous, threatening date palm,
stands stuffed with all its fronds
tickling the walls, or drooping over
the fence, to tell me not to ring the bell.
And I would ask what it was doing
in so tight a fit. I would say that this
climate was no good for busy mop heads.
I needed no dark fingers reaching
for the latch. I needed no shadow
of the fear of death like a feather-duster
left by a lazy maid to taunt me.

OLD FLOORS

Soft, as though made of mud,
old floors sink slightly
at the lightest tread of feet
that trust them.

They ripple gently
as they writhe their way
beneath shelves of unwanted goods,
cradling lost pencils in their cracks.

They seem to tire easily.

Be careful,
lest your tread cause them
to relinquish the weight
which they must bear
and drop you,
with grateful rot,
into the welcome
of the cellar.

IN THE FOREST OF THE WENDIGO

1. LOST

The long-house has wandered off
somewhere and I am left behind
to find it. The stars stick in the branches
of the highest trees that have no green
save at the top of the naked trunks.
Beneath the slip-slide footing
of pine needles, something way down
rumbles and shakes the ground
with muttering scarce-heard. I feel it
in my bones. I wonder
if on some far-off island
they are dying, or shouts
of warning rise to the clouds.
The web of a spider
burns my face. Whiskers
of fog feel out for me.

2. THE SECRET

A glade. An opening in the woods
where anything might happen.
Now the forest wakes. The grasses
cease to move. The bushes liberate
their hoarded twittering. The bull frogs
stop their vocalise, but yet
the moss invites me a lie down,
while the trees part in anticipation
of I know not what.

I run and run
until I am exhausted. The forest
can keep its secret.
I shall not intrude on what
it may or may not foster.

3. IN THE DEEP WOODS

When I hear the ground
crunching followed by the sound
of bells, I know that *he*
is nor far off, that monstrous, tall
hunter in whose ear Hiawatha
rode; that behind a clump of trees
his laughter wobbles the juniper
and soars to a mighty screech,
that I had best be going home.
I do not care to have him
swing downward with his tomahawk.
These woods are treacherous
with spirits. I must not look
nor to the right or left but keep on going.
He is laughing
at the death that fouls our waters,
above the earth that is poisoned
 by the same stuff,
giving bad breath to his laughter,
our self-inflicted hatchet-thrust
the destruction of our woods.

CAVE OF THE PIPER

Lake water silent. No bird called.
No fish jumped. The sun was hiding,
coy through thick overcast. The day
held its breath. My oars were lifted.
The boat stood beside the entrance
to a cave which once a musician
entered playing the bagpipes.
They heard the pipes sigh,
heard them stop. Since then
I have heard adventurers stammer
about a gigantic human hand
whose fingers seem to reach
about as if their owner was unsure
of what he wanted. I did not enter.
I left it to its strange amphibious
spirits that harry those who take
a swig of spirits before they enter.
I rowed on further
to the promise of a landing
and a sturdy cup of tea.

FAÇADE

His fingers come off
inside his glove on the table,
where he normally keeps
his haunted shoes. His hand
writes out a check in payment
which his butler exchanges
for a bale of hay from which
he stuffs his shirt. His pants
are packed with pebbles and his face
is plastered upon a piece
of sculptured marble. He drapes
all this with a once-respected
cape. He waits to face eternity
as if forever meant juggling
this sadly-constricted body
until time wears out.

NIGHT WRITING

If the poem
is a problem to be solved,
leave the poem
in the moonlight
to solve it, and in the morning
you will wake up
and find the solution
on your desk. And who
had written what is sparkling
there? The poem which
has written you, frying
your day-old eggs for breakfast
and wondering who you are.

SWIMMER FROM ATLANTIS

The last day I was at the beach
the ocean had thickened into gelatin
some three feet downward
from the surface.

I saw him in the sand. His hair
was flying in its eagerness. He plunged
his feet into the sticky greenness
And later climbed a bulging swell
to where it cracked along the topmost ridge,

then crawled on all fours in the trough.
I heard him laugh, and I was glad
for him. I put some cast-off globules
of the spray in both my pockets.

My friends would not believe me
when they saw my finds. They spoke
of a new molecular state of iodine
which smelled like salt and fish,
and I believed them. [I had seen

the one who was in it and of it.]
What was I to do?

THE TREE, THE WOMAN, EARTH SHAKING

In a fraction of time
I saw her with her black mane
writhing as the wind
lifted it. She was standing, huge
as the outline of her being
stood, and her face riddled
with the tears that ran
down gullies of her cheeks.

In the same fraction of time,
as when a large frond was lifted
threatening in its darkness
of green and bronze, then dropped
blindly to its shaggy mop.
She could have trod on me,
trampled me into earth, that woman.
The palm tree only bent
to the pomp of mourning and the earth
shuddered for a fraction of an instant.
I have known this unfurled darkness
even in the brilliance of sunshine,
in the orgasm underneath the solid earth.

NEW MOON

When the new moon
turns up its toes
and hooks its lifted hands
for joy in the clarity
of sky, I try to fish it out
from behind the blackness
of a water tower
and set it squarely
on your rooftop.

But now I cannot do it.
I am in no position.
Your rooftop is not
available to me.
When I come back
it shall be beaming freely
above your chimney.

CATHOOD

No more than the towering
of great black wings is my awareness
of quiet cathood seated in a corner,
not of the muscles rippling
through the sheen of fur, but of
an unshakeable serenity, of two ears
up and swiveling to capture words
and savor them, the possibility
of a gentle prod of paw which cannot
pick at guitar strings, hold a glass
of brandy or a lighted cigarette
anymore than he can loop
the splendor of a tail around
his hip when seated on the floor.
The impression of cathood is what
he is, for he is neither man nor cat,
as he moves within this world of mine.

THE LEVITATOR

One pushes or is pushed.

Such the nature of propulsion.
Airplanes work to stir the air
with fans, jet planes
disgorge the heated air.

Boats push the water
with propellers, oars,
men with their arms and legs —

But you push
with only thought
at psychic space,
a method which we cannot
understand.

WHAT BECAME OF FATHER

Started in town to a meeting today
and fetched up in Camden, New Jersey.
Answered the telephone and then
hung up, instead of leaving the receiver
on the table waiting. Then to top it off
poured a full pot of tea
into my sister's plaid-skirted lap.
You thought you would be
a philosopher today. Much good
that did you. Better try it
all over from the beginning.

IF YOU SEE YOUR FATHER

If you see your father reflected
behind you in the mirror, do not be
upset, because you are not reflected, too.
Remember that it happens to the best of us.
We get lonely, like to be near our survivors,
who are likely to be fearful of people
whom they thought had dropped out
of their lives forever,

and if you see
a hollow in the cushion of his favorite
chair, say something cheerful. Sniff
a little for the faint smoke of a pipe
and do not keep checking the contents
of the refrigerator although you heard
its door close. Just try to remember
his outline against the twilight sky
or the silhouette of his head and shoulders
against the living room window,
and murmur of how much you loved him
before he thought he had finished
the chapter and turned the light out.

THE BABY-HEAD ANGELS

1

Over in the corner where
the walls meet with the ceiling,
a head is lodged, apparently a spare
with no neck to stand it on, a baby's
head with thin hair boiling
forward over brow, eyes in a bit of squint
that hides the truth about their color,
little turned-up nose in a puffy face,
like the face of any urban urchin.

I pat it no attention, let it whistle
softly all melodies forgotten, like some
hissing steam issuing mindlessly
from the mouth of a tea kettle. My pen
wanders equally without motivation.

I feel a tap on the shoulder
and some hair in my face. Some sounds
barely formed into words.
I let my hand and my pen move.
Then I bat [my invisible visitor]
with the heel of my hand
and it disappears. Call it an Angel,
if you want, a Muse or the Devil,
stripped to a head as mode
of disguise, but it prompts my writing!

2

One of them once got trapped
in this church. He flew in over
the tilted sash of a clerestory window.
It was obvious that he was not used
to being inside. He kept bumping
his baby head against the high beams
of the sanctuary, like a wayward bird,
or a bat trapped indoors. One day
I saw him. He was all head,
with the thinnest hair of tired gold.
He had no armor or legs or torso,
but he had wings that blew a bluster
over the open missal. Oh, and the cough
that fed on the incense rising,
that most especially annoyed the priest!

3

He came to the universe
with such excessive speed
that he tore it apart and it
exploded through the soft spring sunlight.
Some looked aloft to see him
with his hair on fire, and digested
the fact that they had seen an angel.

He slid down a sunbeam
and the fire in his curls went out.
He fell down forward
through a church's open window.
He did not bleed from the damage,
although he broke some orange panes
and came to rest on the Rood beam,
sitting on the bottom of his head
and double-chins, as best became an angel.

He was fat and disheveled.
His blond hair was charred
and smiled distressingly. His blue eyes
were panic-stricken. He had no limbs
or body and had only his wings
for transportation,
an angel on unfamiliar ground.

His blue eyes flickered back and forth
over the congregation, and with a terrible
working of his muscular wings, he shot up
and remained like a stationary bee,
a helicopter hummingbird
right in the arch above the apse.

4

. . .When one of them
lodged itself inside my attic,
I tried to chase it with a broom,
whereat it gathered up
a fluttering behind each ear
and hung there on a level
with my eyes, roaring
like a helicopter.

I wondered what the use
of them can be for God.

5

We must savor to the utmost
all that we can of the very best
of these, our most treasured moments,
so that twenty years hence
in our memory, they will seem
even more spectacular
than they really were.

AT BRIGHTON BEACH

Evening came down over Brighton Beach
as if someone had put a cover on a pot
and there I was sitting on a splintery bench
while last-minute shoppers boiled
beneath the tracks of the “A” train; far below
the metallic glints of waiting rails,
while further off the proud sweep
of the boulevard curved with its timeless
intimacy around our unmoving shoulder
of the baleful sea.

And suddenly at my side, a dainty slip
of a summer child in a Kate Greenaway
gown of a fully Empire styling
down to white cotton ankles
and black slippers topped off
with the coal skuttle bonnet.

It is no night to be out in summer finery,
I think, as the train rolls in. It is almost freezing.
She meets my eyes with curious
blankness, and disappears, just as the doors
of the train spring open.

A SCREAM IN THE NIGHT

A scream in the night
that rose to blossom in my head

a scream in outline
as a full-blown sound
that never touched my ears,
then stopped for the dripping
of a faucet, a shameless backfire,
men pounding in the house
across the street, an ambulance
elbowing through non-existent traffic.

Was someone dying?
It was not a peaceful death.
And why was I singled out
to be recipient of skeletal news.

I have heard a painful string
of backfires, a telephone ringing
seeming forever with an answer,
the howling of a garbage truck,
but never such an urgency as this.

THE SMALL VOICE

Your diminutive slithery
slip of a voice
almost drowned in an ocean
of telephone ink, that black
unstirring silence. I heard it
thrash about and mew at me
before it fell over
and into my ear, then down
the channel and into my throat
where it picked up a cough
and cleared itself
to my immense relief.

NIOBE AT THE BEACH

Out on the beach it crouched,
a tall, black boulder, narrowed toward its top,
like a warning finger raised against
the bloody tantrum of the setting sun,

and as the hours piled up and dusk
rustled a little in the re-arrangement of light,
close in beside it stood a weeping figure,

proud female clad in a gushing sheath
of angry waters veiling her nudity
in thickness of gray that carried trains
of bubbles in their swiftness, ropes of foam
that set the sand grains dancing,
boring down into it and spreading out
in dampness while the ocean retreated,

and the gesture of the rock
uttered one word with its digit: Silence!

I never pass that way
at sunset any more.

THE MOUNTAIN TITAN

Evening arched above the rattling
of the bus taking us and our belongings
up the wandering valley
to the city we had longed to see.
The sky was clean of clouds
above us, and around us the valley
slipped away back of us
into the night to come,

and we all saw droplets
clinging grimly to the cold curve
of the crescent moon, and then
others drew their bodies in with nascent
terror as the head and shoulders
of a man in silhouette loomed clearly
above a jagged mountain.

His eyes were holes of misery
and his mouth was a silly grin.
The bus ran onward, never stopping,
and the figure turned its eye
to follow us, but we were rushing
headlong into an exploration of the dawn.
One tear was loosed upon our juggling roof.
We were on the way to meet the sun.

SHARDS OF ISOLDE

1

The beginning of all my problems
was the hair a bird picked up
and dropped on the windowsill
of Mark, the King of Cornwall. He loved me
then because he had seen my hair
and guessed that the rest of me was glorious,
so Tristan was sent to find me.

2

I am too old to remember
the single strand of my hair
that announced me. The chip from the
sword that had killed my father,
and the queasy flirtation with sea-sickness
brought into bloom by Brangwen's
fumbling with the philtres.
The one I drank plummeted me into the well
of Tristan's shoulder, and I stuck there,
never thinking of my betrothed
awaiting me, with my head held
to the rail of the deck by his Messenger
whom I loved, murderer though he might be,
and I, adulteress before the rites of marriage.

3

At the end of the meadow,
high on the brink of the angered ocean,
I see a tossing of ebullient spray
from the boon of the sea, so many
feet below, from its contact with the cliff.
The heavy globules fall
into my eyes. I cannot see
what color are the sails of the ship.

NOT READING ALONE

Sitting on a rock
under an apple tree, reading,
I noticed the pages of my book
flipping back and forth as if someone
were reading over my shoulder,
and was undecided as to what page
he wanted, as certainly someone was.

A SUDDEN SCREAM

A sudden scream,
wounding the velvet body
of the night, as with a shot.

The young moon rocked,
a gentle moon as of one
who protected it, mercifully
held the little splinter
of new-washed bone against
the lightning of fear,

for the moon was totally unaware
of droplets forming
around its outer rim
or how they dropped
to the earth at random
and at this time cut through
the flesh of a sleeping child
and bit the responsive bone.

WHO COMES BACK

Now, it is time for you to return
this way with your curl of words
on your hip and under your arm.
The mountains move away and leave
the valley even wider as the mica
splashed upon the insolence of your shoulder
answers the infant moon with blinkings.
Your face is a danger to the clouds,
which reverse themselves to avoid you
when you march down through the slumbering
villages where people sit indoors
to hear you passing, mark your progress.
As you go through unnumbered bushes,
your feet press water from the earth.
I know, old father, your passage
is not easy in the moonlight.
It is impossible by daylight,
and the dusk is not long enough.

DIES IRAE II

Somehow and for some inexplicable reason
the sky after sunset last evening
was damaged, and most of the clouds
had died when a grenade was thrown
with an immense report that cut
into the lining of the sky, liberating
a gush of silver birds. I felt the fire
reach out for my intestines and hold it
in a great mailed hand that squeezed
from it the breath of Aphrodite.

Let me walk forth on two canes,
singing the songs of healing, and let the high
vaults ring back a thousand *allelujahs*
when the dangling stripes have been stuffed up
and packed in hard with an aromatic
root, and the sons of the riflemen are dead.

TWIN PEAKS

Twin Peaks,
two breasts uplifted
as if we had been dared
to make something
of the sexuality
of San Francisco, and that
is like what I would make
of four slim ankles
veiled in black nylon,
shooting from four sleek
black high-heeled shoes,
in under the hem
of a single golden coat
and matching hair. I saw
the same four feet
beneath the table
as two pairs of ankles
crossed. I can make
nothing of all these doubles.

DOLOROSA PALMS

1

Up toward the Twin Peaks
on Market Street, somewhere around
the corner just in sight, you almost
hear a chorus wailing
Dolores — pain in the legs, the heat
or temptation of the driven soul
stopped in its frustration
by Market Street. The tall stout trunk
of a palm tree like a single leg
dabs with furious feather duster
at the wind. The great flat fingers
sway like a swimmer's arms
in green and bronze above a heart
of the richest orange,

and as you approach
you see it as one of a single file,
all flailing in silence, cloaking
that doleful chant of *Dolorosa*.

2

Huge pagan strangers licking
layers of the wind away, they come
as dancers at the court of Versailles,
or like an indefinite procession
of undecided length, they come
as heralds for someone yet greater,
even more nobly crowned,

or is it the path of someone mounted
upon a donkey, to whom the great palms
dance and sing Hosannah,
knowing of the doom to come,
or his mother with the seven swords

in her heart, a sword for each
hill of this bustling town?
Or the grief of a humble friar
and the passion of his stigmata?

Look down the strip of heaving
Dolorosa palms, up over slopes
and down in valleys bringing
what or whom, but do not try to follow
them, to seek them where they start,
if you would not be overburdened
with the sobbing of *Dolorosa*.

3

*California Volunteers Monument &
Spanish American War Monument,
Market & Dolores, San Francisco*

Madness announces grief.
The eyes of the horse
roll in a frightened frenzy.
The rider has both hands full,
struggling with the reins. The banner
whips from the staff of the spear
that holds it and the sword
in the other hand is raised. A man
lies, trampled under the horse's hooves,
and walks beside the horse.
The horse has wings.⁵ Madness in bronze
and patina of green melts
with the sombre flailing of the palms.
O, Dolorosa: this is where it starts
or finishes, screaming at something
terrified, while the palms take up
the frenzy, for what or whom?

⁵The statue, by Douglas Tilden (1906), depicts Bellona, the Goddess of War, riding on Pegasus, the winged horse from Greek mythology.

4

I have yet to turn the corner
but I hear them now, a faint high
fluting, dispensing a melody.
which lingers and grows more solid.

I see the first frond curling
an admonishing finger before the wind,
and the voices increase in volume
until the procession of palm
trees rolls and wallows
with the keening of many women,
mourning the deaths of their sons
in the useless Mexican War.
The palm trees march
all the way up from Mexico,
to give us their mournful message.

HILL VERTIGO

On the hillsides the houses cling
row on row, dainty with heights
of steps, and long thin slots of windows
cutting of geometry prettily painted.
When will the city rock them
from their solid perches, that suddenly
in a magnificent tumble they will
gather at the bottom in a heap
of clapboards, tooth-pick columns,
and broken glass, all clamoring
for reconstruction. One day
this constant shadow climbed up
a hill, heels stamped at the sidewalk,
toes dig into cement, but shoulders
did not slant, nor fingers touch
the ground, and at one corner,
swinging around to see the full
extent of climbing, felt dizziness
as the whole panorama of the city
spread itself behind and out there
where the cross-street ran another cluster
of houses stood upright on the frightful
slant. Hands hardened at the grasp
of bars in a gate. Mind took in the danger
of tripping and falling, or rolling down
to the waiting of tall office buildings.
The wind came playfully to where
body lingered, and from which two
impudent and staring eyes
looked out to the twin caps of hills,
on Saint Francis' church
in the street called Dolorosa.

GOLDEN GATE DISILLUSION

1

San Francisco seems quiescent.
She lies sprawled flat
upon the hills and dreams
with everybody running
through her catacombs, changing
color, trying to be something else.

They offer you ice,
and as for its water: keep it
for a moment and it urns
into acid. Leave it alone
and it is suddenly alkaline.
But what it was every time
shows through its next pretense.

The place is not literary,
though literary personages
beckoned upon its hills.
Name it the fostering Mother
of indolent children, but each child
works with more energy
than its father and comes out
fulfilled, yet knowing fearfully
that he needs something more.

The city is a desperate liar,
and the lying hurts.

2

The wrong side of the continent
where everything is pretended:
palm trees, that it was tropical,
ignoring the chilling wind;
the subway advertising,
that everybody was sick;
the hosts of little houses,
that they were not the setting
for a children's operetta;
the land that would stand there
forever, while earthquakes
bounced it in remembrance
of a fire which caused it
to be built anew.

And I would go back
some day but even if I did not,
San Francisco would still
stand there in my memory
sprinkled on all its hills.

EARTH TREMOR

Imagine a lake with water
so still it seems almost
to be a sheet of metal
on which trees along its borders
stand rightside-up and upside-down.
Then see a vibration cross
its face. The inverted trees will shiver.
I imagine all the ivy on a wall
breaks forth in consternation,
till it seems that the wall itself
has rumped and you know
that the lake is still the wall,
and under both of them
the sold earth is shaking.

MUSCLES, CANINE ANTIQUE

My dog, Muscles, poured
himself out the door
and lay like a puddle
of fur in the garden.

He is a shade of gray.
Non-achiever, as the sky
became night he butted in
with his tail knocking
on everything and sprawled
on the rug on the living room floor.

Muscles is a member
of Weight Watchers. Every month
he peeks to see
how his muscles are doing,
then falls back to sleep.
The world has never changed.

BOHEMIAN IN SAN FRANCISCO

He is living compactly
in San Francisco, no differently
than by his Parisian routine
whereby he first dropped an egg
into an electric coffee pot
and boiled the egg and ate it,
then heated up the coffee,
and used the shells
to keep the grounds down,
and used the grounds to clean
the inside of the pot, but then
he got moved to the United States
and everything totally changed
for good, but he still thinks
San Francisco will do as well
as Paris, now that he has retired.

MAN ON DRUMS

His face a patch of white
half-hidden behind the cymbals,
bass drum and the snares,
where he sits buried among remembered
fragments of a broken song.
A skeleton dancing its rhythms
without all of its bones
under the padding fleshing of the bass.

He tickles the cymbals
with a swish of the brush, one hand
clutching at the idle sticks.
Then all at once the sticks are flying.
Swiftly he lets them go,
until with a final flourish
the drummer at last collapses.

JULY FOURTH

They are shooting holes
in the sky between the leaves.
They are making the buildings
utter curses, crossing out
the chirps of katydids, who provide
the music for the fireflies'
random presence. At every blink
another sharp explosion. The night
is tattered by the vandalism
that tells of our independence,
that says we can win a war.

THINGS SPUN IN SILK AND STEEL

Such a fine, delicate web
she weaves, exquisite
in every detail, like the nearly
non-existent connection
from the web to supporting twigs,

and it is not meant
to catch anything but moonbeams
that slide along its threads
and, in so doing, like a bow
draw forth a whisper,

the faintest ghost of melody.
Then come the the beads of dew
at times, so fat they break it.

The Bridge escapes the land
at either end. It leaps
to cathedral arches
toward the middle of the river,
pulling a Hallelujah
of cables over them
in the outline of angels' wings.

WAITING FOR THE FOG

Timid sunlight filters through
the tall spruce, standing straight
bearing no branches, except at tops.
They are tall, lean columns
underneath the silken carpeting
of needles, deep down under earth
vibrations in the rocks. No sound.

I linger, knowing that the fog
will soon be on its way, white filaments
seeping among the lofty pillars.
Now the voice grows steady.
The leaves on the ferns are nervous.
Out there in the ocean, the fog horn
on Manana⁶ gathers strength
and seeps through rocks, as through
my bones, as in some few hours
the fog will hang upon the trees
soaking their topmost branches.

⁶ Manana. The fog signal station on Manana Island, Maine.

THROUGH THE KEYHOLE

When I squat to look through the keyhole
and see your own eye
staring back and collecting
the iris-curved images of
the rugs, the furniture,
the photographs that clot the wall,

I see the million eyebrows
of the endless sea
white and rejoicing,

the many adipose clouds
that populate the wastes of sky,

or miles of desert sand
where a sole Saguaro waits,

and I know that you are seeking
boots, umbrellas, the hat-tree
to furnish your yawning expanses,

but all you find is my exploration
winding like a ribbon
throughout the stars.

FEAR ON THE LAND

A sturdy fear haunts the land.
It shies away from everything.
Do you see those pines? They are like
bonsai trees of normal height, with the branches
growing in one direction, reaching in.

The grass suffers some
nervous affliction. It stands stiff
as if in wait for trouble, and the sand
fidgets, never keeps still a moment.

These fields wetlands, and shoreline
all together cower like a slave girl
naked before her master,
with her faced turned from the wind
and the grating sand, her arms
reaching in hysteria
for something that resists attack.

THOSE GREENWICH VILLAGE GARDEN RESTAURANTS

You must try a little table
in our garden in the back. There,
the flies are plentiful. They will keep
you busy until the waitress
finds you, and — think of it! —
no air conditioner to spoil
the coziness. It was 102 today.
The flagstones soaked it up,
so you can imagine yourself in Florida
and itch. There are also little pods
and insects to fall in your soup.
You would gladly pay
a higher price for such conditions!

AUGUST ON MORTON STREET

The slant of the sun slides
visibly down the walls this evening,
as it used to so many years ago,
and it seems like yesterday.

There is something in that tilt
of light, that almost citrus glow
reminding me to go back over town
despite the changes in the buildings

and the stifled promise of slightly
cooler weather. That, and the rose tone
that seems to dye the bricks
at that corner, will never change,
will always beckon me back to east of here,
at the eighth month's outset.

HAUNTED, THEY SAY

A window floats upon the leaves.
Nothing unusual. It seems like a window
to a studio. The room, white-painted,
and the lights like Klieg lamps. Why
such a barrage of brilliance? The casement
screams with all-fours wall out through
the branches. They say it is the window
of the most-haunted apartment in Manhattan,
but what goes on there? Something which only
the light can quiet? At least it must
be comfortable in the summer with cold
drafts swirling in around one's feet!

SECRET ORIGINS

I remember the day
when you finally came apart,
when your weight rode
on your hips, but your legs
refused to work, when one
of them came unscrewed
and both of them melted
to the consistency of butter,
and you sat on your waist
in the road. Two camels came
to lie down and inspect you.

That was the day when
the Sphinx sulked
beside a cardboard imitation
of the Pyramid of Cheops
and the Nile had lost its magic.

THE ROPE LADDER

On a clear morning in August
a rope descended from the sky.
I and my brothers stood gaping
by the cowshed. The rope hung
straight and steady as a rope should,
and we peered up its length
to the place of beginning and saw
only more rope lowered to the lawn.

I broke the spell. I tore my eyes
away. It was lying across the cabbage bed.
My older brother went to coil it up
and pretty soon he had it
running through his hands until it stopped
with a jerk and then was sliding upward.
In a half hour's time, he went up with it.

and there he was in mid-air.
Swaying, he tried to climb back down,
hand over hand, but the rope ascended
at his speed and still he held position there.
He slid a little, but his hands were raw.
Then his section of the rope fell off

and dropped him. Such excitement
with the ambulance. The efforts to explain
and then to show the men what happened.
Everyone streamed out to the vegetable
garden. All the length of that rope had gone.

TRANSIT IN MAGRITTE'S BELGIUM

On a day when most of us
were on vacation, a bus full
of municipal white-collar clerks
started out on its route to the suburbs.
Each one was seated and each
had his head buried in the daily paper.

The bus sailed off down the street,
gathering altitude with every mile, and, soon,
high in the air it progressed above Bruges,
and then the bus stopped. Some got out.
They fell. The bus continued. A few more
dropped like seed pods, slowly, turning
in the air, eyes fixed on nothing, arms
to sides, all dressed alike, like so many
little toy civil servants. Then they landed,
unhurt and unruffled, each in front
of his own neat home, and then they woke up.

THE HAND

Across the street beyond the water tanks,
high up on a white-washed wall,
a giant hand with splayed-out fingers
clutches at the bricks. Perhaps a fungus.
Then again, perhaps a shadow
of several things combined. No one else
speaks of seeing it. A boisterous breeze
makes tides of tiny shivers run
across it in the morning sunlight.
No one knows what it is, or means.

WITCHES ON PARADE

Gray in the light of birds-eye spots,
gray but with hope that forges
through night on stilts. Soft gray
of the cerements of fog. A gray of tatters,
rag-streaming on cold laughter of the wind,

as through narrow city streets
they strode, sweeping away the hours,
the minutes, of our past with brooms
of bleakest straw, their heads craned back
or to the side, their hair like paper
turned to ash but still in form of paper,
nine tall witches overtopped the crowd⁷
on silk, and woke the autumn
with their exhausted breathing.

Make way! Let yourself not be trampled
by their wooden feet. Walk softly as if
on pine needles among cathedral trees.

HEAVY SHADOWS

The shadow of an object
has greater density
 more tangible hardness
 more obvious dimensionality
than what carries it,
which like a pole
stands straight up, while its shadow
dents the earth it lies on,
more real than the shadow caster.

⁷ *Nine tall witches* ... This is possibly a description of a float in Greenwich Village's spectacular annual Halloween parade.

THE PAPERS IN THE LOCKED ROOM

Nobody could have been
sprinkling bald paper with letters
from the impatience of fingers.
Nobody could
have worked so hurriedly
in the secret heart of the night.
Nobody, on standing up, could cast
so large a shadow on the window blinds,
especially since the lights
were off, the door locked, and nobody
ever did business before six o' clock
in the morning. No one.

But the Vicar wrenched at the door
and sprung it open at the moment
when the lights switched off and plunged
the room back into the depths of darkness.
The vicar brought out a flashlight
and saw an eye-blink when the lights
snapped on again. He heard a voice

from a young man directly behind him —
although nobody was assuredly there —
saying, "I was finishing up what I had to do
when this heart attack hit me.
Good-bye. I have got to leave, let go
of all this apparatus, and be gone tonight.
Please forgive me. This is the last
you will see of me."

Gone!

THE WAVING FINGERS

The slim crisp of an infant moon
hung over the garden gate, so nearly swung,
it looked like an infant in a cradle.

Elsewhere in the sky, two random planets
had ventured near, despite the
upstage of even so small a moon.
They dared to have their pleasure of the evening.

The cornfield spread out rows
of spikes in silhouette against the darkening,
when suddenly at the edge of the world
a fist rose and loosened its fingers
as if it were trying on a glove.

No one was upset or disconcerted.
Every clear evening was thus ushered in.
Over centuries, the farmers said:

“We all looked casually at the phenomenon,
then closed and locked our doors
before we wandered off to bed.
We left the great hand to its exercises,
which was all that it wished of us.”

CAT CALLS

Cat calls among the tussocks of the reeds —
 maybe the neighbor's children,
 most probably not,
but down there where my garden
 turns to swamp, the little figures
leap up among the higher fronds
 of ferns and grasses. It is too foggy
to see them in the twilight.

They bother me no longer.
 In the morning a few less
 apples fallen on the ground,
 but yet, how many less?
Tiny fingers work at the vines
around my kitchen windows.

Cat calls, and a sudden brilliance
 from the front of the house,
 the moaning of a car,
 and no car out there at all.

Such things do not happen
in the city. Out here you learn
another way of living.

ON READING FROM MEMORY

THERE IS NO reason in the world why anyone should do as I do, yet since I have been so often asked what it is I do when I deliver my poems in public and how I can do it from memory, it would seem that a few notes on the subject might perhaps be of some interest.

First, since the process of writing these poems was essentially the process of listening for them, all that is needed is to listen for them again. As it was not for the word, but the cadence of a phrase, a sentence, or the relationship of phrase with phrase as it is spoken, so the second listening is for sections of verse rather than for single words. If certain words refuse to materialize as components of a unit of sound, at least one still knows the pattern of missing syllables and may substitute something of the same construction and kindred meaning. For this reason some people feel that I am improvising on a rough outline, especially if they have heard the piece before, and sense the intrusion of words and phrases which were not what they had expected. At least they listen, and listening is the basic understanding in this endeavor. If you try to dig it out of the past by trying to remember what ought to be there as dictated by logic, you are sure to run into a blank wall.

The next thing is to find what it is that is sounding, and in order to do that, there must be a regression back to the first impulse which originally created the poem, and the creation of hallucinatory “props” if necessary.

If I am to dwell seriously on “My Old Friend, the Sorcerer,” I must be able to see his “tall house on the ridge” as I did when I wrote it. Auto-hypnosis makes this possible. I must draw back into my head to a place from which I can direct my eyes, raise and lower my voice, command gestures, and regulate speed as if I were playing an instrument. I must be in a position to aim all my apparatus at the audience, and to do so, I must retreat from any identification with it and become the operator.

There is a sudden falling back from the eyes. The light dims. The room seems to grow longer and the first row of the audience draws back. In cramped quarters where the audience is pressing in and too close, it is often difficult to draw far enough away to prevent a flawed performance. Once the audience has withdrawn, the various persons comprising it lose their three-dimensional appearance and become as flat as persons on a television screen. They are so unreal that they become a background for the poem. The constant raking of the audience with a carefully controlled movement of eyes and head makes them look like an audience surveyed and explored by a television camera. But for all that,

they are of far less importance than the scene projected across their flatness as in a double exposure.

If for some reason, one member of the audience belongs in the *mis-en-scene* of the poem in any way, then we have the Svengali effect which makes it seem that I have completely identified with the reality of the poem. This is merely an appearance, for I always identify only with my relationship to that group-photo audience and nothing else.

The ending is often a complete shock. After the final word, the trance breaks and the lights suddenly become unbearably bright. It is as if I had alighted from a bus with tinted windows. I am disoriented and confused. The room has suddenly changed shape, and the people are all at once uproariously alive. It is a shock of short duration, but it is always a shock. All the reality of the poem is as static as the words on the printed page or the titles which are a necessary "cue sheet."

As yet I cannot do without that list. Declaiming a poem is one thing. Recalling the exact order of a program or clawing suitable titles for a series from the air is as yet beyond me. I need it as most poets need their texts as an anchor in a written reality or scrawled or typewritten stability in case something essentially might suddenly slip from my head with no written reference to which it might turn to remind itself. The poets who go through the same poems time after time could easily do away with their texts if they worked over the sections which only the text can give them, and I would shelve the cue sheet if I planted it in my head. So far I let it be the one sheet lying on the lectern, so it seems that the lectern must serve some other function that to stand as an object with which one engages one's hands or upon which one rests various percentages of one's total weight.

—*From a hand-written notebook, undated.*

HOLLAND AT AGE 42

From The East Side Scene Anthology (1968)

Publication: I have had material published in little magazines too numerous to list across the US, in Canada, Mexico, Argentina, England, Italy, Greece, Switzerland, and Sweden About a third of my output — put it nearer a quarter — has come out in England. I have one book behind me: *Return in Sagittarius*, Eventorium Press, NY, 1965; Midwinter 1967 or 1968 I expect to see the emergence of *A Game of Scraps*, Poems of the MacDougal Midway, Charleston, Illinois.

A collaboration consisting of matched or “conversing” poems and photographs by Donald Curran, *Lens, Light and Sound*, is now going the rounds of commercial publishers. Sometime in this century, *Gem Dweller*, a complex of poems triggered by an interest in rough semiprecious stones, will come out, enhanced by experimental photographs of three dimensional abstract forms in color, also by Donald Curran.

Broadcasting: I contributed to the tape Walter Lowenfels organized for WBAI, New JazzPoets, and to WRVR’s series, Discovery of Poetry. A selection of the poems from *Lens, Light and Sound* has been read by a representative of WUWM on the University of Wisconsin’s program, Sense Waves in Milwaukee. I have contributed two fifteen-minute readings to the Contemporary Poets series which is being made available to educational programs throughout the States by the University of Nevada. This last Autumn I recorded a bi-lingual English-Spanish reading, the Spanish being read by John McKinnon, a British-born Argentinian actor. The poems were short lyrics of mine, all from *Lens, Light and Sound*, which were translated into Spanish by the American expatriate novelist poet, Alma Curran, now resident in Barcelona. These were submitted to the Director of Cultural Affairs of the Pan American Union who was so pleased with this back-to-back venture that he handed them over to the Voice of America for broadcast in every Latin American country and had the tape especially copied for local programs in Argentina and Central America. May 1, I cut a solid 50-minute tape for WNYC-FM for their program of readings, Spoken Words, Some of my work has been read, off and on, on an FM station in Harrisburg, PA.

Needless to say, I have been reading publicly around NYC. Perhaps the nicest thing I have had said to me was written in a letter by Rafael Squirru, Director of Cultural Affairs, Pan American Union. “Since good international relations are based on human understanding, a lot of time and money wasted in other areas would be better spent in the making of tapes like your own.”

Finally, I was born in Portland, Maine, July 12, 1925 I don't mind saying so I can scarcely resent facing a forty-second birthday since the alternative would be not making my birthday at all. I much prefer being aged 42 than non-existent, or for that matter, an eternal spirit. Maybe my poems should not be heard, but I like them to be, and those who hear the poems uttered by spirits are mighty few.



Pen-and-ink drawing by Brett Rutherford for cover
of *Crises of Rejuvenation, Volume 2*

SMALL PRESS SYMPOSIUM: THE POET

Barbara Holland is one of the most published poets in the small press. In the following article she discusses some of the reasons why she chooses to remain loyal to a small 200-circulation poetry magazine in the Southwest than cash in with the almighty slicks.

EVER SINCE THE mimeograph boom in the mid 1960s, the Small Press has been the most accessible outlet for the unknown poet. As always, the established magazines, although obviously the goal of all poets, even then were using poetry largely as filler. They kept up their prestige by taking work largely from name poets — and since many featured prose and had so little space, they were inclined to parcel it out to favorites whom they published over and over again.

When I first started out sewing a profusion of poems from coast to coast in Small Press magazines, non-poets and some active poets asked me why I did not concentrate on sending my work to *The New Yorker*, *Harpers* and *The Atlantic Monthly*. My stock answer for that was that an exclusive attack on the big ones would keep me completely out of print. In a little magazine I might be read only by a small community in Minnesota, but with a big slick I would not be able to make it out of the slush pile. Multiply that little magazine and spread the geographical extension of acceptances and you find that you can reach quite a number of persons in quite a variety of locations. Of course, trade publishers will ask for the circulation figures of your publications. Each one will be only 600, but multiply that by 500. It grows. Continued submission of this sort I call erosion. It takes time, but after a number of years it works. True enough, the readers are mostly other poets, but who else is going to be that interested anyhow? I find now that most of the people who snorted at the Small Presses at that time are taking them seriously now.

In the work which I have done over the past year on the *National Index of Literary Periodicals*, I have run into many names which occur time and again in Small Press magazines and who have published individual books with Small Presses, but who have never shown up on trade publishers' lists, except in anthologies, and probably would have it no other way. Some of these poets have been at it a long time, and one wonders how often they have been nagged about their lack of ambition. Surely on the poetry scene the names of Douglas Blazek, Lyn Lifshin, Erroll Miller, A.D. Winans, and others are household by-words. But again one is reminded that poets of any kind are little noticed, and would remain so, even if they were published in *TV Guide*.

Poetry just does not do well as a commercial product. It does not seem worth the promotion that it needs and therefore never sells. A big publisher must make enough to cover costs and promotion first. That is why some of the trade publishers are now doing business in the manner of vanity presses, but very quietly. They must publish one or two poetry books so as to appear not to be against poetry. Meanwhile scant demand has relegated poetry and short stories even more heavily to the Small Presses, many of which have become so respectable that they are fast becoming as difficult to break into as the trade presses. With its wide spectrum, the small presses afford niches for a wide variety of writing and levels of talent. They are by no means the province of mere amateurs. Joyce Carol Oates and Susan Fromberg Shaeffer are to be found in their pages.

Nor are they exclusive property of cranks and egomaniacs, although the editors who aspire to be reviewers in their acceptances and rejections make one wonder. We are blessed indeed by having so few of the reviewers who attack poets on a personal basis rather than artistic failures and who are always defended by those who point out the libelous goings-on in 18th-century works, as if two wrongs ever make anything right. They do exist. Small Press reviewers are usually also poets and therefore are as frustrated as those who are reviewed. Sometimes they feel threatened by the objects of their criticism and become quite unfair. As for the rejecters, if they did not so often fancy their power of veto as a vehicle for creative vituperation and stuck to printed notes, the world would be a far less thorny dwelling place — but instead claim they are being friendly and folksy by padding reject envelopes with hand-written diatribes. One should be grateful for holograph material no matter what it says.

— *Contact/II*, c. 1979.

A POET AND HER NEMESSES

EVERY POET WORTH her salt has opponents as well as advocates. Envy and incomprehension are rife in the stifling poetry scene, as full of cliques, jealousies and cabals as any closed society where egos are large, and the rewards small. One of Barbara Holland's most persistent naysayers was Marguerite Harris (1898-1978), a poet, editor, and doyenne of a prestigious poetry reading series on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. In Barbara's case, Harris was a vicious manipulator, eager to include her in an anthology or event when it suited her, but more often staging sabotage against Holland's New York reputation. Using tactics that would today be called "passive-aggressive," she would dangle a reading date, and then withdraw it, saying, "It has come to my attention that you read too often below Fourteenth Street."

Writer and photographer Lillian Binder caught Barbara Holland at her perch in Pennyfeathers Coffee House and got her to reveal a bit about the resistance she encountered from the "proper" poetry circles in New York. Holland told her:

"When I first came to New York I was considered an interloper and still am. They thought I was barging into the club. I made them even more furious by not joining them. They really didn't want me and I did not want them, but they didn't exactly like my refusals either. They didn't like independence on the part of anyone, and still don't ...

"Rochelle Owens, Terry Stokes, John Charney, and Hugh Seidman refused to read with me. Terry: 'She's unknown.' John: 'Who the hell is she?' Hugh: 'I'm a major poet. I'm not going to read with anyone who is not.'

"And that's not because I'm a woman. They're dying to read with Anne Waldman.

"I have a reputation for being what I am: 'A lower echelon poet.'"

Then, turning to the subject of Marguerite Harris, Holland revealed, "At Dr. Generosity's, Maggie used to subvert my readings and say, 'Don't bother listening.'

"One time she came in with a bunch of Puerto Rican boys and started a chant: *Get off the stage. We want poetry.* I just stood there. I thought, this is the way she is, just let her go ahead. I felt I should respect this woman because of her age.

"She once called me and said: 'If you're broke, I'll pay you the amount for the reading, but you can't read.' I said: 'Maggie, you can't get away with this.' BANG!

“[Marguerite] was so false: ‘If Barbara Holland doesn’t publish or read another line, we’ll all be better for it.’ She said I was indecent: ‘Ladies don’t allow their emotions to show.’

“Well, a woman who makes commercials for fixitive for false teeth isn’t very dignified either. How many grandmothers would care to be on TV sniffing laundry?

“There’s justice, and there’s morality ... and then there’s the human machine.”

Holland ended the conversation, saying, “Everyone has a prison. I am my own prison.” (Interview from *The Helen Review*, Vol. 1 No. 1, Summer 1978.)

And then there was the “other” Barbara Holland. Once Holland was in demand as a reader, she became aware of “another Barbara Holland,” perhaps based in Buffalo, NY. People began to confront Barbara at readings, claiming she was an imposter, and that they had seen and heard the *real* Barbara Holland at some out-of-town event. One time she was denied the lectern at a featured reading, as the host refused to believe she was *the* Barbara Holland. “I hired the Barbara Holland who wrote ‘Black Sabbath,’” he asserted. “I have heard her read it before.”

Barbara prevailed, and recited “Black Sabbath,” as she always did, from memory. But for at least half a decade, she would be haunted by the idea of a *doppelgänger* reading her poems aloud, perhaps ineptly, and collecting reading fees she could scarcely afford to lose. There have, in fact, been at least two other Barbara Hollands, both fiction and prose writers, with no need to impersonate their poetic namesake. We will never know the real name of the imposter.

Barbara knew Allen Ginsberg from her early Lower East Side days, but only one anecdote gives a hint of any interchange. Barbara was on her fire escape, washing her apartment windows, when her bucket tipped, spilling water on someone walking below. She looked down, and it was Allen, walking with a companion. Ginsberg looked up, and said, “Oh. *Her!*”

I spent an afternoon with John Ashbery when the elder poet visited Providence to judge a contest and read there, and we talked about the New York poets we had known in common. Of Barbara Holland, Ashbery recalled, “Oh, she was terrifying. One never knew what she would say next.”

— B.R.

BOOK REVIEWS

Hexagrams: An Anthology of Six Poets.
Poets Union Press, Brooklyn, NY.

Hexagrams is a joy, especially when one has just been leafing through several journals of poetry which tempt one to wonder seriously how the poems came to be on the pages. Did anyone, in fact, write them, or were they turned out according to meticulous instructions by typists? *Hexagrams* is a collection of a refreshing number of pieces by six human beings, all of them committed to their craft. It is nice to know that such a one as Pierre Boenig has been involved in this endeavor, for his ear in foreign English is faultless and his style of verse and gentle meditations on a most ungentle past blends well with the work of the four Sibylline women: Cortnie Lowe, Lynne Reynolds, Merle Molofsky and Terry Hayes, as well as with Les Von Losberg who is, as usual, quietly elegant.

The women in this group are most unusual. Cortnie Lowe's material cries to be read aloud; it sinks back into a whisper in print. There are few who can maneuver through so many diverse rhythmic changes or who have the reverence for vowels that she has. Thematically she is earthy and ritualistic while obviously indicating that she has private rituals. Molofsky is more forthright about her folk rituals; she loves them. She is a back-country balladeer who uses a conversational base for her operations. Hayes tells or implies stories and nightmares. "Threnody" and "Selena's Song" tease with faint memories of Lorca, whose feeling for any place is fantastic and dream heavy. "Blue Hill Winter" is the whole of a short story condensed into a few lines of sheer horror. Meanwhile, Lynne Reynolds leads us into a prim and decorated atmosphere where all is not as peaceable as one might suppose. While not having a really tart tongue, Reynolds can be subtly astringent.

But enough of this girlish gushing. There simply is not space enough to take each poet's work apart for analysis. (What a temptation to go into Hayes's dance sounds more thoroughly, or to pick up some of the more provocative phrases from Reynolds.) It is fun to measure the alchemies of these women one against another. All of them are magical, claim they are, then go about it obliquely enough to save one the sensation of being in a Tarot-cum-I Ching Boutique. Look at the title of the Book!

But the men are doing their magic differently. Boenig cleanses the earth of old evils by treating it to exhibitions of nature at this moment and Von Losberg works with words themselves as in "Like every over-delicate lover." The line remains forever in one's head and one must

give praise that someone can say something which one is not forgetting while it is being said.

The best way to review poetry is to reprint pages of it and let it speak for itself after the manner of *Poetry Now*. Instead of that, one can merely say: here are six individuals with vivid imaginations, something to say and a strong devotion to getting whatever they can from so rich a language. To find out the true wealth of our language and feel the current poetic smog lift for an hour or two, buy *Hexagrams*, for poems which you keep wanting to re-read for crying out loud! You can't say "So what!" to any of these poets. What they say means something to them and the urgency is contagious. The world seethes around them, and they mean it. Perhaps they have found out how to resist the deadening hypnotism of television, and really, there is no need for any explanation.

Hexagrams is a treasure and the proof of that is to be found by examining it and sharing six adventures.

— Barbara A. Holland

Rochelle Owens, *I Am the Babe of Joseph Stalin's Daughter: Poems 1961-1971*. The Kulchur Foundation, New York, 1971.

A decade of poetry by Rochelle Owens is bound to reflect the raw, rough times that bred them and the many changes in the national consciousness of the native culture and of others. The impressions which Ms. Owens gives us of this emotional unrest manifest themselves as explosions, of irritation and a kind of rough horse-play. Every page of this book brings out a cutting view of one type or another and no aspect of religion, ethnic origin, or acculturation is safe from these recurrent jolts.

It is obvious throughout that Rochelle Owens has little patience with superficial thinking on these matters or with blind acceptance of the status quo. Hers is an exploration of honesty and as such is largely a painful one. Her laughter is often derisive, as laughter must be when one is convinced that one must learn to live with conditioned liars, that the volume, extent, and intensity of distortion, warping and outright metamorphosis of the truth will continue no matter what one does or says and that the only course open to one is accommodation if not acceptance.

Rochelle Owens refuses to accept. The idea of accommodation is odious, but since it seems to be the only course to take, she does so under protest.

In the earlier poems in this collection the protest clearly echoes some of the angry black poetry of the early 1960s, an impression fortified by

the appearance of the name of Le Roi Jones in some of the titles and by the appearance of some of these poems in Jones' literary magazine, *Yugen*.

The reliance of repetition and resounding Third World type proper nouns echo the incantatory phrases and the cry of Uhuru which assailed Caucasian ears when Stokely Carmichael first launched his diatribes against the white community. One hears again the scornful and outraged tenor of Archie Shepp that kicked up into the air with each dissonance as the sound came crashing on middle class ears like an upper cut to the bourgeois jaw in musical buffetings which were the order of the day in LeRoi Jones' loft on Fourth Avenue or at the Jazz Composers' Guild. Rochelle Owens combines this sound pattern with epithet images which are spun off as from a centrifuge. The bizarre and unexpected scraps of shrapnel, closely akin to those launched on the air in primitive curses and exorcisms, pepper the reader with challenges to his own cultural biases and his own likely dishonesty about their persistence and crudeness. Those who find this assault surprising and who deem it baseless because they will seek no farther, are going to feel unnecessarily beleaguered and will not take kindly to it. This is a book to be met with courage, good will and a willingness to seek the whirler at the center. Those who meet it thus will find the poet a little less likely to withhold forgiveness than they expected. It is a wild adventure for the aware. Does any one want to try? They will find it rewarding if they do and they will be gratified to find that the call to emotive experience is not, the threat that the more cautious poets and readers of poetry believe it to be.

— *Barbara A. Holland*

LOST MANUSCRIPTS

Around 1983, Barbara Holland made a journey to San Francisco. She stayed in a residence hotel operated by Indian immigrants, and gave herself time to explore the city. She wrote enough poems about her visit to propose a chapbook, to be titled *The Street of Sorrows*. Its contents were to be as follows:

- Date Palms
- The Singer Evokes Images
- In the Night Your Laughter
- An Hour Before Dawn
- Who Needs It?
- Television on the Porch
- Why the Palm Trees Mourn
- Opening Chorus
- Fresh Paint
- Fire Crackers
- Poltergeist in a Restaurant
- A Canine Antique
- At the Crucial Hour
- I Tried Not to Care Either
- Who Turned On the Light?
- Yankee in San Francisco
- Mission Dolores
- A Modest Street
- A Tall One
- Concha
- Moon Woman
- Billy Georgakis
- A Little House Ringed by Hills
- Royal Palm Trees
- Merlin
- The Artist
- On the East Coast
- A Nestless House
- Spun Off

No manuscript for this chapbook has come to light, but some hand-written sketches were found in a 1983 notebook. Those poems which were complete, or nearly complete, are included in this volume. There is no typed manuscript for this set.

Holland mentioned *Gem Dweller*, “a complex of poems triggered by an interest in rough semiprecious stones ... enhanced by experimental photographs of three dimensional abstract forms in color ... by Donald Curran.” No manuscript has been found.

Michael Redmond, in correspondence with The Poet’s Press, mentioned seeing a cycle of poems in manuscript, centered on the story of Tristan and Isolde. Only one “Isolde” poem has come to light.

CRITICAL RESPONSE

RUNNING BACKWARDS WITH A CHTHONIC GODDESS

A Review of *Running Backwards: Selected Poems* (1983),
Warthog Press, West Orange, NJ.

by *Ivan Argüelles*

For me a poem
is always a hole bitten out of,
or smashed through most of,
the middle of a sheet of paper,
obscuring something,
and the question remains —
of what?

— “A Meditation on Andre Breton”

A GOOD QUESTION INDEED! There is a Plutonic wealth and variety in this book of selected poems which spans the course of several decades. Barbara Holland takes the reader continuously in and out of the Underworld in a haunting and vertiginous journey. Are we in the mirror looking out and through ourselves? Who is that phantom, that old lover, who weaves bitterly through the background, a coat, a hat, an untenanted suit? Ah, the enigmas which constitute spellbinding poetry!

Thou shalt not suffer
a witch to live

—“Black Sabbath”

First of all, if you have never seen Barbara Holland do a reading you have missed a premier performance. This book then, with its evocative, often blasphemous, often weird, but always lyrical intent, with its absolutely lucid perspective as seen from the stance of a demented prestidigitator, will just have to do as a substitute for seeing the real thing. Barbara Holland first came to my attention with some of her poems that were included in one of those “seminal” anthologies meant to represent something like the East Side Poets, a sort of poetic counterpart to the ash can school of New York art. Certainly, Barbara Holland’s work really belongs to no one school, let alone a conglomerate of disparate travelers

who wound up on the Lower East Side in the early 60s. Hers is not really a poetry of place, as it were, because she extends her self through the ages, constantly defining a metaphysical reality with more than a spoonful of black humor: witness the poem, “Rhetorician!” — four terse lines:

One morning
just about this time last summer,
he died, conclusively
and clinched his argument.

Yet Barbara Holland is in many ways, for me at least, very much a New York poet — that is, I cannot imagine my poetic education in that city without her presence. These poems return to me all that intensity, sometimes insane, sometimes poignant, which characterized growing up poetically in the late 60s and 70s in Gotham. As you proceed through the book the chthonic map of the city, of its denizens, of its faceless multitudes, becomes palpable, becomes something you can feel beneath the skin, like sand or grit. Reading these poems we are indeed among the night-walkers if not among the night-crawlers: “these crutches are out/ on their own, this time by whim impelled/ through any neighborhood of night” (“Louder than Life”). Is this the secret poetry of all the Bag-People? I think it is. And it is the miasmatic construct of that chthonic city, that map of utter irrelevancies which plagues the chronic insomniac and makes the somnambulist weep at the sight of day. And it is also the terrible struggle, the urgency, the emergency of persisting to exist.

You have to be Queen Tumult to exist
to fulfill your imagined destiny.
—“End of An Era”

Barbara Holland is Queen Tumult, all right. She is not one of the lesser queens or deities ranting, whining or bitching over destroyed love. Barbara Holland’s hurt is monumental, yet subtle and all pervasive. It doesn’t leave you for a moment, even when it is apparently whimsical, as in such poems as “A Tryst Beneath a Birdhouse,” “Leavings,” or “You Never Notice,” in which the reader participates in a hallucinatory effort to dismember and divest the lover of any humanity, and still hurts for the loss of communication. It is her perceptions concerning the frequent failures in human relationships that heighten Barbara Holland’s poetry in terms of a truly painful ontology — forever wounded, the artist on the edge, obsessed, observing patiently the process of forensic decay, while the *others* go on assuming the world to be real, material, meant to endure in its illusory stasis.

Barbara Holland is possessed, writing from the very core of her being, opening up for the interested reader distances, camera angles, fields, nuances and depths not ordinarily encountered. When she reaches for an image she cuts right through the layers of matter and reverses their order, “when wood rasps granular like stone/ and rocks river grain/ through their lasting stolidity” (“Crises of Rejuvenation”). I find it a relief to open to any of the poems in this book — sense of dread, awe, panic, scorn, humiliation, exasperation, lunacy — it’s all there and more. It’s not comfortable, it’s not elegant or pretty, it’s not a sequence of “well-crafted” verse by someone about to OD from doing poetry workshop exercises. It’s the real thing, America. And it doesn’t fit neatly into any school, though there’s more than a daft touch of surrealism in it “. . . watching the dormer window/ of the tall house on the ridge/ issue a flight of clouds.” And some may well want to categorize this as poetry of fantasy, or even science fiction, God forbid, and the feminists may claim her as one of theirs, or members of the occult practices may certainly see her as one truly possessed, but in the end her poetry is simply some of the best being written and performed in the late great crumbling America of today. Don’t miss it! Her humanity is at the very essence of her work:

I am a scavenger
with a special use for gold.

— “Apples of Sodom and Gomorrah”

— Published in *Ally: A Poetry Journal*, 1984.

**TOWARD A VISIONARY RESONANCE:
BARBARA A. HOLLAND'S
COLLECTED POEMS**

by Stephen-Paul Martin

I

BARBARA A. Holland has been called “a master before whom many, or most, if not all more famous poets should quail”¹ Indeed, the high quality of the poetry included in the recently-published first volume of her *Collected Poems* (B. Rutherford Books, 1980) suggests a writer whose talents deserve more attention than they have generally received.

Volume I consists of work from Barbara Holland’s early chapbooks (*A Game of Scraps*, *Penny Arcana*, *Melusine Discovered*, *On This High Hill*, and *You Could Die Laughing*) as well as poems from two unpublished chapbooks (*East From Here* and *Lens, Sight & Sound*). Volume II will be a reprint of a 90-poem cycle that originally appeared in 1974, *Crises of Rejuvenation*. Although Holland’s work has never been afforded the deluxe packaging and distribution a major publishing house would provide, its meticulous attention to diction and rhythmic dynamics, its emotional power and intellectual density, point to an artistic achievement that merits careful study, especially in light of the sloppiness and ennui that dominate the poetry of her more celebrated contemporaries.²

¹ Kirby Congdon, in a review of Barbara Holland’s new chapbook, *Autumn Numbers*, from a recent issue of *American Review of Books*.

² The most publicized poets of the sixties and early seventies — Lowell, Plath, Berryman, Sexton, Roethke — either verbally celebrated their impending suicides or paraded their chronic emotional dysfunctionings. It is significant that the publishing industry should choose to magnify such attitudes. When the craft of poetry is consistently presented in conjunction with mental illness and death it is easier to discredit. Poets can then be given convenient labels like “schizophrenic” or “manic depressive” and swept under the carpet.

II

MUCH OF WHAT is acceptable to established poetic taste might well be called “Pozak,”³ an enervated descendant of verse experiments introduced by Whitman and carried into the twentieth century by William Carlos Williams and his followers. Pozak is characterized by the lack of rhythmic impetus, the indifference to melodic possibilities that careful attention to the shape and sound of words may produce, and the chic celebration of banal, resigned attitudes. And while a strong case can be made projecting Williams as an important twentieth-century poet, his followers — Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Gary Snyder, Robert Duncan, Joel Oppenheimer, have reduced his initial efficacy to the point where a more recent poet like Lyn Lifshin, utilizing some of their techniques, could fashion a firm reputation publishing work like this:

AFTER THE HOT SPELL

the first day no
mist in the pines

morning smells like
the first day of

school those who
haven't sleep

all night one
woman dreams of

winter rain still
on the leaves by

ten if there'd
been beer on the

ledge you could
drink it now

Like Muzak, such writing requires no emotional deposit, yields no emotional return, and is quite disposable. It does nothing more than hint at subjective states whose import is neither established by context nor

³The term is derived from that pervasive and lobotomizing staple of American mediocrity known as Muzak.

developed through the depth of the images. Instead one is supposed to believe that the jagged motions artificially induced by fragmented syntax, coupled with the deliberate banality of the images, are part of some more enlightened aesthetic that need not even try to investigate the mysteries of human existence. One ends up wondering why such poems are written at all. There is neither transcendence nor the dignity of individual struggle.

The validity of Pozak is an issue Barbara Holland's poems call into question simply because they measure up to standards of technical mastery good writing will always demand.

Whatever may be said against the generally-tormented stance of Holland's work, it differs from what we are calling Pozak in the depth and scope of its struggle. Depression has become an all-too-convenient pose for the twentieth-century writer, and must be distrusted when it seems a mask for self indulgence, and not (as in the case of most of Holland's output) a state to be confronted, precisely defined through aesthetic rigor, and overcome if possible. When T. S. Eliot locates his agony in the omnicultural framework of *The Waste Land*, or when Rimbaud generates in *The Illuminations* a tortured sequence of imagistic potentials opening into an unforeseen zone of awareness, a different process is involved than when a poet succumbs to the weakness of his own circumstances to compose a convincingly demented poem.⁴ The following lines, again from a poet with a growing reputation (Fritz Hamilton), are a clear example of the narcissistic tedium Pozak tends to manufacture:

You, in turn, can torture me with knowledge of other
Men who give you more (especially in bed!) and
Your total dissatisfaction with me for giving you the

Nothing! I promise ... and
To make your disappointment even more meaningful, you
Must now kick me incessantly in the nuts to
Assure my song of endless

Sustenance ...

The level of technical refinement in this passage suggests a hastily jotted-down notebook entry. The subject matter might well be the fantasy

⁴ In a recent interview with Claudia Dobkins (published in the Spring 1979 issue of *Contact/II*), Holland comments on the need for aesthetic integrity based on the poet's desire to overcome, and not succumb to, the problem at hand: "as an exorcist, a poet is actually grappling with her own personal demons, coming to terms with them and attempting to dislodge them."

of a rejected lover preparing to visit his psychoanalyst. The “endless sustenance” can only be the mass production so crucial to the Muzak “tradition.” And yet literary journals from coast to coast are crawling with such work.

As stated above, many of the devices here associated with Pozak were originally part of the stylistic revolution, spearheaded by Williams and Ezra Pound in breaking with stale nineteenth-century conventions, that occurred during the World War I era. They have now become stale conventions themselves, and far from energizing the “Post-Modern” designation they are often afforded, are in fact externally imposed signatures that affirm the process they seem to attack.

III

THERE IS LITTLE Pozak in Barbara Holland’s *Collected Poems*. Its language is stripped of the irritating particulars that led the Confessional Poets into autobiographical melodrama.⁵ What seems most significant about Holland’s poetry is its intellectual integrity, and the corresponding surge of tumultuous emotion striking directly into the core of the creative moment. A poem like “The Valley of Little Thunders,” for example, records the secret motion which precedes, arranges, and then releases a consort of images:

Vibrations, running underground
beneath the ridges,
excite the small leaves of the undergrowth
into a nervous fluttering ...

If a poem is to be significant it must — even under the stress of unavoidable conflict — remind its readers of, or produce in them, a moment of quiet exhilaration, undefinable except through a verbal arrangement of unusual grace and subtlety.

These moments themselves, and not their subsequent intellectual classification, are what is most crucial: “Ask nothing/ about anything you notice/ here. Your ignorance is sacred.”

The Imagists (and Williams especially with his stentorian credo: “No ideas but in things”) were moving in this direction to free poetry from abstractions tied to a culture whose sickness had begun to leak out at the

⁵ In the Dobkins interview Holland uses the term “shock value” in connection with Sylvia Plath; it might also be well applied to a whole generation of poets influenced by Lowell and/or the Surrealists.

comers. But the time has come to establish the more universal significance of those “things,” to release more explicitly the ideas from the objects that contain them.

This is what Holland is moving toward in “When Stones Have Shed Their Skins,” where things are not merely to be recorded, but split open and transformed:

What must the winds bear up
when stones have hatched;
what wings shall fan
the cold fires of the stars
or beat to warmth the white
heart of the moon
when stones have shed their skins?

Good poetry can locate ambiguities whose resistance to logical understanding is pleasurable and significant. The above lines, churning with objects prepared to explode into a new arrangement, suggest both a tension inside the objects themselves and the tumult coiled in the writer’s imagination. Such simultaneous penetration — into things outside and within — is the true province of an image, producing a heightened condition quite different from the slack Imagist focus on things in their normal state. When Rilke, in *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, says, “I am learning to see. Yes, I am beginning,” he means that the depth of reality is beginning to appear in its surface. Likewise, Holland’s poetic eye can discern “clots of sky concealed in stones.” And her lines reverberate with rhythmic forcefulness, far from what Robert B. Shaw has called the tendency of most American poets “to write some thing that is just barely not prose” (*The Nation*, 11/8/80). There is an urgency here that hovers between wonder and fear, lifting the reader out of mundane circumstances that Imagist poetry is quite at home with.

Such urgency is often precarious. For Holland is aware in “At Breaking Point of Sky” that “a single word/ dispersing silence might/ unseat that star.” The powers of utterance are given almost apocalyptic authority, directly evoked through sinuous diction, a visceral quality to the combinations of syllables and placement of rhythmic stresses that exempts this piece from the charge of being a merely abstract speculation: “Sky strains, tightened/ to the limits of its elasticity.” Words become the experience they signify, and so transform that experience into something for which the poem is the sole expression. This is what Roland Barthes means when he designates a “Zero Degree” in writing, where “the absence of any explicit signifier functions by itself as a signifier” (*Elements of Semiology*, 111.3).

The poem is therefore the key to a potential it alone has the power to unlock, and draws on its incantatory origins to summon the mystic properties that underscore its subject. The opening of “Medusa” works through a rhythmic crescendo to project an atmosphere layered with significance:

Spray. Thick and heavy dawn. A day,
clouded, soaked, sucked, swirled,
exploded. Pouring back into the sea.
The hiss of serpents rising from my head
as mist in streamers writhing
across the rock. The night
with horrors riding on the wind,
flung by the breakers at my feet,
their jaws gnashing; tentacles,
half-hidden in the beards of weed,
hanging above the down pulled anger,
the recoil and massing force.

Multiple cadences, building up and dissolving the images, conjure the face of Medusa. We are not asked to know her on the basis of a one-word signification, but given a living experience of her psychic state by following the motion, shape, and evocations of the word-play. This creates a uniquely compassionate view of her predicament:

If you could watch the quiet
centered in the eddy of my eyes;
if you could peel away the roughened
hoods of granite, shrouding your own;
if you could bear to see, as I,
my hideous companions, the desolation
of the night, far from the promise
of Hesperides, my madness,
my sallow and emaciated face,
framing these desperate eyes,
[it] would make you see my inner nightmare
as so much greater than
the nightmare that I am.

True identification is achieved by seeing something from its own point of view: to feel the surging inside the stones, the sky straining, the hideous thrashings of Medusa’s nightmare.⁶ Only through penetration

⁶ In “Recollections of a Poet” (*Contact/II*, Spring 1979), Kirby Congdon provides very sensitive commentary on “Medusa,” pointing out that its torment is mitigated by the fact that “our hearts, as readers, refuse to accept

can the relationship between things and the mind observing them become significant.

In “Argo,” rhythms of both direct force and subtlety conjure a mythic personage whose motions in themselves constitute the heightened awareness suggested earlier:

She who preceded us,
walked brazen over pinnacles
and ridges of seas,
skipped over hollows, rode the sleek
monster backs of the endless waves
into the gaping crevasses
between the stars ...

It is just such Blakean resonance that Pozak has tried to discredit,⁷ but which must inform any writing aspiring to the two-fold excavation of natural and psychic space. Only then can “we expect/serious instruc-

the poem as loss or as losing. The poem skirts tragedy, but the stubborn attitude of the narrator requires the reader to see the poem more as a classical projection of dignity.” It is this “dignity” that separates Holland’s poetry from the Confessional School.

⁷The attack on the transcendent ideal is perhaps most clearly presented in the theoretical writings of Charles Olson, which insist that “particularism has to be fought for anew” and emphasize poems made “of things which don’t carry their end any further than their reality in themselves.” Such attitudes led Olson to attack Socrates for his “readiness to generalize” and willingness “to make a universe out of discourse.” The connection of such thinking with Phenomenology — with Heidegger and Husserl — is well documented in Paul A. Bove’s *Destructive Poetics*, which attacks the New Critics for ignoring Olson’s achievements. But while it is hard to support the tepid formalism of Robert Penn Warren, Howard Moss, Richard Howard, and other poets associated with New Criticism, it is equally difficult to accept Olson’s insistence on “the reductive,” which sounds convincingly subversive until its true banality comes forth as the operating principle in lines like these:

Gee, what I call the upper road was the way
leading by Joshua Elwell’s to the wood-lots
1727

and Cherry on the lower road was, 1725, the way that
leads from the town to Smallmans now Dwelling House.

(from *The Maximus Poems*)

Not only is this barely passable prose given the appearance of poetry through line-breaks, its use of irrelevant particulars makes it meaningless to anyone but the poet himself. Eliot’s comment, “I don’t know what *The Cantos* is about, and I don’t care” — is appropriate here.

tion from the trunk/ of a tree that had woven a galaxy/ of suggestions in wind and sun,” for only from the vantage point of significant depth can poetry sincerely take upon itself the philosophical aspect of its enterprise:

Past, present, and future
floated upon her shield: as one,
as three superimposed,
a trinity of troubling deliberations;
confused in their overlap
and triple deep texture,
merging and swimming
apart. They were not to be looked
upon or endured.

This is a dimension the early poetry of W.S. Merwin investigates, but without the firmness of motion, the syllabic precision, and the concrete imagery needed to solidify its abstraction. Holland’s language has the technical assurance to chisel out and explore directly levels of reality most writing can only allude to.

One such reality-level is the source of images, that calm vortex of light from which visions and sounds originate. The opening lines of “The Sibyl of Cumae” are a forceful evocation of a presence as yet unsolidified into definite shape:

Out of Avernus, up from beneath
the overhanging rock and shifting
of intensity of darkness, I became
manifest in climax of joined brasses
and bowed strings, declared myself
in trumpet salutation, in carved
and weathered wood, yet had not turned
to face the open portal of my genesis.

The poetic process generally distributes abstract energies into limited concrete forms. Here Holland defies that convention, reaching in past the portals of genesis and uniting with an image in its unformed embryonic state. As the Sibyl declares: “I, alive, remained/ an artifact and out of time.// Hear me! I speak in smoke.”

Likewise, the visage of Lazarus can be called forth in its apparitional aspect:

Currents strive with tides
yet you are motionless beneath them,
sway, widen, shrink, distort and yet
in composition hang inviolate
beyond the outer boundaries of life.
I could touch you into fragments
with a whisper.

— “Portrait of Lazarus”

Only the most delicate surgeon of language can open the womb of poetic space occupied by unborn images. The rhythm created by the line “sway, widen, shrink, distort” gives to Lazarus “the form of motion”⁸ but not of spatial representation.

In probing the creatures of the underworld, of course, Holland is following a Jungian trajectory. Yet a Jungian reading would do these poems an injustice; the objects of the subconscious can only be seen in their pure state by a poetic eye that does not submit them — as any psychological study must — to finite categories of understanding. Subconscious energies may not be extracted from their context easily, as Orpheus found with Eurydice. There is an evanescence which lies at the core of dream-objects — a desire to vanish, to avoid solid form — which the imagination is always painfully aware of:

He was never completely
convinced of my presence. He felt
that the minute he turned
his eyes from me I might vanish ...
as if the surfaces
I trod with him were water ...
He turned back to look at no one,
and I laughed.

— “Eurydice”

Holland’s poetry is also significant in its effective use of conventions that must now be considered suspect. “Portrait of Lazarus,” for instance, faces death with an authenticity most Confessional Poetry never attains. There is none of the sensationalism of poets like Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton in their exploitation of the death-wish:

⁸ The phrase is from Williams’ poem “The Wind Increases” and describes the tangibility and dynamism a word must exhibit through its use in a poem.

I see you soaked,
death's moisture on your face,
your eyes still hooded against light.
Until they cease to mirror
the contents of your recent world,
be sure to hide them.

Here is the full integrity of an encounter with the underworld. If its forces are truly fearful, one does not unite with them. One faces them if possible and delineates their presence, but one does not indulge in the Confessional tactic of celebrating their attractiveness. One asks instead to be released, as Holland does above. A depressing reality has artistic validity only when it is something to be “exorcised,” and not made into a spectacle.

Nor is Surrealism alien to Barbara Holland's universe. But where Surrealist techniques — in a poet like James Tate, for example — tend to serve a sardonic self-gratifying agony we never quite trust, they are often used in Holland's poetry to amplify feelings already established by context. For Surrealism, all the while it is eating through the fabric of space, must nonetheless evoke recognizable — though not necessarily definable — feelings. Thus a poem like “Elegy for Alexis” uses Surreal images to make personal loss more vivid:

What sort of wind,
Alexis, wept within your rooms
and wiped the stars
from all the windows ...
and drove the hoofs
of stallions through your loneliness?

These lines are touching, deeply felt, and at the same time generate the interest of a displaced or altered spatial reality.

Such displacements are, of course, the basis of laughter, and there is in Barbara Holland's poetry plenty of the dark humor for which Surrealism has always been such an excellent vehicle. But Holland's poems never become mere depressive jokes. In “Bad Company,” for instance, the reader is instructed:

If the two of them
arrive together as a team and vanish
upon the moment of appearance ...

Close the door smartly,
hang some bacon from the knob,
and run like hell.

The synthesis of a macabre brand of slapstick humor with a supernatural situation is exactly the kind of juxtaposition good poetry can force its reader to confront. It is perhaps the prime virtue of Barbara Holland's *Collected Poems* that these difficult combinations are so consistently achieved.

IV

The danger of poetry that redefines the boundaries of awareness is often obscurity, and the *Collected Poems* is not entirely free of this charge. Take, for example, the *unclarified* density of a poem like “Vectors of Advice”:

Vectors climb
in catch and toss of landings all the way
up side of subject in black lacings strung
in back and forth upwardness,
and indicate, in shadow parody,
their implications ...

The tendency toward phrasings like “catch and toss of landings” and “back and forth upwardness,” which are vague and awkward, is perhaps too prevalent in Holland’s writing. The risk in penetrating rather than merely depicting the surfaces of reality is that language may be forced into contortions it cannot really support.

Yet some contortion is necessary if the depths are to be sounded. It is to Barbara A. Holland's credit that she is willing to take the chance,⁹ and has succeeded in composing a poetic universe whose intellectual scope and emotional power are beyond what most writing even attempts. Hopefully what has been presented here will continue the recent movement (*Contact/II* and *The Helen Review* have recently published features on her work) toward the recognition of an artist whose dedication to the craft and visionary resonance of poetry is a touchstone for its further development.

⁹ Which is not to place this poet alongside bombastic writers like Gerard Manley Hopkins or Dylan Thomas. Where poems like “The Windhover” and “Fern Hill” may derive some of their poignancy from their pyrotechnical syntax, most of what these poets have written is more innovative than it needs to be.

SINGING HER OWN SONG

by Claudia Dobkins-Dikinis

BARBARA HOLLAND'S *CRISES of Rejuvenation* seems to have done exactly what she wanted it to do. This neat volume, published by Grim Reaper Books¹⁰ in 1974, is the doorway to Holland's surreal and precise mind.

If she remains inscrutable, people like Ray Bradbury penetrate her silence: "In a world where there are so many Irving Wallaces and too many Harold Robbinses, and far far too many Jacqueline Susanns, all duplicates one of the other, how nice to know there is only one Barbara A. Holland who speaks with her own voice and sings her own song."

With the publication of *Autumn Wizard* by the Poet's Press in 1973, Holland had already established herself as a notable poet. Intense and agile, she is a great performer. Holland lets us see that she means what she writes; each poem sails into complex imagery, her delivery is pitiless but shattering.

What is so delightful about Holland is the labyrinth she creates. We find ourselves in a strange world inhabited by vampire roses, a sick president who wants the chimneys covered for fear people on the moon will see him.

Too, we know how she perceives "An Abominable Breakfast" as her eyes plow minestrone, as an alternative to being bruised against someone's scowling face. Her vision is chilling when she writes of a woman living with ail imaginary knife in her back; we laugh when Holland gets "high" on tea and stands transfixed before a parking meter.

Though Holland may seem reticent or unapproachable this is not so. She is stately and elegant in her way yet she is excited, even anxious to discuss style, craft. Her photographic mind coughs up dialogue and pictures dating her poetic experience over twenty years.

A feminist and an iconoclast, Holland arrived in New York in 1962 at St. John's in the Village, McBurney YMCA, Les Deux Magots and the Cafe Metro.

Her arrival in New York was an eruption for her, an awakening: "I found myself in a segment of society that did not consider weekly visits to the unemployment line a sure sign of failure or an attempt to run one's own business an admission of an inability to adjust to the corporate structure, and where revealing that one was a poet did not automatically inspire people to recommend you to their shrinks, deplore your lack of maturity or total lack of humility."

¹⁰ Grim Reaper Books is an imprint of The Poet's Press.

Fleeing the claustrophobic atmosphere of the “baccalaureate mill,” Holland began freelancing and devoting herself to poetry full time. “New York was the start, even though the only public experience I had prior to that was a pseudo-workshop with a Poetry Society of America affiliate who always considered the poetry part of the evening to be gotten out of the way so that small talk could be indulged in at greater length.”

Of poetry, Holland makes it clear that the song she sings is her own. “Poetry was my personal rebellion against the second-handedness of the scholarly criticism which comprises doctoral work in literature and the file-clerky business that it is.”

The recipient of a Creative Arts Public Service (CAPS) grant in 1974, Holland divides her time between readings in Boston, Baltimore and New York, guest-edits magazines around the Eastern seaboard, freelances and continues to publish widely in magazines across the country.



THE INTERVIEW: EXORCISING POETRY

CLAUDIA DOBKINS: *How long do you work on a poem?*

BARBARA HOLLAND: It depends on the length. It depends on a lot of other things too. Yesterday I wrote three that took me practically no time. I had to spend a lot of time on line breaking.

DOBKINS: *Do you compose at the typewriter or do you start with long-hand?*

HOLLAND: Always long-hand.

DOBKINS: *Do you think that the more personal the poem the longer it takes to write?*

HOLLAND: Well, what takes the longest is if I hear two or three phrases running around in my head that interest me and I feel something could be done with them. Then I start with other phrases, adding to them. That sounds almost like an exercise and in a way it is. If I start with a general theme and flush it out I might work on it for a week then drop it. I might go back to it a month or so later and then write the poem.

DOBKINS: *What happens when you meet a dry spell?*

HOLLAND: I usually read. I read all manner of subjects. I had a terrible time with a poem, I don't remember which one now, it was in 1966. I remember spending the whole night reading about Stonehenge. The next morning I finished the poem.

DOBKINS: *Do you think it is important for a person to study craft?*

HOLLAND: I believe that studying form in poetry is akin to studying classical ballet even though you may want to study Martha Graham's system. It is good to gain control over the form; in other words, you work with a villanelle, a sestina, a sonnet, then you forget about it.

DOBKINS: *You mean you absorb the technique and then forget about it?*

HOLLAND: Yes. You learn about meter, syllables, you learn about rhyme and how to get on without it.

DOBKINS: *Do you think it is damaging for a beginning poet to study craft, if he/she has not yet found a “voice”?*

HOLLAND: A poet who has not discovered his voice is often times very self-conscious and insecure. Often they need someone else to stay with them and push. That’s all very well, but when they find their voices and can still be pushed it becomes detrimental. I don’t think it is detrimental to study form at that time because they don’t know what they’re doing. When you’re just starting out you need all the help you can get.

DOBKINS: *Do you think it is valuable for a poet to play with another’s form, even imitate it as an exercise in craft?*

HOLLAND: I think it’s excellent.

DOBKINS: *Could you name a list of poets that you have experimented with in this way?*

HOLLAND: T.S. Eliot, Marge Piercy. I went for a time imitating Ree Dragonette but I had to stop that. With Marge Piercy I had been into a very short-line thing that I wanted to get out of.

DOBKINS: *Would you recommend any books for poets?*

HOLLAND: Babette Deutsch’s little book, if you want to know a certain form and how it is done it is all tight there.

DOBKINS: *Babette Deutsch’s Poetry Handbook?*

HOLLAND: Yes.

DOBKINS: *Do you ever do translations?*

HOLLAND: Yes. Recently I translated four Haitian poets from classical French.

DOBKINS: *Do you think that translation helps you in your own language to stretch yourself?*

HOLLAND: It does that certainly. I know an English poet living in South America. Every time he hits a dry spell he translates a South American poet just to keep working with language. If you can’t have

your-own thing you can have somebody else's and that does work. But on the other hand, for a sensitive person I wonder if that isn't dangerous; you get another person's psyche in you head and you fight that other person's battles, you wrestle with someone else's agony and it's weird!

DOBKINS: *Don't you feel an enormous responsibility to the other person's work? You are, in a sense, making so many decisions about the final representation.*

HOLLAND: It is an enormous responsibility and often you feel that the person you are translating isn't anybody you know at all. You've got this stranger pushing yourself out of your head; you don't know who you are and they don't know who you are and it gets to the point where you wonder who is who and what's going on anyhow!

DOBKINS: *Do you write at a certain time during the day?*

HOLLAND: Never during the day. After midnight. I wait until all the crazies have done to bed and have stopped screaming at each other and until all the other crazies have stopped using the elevator, then I write.

DOBKINS: *So you're a night person?*

HOLLAND: Very much so. Even if I have to get up early the next morning. If I have to be up at 8, I work until six and just stay up until 8.

DOBKINS: *Do you try to discipline yourself to write every day or do you write at times when you feel assured that things are going to happen?*

HOLLAND: I don't believe in writing every day. I write when I have something to say. I know people who write every day religiously whether they have anything to say or not just to keep it going but it makes an awfully thick waste basket.

DOBKINS: *Do you ever keep a journal?*

HOLLAND: I have been told that this is a good idea for the fascinating crazy ideas you have that you can't remember then minutes later and for the lines that come up when you're half asleep that you can't remember the next morning. It can make interesting material for later.

DOBKINS: *What do you mean when you define a poet as an exorcist or an outcast?*

HOLLAND: Well, as an exorcist, a poet is actually grappling with his own personal demons, coming to terms with them and attempting to dislodge them. In other words, all poetry is a form of therapy. Of course, there is some poetry that is so decidedly therapy that it is embarrassing. Much comes from the confessional type scene.

DOBKINS: *How do you feel about the so-called “confessional poetry”?*

HOLLAND: I am not too interested in what I’ve seen. I certainly wouldn’t do it because I feel we all have problems and usually those are pretty repetitive affairs. Once you’ve heard a load of this stuff it’s likely to be repeated again and who cares?

DOBKINS: *Sometimes the label “confessional poet” has been used to describe Sylvia Plath.*

HOLLAND: I find Plath embarrassing. She has a perfect right to say she wants to murder her child, I suppose, but this is rather uncomfortable as a subject. To go into it in great detail, and she seems to, she shows herself up to be someone who is thinking thoughts we ought not to think. It looks almost like shock value whether it’s intended to be or not.

DOBKINS: *Confessional poets do just that. They voice the thoughts they are afraid to think. Do you think it is honest or brave or that it all is just for shock value?*

HOLLAND: When you get a person who is writing material that they are pretty sure no one else is going to on such-and-such a forbidden subject, you can pretty well be sure that they just intended to knock the wind out of your sails and that I always find offensive.

DOBKINS: *Do you find the quality of an exorcism in that kind of poetry?*

HOLLAND: I am thinking of one or two people who have come into prominence in the genre who I’m not willing to take up again because I don’t want to subject myself to that. And it’s just that, I am not going to tramp around on other people’s taboos. I had a feeling it was all done for show. On the other hand, I feel guilty because I may be doing a large disservice.

DOBKINS: *You were talking about poetry being a form of therapy. Where can you draw the line between exhibitionism and art?*

HOLLAND I don't think it is necessarily art if you can concoct a situation that doesn't exist. I mean, for instance, a poet who is obviously making a big issue of Oedipal qualities. She is very much involved with her father, is very much involved with older men and keeps this up. She is just trying to show a bourgeois way to get off.

DOBKINS: *You use the surreal or the supernatural as a device in your poems. Did this form evolve of itself or did you consciously experiment with it?*

HOLLAND: It's a simultaneous eruption. And is largely triggered by the same motive Magritte had; a general fed-up-ness with the hum drum and the feeling that whatever the situation it might be dramatized by using a completely crazy situation instead of something more everyday.

DOBKINS: *In your poem "Someday a Sudden Craving" you use a rather supernatural or fantastic situation with vampire roses. Is this an example of the Magritte influence?*

HOLLAND: No. It was influenced by a situation which struck me as so bizarre. I was told of a relative who fed his roses with old whole blood. It intrigued me and I tried to carry on with it in a semi-logical progression.

DOBKINS: *When did you discover René Magritte?*

HOLLAND: I discovered him in the Fifties in Boston. I was keeping company with a lot of artists. I kind of lost track of him though until I came back to New York. I was fascinated with his interchanges of various parts of his paintings; a human face could be dislodged to the side or done away with completely with something put in its place. It was a suggestion of the Buddhist attitude that appearance is totally unimportant. If you shuffle it around by any other way it will all come out more or less the same.

DOBKINS: *When did you begin integrating Magritte's paintings into your work?*

HOLLAND: I started writing poetry about things that Magritte might have painted without thinking of Magritte. The first one was a study of a human face slowly dissolving into a rock formation. I had a

vision of a face halved ... flesh and bone on one side and the other balancing a rock formation with just enough trace of a face left to show what had happened. I then proceeded to study Magritte after having these long conversations about these poems that seemed to be so much like Magritte or some surrealistic painter. I got into the formula of "What if?"

As Brett Rutherford says, this "what if?" is a personal, a heavy involvement; that if a certain thing should work out a certain way it's going to affect me very definitely somehow ... if somebody can grind out clouds from his house they are going to cast shadows and these shadows are going to penetrate the roof ... wherever I am, under whatever conditions, I'm going to be influenced by these shadows, which says something highly symbolic about the person doing them.

DOBKINS: *Two poems, "The Apple of Sodom and Gomorrah" and "Black Sabbath," use the supernatural in two ways; in "Apples" the heroine is trying to call up powers; in "Sabbath" she is trying to exorcise them. How did this monologue form evolve?*

HOLLAND: This evolved from a fascination that completely predated the feminist movement. With classical literature I did poems which I call *impersonations* of various heroines, Cassandra, for instance. Then I did a whole other set of sorceresses and priestesses who were supernormal up to and including the Gorgon Medusa. Then I began creating my own.

DOBKINS: *"Black Sabbath" particularly has become a symbol in the feminist movement. It has been anthologized and you are requested to read it frequently. Why do you think this one has such a strong effect on women in the movement?*

HOLLAND: The poem to begin with is a highly rebellious poem. It rebels not only against the status quo and the establishment but it rebels also against the anti-establishment. It leaves the speaker stuck between the two of them which is a totally intolerable situation. So she's in rebellion against that, too!

It was written at the time when most of the rebellion was the whites against the white race and the racial struggle toward integration. It was originally published by a black poet in an integrationist anthology called *Freedom Now*. It was just about freedom and he didn't care freedom from what! Or whom!

DOBKINS: *When did you write "Black Sabbath"?*

HOLLAND: In 1964. "Black Sabbath" was done as an answer to a request from somebody who was vastly irritated and extremely arrogant and very busy slapping people who could do what he couldn't. He kept on bothering me and nagging me for a poem on magic and spells and I decided to give him one that would curl his hair.

DOBKINS: *Good for you! You said that you don't like being labeled: "feminist poet," "Beat poet," "Surrealist poet," etc.*

HOLLAND: I'm not sure I even like being treated romantically. Well, everybody gets labeled because sooner or later you come across somebody who is either a male or a male-oriented female who says "What kind of poet are you, what box are we going to shove you in?"

DOBKINS: *Do you feel that labeling the artist is a male criticism?*

HOLLAND: It seems to be. It seems to develop from a fear that if you can't categorize it you can't handle it.

DOBKINS: *What about women who gear their work for a feminist market? Isn't that limiting? Some magazines may tell you you aren't feminist enough, another may say your politics are too strong. Then you are stuck in a bind.*

HOLLAND: Well, you had the same thing during the worst of the Vietnamese rumble. Everyone turned into a flaming pacifist because everybody else was doing it. A lot of anthologies were directed towards that. If you could do that you were supposed to be involved. And then you had to get the same kind of criticism; "this is not specifically enough about war or your involvement with the pacifist movement."

It was tiresome in exactly the same way. Now you always have to sound like you're straight out of a barracks ... all the time, which is very limiting. Also, the treatment of sex is extremely raw and done without much allusion to symbolism. I find this just a repeat of the same old thing.

DOBKINS: *Isn't this stage of over-politicizing and separatism an example of what you call a "radical adolescence"?*

HOLLAND: Yes. But as long as you are stuck in it it's tiresome. The black people went through the same thing. They isolated themselves, they scolded other blacks for not being "black enough," called them Uncle Toms if they weren't black enough. Now black poets want to be known as poets, not black poets, they don't want the tags.

DOBKINS: *Erica Jong said in her Ms. article "The Housewife as Artist," that it is hard enough to be an artist anyway, so why make a fetish about sex.*

HOLLAND: Why make a fetish about sex, or color, or race or religion or anything else? I certainly hope we are going to get out of it and I think it's a good idea to point the way to some who seem to be stuck. Because it's no place to be stuck.

— *Contact/II, Spring 1979.*

A WELSH RAREBIT, A MARTINI & A GRAY RAINY AFTERNOON

by *Maurice Kenny*

“A dry martini up with a twist and a welch rarebit, please!” Outside, the grey miserable January rain spilled onto the sidewalk of Sheridan Square in New York City. But the back room at the Lion’s Head was warm and quiet. Only one other patron nibbled a sandwich within the dull mid-afternoon light that dropped through the front windows.

“Where do you want to begin,” Barbara Holland asked, pleased but nervous. She wrenched open her large bag and plowed through for cigarettes and matches.

“Well, I’d like to hit into your publications, the bio. Where you’ve published and where not; the why and why not.”

“My poems have appeared in over 700 magazines in this country.”

She spoke proudly of her CAPS grant coup, a recent article about her in *The Feminist Art Journal*, and her latest book published by the Grim Reaper Press, *Crises of Rejuvenation* (Volumes One and Two).

“Something of importance and interest would be the ‘little magazines’ that have published your work,” I asked. “And, of course, the big magazines as well.”

She sipped her martini.

“Many magazines have been good to me . . . Jack Power’s *Stone Soup Poetry*, for example. Will Inman’s now-defunct *Kauri*. *The Greenfield Review*, *Jacaranda*, *Wormwood*, and many others, and recently *Contact*. They all rather make poetry happen.”

Ms. Holland lit a cigarette.

“Who needs Columbia University and Iowa, the *Atlantic Monthly* or *Saturday Review*? For that matter who needs Mark Strand and Lowell, Strand’s still in the fourth grade. Let them have Sexton and her junk-fiction and the non-vehicular Sandra Hochman. They think Kirby Congdon lives in a Post Office Box. Trade publications have given up on poetry ...”

“And fiction?”

“And fiction. Real poets think big magazines ... like New York City itself ... are good for only a check.”

“You mean places like *Harper’s*.”

“Exactly, yes, they don’t make poetry happen. They stifle it in the payments. The alternative press ... Black Sparrow, City Lights, Kulchur, Big Table, etc., ... no checks, but poetry happens there ... in those presses.”

Her rasp struck out against the literary syndicate, the snob syndrome wherein without a Litt. they wouldn't lick the envelop to return your rejected poems.

"The 'small press' is going on ... *The Smith, Hanging Loose*. Modern technology has been a great factor in its success, and made it all possible. The new mimeograph, the xerox, the offset printing machines. Ironically, the establishment which commissioned this technical expertise has inadvertently helped birth the small alternative press. Radio has certainly helped as well by giving microphones to your unknown poets. TV is empty barbarism with its fast imagery. People don't have ears anymore after TV's assault."

"Part of the sound pollution?"

"Yes!"

The waitress brought welch rarebit and coffee and she attacked it with gusto as if it were a plate of cheesed editors, publishers, bad poetry and poets.

"The platform is real," she went on. "Oral tradition. Can you forget Dylan Thomas? I loved his work. I first read him during a blizzard in Concord. And Sitwell? What orchestration! Now we've got Rod McKuen instead, all over the place, and the rock poet, Patti Smith. You know the Beat brought back the oral tradition which amalgamated with jazz. Rexroth, Patchen, Ferlinghetti, of course, Allen [Ginsberg]. Jazz sharpened the ear, especially in its marriage with poetry. I read with a jazz background. With Billy Dixon. I still give many readings on the platform ... though not with jazz anymore. Jazz helped make modern poetry happen ... though there isn't much honesty in poetry now. The young want to *make it* but fake it; they want to become Hollywood properties. Micheline and Malanga are living in the world of Disneyland ... genteel ill-manners. A big itch."

Again the fork hit the welch rarebit. The cheese coagulated on the fork teeth. Another sip of the martini. A flare of her nostrils. She threw back her hand; her loose gray curls were bobbing, as if against the wind.

"Besides 700 magazines, many of your poems have been anthologized, have they not?"

"Yes."

"What? Which?"

Slightly embarrassed and with a touch of modesty, she replied:

"*East Side Scene* ... that was an Anchor Book. *New Jazz Poets*, though most of the poets were black. Viking brought out *In Time of Revolution. We Became New* was done by Bantam, also Walter Lowenfels' *For Neruda, For Chile*. And forthcoming, *A Tumult for John Berryman*, and an Ezra Pound anthology edited by Herbert Martin for Dayton University Press."

"That's very impressive."

She shoved the welch rarebit plate aside, symbolically slighting the remark.

“And you have had a large number of your own books published!”

“Nine or ten.”

“Small press publications?”

“Yes.”

She paused for coffee, fumbling for matches and cigarette. “Cherry Valley Editions did *On This High Hill*. Bard Press did *Melusine Discovered* in 1975. The Stone Soup Series did *You Could Die Laughing*, and, of course, CAPS sponsored *Crises of Rejuvenation*. And others ...”

“Have you ever done any editing?”

“Oh yes! In 1969 I guest-edited *Sanskaras*, *Hyn* poetry magazine; *Stone Soup Poetry* Numbers 16 and 28, etc.”

“What is your current project?”

“I’m co-editing the index of the *National Index of Literary Periodicals*.¹¹ All or most of my time is now given to the Index.”

“Are you enjoying it?”

“Yes. I’m finding names of young poets, and old, and, of course, their work, I’d never been familiar with before. That’s enjoyable. It’s hard work, and there is pain.”

“Just indexing the 700 periodicals in which your own poetry has appeared would be a labor for giants.”

She smiled.

“Has it ever angered you not to have been in one of the slick magazines ... *The New Yorker*, for example ... one of the slick magazine stars?”

She stared into the black coffee quivering in the cup and squashed out a cigarette. She instantly lit another and looked across the dining room.

“Yes and no.”

Her mouth tightened. Her lips pursed. “Naturally everybody needs the *New Yorker* check!”

“And the prestige?”

She froze the last question with a cruel, blunt scowl. “No poet has that much money to cancel out the possibilities.”

“Would you?”

She chose to ignore the question.

“I have found enough good homes in the *New York Quarterly*, *Beloit*, *Remington*, *Shenandoah*, etc., to be fairly contented. The literary syndicate offers glass windows ... for John Ashbery, Strand, Berrigan, who are made of stained glass.”

¹¹ *National Index*. This project of The Poet’s Press died when a prospective reference book publisher backed out.

The light was drawing away. The charcoal rain dropped a heavy sludge across the dining room window. Cigarette glows were the brightest lights in the room.

“Someday we’ll all cry murder.” Her voice rose:

“Humanity can’t kick poetry and poets out! It’s anti-culture now. Plato wanted to kick us out. The university played it up and then stamped it out. Now the show biz syndrome: nightclubs, record companies ... the Patti Smiths and the A.A. Pritchards have taken over. Someday we’ll all cry murder!”

She downed her coffee.

“From the university to the burlesque ... play pens.”

“What magazines do you favor most?”

A thoughtful moment passed. “*Stone Soup Poetry, Boundaries, Gallimaufry*. Many are good. Many are producing, publishing young poets with fresh talent, and older poets with true gifts.”

The young waitress, now smiling, brings the check. The afternoon has disappeared. Lights flare up. Dinner guests arrive. Talk, laughter, commotion. It’s time to go. There isn’t any room left in the Lion’s Head dining room for talk and poetry.

Barbara Holland pulls on her old rabbit fur coat, scrapes the table for matches and cigarette packs and bulldozes them into her purse.

“Poetry is bricklaying. Some of the beats were truck drivers. Ferlinghetti’s a truck driver. Kerouac polished the lie. Only Ginsberg is a classicist. Poetry has to be a sane affair ... not a turn-on, a theatrical romp. Yet, we can thank the beats for having brought us much ... for the return of the oral tradition ... as I said before. But poetry is a sane affair. Berryman won’t explain his work! Growth!”

She plunged her thin hands deep into the pockets of her coat.

“Where and who is Robert Bly? I’ll take one John Weiners!” she said, throwing statements about, as if consorting with the darkening gloom.

Out on the street we shook hands. I watched her cross Seventh Avenue heading toward West Fourth Street. The sidewalks were clogged with drenched workers and shoppers and the street was jammed auto traffic. It was grey. It was raining. Neon splashed onto cement, froze on the pearls of dropping rain.

Barbara Holland moved securely, steadily, through the crowds.

Contact/II, Spring 1979.

A FEMINIST VOICE IN POETRY

Olga Cabral

A POET IS READING her poems. Or rather, she has discarded the sheets of paper, set them aside on the lectern, preferring to deliver her poems from memory. Narrow and tall, an oblong of shadows and angles, she faces the audience directly. She airs no artificial graces, asking nothing from you but that you follow her into the poem.

She closes her eyes and launches into the delivery. She herself has disappeared. She *becomes* the poem. There is only her voice, chanting, growling, climbing, falling, breaking, gutsy and raw and gravelly at times. Each word comes across supercharged. An enormous tension builds up. The audience is sucked into a vortex of energy — the energy of the poem itself.

For Barbara Holland is a stunning reader. Perhaps stagey but surely one of the most absorbing artists to be heard anywhere. The effect is eerie and hypnotic. You search your mind for comparisons. Inevitably, the image of the Sybil suggests itself: the Sybil, surrounded by vapors, dropping each word singly and separately in the mists.

But this suggests the priestess, the oracular. She is something much more human than this, more *torn*, more unrestrained.

No man reads like this, you think.

This is an energy from a distinctly feminine source. Perhaps you are hearing the dark voice of womankind itself, the *duende*. Yes, that is more like it. *Duende*. Something like that. Lorca recognized and understood its source. Poets (men) have tried to appropriate it. This is the gift that Barbara Holland has, that she communicates.

The large audience that follows her about does not come for the performance alone. There is the craftsmanship itself to be respected. A writer of lexicons, with a Master's degree in Middle English Philology, this poet prizes and relishes the English language. Her use of language reflects the elegance of a painstaking artist.

The poems themselves are packed with a tremendous intensity-filled with bursting imagery. So precise is the language, so densely woven the succession of ideas, that you would be hard put to it to take out a word without the entire line crumbling. The extreme density of some of the poems can at times be opaque and enigmatic, requiring several readings to get the full impact of the poem. And there is a painterly eye at work, a sharp and selective ocular vision for objects, the separate and mysterious existence of *things*, the minutiae of daily living. These objects seem starkly clear, as if seen under high-intensity lights — yet always appear a bit

askew, even threatening, as if from a different universe. A critic has suggested “NeoFuturist” may be a suitable label for her — and it is interesting that this critic also happens to be a lecturer in art. He notes her “pre-Raphaelite’s preoccupation with fine detail and ... feeling for dynamic interaction.” There is a turbulence, a whirl of surrealistic ideas. The time is always

*That moment of panic,
when places are exchanged
and the rhythms of life
reversed
when names and the objects
which they had previously
owned,
divorced for other partners . . .*
— “Crises of Rejuvenation”

Holland had her origin as a poet in the coffeehouses, especially the now famous Cafe Le Metro, that existed on New York's Lower East Side in the early 1960s. She had, in fact, first been presented there by the poet Ree Dragonette.

Holland had come to New York via Boston, “the scene of my wild, bohemian days,” the poet has observed, where, having interesting, emphatic facial planes and angles, she was considerably in demand as a professional portrait model.

The family is one distinguished in architecture and archaeology. Her father, an American architect concerned with the preservation of historical monuments, went to Greece and while there fell in love with archaeological diggings and the restoration of ancient shrines and temples. This became his lifelong passion. His great work was the excavation and restoration of the shrine of the Delphic oracle, although he was similarly involved with other small temples in and about Athens.

After his death, his unfinished work on the Acropolis was completed by the poet's sister — “the only living being,” the poet commented, “who had the experience and training to do it.”

After completing her M.A., Holland had moved to Boston. But she was not writing a line of poetry then, did not know she was a poet. “Nice people did not do it, and if they did, they had the good taste and good sense not to let anyone know they did.” At that time her favorite mode of expression was driving a car. “I saw it as a kind of dance. I still intend to write a poem about the voices that murmur from the midst of the roar of snow tires on a wet, porous blacktop.”

Somewhere along the line her brother, now a professor of philosophy in Brazil, introduced her to small-plane flying. This absorbed her for awhile, although she did not manage to accumulate enough hours of flying to get a pilot's license.

Her survival jobs included seven years as a lexicographer for *Webster's New International* and *Funk & Wagnall's Abridged*. This was followed by a stint as historical writer for a genealogical society, then as critic for *Writer's Digest*.

Finally, in 1962, New York and the community of poets who made up the new avant-garde scene of the Lower East Side. "New York," she says, "taught me that people could call themselves professional poets and get away with it. That changed everything."

Holland's road since then has been the classical one of the artist: total dedication. And the price comes high, especially so for women artists. In all the poems, the *woman* is very much in evidence. She is philosophical about her losses. Deeply intellectual, but with an inner turbulence often revealing the woman's usual self-doubt. She wanders through "noon-white streets," touching objects of "rust and a tin can edge," as she goes. Harsh and hurtful objects.

Pain is revealed but never self-pity. Rather, there is a wry detachment, a certain self-mockery. No matter what, pain can be endured "one wince at a time."

In a poem that is undoubtedly her credo, she describes herself as the wanderer among crowds, the lonely seeker who touches but may not possess; a gatherer of scraps of experience:

*I am a brokerage for shares
in storms;
the mendicant, more bowl
than ego, hollowed up
to lurch of moon, a dagger
catcher stopping Leonids.
I am the prowler of the noonwhite streets,
the closet audience of somnambulists,
the ear
that bites, the eye that
masticates, the nerve that stings.
I am the wanderer with dirty feet
who wipes worlds from existence
by removing dirt.*

— "Scavenger"

Although an active feminist, Barbara Holland's poetry cannot be classified as feminist in subject matter. That is, it is not the predicament of being a woman that preoccupies her, but the existential situation of being alive and human in an impersonal universe. But her poem on Freud ought to find its way into many a feminist anthology. In this small gem of wit she deftly unbuttons the good Doctor, revealing stage props that have become infirm and obsolete:

*Good gray Grand-daddy,
stuffed
into the clutter of a room too small
for emotional surprises, rummages contendedly
through psychic bric-a-brac and bits
of this and that left over
from a padded century . . .*

Enumerating the bits of Victoriana surrounding him and the equally dusty psychic paraphernalia, questionable now in the time of Jean-Paul Sartre, She observes:

*This is our heritage, which never
was completely serviceable,
being a hamper
full of hand-me-downs,
knitted conundrums,
whose soiled and simple
answer glut
the button-box, mementos of
the Franco-Prussian
War and memoranda on the
thrust of birth*

*What shall we do with all
dear Freud's
accumulation of pressed infancies? Now that
we have become so long accustomed to them,
how can we bear to trade off
for uncertainties, this certain quaintness?*

The existentialist can pity the age of certainties while wanting no part of it. The Romantic can realize how difficult it is to surrender our myths.

Barbara Holland is essentially an urban poet — one of the best that we have, and not owing anything to any current school. Asked what poet has influenced her most, she will claim T.S. Eliot. And adds: “In a tiny measure, Vachel Lindsay. Also Marge Piercy, a recent acquisition.” But if anything, her poetry is in the line of descent of Romanticism. Because it is intensely contemporary, urban rather than nature-identified, it must be heavily charged with irony. The urban romantic must work with new symbols, the terrifying symbols of technology. And only the vertiginous imagery of surrealism can convey the speed at which we are hurtling through history.

For the surrealists were the true heirs of romanticism — the result of the sudden confrontation of inner man with the soulless, sexless and all-powerful machine. Reverie had become the modern nightmare and the boundaries between objects were constantly warping and shifting.

Holland’s two-volume collection, *Crises of Rejuvenation* (published by Grim Reaper Books [The Poet’s Press], New York), contains a series of poems based on the paintings of René Magritte. Magritte, who used the medium of paint to explore certain metaphysical problems that preoccupied him through his lifetime, challenged our static concepts of reality.

In these often brilliant poems, Holland uses the artist’s canvases as a point of departure and steps through them into a universe of her own creation. We may recognize certain Magritte motifs as landmarks, but the poet’s insights are her own. What Magritte, the painter, may only hint at, the poet may explore. She goes well beyond the paintings in bringing into question the borderlines of illusion/reality and inside/outside.

In the poem, “Entrance of Origins,” she makes use of a familiar Magritte transposition — materials exchange their properties. A human face is melting into a landscape, only the features lingering against a rather bleak, mountainous terrain. But Holland takes off from there. A face, seemingly an intimately familiar one, is actually turning to stone. But in a terrifying transition, being and non-being reverse their states:

... *Slowly your face disintegrates and terminal moraine erupts,
completely, unaltered and frighteningly alive.*

In a subtle poem that delicately hints at death, here seen as a rent collector, she has become a lodger in a room painted by Magritte. Here a familiar Magritte image appears — the gigantic wine glass, the dislocated object removed from the clues of its accustomed setting.

In its presence the smallest and most personal objects in the room—a comb, a match lying on the carpet — have likewise become gigantic in

relation to the bed, wardrobe and other furnishings, transformed to the scale of a different universe. Both universes co-exist in the same space/time.

*. . . It is a good room,
a small and well swept corner
of experience, which just this week
is entertaining some random items
from a somewhat mismatched awareness ...*

*I would never leave this room at all,
except for the rent, and that
is reckoned only by the type who darkens
the exquisite blue in that glass with wine.*

— “The Lodger”

Magritte’s “Man Reading a Newspaper,” whose absence is made baffling by a discontinuity in time (by the device of freeze-frames), is the neighbor who, in the discontinuities of urban living, has inexplicably vanished from his upstairs room.

*He should be behind
that unreplenished cup. An obstinate
fold of his overcoat laps down darkly
at the side of his chair.*

What must be Magritte’s expressionless bowler-hatted man appears in an acerbic portrait of one who knows “the cube root of 22,056 . . . ” A stone is hurtled “out of context/ into larger/ experience.” On a night when “the stars sting,” a mountain is hatching something gigantic, “cutting a predator instead of a tooth . . .” Combining their vision, poet and painter have met — and are well met.

There are bitter poems, explicit poems of loss, poems that hint of some dark presence. But nowhere is there self-pity. Holland’s artistry transcends the completely personal. Whatever the cost has been, she has transmuted pain, loneliness, fear. “Not now, Old One,” she can say to the waiting granite figure, even though:

*... the high howl of my hunger
for you swoops, a lost bird
between your messenger ravens.*

— “Not Now, Wanderer”

The road of the dedicated woman artist has usually been an unimaginably lonely one. Perhaps the women's movement can assuage that loneliness. Let it be said here that in Barbara Holland we have one of our finest poets, a poet of major stature. A powerful performer who has had more than 200 recitals, a poet who has published in more than 700 international publications, the recognition she has long deserved is now on its way.

She is a true poet of urban romanticism. A seeker of found objects, to whom the jagged and rusty are mysterious and beautiful:

*Now,
I go home
to delight in the cracks
in my ceiling while the light
outside my window
rinses layers of grime
on glass
with claret.*

— “High on Three Cups of Tea”

A craftsman of taste and wit. Elegant. Turbulent. And always human, even a bit humble.

A wry romantic.

— *Feminist Art Journal*, Fall 1975.

RECOLLECTIONS OF A POET

by Kirby Congdon

I FIRST HEARD BARBARA Holland read during that period now called the “East Side Scene” (1960-65). My mind did somersaults trying to catalog her, to make her fit in, to get a label on her so that she could be conveniently carded, filed and the reference drawer slammed shut. But she won’t be downed. She won’t be dismissed. I like an artist who has confidence in himself, especially if he and his work exhibit depth, and thought and feeling. It is this depth I see in Barbara Holland’s work which makes it a replenishing well for the nourishment of our literary times and finally our national culture. Let me try to explain myself, if I need to, with a favorite poem of mine which Barbara wrote some years ago.

In “Medusa” (the title poem from *Medusa*, page 4, and the first poem in *Return in Sagittarius*, page 3), there is an immediate involvement. She is involved. We are involved. The first line is:

Spray. Thick and heavy dawn.

Then she takes a deep breath and off we go:

A day
clouded, sucked, swirled, exploded
pouring back
into the sea. The hiss of serpents rising
from my head . . .

There she is, ladies and gentlemen, swearing at the universe. Nature in the raw. Fantasy realized. Her own heart spread open on the dissecting table, beating as a turtle’s is said to beat for days, long after it has been decapitated.

Metaphysical, Mythical, Sexual

These two lines with their vast energy are only a small facet of the complete poem. The rest of the poem operates beyond the geographical or the visual. It is metaphysical, mythical, sexual. It is this self-sustaining “flotation,” as I call it, that endures through the poem on all these levels. Yet the poem is not academic or intellectual. The emotional power is too strong to allow for that kind of indulgence.

Another thing that pleases me, and it is most evident when Barbara reads her own work, is her straight-forward sentences that carry the weight of the words so well. I keep telling would-be poets that if a thing can be said as well in prose, then why bother to put it into poetical terminology? But there is a more sophisticated exception to this rule which Barbara illustrates; she can pick up a prosaic tone and subtly shake up our attention with it, as in the lines:

Even these golden wings and iron talons
are little help against the full attack
constantly made, withdrawn,
and reasserted
against this rotting molar in the sea.

The sensuousness in the contrast of the golden wings and the iron talons and the reference to rotting teeth emphasize the factual information of the sentence itself. This tone of this-is-the-way-it-is coupled with the intensity of emotion and the intensity of the imagination carries the extravagance of her sensuousness over into that other realm, a realm which I feel is always of equal, if not paramount, importance: ideas.

In the Realm of Ideas

The idea, as I see it, in this poem is the bitterness and frustration and rage that lie behind being spurned or at least neglected by some one, or some thing, which the narrator esteems.

One can assume the subject that provokes the poem is a person, but not necessarily, because the poem is not talking about this stimulus-subject of the poem; it is talking about how the writer, the narrator, or anyone in the speaker's position, feels in reaction to a position of being rejected. Nor does the poem need to be about rejection; it could be merely an inner, private disappointment. This irritation may or may not be world-shaking in its importance, but the pearl that forms around it, the poem itself, is important, and may very well be world-shaking. This is the difference between art as an "outlet" of self-expression and art as the creation of art. We have here an unknown irritant because we don't need to know what it is specifically. What makes the situation vast and powerful are the ingredients put into it: not sadness and malaise, but rather as Barbara Holland would have it — anger, vindication, denial, accusation, pride and heroic responsibility to one's own identity. It is the difference between complaint and courage, between self-justification and being patrician.

None of this sense of behavior as such is explicit in the poem, but this is the tone. This is Barbara Holland's voice.

The very command, later in this poem —

*Kill me. Life waters at the eye. Swing
back your sword*

— is the sort of command that is both an accusation and a dare. It is uttered because the speaker knows it won't be carried out and she knows it won't be carried out because she doesn't care if it is or is not carried out. The indifference itself is such a condemnation that no enemy can survive it. Destroyed, or at least vulnerable to destruction, herself, her vulnerability itself becomes victorious because it won't give in. It won't let go of its birthright. And that birthright is the dignity of the individual.

Defining Poetry

The poem ends with the most scathing description of despair I have read since Shakespeare. Being so deprecatory about itself in such a heroic manner, our hearts, as readers, refuse to accept the poem as loss or as losing. The poem skirts tragedy, but the stubborn attitude of the narrator requires the reader to see the poem more as a classical projection of dignity. If it were drama it would be a tragedy but it is a poem, and we cannot define it further. For that matter, if we wished to define poetry or poets, we can only provide examples of poems and refer to what great poets do. And so “Medusa,” for these reasons, becomes a definition of poetry, and its creator, Barbara Holland, is the definition of what a poet is.

Another example of Barbara Holland's work, which I can quote in full, illustrates her talent for not only tone in her style but for precision in her vocabulary.

It is “At the Beach,” reprinted from *dodeca*, Vol. 1, No. 8 (December 1975):

People like
to throw things
at the waves,

baiting them
as if they were
small animals,

enriching
their anger.

I mention this poem because the use of the one word, “enriching” sums up much of what I’m trying to get at. The word is a delicious one, here, in its sound and in its setting. But it is also accurate. Psychologically so because riches are pleasurable, almost sinful, and what is more self-indulgent than anger? This choice use of words is a talent that cannot be acquired, except in the merely journalistic sense of good grammar and the correct use of one’s vocabulary. It is the poet, particularly one of Barbara’s caliber, who feels words rather than just using them. This sensibility gives them dimensions beyond their practical uses and beyond their usual possibilities of meaning. Even such a pronoun as “their” in the last line is exploited for her purposes because it can serve two antecedents, people and/or waves-as-animals. And again, the pronoun “they” in the second stanza could suggest that the people are animal-like in their violent throwings of things. This poem is not as grand as “Medusa” but it is nonetheless a true poem. I find it especially appealing because it is disingenuous and disarming as it pretends to be a simple sentence in process but ends up as memorable if not unforgettable.

Explicating the Poem

I asked Barbara to explicate one of her poems in prose terms so that the reader would have it from her own authority what the meanings of a particular poem were. She does not say why it is good poetry, and we cannot expect an artist to laud herself when the work itself is proof and purpose of what he or she has to say. But to help me in this essay, she has written these paragraphs of “prose translations” of “Not Now, Wanderer,” from her *Crises of Rejuvenation*, Vol. 1, page 36-38, and I will close with those comments.

“There is really no reason why anyone should be overly concerned by the obvious undertones of the *Niebelungenlied* which ties the whole thing together. Wotan, of course, is the Wanderer, complete with all his usual accoutrements: slouch, hat, cloak, single eye, and ravens, and some thunder and lightning swiped from Thor.

“He is first of all the object of a sexual passion which has been deliberately unfulfilled so that the desire might become the drive behind the making of poems and a tie between the speaker and an aiding power. It is also to be noted that the speaker finds a crabbed sexual pleasure in the desire itself, a pinched sort of perversion.

“He is, however, more than human; he is Time and all nature. In the Wagner he’s been made to say to the young Siegfried, ‘The eye which I lost is the one with which you look upon the eye which remains to me,’ or something like that. This is a peculiarly Oriental notion, showing that no one is alone, that everyone who perceives — certainly all artists share

the wisdom possessed by Wotan himself and that he cannot be escaped. It is he who will be waiting at the end of their lives with a complete record of their achievements in possession.

“He therefore embodies the artist’s career which must not succeed in too great a hurry, possibly not even within that life span, for there is always the danger that that will put an end to further striving at the craft and all further quests.

He represents also an individual whose sustained affection, and interest has remained untouched and unchanged despite many changes of location and circumstance — one who possesses many of my works and makes it his business to acquire more as they come into print. He is then a real-life custodian of many achievements.

“In a way the Wotan is a new archetype; the Earth Father, a nurturing figure who is the inert strength of life as is the Hindu Siva. The desire and waiting are the force attendant upon this being, the counterpart to the Hindu Shakti. Neither is any good without the other and a complete union leads to stasis.

“At least this is a beginning.”

In more ways than one, Barbara!

— *Contact/II, Spring 1979.*

TRANSCENDING MEDIOCRITY

by Brett Rutherford

NEARLY EIGHT YEARS ago, at a salon-style poetry reading on Manhattan's Lower East Side, I first encountered Barbara A. Holland. My reaction? Describe her as the eye of a tornado. Above her, lightning splayed through rents in black clouds. Rock-hewn by an interior wind, she brought the promise of a buffeting storm — the blast, updraft, and blast again of a prairie twister.

In more human terms, she looked like a cross between a wiry New England aristocrat and an urban shopping-bag lady. All nerves. She was herself a seamless neuron ending in sparks.

She was reading a tirade of vengeance against an imaginary rival, "Apples of Sodom and Gomorrah," which includes the strangulation of her rival's infants. *Infants*, mind you, in the plural: "Three have already been extinguished,/ one more means nothing."

A rhapsodic tribute to Ray Bradbury followed, titled "Autumn Wizard." Bradbury's own poems, "unusual leaves," give him no peace. When they get loose, "the room is brawl/ of burst October when the crush/ crumbles and the whole belch of it charges/ the dining room door. Then he burrows / through the heap of his poems for air/ while his house leans on the wind."

This range from the black to the transcendent, is all Barbara Holland's territory. Too many of her early listeners were willing to let her twist slowly in the wind in Salem, while she was a citizen of Concord, too, and entitled to recognition for her full talent as a powerful romantic, a wry humorist, and a transcendentalist *par excellence*.

In much of the poetry scene, and to all of the literary establishment, Barbara Holland remained an outcast. "A witch." "Too emotional, too verbose — not modern at all."

Small press editors thought otherwise — and published her 1200 times in the decade 1965-75. Some one aptly called her "America's most widely published unknown poet." Yet recognition of the kind easily gained by lesser poets eluded her: book editors found her too difficult, not the stuff of the college circuit; august poetry societies returned her mail (unopened!); and several would-be small press publishers of her work successively closed their doors and/or absconded with advance order sales.

While all these vexations raged, this rugged lady went on with her writing, a full-time poet. She composed a massive, 90-poem cycle called *Crises of Rejuvenation*, dedicated to the on-going spirit of René Magritte.

Lest there be any confusion here, her use of Magritte's imagery as a take-off point implies no *literary* surrealism. Barbara Holland would soon drink a cocktail of ground glass as emulate the principles of that canard of a movement. Instead, she writes vivid first-person narratives of what it's like to live in the kind of universe Magritte suggests in his paintings. Some of the poems admittedly, verge on mere explication, an inherently second-hand experience — many more, however, are so original as to transcend even their inspiration to become dazzling flights of fantasy on their own.

In mid-1973, I published a sampler volume of this cycle, called *Autumn Wizard*, under the Poet's Press aegis. Two printings later, we knew that the entire work had to be published. In October 1974, a new imprint was created to publish the works of Ms. Holland and other neo-romantics — Grim Reaper Books. Appropriately, the first title was Volume One of *Crises of Rejuvenation*, followed by the second half a few months later.

At the same time we were struggling to issue Holland's poems in print, audiences at poetry readings finally caught on to what this whirling dervish of ideas was up to. Familiarity bred respect. Reactions changed from "not her again" to the hush of anticipation. For Barbara A. Holland's performances of her work achieved the dedicatory aim of her *Crises* cycle, to achieve, "the privileged moments . . . that transcend mediocrity."

Why has her work, so accessible after one or two visual readings, been so difficult at times for audiences? I believe word choice and syntax are at the root.

A Holland poem can resemble a Brittany field covered with hard-edged standing stones, *menhirs*, gritty, Anglo-Saxon words. They can distract from the flow of the poem to the soft, Latinate ear, just as those oversize salt crystals obscure the taste of a street vendor's pretzel. Not unfamiliar words, no more than salt is unfamiliar, but precise words piled neatly together like a New England fence. No mortar, just the glue of the poem's intent; there is not a pebble out of place.

The structure of some of the poems is problematic at first. Enormous breath phrases — one is tempted to call them operatic gasps — are strung out, straddling lines and even stanzas.

The flow of the poem is often a single strand — don't dare stop in the middle or you're lost. On first hearing, the experience is akin to an attempt to read the lettering on a fast-moving train: you can scan the motion of it from horizon to horizon, make out the broadest contours of meaning, but the rest may escape you.

On the second hearing, the listener has already acquired some of the train's motion for himself — you can keep up. The train grabs you as it goes by and takes you as a passenger, not a spectator. You are whisked along to the final terminus effortlessly.

And what a trip! Barbara Holland's gondolas take a flying saucer flight through a Magritte canvas to Bradbury's October Country. It is hard not to catalog the curious denizens of her poems: vampire roses, attentive fungi, crumbling rock visages, hapless sorcerers who manufacture excess tentacles and clouds, airborne fish, and that pair of unpeopled crutches out for a stroll.

If audiences have learned to relish the sparkling imagination in her *Crises* poems, neither have they failed, at last, to appreciate her darkest utterances as sublime performing pieces. Her jealous strangler, once rejected as a psychopathic wish-fulfillment, is now in demand as she reads all over the northeastern U.S., in coffeehouses, workshops, campuses and on radio.

Barbara Holland's most powerful and Gothic cantos have now been captured in print. "Apples of Sodom and Gomorrah," appears in Bantam's anthology *We Become New*. "Not Now, Wanderer," the most passionate of her works (and the most spine-chilling in performance), crowns *Crises of Rejuvenation*. Her "Black Sabbath," and "Medusa," along with "Apples" again, are represented in Grim Reaper's 1975 offering, *May Eve: A Festival of Supernatural Poetry*.

For Terror and Wonder are the two sides of Holland's coin — the mint of her realm. Her anguish is delicious, timeless; as the Briton David Cunliffe wrote of her, she "wanders through the bleakest wastes of terror and loneliness without a dram of self-pity."

That's the way it is in the eye of the tornado.

— *Contact/II, Spring 1979.*

RUNNING BACKWARDS: A REVIEW

by A.D. Sullivan

THERE IS SOMETHING unassuming about the plain orange cover in this book of poems, the accumulation of several books over several years deposited here under the title *Running Backwards, or Selected Poems*, without and further color of warning. Even the name Barbara A. Holland is hardly warning for what is to follow, unless one has seen her perform her comic/tragic dance of speech at one of the many local readings in and out of New York City.

The first time I saw Holland read, if seeing is the right word, I found myself caught up more in the color of the woman than the words, for seeing and hearing the woman, feeling the vibrations of the room and audience is as moving a poem as any you will find in her book. Sometimes, this poet grasps for the next word in a long memorized series of conquered poems. At other times she flows easily from one poem to the next, an effortless exercise, redone again and again with the precision of an expert. Watching her, you see the mind and heart ... but often miss the articulation.

Subsequently, after the image of the woman passes, the other poems emerge, their images falling from their master like straw ... and it is only then that one realizes that there is no difference between the woman and her poems, that inside her there are a million other strands just like the one presented. Hearing her, one gets the impression that she is emptying herself out with each utterance, and each expression impresses you with a certain amount of her pain.

But listening to her hides something of the poems which she reads. For like the impression one gets from a well-defined oak, the words are sometimes lost in the texture in spite of their inherent power. For one cannot help getting caught up in the reader herself *as* the poem. It is for this reason that I purchased her book, wishing to connect the thousand little images that popped up between the woman's branches. The need to connect them with some concrete form becomes more and more evident as she winds through the leaves of invisible pages ... For one can never read Barbara Holland's mind as easily as her book.

Separating the woman from the poems gives her poems and book a brand new meaning, meaning that climbs up out of her poems, growing from those strands of straw into complete growing trees of their own. For many of Barbara Holland's poems are

Trapped within the four walls
of her bedroom, within the enclosure
of her head, she sits on guard
against the creatures of the night,
watching the flames run rippling down
the edges of their bared blades in sharpness
disproportionate in their length of claws ...

This image from “Night Battles” and other images throughout the book, claw themselves out of the pages as if escaping the tyranny of their creator. For reading them off the bare page gives them a new vitality which in her speaking, Barbara Holland denies them. Her poems spoken, take on the shades of the woman, while printed, take on the shapes of other beings which she (the poet) had intended to create.

After reading this book, one finds oneself marveling at these differences between poem and poet, craving again to hear her speak, as if challenging one’s own ability to separate the beings once having known them as individuals.

Her poem, for instance, “At the Top of the Stairs,” has all the texture and grace of a romantic painting while keeping its fractured Cubism evident at the same time, each facet of the descending figure speaking for itself about its own environment:

The stairs swirl in descent.
Eyes watch the break to freedom
of the scuttling steps
into the pit,

and every muscle in the body
longs to follow, sailing
head first downward
on the dip of a hawk ...

In a way, we readers become ensnared in these poems, swirling down, not from the top of a stair, but from the sky, the hawk taking us in its claws and allowing us the view without the danger. Sometimes, the background and characters merge into one ... a perfect Cubist production, not confusing the reader, but enlightening all to the intricate connections between world and self.

My last experience with live Barbara Holland caught me in one particular phrase from a poem titled “Left-Over Laughter”:

With the loose ends
of the wood shavings
of your laughter left hanging
from every budding bough ...

I found myself diving into the book for an explanation, clutching this one single straw as if it would grow to a tree right there in my hand. Like most of her images, it stood out from the poem itself, a seductive finger luring the unsuspecting reader into its bosom. Once in, other more diabolical factors begin to gnaw at the reader's mind, working up yet other images, sometimes even darker or more glorious than the first.

In "Left-Over Laughter" one finds phrases working against the original hook, "Fingers inside your collar" that drag you even deeper into the poem's meaning:

They say that you walked
right off the edge of the world

Then, with a brilliant twist:

While they also tell me
that the world has no edges ...

There are such twists throughout this book, twists and turns that are as cunning and carefully laid as any currently written. The texture of her poems, while different from that of the woman herself, commands the same amount of attention.

In "The Consultation," for instance, she opens with a hook so terribly attractive that it is almost impossible not to jump right in:

Doctor, I must not have this child,
for it will have no bones to support it ...

From this beginning, one is drawn, not only into the strange and wonderful world of Barbara Holland, but into the depths of social forming. One is reminded by this poem and others of Edward Albee's *American Dream* and the wholesale castration of human beings living their lives in modern society ... Only here, we are presented with a future that has been gutted before birth, not after, and that the conditions of the world have grown so bad that those born into it become:

a poor little thing that can neither
stand nor sit or use its hands, with a sponge
for a skull through a lifetime ...

I was awed by this book ... and still am, going back time and again
for new insights, new horrors, new promise. Barbara Holland's collection
is an endless fountain of surprises, shocks and sometimes horrors ... but
well worth investigation and investment. Read, read, read, then read it
again.

— *Scrap Paper Review*, 1984.

REVIEW OF COLLECTED POEMS, VOLUME 1 (1980)

by Robert Kramer

BRETT RUTHERFORD HAS undertaken an important project: the publication of the collected works of Barbara Holland. The present volume is the first in the series, which is to be concluded with a collection of critical writings on Miss Holland's poetry. In his introduction, Rutherford describes Barbara Holland as "America's greatest imaginative poet." This is a lofty claim, and perhaps somewhat embarrassing to the poet herself. In a country with so many talented poets at work, such an enormous generalization could easily be contradicted with ample evidence. And yet if we place the emphasis on the word *imaginative*, then the claim becomes rather persuasive. For few poets in America can match Barbara Holland's fierce visionary powers. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, she has still not gained the full critical acclaim that is her due, even though her best work is far superior to that of the writers most frequently mentioned in articles about contemporary American poetry. Hopefully the publication of her collected works will remedy the situation.

The quality of the poems in this volume is mixed: some are among the most unforgettable of Miss Holland's oeuvre, while others reveal certain weaknesses. From her first volume, *A Game of Scraps* (1967) we can re-discover small masterpieces, already become classic to some readers, such as "Scavenger," the title poem, "A Game of Scraps," and "This Incarnation." Each of these three poems suggests something of Miss Holland's poetic methods and goals. From the first we read:

I am the prowler of the noon-white streets,
the closet audience of somnambulists, the ear
that bites, the eye that masticates, the nerve that sings.

The poet explores her urban environment, observing and recording what she will eventually "rebuild, rewire, reactivate with sound" ("A Game of Scraps").

But there are so many splendid poems in this collection, especially the dramatic monologues — tragic, fierce, or mocking — of women of independent mind. Medusa, Melusine, Eurydice — from myth and folklore they emerge in resonant language and startling metaphor.

Barbara Holland's language is often unsettlingly brilliant, lean, muscular, each word vibrant, the syntax unusual and inventive, devoid

of padding. The vocabulary is rich and efficient, including rare words, technical terms, and strikingly original compounds, and employing a clever juxtaposition of earthy Anglo-Saxon monosyllabics with more distanced and intellectual words of Latin origin. Of course at times there are excesses: the muscular language becomes swollen and knotted, the effort becomes too evident, the poem turns ponderous and obscure. On the whole, however, this is a powerful book, deserving to be read by all who are disappointed by the banality and languid coyness of the poets currently lionized, and who yearn to read again poems blending passion and skill, intelligence and originality.

— *Home Planet News*, Vol. 3 No. 1, Issue 11, 1981

THE POETRY OF BARBARA HOLLAND

by Robert Kramer

HARLEQUIN AND SPY, magician and wizard, seer and saboteur — these are the roles Barbara Holland assigns to the poet. And in the nine volumes of her poetry published since 1967 we have come to apprehend a distinctive voice in American literature. None of the exhibitionism and whining self-pity of the autobiographical school, none of the arrogant self-righteousness of the social reformers, none of the complacent collecting of self-centered trivia and effete ironies of the New York school, none of the crude and formless stammer of the colloquial contributors to *American Poetry Review* — but a strong, vivid, often violent voice, shattering complacency with a fine, rich sense of language and its possibilities.

In so far as we can speak of “themes” in Barbara Holland’s poetry, certain motifs keep reappearing. A fundamental concern is the above-mentioned role of the poet and the very act of creation. And yet it is not a pretentious self-consciousness that we find, or arid theoretical reflections on the nature of poetry, but rather poems that are natural outgrowths of experience and insight. Invariably the narrator portrays herself as an outsider, observant yet selective and active: “What I ring/out of this witch-crazed moment I shall turn/ to uses of my own, rebuild, rewire, reactivate with sound.” The artist uses what surrounds her, slicing it up to fill her cup, make her world, her poem. And yet the seeds of the poem often come as a gift from some unknown source: “Who sets fire to the silence/ with a sentence.” The poem begins almost unwilling, emerging from the self-creating unconscious, born of dark realms. The writer writes as one possessed: “... for the pressure/ persisted, nagging between your ears,/ or grasping you by the spine/ and shaking you.” And the writer must be cautious in the face of the unknown visitor: “I would never allow/ myself to interfere with the reveries/ of a secret agent/ who could be/ the muse, the saboteur subversive.” The poet sees things that are invisible to the complacent bourgeois society around her, disturbing and upsetting the traditional values of “those whose eyes/ are unaccustomed to unlikely scales/ of measurement or commonly/ indiscernible planes of existence,” as the author writes in the lovely poem “Shamballah.” Here a vision is presented both beautiful and ominous, hinting at the obscure and irresistible roots of things.

An undertone in much of Barbara Holland’s poetry is a feeling of anger, rebellion, aggressiveness. Her fellow human beings generally do not appear very lovable. Seen together they are a “herd” sometimes observed with amusement, often with contempt. The herd doesn’t

recognize the other dimensions that the outsider-poet explores: "See them dance, each in a ring, who only sees/ a circling of kindred faces, never looks aside/ to those who bear no least resemblance." Relationships with others are often illusory, for men wear masks and only feign affections. Many of Barbara Holland's wittiest and most brilliant poems are those of invective and malediction. She neatly carves up pompous businessmen, fatuous hosts, and false would-be lovers. (The only acceptable lover must, of course, be a demon lover, Mephisto himself, or something even darker and more primeval.) The collection *A Game of Scraps* from 1967 seems to contain more portrayals of real people than any other later volume. But lack of communication between people is the dominant interpersonal experience throughout the works. In the later works a more feminist consciousness seems to emerge, a greater awareness of the egotism and vain strut of males. For example the noble Orpheus is seen through the eyes of Eurydice as a bit of an ass. And the poet feels an intense common bond with her sisters, the witches outcast by a hypocritical society.

Although a distinctive consciousness becomes apparent throughout the works, there is no narrow introspection; all is dramatized, objectified. The self presented is alert, observant, dynamic, fiercely competitive for survival. Loneliness always lurks in the background, but suffering is borne stoically, ironically, with a detached sense of humor. Despite the extreme sensitivity to the physical world outside, atmospheric changes and colors in the landscape, the body is sometimes felt to be not the same as the self, but a kind of prison: "... until I come once more this way inside myself." The narrator identifies with the grotesque, the bizarre and bedizened old women who walk the streets or the city, no more absurd than our own absurdity. In the face of "dog howl loss" the narrator finds "a gamin laugh that stripped/ the soft rot of self-pity from my banishment, and sneered/ my anger into snake hide of a harlequin." In a bitterly humorous poem the narrator tells of the knife that she bears always with her, the blade implanted between the shoulder blades, available "for any type of push or pull," and of the accompanying "nausea./ Just as it has always been." There is an intense yearning expressed in one of the finest poems to be found in all the collections, "Not Now, Wanderer": "... the high howl of my hunger/ for you swoops, a lost bird." And yet this seek and search can be fruitful, even in its unfulfillment: "With this suspense and the concentration / of desire, I make my instrument/ of destruction and creation." Art, poetry emerges from the tension of longing not yet satisfied.

BARBARA HOLLAND ACHIEVES some of her most powerful effects in dramatic monologues spoken by such classical figures as Medusa, who tells of her love that is “walled around / with igneous harness,/ or torn ... blown away/ in shreds of icy spume.” Here Medusa is a woman cursed to see the hideous absurdity of existence, a vision spared other mortals. A strong contrast is found in the poem “High on Three Cups of Tea,” one of the author’s most lighthearted and joyous works, where there is such an unusual air of festivity “as if the city has been recently/ deserted by a circus/that left the lights on,” and where bland acquaintances come down “with serious cases/ of beautiful eyes.” But characteristically, at such an abundance of riches, the narrator confesses “I was embarrassed.”

If we can speak of a philosophical world-view prevailing in the poetry, it is a sense of the cosmos as mystery, as inexplicable, unpredictable, beyond the laws of rationality. The poem “Ache of Eavesdropping” contains echoes of Borges in its feeling of enigma and the strain for solution. The “solution,” as in Kafka and Borges is tinged with absurdity. “Somewhere/ at a known address/ in another city,/ details lie scattered/ about on a table/ in a locked and abandoned room.” In another poem from the same most recent collection, *Burrs*, we read of “silence ... as mendicant ... clothed in meaning.” As in other poems, for Barbara Holland, truth lies behind the words.

A seeking permeates many of the poems; not for something obvious and palpable, but almost beyond description. The poem “A Street through the Years” begins: “This street/ is always with me.” It is a poem of lasting quest, of a vision always sought and not yet attained: “Always ahead/ there is that doot/ ... which cannot hide/ a luminescence ... a faint glow.

Again the echoes of Kafka resound. Just as in *The Trial* the man from the country waits before the door and perceives “a radiance that breaks inextinguishable from the door to the Law,” so too the subject of this poem. And just as in Kafka, where the seeker never quite attains his goal, so too in Barbara Holland’s poem the seeker is frustrated: “but suddenly/ I find myself elsewhere,/ the street gone.” The poem ends without fulfillment, but with a wry irony and a sense of continued quest: “The next time I am here / I am a half block off,/ approaching.”

That which is sought appears in “The Breaker” as a person once found, now lost. “In the grasp of a wave/you were gone,/ by a wave flung back.” But the hope for attaining the lost person rings fainter: “Speak to me/ ... in this whispering sand./ Somewhere the sun must find you.”

The poet is ever aware of a power greater than Man’s, an alien, inscrutable force that intrudes unpredictably into our lives. In the poem “Not Now, Wanderer,” the wanderer is apparently the god Wotan, a

cosmic impulse, father, instigator, lover and final resting place. But the silent watching god is just beyond reach. The union of self and cosmos is never quite achieved: "Never does the dark grasp / at the end of your reach / fasten upon me and lift me."

Barbara Holland is probably best known for her fantastic poems of a world gone awry, of horrible transformations, and inscrutable happenings. Fishes fly, people ascend, goblets spring from the shelf and threaten, roses drink blood, faces turn to stone or sprout branches. But this class of poems can be divided into two groups. First there are those, that though imaginative and metaphorical, have a deep symbolic resonance, a psychological truth. The others have a lighter, more playful quality, narratives that simply relate something horrible or outrageous, merely for the sake of the telling, the fun of shock. There is a serious basis for the first group. First, the sense of an inexplicable, enigmatic universe justifies the many metaphoric guises that unpredictable forces may assume. Secondly, the poet recognizes the fallibility of our perception and the insufficiency of our logical categories.

The second group of "fantastic" poems, though sometimes amusing, are really trifles. We have the feeling that a strong talent has, at times wasted itself on trivial "themes," that the virtuoso has played a composition unworthy of her.

In a world of flux and uncertainty, however, metamorphoses are ever incipient, and ambiguity prevails. Barbara Holland's patron classical poet would be the Ovid of the *Metamorphoses*. And her partner in magic and ambiguity in the visual arts is the Belgian surrealist painter, René Magritte. Two poems refer explicitly to paintings of Magritte. The poet takes pleasure in surprising transformations when the normal flow of nature is reversed and our consciousness is jarred to new awareness. She praises these moments of disorientation and panic in the words of Magritte: "These are privileged/moments.../that transcend mediocrity." Barbara Holland's poems often achieve the same effects as Magritte's paintings.

Certain changes in approach are evident between the publication of *A Game of Scraps* (1967) and the books of the mid-seventies. The early poems are more compact, charged, knotted, and more difficult. They are carefully structured creations of language, organizations of verbal stimuli that provide rich sensual and emotional experiences. They employ striking word compounds and most unusual word associations. Each word is loaded with intensity. The dominant influence seems to be Dylan Thomas. The later poems tend to be somewhat plainer, flatter, narratives depending more on their content than on their form, their verbal selection and arrangement, in contrast to the earlier symphonies of sounds, with their strong rhythmic beat. The earlier poems tend to end their lines

where there are more or less natural pauses. The later poems are closer to natural speech, to the spoken language, and the line breaks occur with no regard to sense. When they are obscure, it is usually in the final resolution, sometimes a witty ironic twist that does not relate to any other reality outside of its verbal construct. The earlier poems are sometimes obscure due to the quick leaping clot of metaphors and unlikely combinations that may not always convey discursive thought, but which present a curve of feelings like music.

Few poets writing today can compare with Barbara Holland in her richness of imagination, fecund with surprising transformations — and her corresponding verbal ingenuity.

— *Poets*, Vol. 1 No. 3, April 1987.

POET TO READ HER VILLAGE VERSE

by Michael Redmond

IN PENNYFEATHERS, GREENWICH Village, the woman who has been headlined “the most widely published unknown poet in America” seems to take more pleasure from discussing aspects of Celtic mythology than from talking about her work.

Although her poems have yet to grace the pages of *The New Yorker* — or, for that matter, the three or four other established publications in which American poets can be said to “arrive” — more than a thousand literary journals in the United States and abroad have published her work. These include *The New York Poetry Quarterly*, *The Beloit Poetry Review*, *Antioch Review* and *Voices International*.

Eight books of her poetry have been published by literary presses since 1965. In addition, a number of her poems have appeared in anthologies published by Viking, Anchor Books (a division of Doubleday) and Bantam.

Her name is Barbara A. Holland, she has been living and writing in the Village for some 20 years.

Holland may not have *The New Yorker* and a fat publishing contract to boast of, but she does have other sources of recognition. During the past five years, especially, she has become something of a cult figure on the New York literary scene (Boston, too), and she is admired by other, better known writers, such as science fiction master Ray Bradbury.

Bradbury once wrote to her: “In a world where there are so many Irving Wallaces and too many Harold Robbinses, are far far too many Jacqueline Susanns, all duplicates one of the other, how nice to know there is only one Barbara A. Holland, who speaks with her own voice and sings her own song.”

Although there is only one Holland, she is a poet who evades categorization. Her work has been variously described as romantic, mythic, supernatural and surreal; she is as adept at evoking a seascape as in creating a monologue by Medusa. There are city poems, and love poems, and poems both funny and terrifying. The common denominator is her extraordinary imagination, the classical precision of her language, and a wild sense of humor.

Holland is also recognized as a powerful reader — that is, her readings are dramatic performances, done from memory; they have done as much in creating a following for the poet as the poems themselves.

Concerning the poems: “The content is surreal at times, but I don’t go and do unusual things with syntax. I don’t tear the language apart

and try to rebuild it from scratch, as other poets have tried to do ... I don't think much of ultra-sentimental, Hallmark Cards type of poetry ... In writing a poem, I use breaks in the breath rather than grammatical or metrical structures."

Concerning the reciting of poems: "I read mostly by instinct, but I do have some ideas about performing. I tend to take it very slowly. If I talked naturally, this would be too fast for most people's comprehension."

Holland said she never suffers from stage fright — "even the time I read for 3,000 rock fans in Boston. They looked completely unreal to me. But what I have to do is draw back the ego consciousness and observe myself. I become a stage director; I have this puppet working for me. So, on Boston Common, I just looked at that enormous audience and said to myself, 'Well, here you go again.'"

A native of Philadelphia, the poet holds a master's degree in English literature from the University of Pennsylvania. She has been active on the New York poetry scene since the early 1960s — in Les Deux Megots, Cafe Metro, the McBurneyYMCA, and other poetry centers of the period.

She has since been a featured reader in numerous poetry centers in New York City and New Jersey, including New York University, the City University of New York, Fordham University and Fairleigh Dickinson University. Not to mention libraries, art galleries, taverns, cafes, lofts, theaters and "a laundromat and a show store, as well as the parks and piers of New York," Holland added.

The poet is currently a member of the St. Clement's Poetry Festival in New York. Her publisher, Brett Rutherford (The Poet's Press), is based, however, in Weehawken [NJ].

— From *The Newark Star-Ledger*, November 10, 1981

OUT-TAKES FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH BARBARA A. HOLLAND

by Michael Redmond

October 19, 1981 —Pennyfeathers on Seventh Avenue, Greenwich Village, New York City.

The following remarks by Barbara A. Holland are taken directly from Michael Redmond's hand-written notes, in the order she made them. Barbara was in good spirits, focused, relaxed, having enjoyed a good meal.

"In the late Fifties everybody was interested in Eliot's 'The Cocktail Party.' The funny thing is that they considered him avant-garde."

"The New York School? Well, what's left over from the Beat movement is a rather posh group, including the group that O'Hara brought together at MOMA, and the Naropa crowd. They're doing the circuit — New York is just one of many places where they touch down. They may have started here, but now they're gone Upstate, to New England, or the West Coast. I've never been quite sure how to get on the circuit."

"I usually mess around in my head with a poem for several days. I play around with phrases waiting for the subway. One time I got stuck on the subway going up to hear David Ignatow read and I got an entire poem done."

"I do base some poems on dreams."

"I admire Marge Piercy, T. S. Eliot, and Dylan Thomas. I had a lot of trouble eradicating Eliotisms from my work. I don't understand about three-quarters of Dylan Thomas, but then, they say he couldn't either."

"I'm not sure about feminism, I'm not sure about the ERA. I worry that the ERA will make women the same sort of group that blacks became after they got their special legislation. Then they were driven right back down to the ghetto."

"Poets are the poor relations of literature. They talk about playwrights and novelists and short-story writers, but never poets."

“I get rejection slips. They bother me as much as a little static on the radio. At least I don’t have to deal with people of the mentality that actors have to.”

“We’ve gotten to the point that when poets become prominent, they become public figures. They may as well be politicians.”

“I’m not a joiner. I don’t run with the pack.”

“I’m not a ‘political’ poet. But inasmuch as any writing can be considered a political statement, that’s the sense in which I can be considered ‘political.’”

Four items of interest, from the same notes:

1. BAH spoke of using four standard reading groups: 1. The sea,
2. “mostly for laughs,” 3. long supernatural poems, 4. “outdoor.”
2. BAH said that she derived a regular income (probably pitiful) from “municipal bonds.”
3. Direct quote: “I had been floundering [sic] around in Celtic stuff. That’s how I got into my Isolde poems.” She said there were eight of them, written over many years. I saw the mss.
4. Grey hair, brown eyes.

MISCELLANEOUS QUOTES

A highly original poet. — Anne E. Michael, *Philadelphia*.

Wonderful, solid, uncanny poems, full of dark power. — Helen Adam, *Quarrel*.

Barbara Holland's images on the destructive hatred infesting the minds of many nervous women were conveyed through an excellent choice of words. — Lisa Williams, *Majority Report*.

A unique and vibrant life-force pulsing under her words. — Daniel Evans, *Painted Bride Quarterly*.

Clear, imaginative, unpretentious, meaning something American poetry could use more like it. — Charles Webb, *Margins*.

An expert in the English language. — Yves Barbero. *Bangor Daily News*.

Barbara Holland is a woman of vast writing ability. — Louise Simon, National Public Radio.

Fine sensitivity to nuance and the shifting shapes of mind. — Robert Hazel.

Her work transcends this [the feminist] or any movement — one of today's outstanding urban poets. — *Peace and Pieces*.

Reaches a claw down into your gut and tears it out by the yard while screeching her incantations. — Dr. A. Sevy, *Poetry Newsletter*.

Wanders through the bleakest wastes of terror and loneliness without a dram of self-pity. — Daniel Cunliffe, BB Bks, Blackburn, Lancs, UK.

The voice of the exiled sorceress intoning from the center of the pentagram. Barbara Holland embroiders in petit-fleur, so bright and vivid the figures that you could almost bite them. — Kirby Congdon.

POEMS IN THIS VOLUME, BY TITLE

A

- Admonition, The 208
Aerialist, The 114
All This Talk of Living 148
An Expert at Home 81
And Finally the Moon 38
At Brighton Beach 222
At Mission Dolores 191
At Saco Falls 115
At the Heart of the Universe 39
At the Museum 166
At the Occultist's Door 80
August on Morton Street 247

B

- Baby-Head Angels, The 219
Beetle-Browed Neighborhood, The 63
Better Not to Walk Down That Street 147
Bicycles 203
Bird of the Southern Swamps 157
Blackmail 166
Bohemian in San Francisco 241
Break Dancing, Washington Square 116

C

- Caller, The 192
Canticle for the Holy Innocents 57
Cat Calls 254
Cat Weathers the Sermon, A 117
Cathood 215
Cave of the Piper 209
Ceres 95
Child Sorceress 169
Christmas Dream, A 36
Church Spire 54
Cock Crow for City Sleep 40

Comforts of City Living, The 199
Coming Storm, The 204
Cryonic Age 117

D

Dancing Master, The 108
Dancing Virgin, The 185
Date Palm 202
Day of Wrath 41
Death to the Rats 170
December Beginning 42
Dedication Is A Dirty Word 135
Demon Weather 43
Dies Irae 163
Dies Irae II 231
Din of a Country Summer, The 104
Distant Thunder 29
Do It Again, Prometheus 158
Dolorosa Palms 233
Dream of Baked Potatoes, A 118
Duende, The 25
Dumbstruck 133
Dust-Devil Man 45
Dybbuk, The 67

E

Early Morning in July 96
Earth Tremor 239
Enter by Way of A Cannon 33
Escaped Leopard, The 167

F

Façade 210
Fear on the Land 246
Flute Song 46
Flying Cat, The 162
Fog Horn in Retrospect 59
For A Dead Lady 26
Form and Function 153
Full Red Rose, A 98

G

- Gambit of the Round-Trip Man, The 119
Garden Eater, The 184
Gilt Youth and Golden Age 21
Glimpse from Monday, A 78
Going Back There 171
Going to the Witch to Get Her Back 197
Golden Gate Disillusion 237
Graduate Lounge: A Dream 139
Guess Who Crashed the Party 83

H

- Hand, The 250
Haunted Courtyard, The 161
Haunted, They Say 247
He Who Sits on Mount Kailasa 175
Heathen Justice 155
Heavy Shadows 251
Hilarious Obits, The 170
Hill Vertigo 236
House of Ice, The 69

I

- I Am Deafened by Songs 156
I Can Remember 168
If Unidentified, Still They Fly 128
If You See Your Father 218
Ilse, Molder of Destiny 77
Ilse, The Queen of Swords 89
In Darkest Love 97
In Defense of Shiva VIII 56
In Playtime Territory 28
In the Forest of the Wendigo 206
Indic Astrology 50
Inmate Suicide 101
Invisible Man: In Memoriam, The 24

J

- July Fourth 242
Just Before Dawn, Brooklyn 186

K

- Karma 102
- Knossos 138
- Knowing Eggs, The 163

L

- Lady of Consolation 73
- Land Mower, The 120
- Language of Windows, The 143
- Levigator, The 216
- Life Story 72
- Lingering Fog, The 154
- Listening In 22
- Little One 51
- Little Spell, The 121
- Lost Goblet, The 178

M

- Man on Drums 241
- Manger Scene 195
- Marching 181
- Mediatrix 47
- Merlin 122
- Minotaur Awakened, The 123
- Mountain Titan, The 226
- Muscles, Canine Antique 240
- Mushrooms 50
- Mystery of Night, The 31

N

- Name the Instigator 136
- Needles and Pins 188
- Negatives 55
- New Moon 214
- Night Writing 211
- Niobe at the Beach 225
- Nitre and Ouzo 164
- No One So Exquisite 30
- No One to Storm At 172
- No Secrets 141

None of Us Ever Knew 196
Northward Riding 52
Not Quite Farewell 125
Not Reading Alone 228

O

Oboe, Unexpected, The 180
Of Time and Space 126
Old Floors 205
Old Gold 193
Omen for the Better, An 107
Once More, Your Lighted Window 145
One and the Same 187
Optimism 82
Other Light, The 164
Otter Island 105
Our Hero in Two Dimensions 229
Our Roots Are One 48

P

Palladium, The 196
Papers in the Locked Room, The 252
Parting Theft, The 151
Patch of Activity, A 156
Peekskill, New York 121
Penance for Convenience 85
Personal Rites 199
Pharaoh Is Not at Home, The 201
Plutonium Worker, The 182
Poemello of Seven Fingers 200
Poseidon 49
Purse Snatcher 185

Q

Queen of Shemakhan, The 127

R

Reaction to the Fortune Teller	91
Rebirth Is A Fact of Life	137
Release, The	31
Remembering the King of Darkness	64
Rent Rituals	168
Reverie	189
Rhythm of All Conundrums, The	71
Riddle Called Home, The	142
Rope Ladder, The	249
Ruin of St. John's Churchyard, The	113
Running Stranger, The	130

S

Scream in the Night, A	223
Screen, The	140
Sea Fog	155
Secret Origins	248
Seeking Work with Ilse	87
Self-Made Song, The	68
Senescence	53
Serious Business	34
Shadow of Kundry, The	86
Shadow of the Meadowhawk	111
Shadows Glued On	177
Shards of Isolde	227W
She'll Be the Death of Us	202
Shifting Gears	65
Small Invaders	160
Small Voice, The	224
Somewhere in Another City	79
Stampede	61
Stars and Ladders	190
Strange Berries	126
Study in Post Office Art, A	37
Sudden Scream, A	228
Summer House, The	200
Suspense	66
Swimmer from Atlantis	212
Swinging Song, The	109

T

Tease is an Almost Moon, A	100
Tenebrae	23
Test of Strength, A	38
Then Heigh Ho the Holly	106
These Dark and Intimate Hours	174
Thing Loved, The	198
Things Spun in Silk and Steel	243
Thirsting After the Limelight	180
Those Greenwich Village Garden Restaurants	246
Those Who Perish By the Sword	62
Thread Almost Without End	152
Through the Keyhole	245
Timely Death, A	176
To Keep It Going	129
Transit in Magritte's Belgium	250
Translation	60
Tree, the Woman, Earth Shaking, The	213
Twin Peaks	232
Two Who Got Away	52

U

Uneasy Contract	146
-----------------	-----

V

Vigil, The	157
Vinegar Cruet	103

W

Waiting for the Fog	244
Warning Bugle, The	152
Warning to Archaeologists, A	159
Waving Fingers, The	253
Waxing Crescent in the Alley	158
Weather In Its Place	189
Weather Inside the Castle, The	173
What Became of Father	217
What's Here	53
Wheel Comes Round Again, The	32
When Once You Served Me Music	129

Where Is My Pen?	179
Who Comes Back	230
Witchcraft	165
Witches on Parade	251
With the Aid of the Moors	35
With White Hair Streaming	194
Wrong Alloy	124

Y

Your Mentor	204
-------------	-----

PUBLICATION CREDITS

CHAPBOOKS AND BOOKS

- After Hours in Bohemia*. Edited by Brett Rutherford. 2020. Pittsburgh: The Poet's Press.
- Autumn Wizard*. 1973. New York: The Poet's Press. [Reprinted in 1974 with a different cover.]
- Autumn Numbers*. 1980. New York: Grim Reaper Books [The Poet's Press].
- The Beckoning Eye: Poems from Magazines*. 2019. Edited by Brett Rutherford. Pittsburgh, PA: The Poet's Press.
- Burrs*. 1978. Grim Reaper Books [The Poet's Press].
- Collected Poems, Volume 1*. 1980: B. Rutherford Books [The Poet's Press].
- Crises of Rejuvenation, Volume 1*. 1974. New York: The Poet's Press.
- Crises of Rejuvenation, Volume 2*. 1975. New York: The Poet's Press.
- Crises of Rejuvenation* (Single-volume second edition). 1986. Providence, RI: The Poet's Press.
- Crises of Rejuvenation*. Third edition. 2006. Providence, RI: The Poet's Press.
- A Game of Scraps*. 1967. Charlton, IL: Prairie Poet.
- In the Shadows*. 1984. Weehawken NJ: The Poet's Press.
- Lens, Light and Sound*. [Chapbook issued without the companion photos of Donald Curran. The announced book of photos and poems never materialized.] n.d. Los Angeles: Spearman Associates.
- Medusa*. c. 1961. Self-published.
- Medusa: A Lost Chapbook and Other Poems*. Edited by Brett Rutherford. 2019. Pittsburgh, PA: The Poet's Press.
- Melusine Discovered*. 1974. New York: Bard Press.
- On This High Hill*. 1974. Cherry Valley, NY: Cherry Valley Editions. [When no more copies were to be had, The Poet's Press issued an authorized facsimile edition.]
- Out of Avernus: The Exiled Sorceress & The Fallen Priestess*. Edited by Brett Rutherford. 2019. Pittsburgh, PA: The Poet's Press.
- Penny Arcana*. No date, no imprint.
- Return in Sagittarius*. 1965. Muse Editions, Eventorum Press.
- Running Backwards*. 1983. West Orange NJ: Warthog Books.
- The Secret Agent, and Other Poems from Notebooks & Chapbooks*. Edited by Brett Rutherford. 2019. Pittsburgh, PA: The Poet's Press.
- Selected Poems, Volume 1*. Edited and annotated by Brett Rutherford. 2020. Pittsburgh, PA: The Poet's Press. Published in PDF format to The Internet Archive.

- Selected Poems, Volume 2.* Edited and Annotated by Brett Rutherford. 2020. Pittsburgh, PA: The Poet's Press. Published in PDF format to The Internet Archive. [Includes the full text of *Crises of Rejuvenation* and images of Magritte paintings related to the poems.]
- The Shipping on the Styx.* Edited by Brett Rutherford. 2019. Pittsburgh PA: The Poet's Press.
- You Could Die Laughing.* 1975. Boston: Stone Soup Poetry Chapbook Series.

ANTHOLOGIES

- Bergen Poets 5.* Edited by Alice Kolb. The Bergen Poets. Chicago: Adams Press, 1978.
- Dr. Generosity Anthology.* Edited by Marguerite Harris.
- The East Side Scene.* Edited by Allen De Loach. 1968. Buffalo, NY: University Press, State University of New York at Buffalo.
- For Neruda, For Chile.* Edited by Walter Lowenfels. 1975. Boston: Beacon Press.
- From Sea to Sea in Song.* Edited by Alfarata Hansel and Mabelle A. Lyon. 1975. Phoenix, AZ: American Poetry League.
- Group 74: Poems from the New York Poets' Cooperative.* Edited by Edward Butscher, Roberta Gould, and Donald Lev. 1974. New York: New York Poets' Cooperative. [Re-issued as an ebook by The Poet's Press in 2020.]
- Intime of Revolution.* Edited Walter Lowenfels. New York: Viking Press.
- Man the Poet.* Edited by James Romnes. 1975. Bigfork, MN: Northwoods Press.
- May Eve: A Festival of Supernatural Poetry.* Edited by Brett Rutherford. 1975. New York: Grim Reaper Books [The Poet's Press].
- Loves, Etc.* Edited by Marguerite Harris. 1973. Doubleday Anchor.
- Parthenon Poetry Anthology.* Edited by Angelo Aaron Schmuller. 1981. Far Rockaway, NY: Parthenon Publishing.
- Peace and Pieces: An Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry.* Edited by Maurice Custudio, Grace Harwood, David Hoag, and Todd S.J. Lawson. 1973, San Francisco: Peace and Pieces Press.
- Peopled Parables.* Edited by Louise Louis. 1975. Westwood, NJ: Pen-Art Publishers.
- Poetry Pageant.* Edited by Jean Wood. 1969. Washington DC: Magnetic Publishing Co.
- Quoin.* 1974 Annual. Edited by Arlis M. Snyder. Springfield MO.
- Reflections of the Inward Silence.* Edited by Sal St. John Buttaci and Susan Linda Gerstle. 1976. Saddle Brook, NJ: New Worlds Unlimited.

- The Spring Anthology 1970*. 1970. London: The Mitre Press.
- Talents Unique: An Anthology of Poetry and Prose*. Vol. 1. 1969. Merrick, NY: Talents Unique Publishing.
- A Tumult for John Berryman*. Dryad Press.
- We Become New*. Bantam Books.
- Working from Silence*. Edited by Nora Barraford, Kenneth Gibbs, and Stan Sanvel Rubin. 1971. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt Publishing.

MAGAZINE PUBLICATIONS

Barbara A. Holland did not keep a bibliography of all her magazine appearances, which by her account numbered more than 1,200. A number of poems appeared in multiple publications, typically when editors requested them regardless of their prior appearance elsewhere. The following list merely documents the publications included in the Holland papers, and others located in online archives during the editing of the 2019-2020 books. The abbreviations “n.d.” indicate an undated item, and “n.p.” indicates a publication without page numbers.

A

- “The ache of eavesdopping.” *Aye*. Vol. 2 No. 1, October 1974, n.p.
- “Addenda.” *Some Friends*. Vol. 4, Summer 1976, p. 23.
- “Adjacent realities.” *Lips*. No. 3, 1982, p. 35.
- “Advance upon Canaan.” *Man the Poet*. Edited by James Romnes. 1975. Bigfork, MN: Northwoods Press, pp. 40-41.
- “Advice to the Catechumens.” *Phoebe: The George Mason Review*. 1975, p. 85.
- “After the visit.” *The Palette*. Vol. 2 No. 6, June-August 1979, p. 5.
- “All about Eddie.” *Parthenon Poetry Anthology*. Edited by Angelo Aaron Schmuller. 1981. Far Rockaway, NY: Parthenon Publishing Co., p. 27.
- “All this in silence.” *Sparrow*. No. 27, June 1973, p. 10.
- “The almost there.” *New Leaves Review*. Spring-Summer 1986, n.p.
- “Among so many faces.” *The Phoenix*. (Morningstar Press, Haydenville, MA). Vol 3 Nos 2-3. Spring-Summer 1971, p. 61.
- “An angel on a hot August day.” *Love: A Journal of Innocence*. Issue 2, 1981, n.p.
- “Any weekend.” *The Spring Anthology 1970: A Compilation of Representative Verse from the World’s Living Poets*. 1970. London: The Mitre Press.
- “Anywhere the weasels.” *Hey Lady*. No. 6, 1971. The Morgan Press.

- "The Apples of Sodom and Gomorrah." [In English and in Dutch.] *Chrysalis*. No. 5. 1980. Amsterdam: Elsevier Nederland, pp. 44-51.
- "The appointment." *Paper and Air*. Vol. 1 No. 3, 1978, p. 23.
- "At the beach." *Reflections of the Inward Silence*. Edited by Sal St. John Buttaci and Susan Linda Gerstle. 1976. Saddle Brook, NJ: New Worlds Unlimited, p. 33.
- "At the heart of the universe." *The Archer*. Vol. 24 No. 2, Summer 1979, p. 9.
- "At the midnight halt." *Poetry Parade*. No. 8. Edited by Jennifer Craig. 1978. Santa Ana, CA: Spencer Book Co., p. 20.
- "Autumn wizard." *Ally*. 1985, pp. 22-23.
- "Awkward with angels." *Bitterroot*. Vol. 18, Issue No. 69, Autumn 1979, p. 35.

B

- "Babe of Joseph Stalin's Daughter." [Book review]. *Margins*. Issue 24, 25 & 26, Sept-Oct-Nov 1975.
- "Bathroom music." *Xanadu*. No. 6, 1979, p. 3
- "The beckoning eye." *Modus Operandi Poetry Anthology*. Edited by Sheila R. Jensen. Brookeville, MD: M.O. Publishing Co., p. 32.
- "Blacksmith season." *The Voyeur*. Vol. 1 No 12, November 1975, p. 1.
- "The Blight." *Peopled Parables: First Anthology*. Edited by Louise Louis. 1975. New York Poetry Forum. Westwood, NJ: Pen-Art Publishers, pp. 64-65.
- "Breaking down the night." *The Phoenix*. (Morningstar Press, Haydenville, MA). Vol. 3 Nos. 2 and 3. Spring-Summer 1971, p. 59.
- "A breath of air." *Ally 80*, 1980, p. 14-15.
- "Broccoli," *Tiotis*, Vol. 1 No. 4, November 1979, p. 7

C

- "Cabbages," *Exit*. Vol. 2 No 1, Fall 1979, p. 26.
- "Call halt on suicide." *Some Friends*. Vol. 4, Summer 1976, p. 7.
- "The call of the cold." *Central Park*. Vol. 1 No. 2, Fall 1981, p. 79.
- "Carob ice cream." *The National Poetry Magazine of the Lower East Side*. Vol. 3 No. 2, Spring 1988.
- "Caught unprepared for May." *Wind*. Vol. 10, Issue No. 39, p. 25.
- "The celebration of the sun." *Working from Silence*. Edited by Nora Barraford, Kenneth Gibbs, and Stan Sanvel Rubin. 1971. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt Publishing Co., p. 81.
- "Chiaroscuro: a sketch." *The Speculum*. No. 2, Spring 1975, p. 10.
- "A Christmas dream." *The Archer*. Vol. 24 No. 4, Winter 1979, p. 4.

- “Clothesline.” *Sibyl-Child*. Vol. 2 No. 1, 1976, p. 20.
- “Cock crow for city sleep.” *Maelstrom*. Vol. 2 Issue 1, Spring 1966.
- “College audiences.” *Indigo*. Vol. 2 No 1, January 1975, n.p.
- “Concerns of childhood.” *Some Friends*. Vol. 4, Summer 1976, p. 6.
- “Confession.” *The Speculum*. No. 2, Spring 1975, p. 11.
- “The courtier cat.” *The Hoboken Terminal*. Vol. 2 No. 1, 1983, p. 22-23.
- “A covering letter.” *Sojourner*. No. 1, 1974, p. 81. Also published in *Sparrow*. No. 27, June 1973, p. 9.
- “Crisis in storage.” *Sanskaras*. Vol. 1 No. 2, Winter 1968-1969, p. 53.
- “A cup of coffee.” *Group 74: Poems from the New York Poets’ Cooperative*. 1974, p. 43

D

- “A dab of mayonnaise.” *Alura Poetry Quarterly*. Vol. 7 No. 1, Summer 1982, p. 47.
- “December beginning.” *The Archer*. Vol. 25, Issue 4, Winter 1980.
- “Delphine in Chile.” *Blue Unicorn*. Vol. 2 No. 2, February 1979, p. 12.
- “Distant thunder.” *Contact/II*. Vol. 1 No. 1, Nov-Dec 1976, p. 5.
- “Drunks.” *Quoin*. 1974 Annual. Edited by Arlis M. Snyder. Springfield, MO, p. 35.
- “The Duende.” *Four Seasons Poetry Club Magazine*. No. 23, Winter 1980, p. 3.
- “The Dybbuk.” *Grist*, Issue 4, December 1964.

E

- “Echoes of St. John Chrysostom.” *Lips*. No. 11, 1985, p. 27.
- “Ego flight.” *The Cathartic*. Vol. 2 No. 3, September 1975, p. 2.
- “Elegy for Alexis.” *Group 74: Poems from the New York Poets’ Cooperative*. Edited by Edward Butscher, Roberta Gould, and Donald Lev. 1974. New York: New York Poets’ Cooperative, p. 46.
- “Empty exhibitionism.” *Ally 80*, 1980, p. 13.
- “En route to La Guardia Airport.” *Ally: A Poetry Journal*. Winter 1975, p. 18.
- “End of an era” [original version with variant epigraph]. *Icarus*. Vol. 5 No. 2, Fall 1977, pp. 16-17.
- “Enter by way of a cannon.” *Hydrant*. Vol. 1 No. 1.
- “Escape into orange.” *Tiotis*. Vol. 1 No. 4, November 1979, p. 14.

F

- "A fine American man." *Peace & Pieces: An Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry*. Edited by Maurice Custodio, Grace Harwood, David Hoag, and Todd S.J. Lawson. 1973. San Francisco: Peace & Pieces Press, p. 84.
- "Fog." *Sanskaras*. Vol. 1 No. 2, Winter 1968-1969, p. 54.
- "For a dead lady." *Ahnoi!* No. 1, n.d., n.p.
- "For the new year." *Viewpoints*. No. 74, Feb 1971, n.p.
- "Fresh paint." *Footwork*. Vol. 5, 1983, p. 60.
- "From 'In defense of Shiva.'" *CrossCountry*. No. 2, Summer 1975, pp. 5-7.
- "Full load." *Some Friends*. Vol. 4, Summer 1976, p. 4.

G

- "The gay Indians." *New Leaves Review*. Spring-Summer 1986, n.p.
- "Gilt youth and golden age." *Talents Unique: An Anthology of Poetry and Prose*. Vol. 1, 1969. Merrick, NY: Talents Unique Publishing, n.p.
- "The glass makes the difference." *Appearances*. Number 14, 1988, p. 26.

H

- "Here more than ever else." *The New Renaissance*. Vol. 2 No. 2, p. 13.
- "Hexagram: an anthology of six poets." [Book review]. *Bitterroot*. Vol. 17 Nos. 65-66, Autumn-Winter 1978-1979, pp. 71-72.
- "High on three cups of tea." *Spectrum*. 1974. Santa Barbara, CA: University of California Santa Barbara, pp. 44-45. Also published in *Bergen Poets 5*. Edited by Alice Kolb. The Bergen Poets. Chicago: Adams Press, 1978, p. 33.
- The House of Ice. *The Marrahwannah Quarterly*. Vol. 2, Issue 2, 1966.
- "Huldra." *Stone Soup Poetry (Boston)*. No. 22, 1974, n.p.

I

- "The image of your poem." *Poetry Venture*. Vol. 6 No. 1, Fall 1973, p. 24.
- "In a year's turning." *Encore*. Vol. 9 No. 3, Spring 1975, p. 24.
- "In playtime territory." *Viewpoints*. No. 70, n.p.
- "In residence." *junction*. Vol. 5 No. 1, Spring 1978, p. 37.
- "In small town U.S.A." *The Bad Henry Review*. 1984, p. 53.
- "In the eye of noon." *Sanskaras*. Vol. 1 No 3., 1969, pp. 74-75.
- "In the heart of night." *Loves, Etc.* Edited by Marguerite Harris. 1973. New York: Doubleday Anchor, p. 30.
- "In the mirror." *Ally 79*. 1979, p. 35.
- "In the strength of the moon." *Inprint*. No. 7, Winter 1977, p. 9.

- "Indic astrology." *The Archer*. Volume 26, Issue 4, Winter 1982.
- "The insane pursuit of Tío Pablo." *For Neruda, For Chile*. Edited by Walter Lowenfels. 1975. Boston: Beacon Press, p. 216.
- "The invisible man: in memoriam." *Four Seasons Poetry Club Magazine*. No. 23, Winter 1980, p. 2
- "The iron urge." *Ally* 84. 1984, p. 17.
- "Isle of the damned." *Quoin*. 1974 Annual. Edited by Arlis M. Snyder. Springfield MO, p. 35.

J

- "Joy as a low grade fever." *Pudding Magazine*. No. 7, 1982, p. 28.

K

- "The King of Cups." *Paper and Air*. Vol. 1 No. 3, 1978, p. 21.
- "Krishna in the afternoon." *Group 74: Poems from the New York Poets' Cooperative*. Edited by Edward Butscher, Roberta Gould, and Donald Lev. 1974. New York: New York Poets' Cooperative, p. 47.

L

- "Lady of consolation." *Now*. Issue 2, 1965.
- "Last rites." *Ally* 81. 1981, p. 56.
- "Late August baritone." *Cuttings: A Collection of Short Poems Selected from New Leaves Review*. Edited by John Underwood and Darwin Hageman. 1985. Sunnyside NY: Avatar Press, p. 25.
- "Liberation." *Guts & Grace*. Summer 1981, n.p.
- "Light wind and a locomotive." *Proof Rock Literary Arts Journal*. Vol. 1 No. 1, Spring/Summer 1982, p. 16.
- "Listening in." *Footwork*. No. 3, Winter 1980, p. 56.
- "The listening room." *The Speculum*. No. 2, Spring 1975, p. 9.
- "Love song at Sixth Avenue & Eighth St." *Peace & Pieces: An Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry*. Edited by Maurice Custodio, Grace Harwood, David Hoag, and Todd S.J. Lawson. 1973. San Francisco: Peace & Pieces Press, p. 85-87.

M

- "Martha." *Salome: A Literary Dance Magazine*. Nos. 18, 19 & 20, 1980, p. 21.
- "Mary dancing: a statue." *Ally* 81. 1981, pp. 57-58.
- "Meeting with Muriel." *Lips*. No. 2, 1981, p 4.
- "Melody in brick and wood." *Aleph: A Magazine of the Arts*. No. 4, 1976, p. 1. Also published in *Stroker*. No. 4, Summer 1976, p. 21.
- "The mid-day moon, Selene." *Wind*. Vol. 13, Issue No. 49, 1983, pp. 29-30.

- "Mind your business." *The Palette*. Vol. 2 No. 6, June-August 1979, p. 10.
- "Minuet at nightfall." *The 3rd Thing*. No. 1, Summer 1974, p. 53.
- "The moment of truth." *The New Renaissance*. Vol 2 No 2, p. 12.
- "The month of May." *Calliope's Corner*. No. 12, May-June 1984, p. 4.
- "The music room." *PCC Poetry Center Anthology*. 1983. Paterson, NJ: Passaic County College, p. 31.
- "The mystery of night." *The Archer*. Vol. 27 No. 4, Winter 1982, p. 22.

N

- "Neuvain of panic." *Driftwood: A Magazine of Verse*. Vol. 20 No. 4, October 1945, p. 225.
- "The new sorcery." *Wind*. Vol. 13, Issue No. 49, 1983, p. 29.
- "Night battles." *Central Park*. Vol 1 No 1, Spring 1981, p. 64. Also published in *Footwork*. No. 3, Winter 1980, p. 56.
- "The night is urgent." *Some Friends*. Vol. 4, Summer 1976, p. 30.
- "No more no less than this." *Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream*. Vol. 4 No. 5, May 1983., p. 23.
- "No one yet so exquisite." *Encore*. Vol. 10 No. 4, Summer 1976, p. 4.
- "None other." *The 3rd Thing*. No. 1, Summer 1974, p. 52. Also published in *Man the Poet*. Edited by James Romnes. 1975. Bigfork, MN: Northwoods Press, p. 19.
- "Noon in the presence of the Saints." *Some Friends*. Vol. 4, Summer 1976, p. 4. Also published, in better copy, in *Tamarisk*. Vol. 2 No. 1, Winter 1978, p. 9.
- "Not as the crippled tree." *The New Renaissance*. Vol. 2 No. 2, p. 11.
- "Not now, Wanderer." *Stone Soup Poetry (Boston)*. No. 14, 1974, pp. 1-2.
- "Notations from a rebuilt brothel." *Ally*. No. 80, 1980, p. 12.
- "November." *Ally*. 1985, p. 21.
- "The nuns ran away like the beating of drums." *Phoebe: The George Mason Review*. 1975, p. 84.

O

- "Oblique as moonlight." *Poetry Venture*. Vol. 6 No. 1, Fall 1973, p. 24.
- "Ocean, the opportunist." *Four Seasons Poetry Club Magazine*. Spring 1982., p. 14.
- "Of padlocked censorship." *Hyn*. No. 1, 1969, p. 13.
- "Of wings and feathers." *The Archer*. Vol. 24 No. 3, Autumn 1979, p. 19.
- "The old brave can barely name it." [A poem about the Wendigo.] *Lips*. No. 8, 1984, p. 11.

- “On this side of my coffee.” *Reflections of the Inward Silence*. Edited by Sal St. John Buttaci and Susan Linda Gerstle. 1976. Saddle Brook NJ: New Worlds Unlimited, p. 4. Also published in *Box 749: A Magazine of the Printable Arts*. Vol. 2 Nos. 2 and 3, 1979, p. 25.
- “Onions.” *Tiotis*. Vol. 1 No. 4, November 1979, p. 10.
- “Only because it hurts.” *Lips*. No. 11, 1985, p. 26.
- “Only the past lives here.” *Iota Poetry Quarterly*. No. 2, 1988, p. 5.
- “Out on parole.” *Four Seasons Poetry Club Magazine*. Summer 1979, p. 2.

P

- “Peekskill, New York.” *The Archer*, Vol. 25, Issue 3, Autumn 1980.
- “Perilous dining.” *Passaic Review*. Vol. 5 No. 1, Summer 1983., p. 32.
- “A possible omen.” *New Earth Review*. n.d., p. 15.
- “The product of mirrors.” *Quoin*. 1974 Annual. Edited by Arlis M. Snyder. Springfield MO, p.36. Also published in *Modus Operandi*, Vol. 8 No. 4, April 1977, p. 9.
- “The protection game.” *Stroker*. Vol.2 No. 3, Issue 6, p. 12.

R

- “Rag picker.” *The Phoenix*. (Morningstar Press, Haydenville, MA). Vol. 3 Nos. 2 and 3, Spring-Summer 1971, p. 60.
- “The release.” *The Archer*. Vol. 28, Issue 4, Winter 1983.
- “Remembering the king of darkness.” *Equality*. Issue 43, February 1974.
- “René Magritte.” *The Third Eye*. Vol. 7, Winter 1977-1978, p. 28.
- “A repetition of journeys.” *Some Friends*. Vol. 4, Summer 1976, p. 4.
- “The rhythm of all conundrums.” *Poet’s Nook*. Vol. 4, Spring 1977, p. 11.

S

- “Saint Marks Church in the Bouwerie: Offertorium.” *Quoin*. Vol. 4 No. 4, September 1971, p. 60.
- “The self-made song.” *The Archer*. Vol. 22, Issue 2, Summer 1974.
- “Self-indulgence.” *Womanchild*. No. 2, Summer-Fall 1977, n.p.
- “Self sculpture.” *The New Renaissance*. Vol 2 No 2, p. 14.
- “Sentry lights.” *Viewpoints*. No. 79, January 1972, p. 36.
- “She lives in the mirror.” *Connections* #5. Spring 1977, p. 13.
- “Shiva smiling in the Boston Museum.” *Tiotis*. Vol. 5 No 2, May 1983, p. 10.
- “The shock of living.” *Central Park*. Vol. 1 No 2, Fall 1981, p. 79.

- “A short romance.” *Footwork*. Vol. 5, 1983, p. 60. Also published in *The Hoboken Terminal*. Vol. 1 No. 1, Spring 1982, p. 17.
- “Shoulder hanging hair and boots.” *Sanskaras*. Vol. 1 No. 2, Winter 1968-1969, p. 52.
- “Shrapnel.” *New Kauri II*. 1980, p. 33.
- “Sing August.” *Encore*. Vol. 9 No. 4, Summer 1975, p. 8.
- “Small press symposium: the poet.” [Article.] *Contact/II*. Vol. 1 No. 1, November-December 1976, p. 11.
- “So there, Descartes!” *Group 74: Poems from the New York Poets’ Cooperative*. Edited by Edward Butscher, Roberta Gould, and Donald Lev. 1974. New York: New York Poets’ Cooperative, p. 45.
- “Some day a sudden craving.” *The American Pen*. Vol. 5, No. 3, Late Summer 1973, p. 65. Also published in *Sparrow*. No. 27, June 1973, p. 11
- “Someone in the audience.” *Calliope’s Corner*. January-February 1984, p. 6.
- “Something spoken.” *Four Seasons Poetry Club Magazine*. Spring 1982., p. 14.
- “The sound of a stormy letter.” *Junction*. Vol. 5 No. 1, Spring 1978, p. 38.
- “The sound of one heel clicking.” *New Leaves Review*. Spring-Summer 1986, n.p.
- “The stations of the cross.” *RAM — The Letter Box*. Vol. 3 No. 1, 1978, p. 27.
- “Storm warning.” *Group 74: Poems from the New York Poets’ Cooperative*. Edited by Edward Butscher, Roberta Gould, and Donald Lev. 1974. New York: New York Poets’ Cooperative, p. 44.
- “Strange berries.” *New Kauri II*. 1980, p. 34.
- “The supreme solstice.” *Encore*. Vol. 10 No. 4, Summer 1976, p. 11.
- “Suspense.” *Archer*. Vol. 25 Issue 1, Spring 1980.

T

- “Tenebrae.” *Stone Soup Poetry (Boston)*. No. 22, 1974, n.p.
- “Tenement living.” *Modus Operandi*, Vol. 8 No. 4, April 1977, p. 9.
- “Terror in the street.” *Poetry Pageant*. Vol. 1. Edited by Jean Wood. Washington DC: Magnetic Publishing Co., p. 24.
- “A test of strength.” *Grist*. Issue 10, 1966.
- “That damned September.” *Sing Heavenly Muse*. No. 3, Spring 1979, p. 48.
- “That precious business.” *St. Andrew’s Review*. Vol. 1 No. 3, Fall & Winter 1971. p. 58.
- “These days of magic.” *Reflect*. Vol. 4 No. 2, June 1982, p. 17.
- “These friendly streets.” *Lips*. No. 12, 1986, p. 28.

- "Thoughts on a permanent grin." *Poetry Venture*. Vol. 6 No. 1, Fall 1973, p. 25.
- "A tiff about nothing." *Four Seasons Poetry Club Magazine*. Spring 1982, p. 14.
- "Two spirit songs." *From Sea to Sea in Song*. Edited by Alfarata Hansel and Maybelle A. Lyon. 1975. Phoenix AZ: American Poetry League, p. 111.

V

- "The valley of thorns." *Paper and Air*. Vol. 1 No. 3, 1978, p. 22.
- "Versicle and response." *Working from Silence*. Edited by Nora Barraford, Kenneth Gibbs, and Stan Sanvel Rubin. 1971. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt Publishing Co., p. 22. Also published in *The Paper Promoter*. Vol. 1 No. 3, March 5, 1971, p. 28.
- "The voice from the mirror." *Quoin*. 1974 Annual. Edited by Arlis M. Snyder. Springfield MO, p. 35.

W

- "Walking on the Hudson." *Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream*. Vol. 2 No. 3, June 1981, p. 25.
- "Water baby." *Stroker*. No. 3, Fall 1975, p. 35. Also published in *The Spirit That Moves Us*, Vol. 1 No. 1, September 1975, p. 31.
- "The way it seems." *New Leaves Review*. Spring-Summer 1986. n.p.
- "The wheel comes round again." *New Leaves Review*. No. 9, 1983, n.p.
- "When stones have shed their skins." *Ally 84*, 1984, pp. 18-19.
- "Where will it all begin?" *Stone Soup Poetry (Boston) #16*, 1974.
- "Who cares about recognition?" *Ally 79*. 1979, p. 36.
- "Windfall." *Parthenon Poetry Anthology*. Edited by Angelo Aaron Schmuller. 1981. Far Rockaway NY: Parthenon Publishing, pp. 27-28.
- "The window across the street." *Perpetual Motion*. No. 17. 1983, p.8.
- "Winter night" *Mss.* (University of Pennsylvania student publication), Spring 1946, p. 7. [Holland was on the editorial staff.]
- "Witchcraft." *Aye*. Vol. 2 No. 1, October 1974, n.p.
- "The Wonder Wheel at Coney Island." *Love: A Journal of Innocence*. Issue 2, 1981, n.p.
- "Woodwinds." *Mss.* (University of Pennsylvania student publication), Spring 1946, p. 3. [Barbara Holland was on the editorial staff.]

Y

- "You never notice." *The Speculum*. No. 2, Spring 1975, p. 11.
- "Your mirror image speaks." *Lips*. No. 9, 1985, p. 19. Reprinted in *The Pomegranate Series*. No. 6, 1985.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BARBARA ADAMS HOLLAND was born on July 12, 1925 in Portland, Maine. Her childhood was spent in Doylestown, PA and then in Philadelphia. Her father was Leicester Bodine Holland (1882-1952), an architect who moved in mid-career to art history and archaeology. For a number of years he commuted weekly from Philadelphia to Washington, where he was Chief of the Division of Fine Arts at the Library of Congress. Later he taught at Bryn Mawr College, and also worked with the Corinth excavations of the American School in Athens.

The poet's mother was Louise Adams Holland (1883-1990), an archaeologist and academic specializing in the Latin language (her last work was a study of the Roman poet Lucretius). Her other passions were gardening, swimming, and exploring the mountains of the Adirondacks and Tuscany.

An aunt, Leonie Adams, was an esteemed poet, and a one-time Poet Laureate of the United States.

Barbara's sister, Marian (b. 1927), married an architect and lived in Philadelphia. Her brother, Lawrence Rozier Holland, became a physicist. Her sister Marian McAllister writes about Barbara's childhood:

Barbara was sickly for the first year or two and had little contact with other children.

She taught herself to read, at first from labels on food packages and ads in trolley cars. By the time she was five she was teaching me, two years younger, to read as well.

Living within walking distance of the University (of Pennsylvania) Museum, where her father often took her, Barbara developed an interest in other languages, first in hieroglyphics, then in Chinese.

All three of us went to an old-fashioned “dame school” of some twenty-four children from the University of Pennsylvania community. The single room held "classes" ranging from kindergarten through sixth grade.

Barbara then attended private schools, graduating from the Baldwin School in 1943.

Barbara Holland received a B.A. from University of Pennsylvania in 1948, and an M.A. from the same institution in 1951.

Although she had completed all the course work for a Ph.D., she left graduate school without completing her thesis.

She worked in Worcester, MA on a new edition of the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, taught at a college in West Virginia, researched genealogies, and then worked in New York City for a Wall Street brokerage.

Finally, the lure of Bohemia — Greenwich Village — and the life of a poet, became irresistible. With the slender income from a small cache of stocks and bonds, she quit working around 1962 and rented the apartment at 14 Morton Street in Greenwich Village that would be home for the rest of her life.

Her first chapbook publication, self-published and undated, was *Medusa*, a 20-page stapled booklet. Another collection, *Return in Sagittarius*, was published in 1965. Another chapbook was *A Game of Scraps* (1967). A projected volume of her poems with the photographs of Donald Curran apparently did not materialize, but the poems alone appeared in a slender chapbook as *Lens, Light, and Sound* (1968), reproduced in 2019 in *The Secret Agent*. Other small chapbooks were *Melusine Remembered* (1974), *On This High Hill* (1974), *You Could Die Laughing* (1975) and *Penny Arcana* (undated).

Holland received a Creative Arts Public Service Fellowship in 1974, and during the following year was engaged in workshops and visits with many schools. She was a fellow at the Macdowell Colony in 1976. She read frequently throughout the Northeast at poetry readings, guest-edited two issues of Boston’s Stone Soup Poetry journal, and read her work on radio for WBAI, WRVR, WUWM, and WNYC. She recorded for Folkways Records and on broadcasts for Voice of America.

The poet was also involved with The New York Poets Cooperative, a writers’ group founded in 1969. A founding member, she organized and scheduled poetry readings they hosted at St. John’s Church in the Village.

Her greatest success was in the then-burgeoning little magazines, and Holland could boast that her poems had appeared in over 1,000

magazines and publications. She was certainly one of the most-published American poets of the 1970s and 1980s.

Her association with The Poet's Press began in 1973 with the publication of *Autumn Wizard*, a sampler from her long cycle of poems inspired by the surrealist painter René Magritte. This cycle, *Crises of Rejuvenation*, was published by The Poet's Press, in 1973 and 1974 in two volumes, and remains in print in a single-volume 30th anniversary edition. Other collections of Holland's work from this publisher include *Burrs* (1977), *Autumn Numbers* (1980), *Collected Poems, Volume 1* (1980), *In the Shadows* (1984), *Medusa: The Lost Chapbook* (2019), and *The Secret Agent* (2019).

Another small press, Warthog Books, issued its own "selected poems" collection of Holland's work, *Running Backwards* (1983). Several contemporaneous reviews and essays had acknowledged Holland's extraordinary gifts, most notably a long review by Stephen-Paul Martin in *Central Park* (1981), and a symposium issue on the poet in *Contact II* (1979), but Holland never achieved the fame she richly deserved.

Holland's readings of her poems were from memory, even including her longer dramatic pieces. Audiences were riveted by her performances, whether of the spine-chilling "Black Sabbath," the self-effacing humor of "The Inevitable Knife," or the desolate sorrow of "Not Now, Wanderer." Michael Redmond wrote of her in 1981 in *The Newark Star-Ledger*, "[S]he is a poet who evades categorization. Her work has been variously described as romantic, mythic, supernatural and surreal; she is as adept at evoking a seascape as in creating a monologue by Medusa. There are city poems, and love poems, and poems both funny and terrifying. The common denominator is her extraordinary imagination, the classical precision of her language, and a wild sense of humor."

During her last five years, the poet was beset with health problems. She had difficulty reading her work, and her performances were marred by long pauses and memory lapses. After a series of small strokes, her health deteriorated and she spent some time recovering at her sister's home in Philadelphia. Returning to New York, she died there on September 21, 1988.

Commentary about Barbara A. Holland, including interviews, can be found at www.poetspress.org/fp_holland.shtml

For those who heard her, or who have collected her books, Holland remains a vital voice. She is still whispered about as "the Sybil of Greenwich Village."



The Poet's Press

PITTSBURGH, PA

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 Geometric 415. Poem titles are set in Schneidler Black.

The cover art incorporates René Magritte's *Good Fortune*, (1938) and the title-page includes a detail from that artist's 1959 canvas, *The Month of the Grape Harvest*. The image on the first leaf of the book is Magritte's *In Praise of Dialectics* (1936). The back cover photo of the poet is by Herman Emmet.

