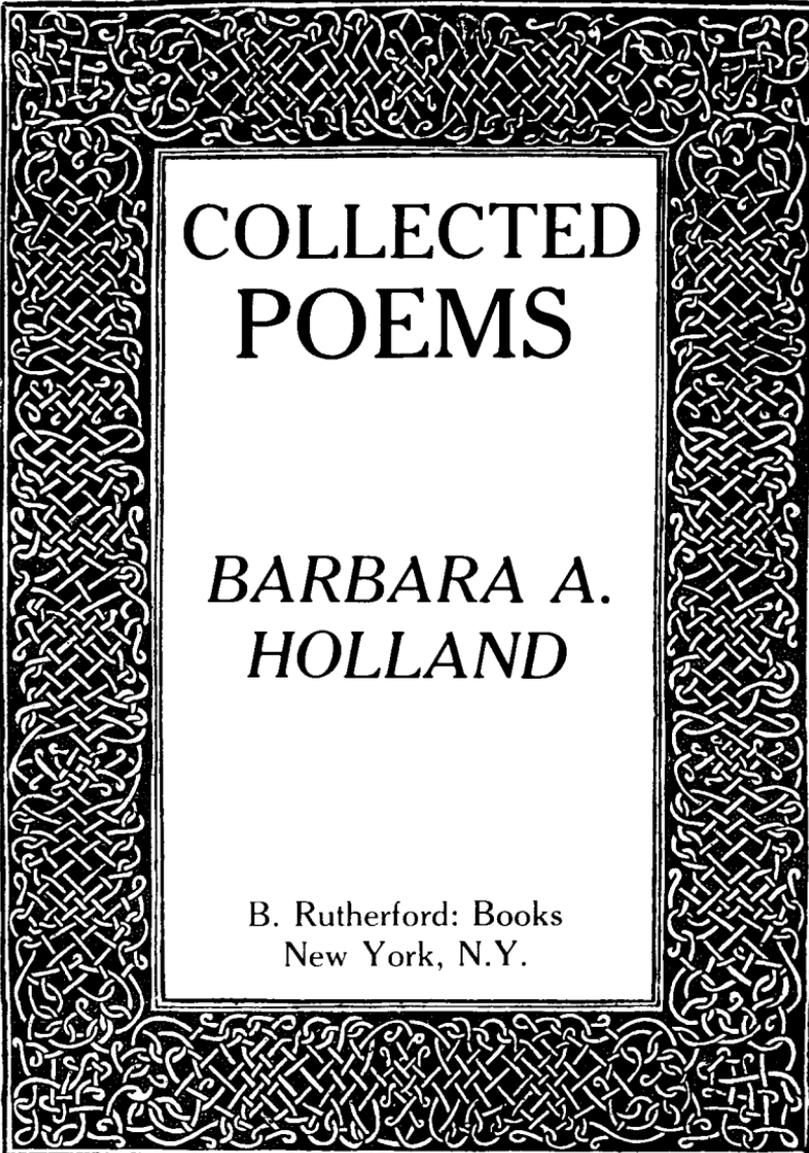


COLLECTED
POEMS

BARBARA A.
HOLLAND

B. Rutherford: Books
New York, N.Y.





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by Donald Curran*



CONTENTS

viii Foreword

A GAME OF SCRAPS

- 1 Scavenger
- 2 Strange Arrival
- 3 So Much for Innocence
- 4 The Comedy of Pain
- 4 Loafers of a Saturday Night
- 5 The House that Never Was
- 6 A Game of Scraps
- 6 Turncoat Night
- 7 This Incarnation
- 8 Side Issues

AFTER HOURS IN BOHEMIA

- 9 Facade
- 10 Terrorist
- 11 A Street of Many Shoulders
- 12 Museum
- 13 At Death of Time
- 14 Playground of the Losers
- 15 Near Enough to Tease
- 16 Stars Over Grove Street
- 17 Mocha
- 18 Night Frosted Tompkins Square
- 19 The Call of Carnival Street
- 20 The Crusader
- 21 Sidewalk Cafe
- 22 An Old Door
- 23 Time of Waiting
- 24 The Moment of Truth
- 25 Parochial Obsession
- 26 After Hours in Bohemia
- 27 East from Here
- 28 Rooftop Orators

AT BREAKING POINT OF SKY

- 29 Dark Autumn
- 30 The Gem Dweller
- 31 Stabs from the Sun
- 32 When Stones Have Shed Their Skins
- 33 Not as the Crippled Tree

- 34 The Valley of Little Thunders
- 35 Leafsuff and Stone
- 35 Gathering Storm
- 36 Only for Birds
- 37 Sea Branch in Sand
- 38 Variations
- 39 String Figures in a Grove
- 40 Challenge
- 41 At Breaking Point of Sky
- 42 Possibly One Day

IN SUDDEN SECRET

- 43 The Braggart Hilt
- 44 Draughts of Cacophony
- 44 The Voice of Now
- 45 Rubbish to Burn
- 46 In a Year's Turning
- 47 When Brash Worlds Live
- 48 On the Midway
- 49 Breaking the Curse of Blankness
- 50 In Sudden Secret
- 51 Optical Illusions
- 52 Where Tension Is

BAD COMPANY

- 53 Next to Nothing
- 54 Elegy for Alexis
- 55 Always One More Time
- 56 Bad Company
- 57 Moon Drinker
- 58 Medusa
- 60 The Call of the Tinkling Cymbals
- 61 On Hoving's Hill
- 62 St. Mark's Church in the Bouwerie:
 Offertorium
- 64 Ride Up the Wind
- 65 A Repetition of Three
- 66 Protest from a Singular Profession
- 67 A Poet Declaims in a Graveyard
- 68 Scherzo at Lavalette Beach
- 69 The Buddha in Milky Quartz
- 70 Orient Moon

OUT OF AVERNUS

- 71 The Last Plantagenet
- 72 The Argo
- 75 Eurydice
- 76 The Sybil of Cumae
- 77 Coffee House Poet
- 78 Portrait of Lazarus
- 80 Through Snow Under Blackened Moon
- 82 The Hymn of the Rocks
- 84 Melusine Discovered
- 86 Melusine, Our Sister
- 87 Recollections of a Memorable Man

YOU COULD DIE LAUGHING

- 89 Breaking Down the Night
- 90 From An Open Window
- 91 Photograph of a Reflection
- 92 Mad Song
- 93 Return this Note Rewritten
- 94 Terror on Cornelia Street
- 95 The Pitch
- 96 In the Nick of Time
- 97 In the Mesh of Maya
- 98 No Common Goblet
- 99 A Party Any Time
- 100 You Could Die Laughing
- 101 Bantam Executive
- 102 Vectors of Advice

TOWARD MAGRITTE

- 103 Krishna in the Afternoon
- 104 Shamballah
- 105 Exeunt
- 106 The Feather-Painting Lunatic
- 107 The Wheel Resumes
- 108 Strange Forest
- 109 The Full-Stop Door
- 110 Water Baby
- 111 Celebration of the Self

FOREWORD

This volume is the first in a series bringing together the collected works of America's greatest imaginative poet, Barbara A. Holland.

This first collection comprises a number of poems which have previously appeared only in magazines, many of them now extinct. Additionally, we have included the complete text of the poet's first book, *A Game of Scraps*, as well as all the works appearing in the chapbooks *Penny Arcana*, *Melusine Discovered*, *On this High Hill*, and *You Could Die Laughing*. The poems from two unpublished chapbooks, *East from Here*, and *Lens, Sight & Sound* will likewise be found here.

A few words about the arrangement of this book are necessary. Our initial intention had been to maintain the author's original order, and to title each segment according to the chapbooks in which they originally appeared. This method has its benefits in that it reveals the development of the poet through several "periods," but offers the serious defect of leaving related poems scores of pages from one another.

Our philosophy is that a volume of poetry should have a dramatic structure of its own—a beginning, a middle and an end. Few readers, however, will want to undertake these more than 100 poems at a single sitting, so that any attempt to structure such a vast number of poems cannot meet with success. Accepting this reality, we re-arranged the poems into shorter segments. Each segment brings together poems related either in theme or mood; each segment demonstrates the poet's staggering talents in a given type of poetic effort; and each segment may be read as a separate "chapter" or "book" in itself. What is lost to the historian in chronological interest will be gained by the general reader as a more exciting book.

A *Game of Scraps* introduces the author and her New York City surroundings, followed by *After Hours in Bohemia*, which evokes the beauty and alienation of the poet's life in Manhattan even more intensely. In *At Breaking Point of Sky*, we turn to the natural world rather than that of man's artifacts. *In Sudden Secret* is devoted to self-revelation.

Later segments of this book show us the poet's imagination run riot. In *Bad Company*, we are treated to a host of monsters, while *Out of Avernus* plunges into the deep well of myth and lore, from Pallas Athena to the unfortunate Melusine. And quite properly, two poems apostrophising other poets are included here where they belong—with the gods!

Whimsy takes the reins in *You Could Die Laughing*: here the poet rehearses the kind of almost surreal twists that will characterize *Crises of Rejuvenation*, her 90-poem cycle whose integral reprint will comprise Volume 2 of this series. In anticipation of that Volume, whose guiding spirit is the imagery of Rene Magritte, we have ended this one with a segment called *Toward Magritte*.

For the patient reader, these poems are their own reward. Those who desire to know more about the works and their author are pointed toward the excellent symposium on Barbara A. Holland that appeared in *Contact II*, as well as other interviews and criticism that have appeared in the small press journals. Some of these materials will be gathered together at a later date into a supplemental volume of this series.

The publisher wishes to acknowledge those whose devoted and patient efforts have kept Barbara A. Holland's work before the reading public—Stone Soup Poetry (Boston), Bard Press (New York) and Cherry Valley (New York) Editions, whose original chapbooks are now perpetuated here.

B. Rutherford
New York NY

COLLECTED POEMS



A GAME OF SCRAPS



SCAVENGER



AM A WANDERER with: dirty feet
peering through the ventails of the visored faces,
sniffing the breaths of open doors,
waiting beneath the ledges of the careless windows
for sounds that might spill over
for my claws to catch
and crack for the extraction of a swarm of things,

large-eyed and catfoot careful
of the nerves they walk.

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 noon-white streets,
the closet audience of somnambulists, the ear
that bites, the eye that masticates, the nerve that sings.
I am the wanderer with dirty feet
who wipes worlds from existence by removing dirt.

STRANGE ARRIVAL

Were I to lean against you
you would be soft as air to me
would not support me,

Were I to try to touch you
you would shrink inside
as shadow into gnomon
on the boss of noon
would be intangible

Were I to seek you out
on maps papered
to the lining of my skull,
you would feel my crayon
run your lifeline
down my palm, should scold me
for importunate advances
would remain invisible.

Shadow Monster,
we are twinned upon
one tide that swings a year
to me again and you
as well against
the better judgment
of my own command
into the long pull
of your breathing

at a snow flick
on my wrist, at breath
of shadow before it falls
upon me after long
separation ending
limps in acquiescence
to inevitable odds.

Gratefully I weaken
to your welcoming,
inlock the lies that guard you
from your sovereign self.

SO MUCH FOR INNOCENCE

There is no getting at you,
no passing those eyelids.

The lashes laid out
on your cheek
are final.

Your face is locked,

but you are still in there.
Your shadow lives
on the window blind,

busied with your personal
rites of the moon,

and no candle
to show for it,

Your listening leans
hard against the inside
of your forehead,

recording
me.

THE COMEDY OF PAIN

If this is where I hope to seal myself
against the leaching in of influence that swells
midtrunk to knife-edged rock that saws through fibres,
or, in their greatness, springs my frame apart,
I know I cannot trust, press hard
on costume fabric made to bear
a short run sputtering of spotlight gold
which tears at touch. I cannot walk a floor
condemned of unsure planks. I hope,
but hope must mince across uncertain wood.

Should force be loosed through dog-howl loss,
this gesture of a moon might fray
to crumbs against the onyx stares of bolted doors
streetlength animical, where once I found
in showbrush mockery a gamin laugh that stripped
the soft rot of self-pity from my banishment, and sneered
my anger into snakehide of a harlequin.

LOAFERS OF A SATURDAY NIGHT

Walking among my whence, I watch them, propped
against the moment, unconcerned with when or where;
some cast
from Moliere into swagger clothes. Their burnished hair
helmets their structure of indifference and frames
their faces with the narrowness of scorn. My ways
through thornbreaks of my own are knotted, slit
by the implication of slack swords which arrogance
fits into idle fists. I set my jaw against
my latest flow of words and knock them out
from sockets where their sounds have lodged. Along
this nugget plucking way my monitors
toss loose change to the wind, and pick my locks.

THE HOUSE THAT NEVER WAS

Locked between walls and the roof the light has made
against surrounding drain of people, I forget
that Time progresses as it does outside,
but here there is so little change.

A light or two goes out. The promenade
goes on. Heat presses evenly from herd backed up
by simple obstacles till heat and light
have domed us over in an airless room.
Emergence into darkness brings relief. I stagger out
as from confinement in a basement, reel as Time
comes head down hunched at me, when we collide,
I with the stopped clock stuck upon an hour
that played itself so many hourlengths over,
knocked into morning, and Time eating up
all but the staleness that the night forgot.

A GAME OF SCRAPS

How can they crowd me out, or buffet me
to gutter walk with groundlings? Where these courtiers slouch
the shuffling service of their cardboard kings
no one shall threaten me. No figurante lurks crouched
to lash at me. Fists flourish, spattering the light
to showers of counterfeit where I have crashed
a bull charge through their midst. Now that I come,
I carry my own here through this melange
of taut immediacies, and pick them off
as with a lath the teeth of picket fence
in serrate slur of contact, with contempt, I touch,
yet only feel the objects of my choosing.

This is a game of scraps. I snatch the best.
The second best are got by accident, some caught
on hooked excrescences of mind while others wrap
their lengths about my ankles. What I bring
out of this witch-crazed moment I shall turn
to uses of my own, rebuild, rewire, reactivate with sound
until I come once more this way inside myself,
the weft of this night's dances on my back.

TURNCOAT NIGHT

Hostility seeps out. Each door that gapes
a crackbreadth reeks of it. Scowls follow me,
measure my time of staying till impatience boils
and sends me from unfinished eating. Eyeslot stares
guard cash, answer my questions, order my exit, out
upon announcements of the absences of friends
cut off through backslit dealing. Even the singers left
on rankness of indifference, including one returned
to penny cups when others passed me by in charity.

The preferred hand rolls tightwad into bludgeon,
curled hard over fistcore coldness
as the horns blow insolence.

THIS INCARNATION

I should be
shaking off layers
of experience

until all
the shedding ceases
at the pivotal
nothing,

and I am
the identical portrait
of everyone,

of all,

but rather,
I am being hammered
by the beat
of my heart

into the vortex
of an absence.

SIDE ISSUES

Above this yelp of lights the milksoft moon hangs tentative, remains irrelevant. One blot cornered midcourse in climbing, may be flicked aside, but not my candle or its finial that sprouts above the shuffling of uncertain feet, for mine are quite decided. What I get I want, or I would not be scuffled to a nailhead stop as foreign gem grit in an oyster shell, nor yet be shouldered from the curbstone to the gutter if the gain did not outweigh the trouble. There are knots in this rat tail worth untying which, if not untied, would hitch me sky slipped crooked, and irrelevant.



AFTER HOURS IN BOHEMIA



FACADE



RAIN that takes no pleasure in its falling
ceases, hangs, swells, and sits down on all
outside the costly welcome of an open door
and grid
through which a pair of sullen eyes
kindle no fires in empty pockets. Underfoot
moisture intensifies. The pack behind, all fists,
elbows, and blunted antlers, leans upon the backs
of those out for a walk, scuff slowed to scrape
and full stop by a palisade of backs that go
as far as backs in front allow.

No one may trust the light to dry him,
the marquee to cut the rainfall, now that the wet encases,
battering from overhead proving too primitive.

A voice of rust and tin can edge of jaggedness
announces law which tolerates no standing around theaters,
though theaters stand where crowds are forced to stop.

Move *them* instead. Move doors and photographs,
the masquerade of loud life at the mud-thick core
of baffled rage. Move all this puff of personality, that steps
and frontage may be kept whatever way
the law would have them. Wetness drives,
immobilizes. Take that theater home. The rest of us
have problems which are getting wet.

TERRORIST

The sun strides bully-fisted through the streets
seeking a head to smash, and where he walks
I shall not go. I dye my limbs a summer brown in dark
of curtained contemplation, lie upon
a long day's waiting as the fan keeps up
a wind in place of wind the sun had killed and hauled
into the court to crumble. As the night
strengthens, I straighten up and dress for peace.

Grains of the dead wind stick to sweat of legs
as footsteps send them from the sidewalk. Suddenly,
an adolescent breeze breaks from the alley mouth,
swaggers in my direction, brushes me,
and flicks the ashes of its father from my arm.
Tomorrow walls will hide me while the sun seeks out
another wind to strangle and a will to break.

A STREET OF MANY SHOULDERS

This is a street of many shoulders: bare shoulders,
shirted and leather shoulders, shoulders in suits,
and rope-rough woolen shoulders;
crouched and cunning shoulders, shoulders spread to bear
wide snows of ermine and rich dyes,
shoulders high-pitched and gabled down to siphon off
despair through drainpipe arms to clench of fingers,
knotted and knuckled on frustration:
shoulders collared up around the ears
braced by the buttress arms and rooted fast
in pockets where the hands, tendrilled to change,
take sustenance from keys; shoulders so high
that elbows proxy for them in dispute with cheek,
eyeglassed, bridge of nose, or hat, and shoulders turned
to hanging gardens of indifference,
or sword hilt shoulders stretched
to the ultimate in all the limited
coffin cornered outreach of the prude,
and finally, nonshoulders. Such have I
whose unaccomplished shoulders fail to answer back in kind
to the lecherous lean, the short shove and the ram
so often that I flinch my eyes aside
to see if I am here, the only one,
walking this street, who has no shoulders.

MUSEUM

So much violence, so much heat and light,
so much search for slaughter, so much greed,
and all without disguise! The quick escape,
the easy egress and the back way up
across the roofs and downstairs into hidden doors.
A shower of sparks, explosions, and a knife,
pursued and pursuer, mesmerized police,
all marked for delectation or for crossing out.
Even the moon is counted off as maverick,
kicked to a corner withering, but still in sight.
Here danger bids us duck and marks our hiding place,
raises a riot or a crowd, and disappears.

AT DEATH OF TIME

Shrinkage, amputation and paralysis.
A highway cut to pierlength by a tape of steel
once as sinuous as river, tense and set
in burnished vengeance. Where the girders marched
the length of loading shed, their feet
are left stuck marching.

Like splinters tightly rooted in the skin,
these pin-stuck people pierce their stance
sun wisped to whisper girth, raisined
and dwindled wire twist by the heat and wind
dazed by the river, white in its waiting
at the severed end of progress
deadened by a sun that hisses out
both height and length, reduces
movement that the face of death
may quiver on the stiffened waters
as the last tramp pier to its termination
nowhere, as people diminish
yet remain alive.

PLAYGROUND OF THE LOSERS

If these are losers, tell me of their loss.
They brag the status of the loser, strut
a slight irregularity as if their trim
had dimmed and roughened, puff it up
to height of fashion out of shabbiness,
prate of it counterclockwise, rounding blocks
in widdershins of disarray, display it,
pound it until the pavement, charged with it,
throbs at the height of heartbeat, boast of it
on hoardings in a host of faces washed in it
who sell its slacklust songs in dark cafes
for nickels in a cup.

What is this loss
that blossoms from their coats? A lack
perhaps, of riches that they do not need
and do not want, an insufficiency
but not a loss. Point out just one
cut out at midriff in a yelling hole
that sucks a rainwind through it. Point out one
listing for a lack of balance to the downward side,
one with a face of gullies packed with salt
deposited by tears, one reckless with
his safety, courting death or injury
through half-planned accident.

I see but one, drum major to his column
or regiment that guards the final remnant of his pride,
a dandy with a smile festooned across the truth,
his ego trussed to saddle of a dancing mare
with hidden wires and rope. I see but one
pretending conquest at the gate of loss
whose play of fraudulence might well be fraud.

If these are losers, not a single rag of loss
hangs, careless, from a pocket of unseeing eyes.

NEAR ENOUGH TO TEASE

A half an hour from here, a few blocks east,
or near enough to tantalize when walking
dark emptiness to footsong, when the jangling swells
insistent in the upperskull, throngs in the caverned head
sweat to congested stop. Grotesques and fops converge
on consciousness. Light sweetens and the crackling stars
tingle at back entrances of conversations, fall
at scattered points along my arm, and I am pull
and start. Legs which know their robot routes so well
that I have wandered off course on my way to something else,
once more, swing habit driven, back and forth.

This time I shall not go. A barrier
shuts out that territory, but not easily. The gate
swings hinge-point singing that there is still time,
still time within the week, within this life. A creak, a grin,
a quick way out, immediate salve should sores break out
from new infection, should old wounds, not yet healed,
require the quick plunge in the forest self,
of dark among bells and goblins, cloistered souls, and shapes
whose closeness dulls the tub-beat of the braindepth gong.

STARS OVER GROVE STREET



LUM STARS

emaciated, underfed, cast
bleary glances on this street
of noise and of impatient cars
' which try to dissolve all obstacles
at sound of horn, which bleat
the stars to bleating back
in wavering and senile voices,

all rusted out to rasp and gravel
like the gameleg song
forced up the nightclub steps
and like the voice of one
who has bubbled up on stale
beer breath and overflows
in sprawl upon the sidewalk,
one who beats a surly gong
and gets it back
in gutter winks from overhead.

These stars are fumed
to poverty and stagger on cheap wine
are driven back into their tenements
by all this falling up
and stumbling down, dithered
half to death on jolts of jazz
that jog, exhausted, back to Basin Street.

Beyond it all
puddles of darkness
and a single light that shouts
a storefront width to hope,
perhaps adventure
and which draws mothmen and whirring women
to the window. Wine in the rinds
of geodes where the stars have sunk
glazed alcoholic, greets them
from amethyst which guards its wearer

against drunkenness. Choral anarchy
and backslap, knowing leers
from pyrite where the stars have made
vitality half vulgar in gross
expenditure in wealth, hard gained and early
lost upon moth eyes, on sleazy cloth
turned to hardware
in bittersnap of sequins
all counterfeit before a shrine
of quartz, murmuring
within its depths
of stars to come.

MOCHA

The hothead salvos of a maniac
mounted on explosions charged the curb and shattered
the bitterness that lined my throat. A troubled calm
coated my swallowing with quinine strength
when, all at once, a warplunge, started from the gutter,
ruptured the stuff of space in spurting demons forth
to hurl a smash of crockery through window glass
and scrape the last bitterness from roof of mouth.

How long till I regain that burnished savor,
spread it beetleback and lustrous
on my outlook, taste it strong
in purpose on the blandness of everyday depends
on frequency of those who scorch the air for several yards,
all to blow up at short catch
of a traffic light in bloodspurt stoppage
of an undertone.

NIGHT FROSTED TOMPKINS SQUARE

Here feet touch moondeath
chill beneath a mist that frosts
to semblance of cement
beneath a winter web of stunted lamps,
formal beyond formality of Lords,

for even spectres
of forgotten courtiers move slowly
as the light that shines through them
makes whisper density of shape and mass
clouded to a mockery of flesh,

but here the stillness
builds in marble, coffins space,
cold cast immobilizing
breath that even ghosts require
as filling for their half
begun suggestions of humanity.

The gate is locked
to those who walk here living.
Once inside, a mortal
is an outline of a man
fumed thick with moats,

crowding and separating
as his skeleton dissolves
transparent, as the ground
beneath him frees his feet
from contact and he runs,
becomes the act of running
and remains no more a man
until he breaks the gray gasp
at the shoplit street.

THE CALL OF CARNIVAL STREET

I hack the rind away, reem out, and hew
the hard core from this flux that lards a cluttering
that cramps and eases for no reason, whet my knife
for lopping branches whipped against my eyes, renew my axe
in bite on motive. Why this shouldering,
this hip-jut bruising and a cheapjack stance
strike spurts of phrase and imagery down at dark of head
only a nutcrack buffeting will tell.

The smell of challenge wakes upon the smash
of light and crowdpush. Massiveness of block
to roadway ruffles beast as growls unroll,
breaking to words and phrases in a snarl that hangs
a thoughtwidth from my face. My sword sinks through,
releasing strands that flutter in a whip and flash
which I remember and which fall in place
on walls, on table tops, on shoulder spans, or drop
in full form, scum inscribed within my cup.

THE CRUSADER



T PROW between two walls
high up among fire-stricken
casement wings, in gilt of glass
and setting sun your discipline
the stone folds of your mantle,

rest linked hands of mail
on hilt of broadsword, rooted
in cement and pointing down
to convocation of the ingest streets
that lead your subjects to you
unaware of scant ledge, heavy
with your cross and crowns,
high floors above their discontent.

Look in, back
of your grime-packed eyes,
beneath your casque,
down clerestory aisles in panoply
of battle-shredded banners,
faded rags in rage of bore and eagle
where the heroes lie,
armoured and ridged, exactly
as you stand, niched into rectitude
of narrowness above
the swarms of small streets
hived with hooded doors
in all directions, carrying
their hopes of livelihoods
maintained, but not of heaven.

Blind beneath the level
of the boughs laced over asphalt
of tag and dog we keep our eyes
under severe control, prevent escape
to waywardness of open windows
stars, and the cut-throat moon.

More stone than yours
they prowl spasms of crooked streets
Their granite downs all progress
of ascent to cornices, as yours
may only rake the rooftops
of the bank, or ride the long glide
inwards on the stroke of nones.

SIDEWALK CAFE

We have five tables empty.
Are you looking for a table?
This way to the entrance.
Are you missing someone?

People, what are you looking for?
Your eyes are looking,
but not your faces,
searching into corners
under plates, in cups.

Are you looking for an angry motorcycle,
a mounted policeman,
or a unicorn?

If you are looking
for the doorway out,
it is not for sale.

AN OLD DOOR

Gaunt recluse
of a door at top of steep
steps stretching tall within
the shelter of a shallow niche,
an introvert, a derelict afflicted
with a tension which is more
than cavity a doorknob left; roots
stem and blossom having been removed
leaving only the hint hole
to the other side worn silent
by a long soured widowhood.

Throughout the day
deep nests of shadows among the bone thrusts
waking through a ground of stone
pocket their secrecy.

Words lose their way in wilderness
of damp wool wadding jaws.
Eyes seek escape in penceave
points of sunlight patched to lids.

Three faces,
full of what goes on behind them,
hang out their silence
for the eye to break at keystone
of the overhanging arch
above the door, at tops
of barley sugar twists
dividing windows.

The narrow wood retreats,
its shrunken comprehension
squeezed within the tight rule
of pinched quadrilaterals

an introvert whose ear at keyhole
cannot rouse, whose censorship
stuffs strands of long mustaches
into granite mouths, locks up
a span of history and stands on guard
keeping time secluded in discarded rooms
that no least sound or sight
of it may pass the hill.
No garbage dumped, or rubbish under law.

TIME OF WAITING

On subway platforms
late hour feet are hammers
of loneliness. Hollow,
as I, this sound
that starts and stops
which in no single step
has called to me.

On subway platforms
empty soda cans
roll to the edge, roll off.

The coming train is full
of you, yet the invisible
feet of aimless hours
are never yours.

Subways are sporadic songs
that no one sings.

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

Knives in the sun
half hidden in the hands
slipped from the pocket,
in display, in pride,
threat hovering.

How much blood
has been shed here,
Park of a hundred faces
and as many years
in individual lives?

Danger lurks behind
the lattices of shadows;
quick feet and sudden steel.

The bongos romp
over wreckage of stale honor.
Danger in cramped lives

in language strafing
with syllables.

How many lives
have been taken here,
Park with a thousand faces
and as many leaves,
blowing for—how long?

How many atoms
in the steel? Quick death!
A never changing sun.

PAROCHIAL OBSESSION

Sleeved brown
in sooty brick, this steeple
lifts a hand
furled into a fist
that shouts imperatives
of index finger

lifted to specific sky
directly above the church
and nowhere else.

Why there,
and only there? with obdurate
persistence silence
casts a vote of affirmation
and upholds the gesture.

No sky
but that which has been chosen
suffers scrutiny
as fertile ground
for maturation
of a miracle.

Follow
the pointing finger
up,
up and up
in burrowing through blue
on climb beyond the highest
cirrus station.

Nothing moves.
A jet tail froths.

AFTER HOURS IN BOHEMIA

The sign swung
singing tunelessly
and bade me dance.

How shall I dance in this street
of shrouded windows
in front of those disapproving
slots in walls
under a mortuary lamp?

Something scrambles up ahead,
slides, slewing sideways
to my feet; a handbill
promising a play that folded
just two nights ago.

I only walk this narrowness
seeking the skyburns
on the night left
by the careless stars,

looking hopefully
for ghosts up there
for there are none down here.

EAST FROM HERE

Domes of umbrellas
sailing past the door
with a semblance
of regularity:

palanquins
crests of camel humps
howdahs,
pinnacles of god-carts.

Curl of the ram's horn.
Coffee dying slowly in the cup.

A drift of rain,
a tide of branches
blowing from the east

Raga, bales of silk
from Basra,
soaked and soiled.

A high ring
run from ear through ear.

What will become of us?

ROOFTOP ORATORS

Gargoyles squat on gutter edge of roofs.
Stone heads pack full of stone in which no matter stirs,
broken to action by electric flickering.
Eyes bulge against the world and keep it back
unsorted in raw jumble of prolixity.

Life stumbles through the streets as drainclog plentiful as rain
weighted with litter in a night-howl flood
bringing its abundance to the Gargoyle
who consumes all that roars down on him
and lets it shout its unassimilated bulk and flow,
unaltered, through the waste course of his gullet.

Beneath this deluge we are almost drowned,
head crushed in roofpitch washoff and its thickening
which rose unprocessed to a granite head,
and equally disorganized, poured, uncontrolled,
through lips dragged open by a hanging underjaw
slung from a conduit mouth.



AT BREAKING POINT OF SKY



DARK AUTUMN

Dark strands of hair
across the walks. Torn hair
streaming from an undertow of Autumn.

Grains of dust flow
in continuous tresses, scud
the surfaces of paving. Afternoons
weaken with overwork.

Beneath the benches
desperation tears at tufts
and pulls them out.

Tell me that no ghost
sits and combs black filings
from the thinning of its Autumn hair
and strews them on the ground.

The march of pale lamps
baleful in the dusk, blink
into command where madness sits
flailing battered wisps
across the moon and drums
the broken slats of benches
with an Autumn mind.

THE GEM DWELLER



HEAR YOU
towering. Galena breaks
beneath your surface
coming up to eyes that steel
against defilement.

Quartz bursts your smile
to drifts of sun
through seep of fog
to fractured brainwrack whiteness.

Malachite mellows
along your summering
at creep of eye as mischief
of a brilliance tossed
by leaves to rollick
barefoot on the rain-sprung moss
and slow.

At sleek of calcite,
rivering grease wavered
thymed downwards in a burn
of oil over grief of glass,

I know that you heal
all that you touch with unguent
of the moon as if the selenite
that creams your voice
had never been sufficient
to inform me of the sly glance
sweetness of you, had not come
pearl in the nightwarmth
of your words.

I hear you
inch by inch
 castled to share
to send me selfdown wandering
through depths of stone
through grape-toothed ways
of amethyst, and then
alone, to climb the long road
back into your eyes.

STABS FROM THE SUN

How is protection
from your hard-hurled blast
to stand against the hay-hot
sweetness of your summering?

Windows and doors will drink it
in until the gilded bird
creeks round a bitter arc
and shrieks a moonlight
withering throughout the night
leaving a knot of dying
where my breath stopped short.

WHEN STONES HAVE SHED THEIR SKINS

Who can say there are no souls in stones,
and who can look at Kunzite
and say that they have bodies,

gauze ripped from the garments of the sun,
a plumage shed by luminous
transparent birds, spent splinters of the morning,

mineral and miracle, held at its climax
in a sheath of stone,
gossamer against its ending?

Youth, northern, frangible inside
drops of blue opal as if dawn had bled
its earliest moments, as if clots of sky
concealed in stone, had been preserved
before the daylight killed it;

all the weathers of the world in quartz;
mist depths of white sand shallows in aquamarine
on frost of breath inside a shell of stone
take life from light and strain at carapace
until the day its long endurance breaks
before eternal pressure from within,
Who would be surprised? Not even God
would have expected it?

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?

NOT AS THE CRIPPPLED TREE

Not for you the dagger cast of ice
slipped as a severed sleeve
and sloughed to earth. Too stout of trunk are you
to wear decay as ornament
and moulder picturesquely in a swamp.

If tree, how much more tree are you than branch,
thick as the shank of forest starveling;
how much more than twig,
for twiglike, you have slit the moon across
that sudden wind, would with a flourish
split it halved, could rob that roundness
of its structure in a snap,
sparked from the sprout of premise?

You rob the hollow curve down dark
of half mind heritage. The old
unquestioned formula evolves,
encrusts in rough of bark, becomes
leafed with a splash of lenses
in which sunlight plays magic
which you know can wound and know
too well how deeply, too well
to dangle talismans to blind the birds,
too thoroughly to let them
lance the stuff of self.

THE VALLEY OF LITTLE THUNDERS

Something matures,
enlarges here, drinks its vitality
from moisture,
develops a precarious ability to stand,
has yet to get about
without stumbling,
catching on objects
when passing them or tilting
heavily to the side and falling,

wallows as if without legs
and revolves in its dent
among the mountains, digging it deeper
and enlarging its circumference.

In some uninhabited hollow,
skirted by ridges and made safe
by the highest hills, whose spines
are roads, blocked in
by scrub and woodland, this continuous
ripening buzzes its gain
in weight and size in a low roar,
muffled as if deeply buried.

Vibrations, running underground
beneath the ridges,
excite the small leaves of the undergrowth
into a nervous fluttering,
then every tree stands as if paralyzed
and the grass is untouched by wind.

Ask nothing
about anything you notice
here. Your ignorance is sacred.

LEAFSURF AND STONE

Waves of feathers spatter on the walls,
in fern dance boiling, leap to window ledge.

Waves of feathers spatter on the walls
where eyes that own the windows watch their falls,
retreats and pounces when the frond spray calls
to room depths, scattering past windworld edge.

Waves of feathers spatter on the walls
in fern dance boiling, leap to window ledge.

GATHERING STORM

The message bobs
on the green air
of early evening;

a tight swarm of querulous
innuendoes leads nowhere,
dips and ascends,

pauses at ear level,
flirts with the treachery
of nettles, withdraws
among the lowest leaves.

The thunder flexes muscles,
waits. It is time that
the foothills were breaking
the last frail tissue
of sleep and stirring.

The full growth
of the mountains
will roll over later.

ONLY FOR BIRDS



ONLY FOR BROKEN NECKLACES OF BIRDS

severed in flight and rearranged,
new linked, though loosely locked

my sky-filled eyes well up
against the light as if the high tide
tears were slowly rising,

as if upon their gloss
a mystery had been reflected
confused by tilt of head,
by shift of shadow, lost
in the hardening of reticence.

Clouds cross the cornea,
now open to the easy loyalties
of hosting birds, bead shot
through grain of iris
as if lashes never had flattened
beneath the sluice of acrid waters,
as if the clouds of birds had always
traversed space that once flashed
fitfully with wings and swords
palladia burnt out upon the idiot night.

Not now the Gorgon
in the hour of truce
in face cast up to evening
some day to be as crazed with wickering
of furrows left behind
on nettled skin laid over ache:

hunger beneath the boles
of rot-soft trees and loneliness
along clay thirst and dust of leaves
as once before when all the sap
of springs and creeks lay dead.

Medusa sleeps at dusk.
Her eyes no longer mine, close
with the density of darkness liberate
my eyes to wander with the random
birds, to float decisive
in the wake of clouds.

SEA BRANCH IN SAND

Who lies half buried in the sand?
Whose arm and shoulder curve as a swimmer's,
sundeeep in underglow of moonwilt silvering,
pulling at tug of grains packed into
will of weight upon it?

That day when sudden wrench
shall work it loose, an apparition,
massaging aching muscles, will be seen
to bare bone under sheath of satin
to a cautious wind whose rub
and polish wears the roughness from the sea soft bough
to flesh of Naiad till a wave-wrought Daphne stands
naked in branch crooked reach of limb as shimmering silk
creeps over coral endodermis brought
to dawnshell over bloodreach
of the sun through wood.

VARIATIONS

When the frost settles
on his whiskers and quickens them
into the stiffness of sensitized rods,
as fault finders, catchers
of unwarranted lint, or as critical
reviewers of the wind,

the faint chill of a phantom worry
crawls inside my bones
but on the next thaw of his whiskers
exits as a ghostly sweat.

That is why I am never
convinced clear through
with a cold that would break my bones
by the freezing of a residue
of doubt within them

for, after all, it is only frost
coated to the softness of amiable hair.
There is always somewhere a fugitive sun
which is prey to innumerable whims.

STRING FIGURES IN A GROVE

Hooked over outspread hands string flashes, darts,
forms squares and rhomboids up leapstarts through grove,
whose hands display cross twigs and sticks
loose bound to intersecting points of buds
blurred to excitement, through a slit of smooth
and pliant youth laced into saw slip of diagonals?

Burnt briar and blackthorn
caught at crotch, jointed and link bent. Roodscreen
mottled in a fiddler's glade, all of its grasses
bristled high, pricked up for listening
at tip of every blade for sounds of sun.

Birds quiver at urgency of mindbolt nudge.
Nothing has crosses behind the fretwork
and to while the time to variety
of stem and shade, those hands
which loop and pluck the string
are threaded and prepared to rush apart
lash eyes with new designs
within which constant winds
act out a new concerto.

CHALLENGE

So it is snow
in the throat again,
forced there,

driven almost to the threshold
of bronchial blockade
against my own breathing
in its lunge against invasion.

Snow! A weapon—
and I have none but obstinacy—
surges, speeded into like
of gust to that
which backs it downward
to its starting place.

It is snow
ice crisp of air
as knuckie-duster of the wind
that reviles me.

If it were not
for this force at lock
of horn and brace
of shoulder with equivalent
boldness, I would no longer
be propped into this
upright posture

and this walk would only
be another recital
of feet counting cracks
that intercept routine.

AT BREAKING POINT OF SKY

The blown glass evening rings.
Sky strains, tightened
to the limit of its elasticity,

and high along the cold curve
hums the ghost tone
of a bell at afterstrike,

the long taut sound
of endurance at the end
of stretch, at weakening
when silhouette of spire or chimney
is enough to rupture it,

when an incisor star
might tremble once too much
and jar against
the blister top that shields us
from the light that weighs
against it, thinning it.

A single word
dispersing silence might
unseat that star.

More deadly
than a shower of glass blades
is whatever force a rupture
in that sky might loose on us.

POSSIBLY ONE DAY

A galloping meadow
never gets anywhere in spite
of all the speed it means.

Bounding, unaware
that it has been created
thwarted,

 it hurries
its high hair over earth
that lay beneath it,

but not one inch
to the better
by delight in travel.



IN SUDDEN SECRET



THE BRAGGART HILT



HEFT FROM A CAROUSEL, fist filling things;
snatches of talk, the urgency of beat,
the flash of steel a smile
in slivering windows, bone
locked into posture crusted false in elegance.

I could be a charlatan and like it, be myself
and like it even more. Trombone
on the rocks, a dash of gin, and wit
salted among the spritelamps could be some of me
or all, mocking the jingling of this street
with dancing selves
were I not so determined to have none of it.
The braggart hilt beneath my hand is cold.

Chilled trumpet splashed with brandy in a ready throat
is twinge of malice in my mouth,
assassinates.

DRAUGHTS OF CACOPHONY

I arrived here robbed,
nothing inside me, darkness in my head
and leaking from my eyes. Even the ground I walked upon
was stolen. Thus I came to fill the vastnesses inside
my limited domain. I swallowed clash
of store with store or restaurant in display
of beckoning and from the grossness of feigned oddity
gained in solidity. I snatched at staves
swung at the thresholds of percussive palaces
and kept them for a final hitting back.
Crazed to rawness by vulgarity, I covered burn
with sting that counterbit, made of each sense
a wall against myself which hid my emptiness
with temporary surfaces for feet and fists
to batter with the rhythms of revenge.

THE VOICE OF NOW

This *now* has nailed me to a swelling must
and though it may run bramble-ragged
over everything, no one will notice it
until I tell. My bell would crack a tower in two
if I should wait while resonance grows richer, for this *now*
is loud within my mouth. Its sudden taste
is iron touched by ice and jolt of shock
that loosens grip on words and words will go
smashing the slats of louvers as the stroke upon
my gongside kicks my whole compulsion up and over,
sending it tonstroke down upon another *now*
not quite so sharp. This *now* has nailed me
to a swelling must. I shall be torn upon this growth unless
it snaps at belltongue sundering when *now* has struck.

RUBBISH TO BURN

Here in this jungle din I keep my void
for you to fill, though that with which you stuff
its vastness will not stop the crumbling and the final fall
of walls surrounding it, yet paper lace, plastic and paint
in fluorescent scorch are cargo which will be no loss
should they be loosed upon abyss when floor dissolves
abandoning its load. A hoard of trash
is better fare for pockets than a bloodwarm gem
at threat of robbery, more thorough than petty snatch
which tweaks the muscles of your hands. Your penny gear
totalled upon the pintop tilt on which I live
I keep to jettison. Since I have lost
my ember gift of God, I heap your rubbish high.
My looting gains me bulk to spend of space, to feed
my trap door luck.

IN A YEAR'S TURNING

Oh may me heart's truth
Still be sung
On this high hill in a year's turning
—*Dylan Thomas*
“*Poem in October*”

When once we came
in on one another,

and hung there,

if only,
but for that moment
until the rope wore through,

dropped us,
and sent us sprawling

and snarling,

all was our silence then,
my love: our seasons,
deceptions,

scrapings from years past
lodged edgewise
in our throats.

No arguments.
No lies. No insults. The truth
roared from noon
rampant,
Home!

But Autumn
was already fetus
in the belly of August;

in terror,
to be later dropped
split open and divided,

in our course of custom.

WHEN BRASH WORLDS LIVE

All the grotesque, bedizened and bizarre
occasions and their causes, all who wear
a minted excess of accepted oddness, run
a clatter pace about me, while a minimum
of strangeness settles at my side, becomes
more colorful than any one of them.

Thornprint phantoms of my own inhabit air,
walk skulltops hoofbright swiftly over crowds,
hover on chuckle at the obvious rind encasing vanity.

I know them both. As single entities
they tire in tawdriness, when intermixed
they swirl, a bold stew for the hunger hour
that pours untempered chili down its loneliness.

ON THE MIDWAY



HEREIN STALKS HONESTY: a prancing hag
splashed with a play of gauds on upraised arm
lifted to taunt the long unneeded moon
with ribaldries; who cuts the night sky
with her knuckles,

sharp with paste set in a knockjaw outrage, aureate in brass
upon a talon curved to gouge, if gouging gets
the slim essentials of her sustenance,
power and the skill to blind,
but not much more. Her candor is my strength.

Her hawk head tilts an imp inch to my laughter.
We have added each other's totals till we understand
each other as no one ever will. I know
how soon I shall be traipsing through her property.
Too long the weeklag for the wine-deep pluck
of string bass stolen easily in areaways to be a memory.

One beat
calls for another, calls for light in spring
of carnivore across a meager street, for drifts of idlers seething
at the curb. More shove than motion, more remnants
than a feast,
yet many a meal of gobbets from a chain of halts,
of conversations, and a cup of tea were mine for cheating.

She could plunder me,
but never has, for I have robbed her first.
I know the ripest areas for lingering.
She keeps her harlot hand cupped for my change. I drop
a button in, dislodge a diamond nested in her rhinestone swirls.
I know which socket grips are wearing out.

BREAKING THE CURSE OF BLANKNESS

Your eyes,

from the darkness
and the contours of your face,

drawn by my stare

and into both of mine,
where, pupil to pupil,
they were matched and mated;
dusk upon dusk
and into a quivering
rinse of gray, blue, green
and the sand warmth of shallows,

while inside,
and all about my head,
your voice resounded.

Your eyes,

floating on the glare
of the desk lamp that guarded
the muteness of paper,

which paralyzed my pen

captured my compulsive straining
and reduced your voice
to a faint sigh
from the dark of another waking,

and the paper wrote me.

OPTICAL ILLUSIONS

My bones are bare now;
gnawed down by moonlight
and picked clean.

They are flashes,

a scarce width more
than flickerings

of recognition.

When you sort them,
they know your fingers:

the silver bowl,
the icy water,

their convulsed appearance
on its surface,

and in your hunger.

WHERE TENSION IS

To perch upon a threat, from dare to dare
I move in all the moments of my sitting.
The wan clock tires with ticking. Accumulated strength
rears to the ultimate event.

No longer now
the sly sulk sliding under fire escape.
I strut a parallel to danger, quick to hide
the hot jest flickering with every step,
the bite of triumph in my teeth.



BAD COMPANY



NEXT TO NOTHING

Next to nothing or the genuine thing
rewards the seeking, the circuitous walk
till night hangs heavy with unborn day.
It was hardly the dragons under manhole lids
that brought you to this jumble of loose heads.
You never thought to find them here at all,
 but everyone
talked of coming here to look for them,
encouraged you to guard your socks against
 escaping flames,
look out for fumes, and watch for lizard eyes
squeezing slow winks from under propped-up tops.
You failed to find a single one. What did you see?
A sand-rough haze beneath your eyelids?
Your own legs brittle to the moondeath wind?
Next to nothing or the genuine thing?

ELEGY FOR ALEXIS

What sort of wind,
Alexis, covets your house,
what kind of claw slips
over balustrade and grabs
your guest, leaving the slender ledge
a vacancy of gusts that tells
the searching host no tales
of sills below, counting down
twenty stories through
the death-blue haze to asphalt
and the smash that ends all stories?

What sort of wind,
Alexis, wept within your rooms
and wiped the stars
from all the windows
at the night-hung edge
above the senseless reeling
of the universe, that filled
all space with panic force
and swept you over,
bowled barbell brace
of door block from its lock
on life and drove the hoofs
of stallions through your loneliness?

What sort of wind,
Alexis, breeds within the ear
that listens for you and behind
the eye, squinting up height
of wedge at fork of avenues
to the last brink of mortality
that climbs beyond the indecisive
glide of paper scraps
on thermals swirled past your last
floor on earth
to where you are?

What sort of wind,
Alexis, urges us to seek you
as you once had sought,
to know only the thin ledge
of the parapet where dust
is rushed in endless search
of self
 where there is none.

ALWAYS ONE MORE TIME

Up the nobbled sides that line the well,
up each protruding stone
after the eyes have taken in
its shape and size as fit for hands
and feet to feel for looseness or security.
How slow this limb-stretch climb
that grazes skin, brings a hard hitch
to equilibrium as underneath
the half-swung weight a rock
has given more than its
endurance will allow.
At once, a new deep-rooted
hold is sought for, found and tested.
Up the hair of God
ascent continues, all four
searches fumbling blind,
till sky intrudes
to judge each new configuration
a starveling second
before the lid comes down.

BAD COMPANY

If a thick green discharge
oozes from underneath his fingernails,
and stains the carpet,
or if the teeth in his smile
gleam solidly with stainless steel,

a bad evening is probably
ahead of you,
if not a frightful one.

If she brings in a dazzle
of chandelier lustres and a stiletto laugh;
if her hœels strike sparks
from the parquetry and her hair
retracts visibly into her scalp,

meditate, if you can,
upon an inexpensive lawyer

and fire insurance.

If the two of them
arrive together as a team and vanish
upon the moment of appearance,
scrutinize the fireplace,

then if any sort of ankles and shoes
whatever hang into it
from the chimney,
saturate the whole house
with the stench of cabbage, even
if simulated, and take your leave.

Close the door smartly,
hang some bacon from the knob,
and run like hell.

MOON DRINKER

You soaked up more than your fill
of the moon

last night

 when I saw you
on the front step
offering the moon the full of your face
and turning it
this way and that
for saturation.

I could see how the day to come
would know you,

 pale,
as you always are
at the breakfast table,

but in that shuttered room
of yours,
your face would mask itself
closely in a delicate
radiance,

strengthening
with any slightest contact,

as between my palms,

burning
in memory later.

MEDUSA



PRAY. THICK AND HEAVY DAWN. A DAY,
clouded, soaked, sunken swirled.
Exploded. Pouring back into the sea.
The hiss of serpents rising from my head
as mist in streamers writhing
across this 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 downpulled anger,
the recoil and massing force.
Even those golden wings
and iron talons are little help
against the full attack, constantly
made, withdrawn and reasserted against
this rotting molar in the sea.

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 meaciated face,
framing these desperate eyes,
would make you see my inner nightmare
as so much greater than
the nightmare that I am.

Mercy spares you,
turns you to stone, that you
may not see me, see that beauty
in a face, mortal,
yet more than human, calls
forth no love; that any love of mine
is walled around
with igneous hardness,
or torn from me, blown away
in shreds of icy spume.
Kill me. Life waters
at the eyes. Swing back your sword.
Look elsewhere lest your arm
remain upraised forever.
I must resign myself
in death to a similar condition,
to darker places, caves loathsome,
crawling with sluggish
saurians, cold in the deep
recesses of the cess-pits of the gods.

THE CALL OF THE TINKLING CYMBALS

They are here again today.
Their fingertips are alive
with buttercup bells. Patterns,
cut out of the sunlight,
play over the flowers that dance
in the winking of their hands.
Hear them. Already the air
is rain waiting,
pausing upon its patience
until the end of the celebration,
through which, the children,
peering above the sills
of their eyes, are asking
if I am harmful.

Is it not foolish of them
when their chants cling to the corners
of my darkness after their dance
is done? My rooms are still
and weighted, thick with the heather
on the breath of the gods,
and all night long
with the invitation
of the fire in the bells.
These are my kinfolk,
who counsel me in the singing
of unknown birds.

ON HOVING'S HILL

Ghosts and their counterfeits
on Hoving's Hill
are met as equals. I shall be difficult
to find if you should search
for me among them,
for I am solid;
I take up space and may not bring
my bulk of blood and bone
in stride across the fence,
but still I wander there
and prod at them,
testing for skin and hair
for rind of wind and sungames
shot with shadows
finding out which ones
ascended Hoving's Hill and fell
in Hecksher's pit
just as the sun went down,

how many
and which ones of them
are likely to return,
if anyone, once more
supported by that sand dump mound
remembers how it was
and when,
 how long he stayed
and whether ghosts in guise
of men drop all pretense
in Hecksher's husk
of an inverted mound, itself
the ghost of Hoving's Hill
turned upside down.

ST. MARK'S CHURCH IN THE BOUWERIE:
OFFERTORIUM



REMEMBER IT ALL QUITE CLEARLY:

the pelting feet, the half-shouldered
overcoats, the near brutality with which some
two dozen persons including two vestrymen
stumbled and tramped over seated parishioners
to reach the aisle, of how it opened
to their record dash, how they blocked
the front door in terror and would not move,
when in the church behind them
there was nothing.

Dust. Sunlight. The old smoke
of a sermon rising above the heads
that were filled with the aroma
of a Sunday roast, while the oven gauge
crept cautiously upon its deadline
and awoke them to a motion
at the far side of the altar,

which after a moment of definition
brought them to their feet
faster than the first bar of a hymn
and launched them into a panic-pounding race
down aisle, through door, into the ugliness
of street outside, ugly enough to reassure them.

I saw her at the Epistle side
of the altar, an exclamation mark
of a slender girl, the bulky bell
of a crinoline blossoming from her waist.
One chalk blotch of a hand at her breast
to secure the long triangular shawl,
the neatly bonneted head and two nailhead
eyes that seemed to bore into it
or into the bone behind it,

swaying as on a light breeze
that changed position with the slightest
stirring of the air, poised a good
half-foot above the floor with sunlight
creeping between the hem of her skirt
and the tired carpeting, wavering
in a paroxysm of nonfocus, rippling
violently from head to foot
as all the details turned to haze,
cleared back, smudged fuzzy,
fixed their focus once again
as through binoculars and suddenly
wisped off, went all to pieces in a scattering
of blurs which swiftly disappeared.

And that was all,
absolutely all! The church lay still,
fumbling about with its budget
which would not repair the rectory,
candles to be lit that they might
be seen by all men. I saw *hers*,
guttering, nearly transparent
against the stale sunlight, flickering,
wobbling like the candle flame
upon the altar, still here as then.
When? 1860, before the candlestick was broken.

RIDE UP THE WIND

Still heard, still flutesong flying
on the seawing, still aloft,
do not glide further downward, do not come
closer to sand and rock than you are now.
You have already come too close.
I hear your feet that once picked rainstop
pinpoints on a pond, on flat of sole, walk
as the rest of us, tamping the earth beneath you.
Since the herd has hemmed you in, required of you
a pace as footwork-weighted as its own,
you are as one in sodden finery, your hair
bedraggled, as all who are afraid of self
see themselves mirrored. Would you humor them
by feigning poverty as no one thinks he does,
as everyone feels that his fellows must?
Ride up the wind,
as one who skimmed the breakers of the plumage,
stiffened hair with seaspout water brilliants,
made the vast dance of the aftergale
 your chariot, ascend
with all in arcsweep upward who follow
and understand.

A REPETITION OF THREE

These, the approaching three on all these streets
come, and are come upon, once more advancing, come
on a never-mind loose lilt of limb, are gone
to come once more, three plaster masks
 against your going,
come from whichever place towards which
 your going leads,
come as if marching on your origins.
At gasp of knife unsheathed, at altercation
sprouting a scattering of heads at window sills,
at black of body down at flash of fists,
 in crowdtroth nucleus
crushed against the entering lurch of anyone
a flashlight bleaches them to focus from the others
as words made flesh at bloodshock
 on the swordbreath thrust,
words fleshclasped instantly on thunderclap,
 and coming,
come on the gray of waiting. From stunned sense
at birth of violence, they come reborn.

PROTEST FROM A SINGULAR PROFESSION



HOUGH ONLY A COMMON HOUSE GHOST,
skilled to pass through brick and concrete
much as cold comes unrestrained
by voile, through no acquired technique,
but as a function of me
which repeats itself with me as message

I must fault this skill
as action independent of control.
It sifts me down
to concentrate of dust and light
on which I draw for substance
in a single stroke of smoke
self-sculptured to existence
in a humanoid advance on space and time,
shaft smitten through to both
of them and rupturing both utterly
in service of that eye which otherwise
lives bounded by its blindness and all
without my authorship or questioning.
Intent is sight of me,
speaks of itself instantly
when I appear, calls out
in illustration of its argument
which is my pose, the purpose
of my gestures and my full
attire styled into focus of address
which often goes mistaken.
Time and again the contact
cracks across the centuries
and misses;

time and more time
for shock alone, an empty house
of unintended secrecy as what
went by unspoken
keeps on
speaking still in waste
of spatial rhetoric
in vacant rooms.

A POET DECLAIMS IN A GRAVEYARD

Clouds congregate
and shadow blots the stone book,
laid open on its fluted lectern,
that the wind might skin the names
from its pages of marble,
and repeat them with endless sobbing.

Your papers rebel against
their anchoring pebbles. Your hands
press them down at their edges,
grinding them into grooves
of disregarded names in support
of your thrust of passion,

as your throat throbs
with remembered loves, the aftertaste
of werewolf revels
and the leap of dolphins.

The deep grass shudders
to the roots as the vanguard rain
chatters on splitting slate.

SCHERZO AT LAVALETTE BEACH

After those centuries of practice,
after those long rehearsals
at the far end of the beach
where the wind so often wove your hair
with sunset laced with cirrus,

Why have you come here
far too drunk to keep four legs
beneath you and in good shape
for support?

Look at you now!

There they go, spraddled to ungainly
four-sag stance of a calf
too young to know its balance.
With your stag's hindquarters
and elegant knees, your human torso
raised as figurehead above your lithe
potential for sylvan grace,

you dare to slump there
over your auto harp, your legs
all out of tune and your hair
sweated to slime of a rotten dock
at the moss edge under water.
You are a poor show
for a local monster. After the town
had paid you off in gin
for dooryard dances, you drowned
Killarney in a sodden croak,
and when you could have sung
in pine croon the incantation

of the seven seas you had to plunge
your hind legs into the tulip bed,
whence vomiting the Pleiades,
you left their ghostly star tears
on the seedling lawns.

Go tear the beach apart
and come back sober.

THE BUDDHA IN MILKY QUARTZ

Infusible,
insoluble within the haze,
thickened about
the question of Nirvana.

In trigonal,
trapezohedral chamber cracked
to snarls of veins,
within the steam-skeined
cloud of skin,

the ever soul

lives, mudra of silence
and solidity
in quartz-crazed stupa.

Carbon dioxide
and samsara crowd the highway
of the inner eye

that ends all roads.

ORIENT MOON

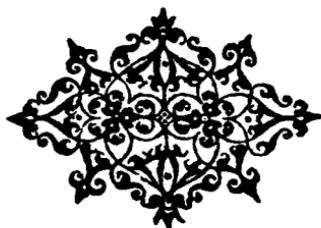
There is a rabbit in the moon,
a fetal rabbit, closely cramped
against its curving rim,

his shoulders hunched
about his head from which the long ears
flow down rounded back;
a neatly packed white rabbit
with a mixing bowl in foreleg
hug that holds a month of salad.

Smudged eyes no longer brood
above us. The rabbit profile
looks beyond the earth, his eyes
half closed in contemplation.

Now the honey drains no longer
into dreams and sickens them,
but the inverted salad bowl,
plastered with lettuce leaves
hangs over us. Our madness seeks
no sweetness from the night.
Our ease wizens with vinegar.

This is a rabbit-ridden
Orient moon, which has no need of us.



OUT OF AVERNUS



THE LAST PLANTAGENET

This night the third King Richard tips his nails
with wink of homicide, assumes the claws
that turn the prods of fingers into bayonets,
and drops them in his haste. He crouches, pokes,
crawls close enough to rough of wood in search
for flesh-rip steel. His throne glows red jell sodden
with the seep of blood from ancient tragedies.

A shadow sprouts
in maimspit highlight and the fallen king
reaches into darkness for the prong of greed.
I watch, but do not drop to seek the blink of death.
I keep bad company by accident.

THE ARGO



DAY AFTER DAY, WE WAITED
upon her answers. 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
whence she had come to us.
We had known her
first as a stranger in the sorrel-soft
puncture of August and September,
spear slanted down
in a tumult of bellowing leaves,
leaving no trace of her coming,
of her passageway
through an ecstasy of indigo,
but hairs torn from her crest
and floating high overhead,
cirrus in Virgo.
But could we expect
serious instruction from the trunk
of a tree that had woven a galaxy
of suggestions in wind and sun,
in a tideflow of racing
letters on moss and stone,
even though we had stripped it
of boughs and had hacked
away all but her figure?
How could we be so sure?
She had governed that tree.
Her hands had played in the branches.

Her thoughts had given voice
to the winds which had roared
it to words. She had whispered the leaves
into a scuttle of messages.
We had tried to confine her,
naked in the bark-bare wood,
yet had we found her?
Now her crest scored the sky.
From her helmet portents sprang
forth in an urgency of portent.
Upon her breast, snake-sprawled
and leering, the demented face of Medusa,
defiant, peered out from the hide
of a lion. I do not doubt
that all of us had reservations,
questioned, condemned as criminal
foolishness much that she told us,
that all of us, under our skulls,
were as gray-eyed as she,
and that all our lives
would be lost in our ship and our plans,
however logical, if we ignored
what she told us.
She was lunatic,
storm-proud, a warrior. Three roads
lay open to her equine impulses.
Past, present and future
floated upon her shield: as one,
as three superimposed,
a trinity of troubling deliberations;
clear in their separate entities
confused in their overlap
and triple deep texture,
merging and swimming
apart. They were not to be looked
upon or endured.

Day after day, our ears
were hollow cones to funnel
her counsels into our heads, our ears,
the rocking speech of the shaft
against thole pin. Her lips
were distant, high as her head was,
floating above the spray,
each splatter of which
was a blister to ignorance.
In Virgo we found the figureheads
of ourselves, hewn from our trees
of bones, touseled in the scrawl
of our nerves and veins.
At sun-focus, Virgo;
riding the arrogant storms
of our search: *Pallas Athena*,
crouched in the tunneled coiled
tombs of our heads.

Listen!
Attend Sophia!

EURYDICE

He was never completely
convinced of my presence. He felt
that the minute he turned
his eyes from me I might vanish
as once, in fact, I did;

that a lover crouched always
under a toadstool, ready
to seize me by the ankle
and, gripping it, would yank me
underground, as if the surfaces
I trod with him were water,

or that another might be hanging
from a bough by his knees,
fishing about with both hands
in the dusk below
for my hands, reaching.

There was one
in the closet under the stairs,
one in the laundry hamper,
and one who sang madrigals
in the smokehouse every evening.
What an ear he had!

When he came down
to Hades, singing,
What shall I do without Eurydice,
I all but answered him in song:
as did you always
with Eurydice.

He turned back to look at no one,
and I laughed.

THE SYBIL OF CUMAE



UT 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.

This was my hour to pray,
as music, concentrated in my head
behind the ivory of brow, the gate of horn
too bright to burn as sound shot
upward in a beckoning of Pentecostal flame
and wept its fire behind me,
then flickered its hunger from my shoulder,
died, and in its death, diluted darkness.

I was suspended, carnal, and yet flesh,
light given form by creep of shade
as from the march of clouds, of pits
and of depressions upon the marble hold,
hand on my forward thrust of vision.
Brightness died and softened the desert
of my body and I, alive, remained
an artifact and out of Time.

Hear me! I speak in smoke;
a web of spray obscures my meaning,
moistens its brittle thorns
and globes them with the eyes of angels.
Come upon my presence suddenly
to feel a sword and breathe away
and leave you petrified, as I, an illusion
of the deft deceit of portraiture.
I bare you before the bold eye of the future.

Look and go blind. Hell lingers
in a dust drift when the eyes
are born again to morning, and retreat
within the remnants of receding sleep
to find once more the promises
molded out of fog. Whether in truth
of ivory or through hallucined horn
the blast becomes your image,
look on mine, high on the long note
sounded over Hell, the golden leaves
break brains and wake the dead.

COFFEE HOUSE POET

Now I have seen her,
who had always been for me
a creature swirled from wave waste by the wind
and rushed across the ocean crust,
her hair, a cloud that carried
stars that its haste uprooted
and which clung to it like burrs.

Now she is all of this, and something more,
something that echoed to my cloudy cross,
beaded with sweat of God in evening amethyst
which mingled with the twilight and inflamed the world;
her world of crowd and noise, my world of agate drift
and stains that spotted sundry pages from which

I dislodged her,
long before I sought her out, before her hair
wept bitter stings of ice upon a butt-squashed floor,
discarded star sprouts swept away to grow
in cracks that gape to cloud rifts
where the floor had been.

PORTRAIT OF LAZARUS



THROUGH MILK-THICK WATERS
 across your face
stare at me, if you can. Although your
 eyelids weigh
 the cumulative poundage of the years
clustered upon your passing,

look at me, and in the strengthening of your gaze
break through the wasting web of cloud
between your plane and mine.
Concentrated in the focus of your eyes
grasp what your attention lights upon
and merge with its reality.
In one long look come back.

I have no skill to rouse you, have not dared
to stir the fleece of sleep that almost shrouds
unquestioned structure, hesitate to mar
the structure under which you float,
lest I should lose you with your image.

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.

Scream!

Like one who serves himself
as Orpheus and binds the muscles
hauling the hawser till a span of time
is coiled upon one death
and stings with sound the immobility
of vacuum, then in crescendo

ruptures his wrongful grave and climbs
his brasswind guide rope back to life,
ascend the sun stave to the surface,
press hard against the clouds
until their first threads disperse
and wait before your mid-day will
then turn the false integument of death
to thinning night.

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.

Until the waters of the Styx
no longer cling to ends of hair
nor wait to drop in fall of globules
to the living soil, I wait,

fearful lest they should fall
in chains of poison to my skin,
dreading the wisdom of the dead
which holds your eyes.

THROUGH SNOW UNDER BLACKENED MOON



HE NIGHT WHEN THE TIRED MOON
shrivelled and turned back, the sky
was cracked to spiders' legs
of fracture on the boughs
on which the snowcloud mattresses
lay heavy. Air was dense
with the snow and trunks
were packed to half height in it.

Our candles broke their fragile thorns
against its charging bulk
and left us floundering.

This was no night for pilgrimage
for single file wound in and out
among the starved trees, for following
what little we knew of what little road years
of neglect had left us, for our search,
now dried husk of compulsion.

Long ago the joy within
was whipped by wind and beaten
into wicks too damp to soak up fire
and smoke was all we walked upon.

Yet still we moved,
conscious of the black orb
hanging low above our heads
looming near enough to shove us
in the ground and high enough
to threaten the sudden drop
of a whole world, mashing arbutus
and our bodies underneath
a meteoric corpse

watched by the saints
who long had prayed for it
and wrapped its darkness of retirement
in their lumninescence.

Friars, thieves and the gypsies
seek the outline of their future
in its sheen and cannot tell
its meaning, can discern no markings.

Saints know the original enlightenment
towards which we drive ourselves
through wind and snow
through what is left of trees
while the moon shrinks
and drains off virtue.

Only the saints have found
the old route under snow.
Their candles stretch proud fingers
claw bright against the slash
of storm, and touching
as ours did not, a truth
of snow-clogged stars we cannot know.

THE HYMN OF THE ROCKS



WULLED BY PRESBYOPIA AND CHILDISH PRANK
he walked along the tideline
where assembled monks were said to crouch,
cowled out of human form,
a multitude of motionless and rounded backs.

The winds came down and harsh to flesh.
No garment stirred. No hands came up between
expectant face and grate of air.
No shift of weight altered the position
of limbs pressed against arteries, freezing
under heft of granules, granite legs,

and yet his words swept over them
and carved out arms clasped about heads
on upraised knees, smoothed over hard
under lichen-crusting case of stone.
Weed wept down pitted jaws in beards
salt-caked in penance. Terns rode
out icy skies of cersicles,
and then his speech was over.

Silence. The sea was slab.
Adrift on wings, whiteness slid
over blue and climbed to wait for all
the beach to hummock up to life,
and shout.

The child guide slid
inside the door, shameful, as his master
felt out forms of rock
where all his audience was said to be.
The old man bowed, signed himself
and all assembled there, as one, to God,
turning himself away to drag himself
on staff to storm-chewed steps
and then, "*Hail, Holy Bede!*"

Unlocking from compact form
from over hunching years, stooped
from the crippling of millenia, the rocks
swayed upward, loosing clasp
on clench of secrets crammed in the crouchpack
grasp of bodies, letting out
their hoarded senescence. All fissures spread
as up through the strength of crags
the bass notes crannied wide
as gulleys of vibration shuddered
underground and all the seabirds,
flashing to the risen sun,
unsealed their hush of premonition,
scrawl squealed through song of rock
down-dropped by undertow
to rumble underneath the ocean,
 "Hail, Holy Bede!"

MELUSINE DISCOVERED

They said my eyes were different:
wider, deeper, darker, bluer.
That is all.

So what do you say
when the whole garrison
blunders into the bath,
and sees you

like that;
your top half huddled
under your hair, and all else
from the waist down
coiled fat and sleek in rolls
of spots and mottlings
in a pail?

Nothing,
but your eyes swim in a season
of dances, lost with all
such seasons forever; lovemaking
after the fashion of woman;
a man—

*Keep her in her place, he said,
pickled in brine.*

A fine kettle
of snakeflesh for a princess!

Meanwhile, you wring
your spine to pick loose
absurd packets of leather
and cartilage, then flap them open
in his face.

That for you, nosy!

Look me up in the crotch-hold
of the tallest pine.
I shall be up there,
swinging spots and mottlings
from a bough in the starlight,
and mind your careless huntsmen
keep their arrows by them,

Uxoricide!

RECOLLECTIONS OF A MEMORABLE MAN

He is the horseman
standing
at the turnpike cutoff

horse motionless
yet twitching.

He himself
in overworked denims
and tee shirt
barrel-hooped all the way
up the torso
in navy blue.

His vision is on vacation
window shopping.

his hair
emeritus
has retreated
to a suburb above the ears

He is out of place,
but nowhere as much as his master
with the halberd profile
whom we remember
drilling both elbows
into spurious marble
in a grease-choked diner
with both eyes plugged
into the reruns flickering
across the beige
and oil in the reinforced concrete
of a coffee cup,

while his Fruehauf rig
lay by near the gas pumps
dreaming of San Francisco
and its City Lights.



YOU COULD DIE LAUGHING



BREAKING DOWN THE NIGHT

When you are used
to nights that are filled
with flutterings and tweakings,

what do you
when you meet one which says
absolutely nothing
and presides stone-faced
and obstinate?

What do you say
to the darkness when its speaking
has removed itself to most
undertain places or listens
at the thin screen
of consciousness, waiting
for you to talk?

Will you oblige it
with a volley
of vituperation aimed at nothing
in this world, or will you
also wait, if only
just to see which one
of you can wait
the longest?

FROM AN OPEN WINDOW

Throughout the day the sun
continued with its aureate drone,
let down its screens of gauze
between the passacaglias
of the branches, and played
through the nearly imperceptible
comings and goings of meandering
moats among them. It leaned
on the tallest trees and flattened
the exuberance of the meadow,

It would have continued,
had not its tone
been insolently broken
by a more aggressive splendor,

like the upstart suddenness
with which
 first one,
another,
and a third of four
inordinately tall and slender crosses
blared trumpet challenges
above a summit of foliage,
each with a clear discoid
heart of glass gaping
from the intersection of its members
as if in astonishment
before a monstrous truth,

or like the imposition
of cadences by Richard Strauss
from an open window;
attendant also
upon the wonder,
but without surprise.

PHOTOGRAPH OF A REFLECTION

Nascent in glass
a face encompasses
the painted forms beneath it,
floats within
the ribbon width of smoke
is kept aloft
upon a spire of flame.

Hypnosis
in updraught
rising in awareness
closes in
and coils hard against jaw
and brown a harried want
escaped from sensuality
to thrill
only in chilling cheek
of glass, and wears
the face of prayer to keep
its torment closeted.

The night is tall,
the fingered light extends
a warning to the compline mask
that disciplines desire.

With only force of mind
that burns away emotion
the spirit that ascends the cylinder
of smoke from pane of glass
can only drift
back to the gelid surface
and remain
later as film of dampness
which the hungry sun
shall eat away.

MAD SONG

When birds have hoofs
and fishes have feathers,
I might believe you
when you scoff at stars
that agitate the bone
behind your brow
even though a flock of them
might burn it through
and riddle my own like shot.

Should my house
be thundered frequently
by tread of hoof, the blacksmith
shoeing sparrows
bring new flame to forges,

I might believe you
far more willingly than that
the smoke of such a fire
had numbed the cortex
of your brain
 which might explode
should you ignore
its tenancy as usual

whether or not your conscience
loves the lies it takes
for makeshift sleeping pills

If, on the other hand,
a school of trout
should sniff about the chimney pots
for scent of cats,
lie headless on the skillet
as a plumage fold of fluff
sleeked into overlap of scales

TERROR ON CORNELIA STREET

Somehow I never
think about such things
without

distinct malaise
of stomach.

Somehow,
it will not do
for me to dwell on butterflies
with dark eyes throbbing
in their orange wings
that taper off
in streams of fire
without recourse to something
solid to support
my head.

Therefore,
I must beg of you your mercy
for your pitch of ball
on brick might meet
my head again
if I should let it pass between
your sidewalk and the wall.

The butterflies were beautiful
but nausea
and fear of crushed skull
tell me that they are not.

THE PITCH

The brush stroke which turned out
to be applied upon the work's completion
can be determined by the practiced
eye, guided, as is mine, by intuition.

I capture it and sweep it backward
with an unused brush which sips
the painting from the canvas,

soon to be restored to palette
after having been so carelessly
misplaced, then find the brush stroke
next before it, and remove it;
then the next, peeling down the process
in exact reverse, lifting all
the brush strokes off in retrograde
down to the dry weaving,
leaving it as if untouched,
as if no nightmares ever had
instructed on it, false
in respectability, by frame conferred.

I offer it for sale, dry
as it is in bareness;
uncommitted brew in solid nip
to the bristles sniffing out
both form and line in raw
and eager brushes and a palette full
as if untasted and untested
as a rooftop dares to someone
to do it all again,
and do it well or just as it was
to tempt me to undo once more.

IN THE NICK OF TIME

It was quite simple; the people,
who were no more
than a scattering of soot
at the end of a city block
of cathedral nave, would be no problem.

By the time you had overtaken
them, you would surely
have accumulated sufficient
altitude to rise and walk
the air above them.

Once
that reasoning got loose
and fell on the soil
in your skull,
it rooted,

for suddenly
you clutched at every
pew you passed,
at every chair back,
fearing that each step
forward might be
your first one upward.

The pillars towered
and faded into the grayness
of an interior sky,

and as a doubt-laden glance
slid their smokey
solemnity upwards,
you sensed a slight lift
from a tug at your eye.

Then clutching at every
available solid
object along your path,
you retreated
to the doorway,

and just in time.

IN THE MESH OF MAYA

Mouths open in the mesh of Maya,
snatching at whatever may be blown against it,
in patches active, in others satisfied to savor
the intake of a day. There where interstices
do nothing more than breathe, wind plasters trash
against the mesh, as always with any other meeting.

That keeps them quiet while the others chatter,
talking with their mouths full as an uncoordinated chorus
multiplying incoherence to a din that no one
can ever untangle. Meanwhile the wind drops.
The fragments still stick to the mesh as if in bite
of many mouths, still silent until mesh nuggets
are bitten off, leaving as many mouths with rubbish.

NO COMMON GOBLET

Sorry to have slapped at you,

without warning you first,
but had you reached
aloft and leaped for that flagon,
hung on bullroarer thunder
above you, and had you
secured it

by its stem,
it would have risen
from its present height
above your hair,
tearing you from the floor,
and swinging you from the ceiling.

It would have dropped you then; it would,
I can guarantee it.
And had you failed
when it bobbed
away from you just
as you almost had it,

or *it* had you,

on a clatter of ceramic wings,
it would have climbed
to lunge at your head
with all its weight
of earthenware behind it,
or would have swerved
to dash its payload
in your face.

A PARTY ANY TIME

A glass
blooms in my hand;
when did this sediment-
besotted blossom
root itself there?

The sixth in series;
only five past ten
and up
to the knees
in prose!

a proud night
for the plotting
of conspiracies,

knotted in displays of backs
to thwart a stranger,

of switchable challenges
and ears
at prowl.

I wonder
how many strata
of expensive furs weigh
upon my instant
out.

YOU COULD DIE LAUGHING

Suddenly you disintegrate.
Your shoulders draw forwards and downwards
as if you were sheltering
a faltering match.

Your eyebrows escape for sanctuary
in your hairline while the planes
and ledges in your face
battle with one another
like legatees.

You cough and shudder
on the verge of shattering. Your face
claps a lid of marble
on its contours of jelly
and writhes in agony behind it.

Your mouth pinches
down the unfortunate episode,
clamping it into an interim
state of suspension,

but under the shadow
of your eyes, a squat godling
with a swollen belly,
still clutches at the hot
and toxic seed
of revolution.

BANTAM EXECUTIVE

Clean-g geared for business
and efficiency, scurrying upstream
flinging river wide from bow
in professional impatience,
stiff-lipped portrait of a clerk
turned manager, the runt ship
levels all nozzles for a signal
which will cannon streams of water
spearforth strong enough to split
a pile lengthwise or dagger
through a warehouse door,

threatens a dash through shipping
to a stripling fire, all set, all polished,
dressed up for attack anticipating
warplay and relishing its role.

The valor of this executive rescuer
heats up chewed water orange angered,
boils in froth of mouth with wrathsuds
of fanaticism, seeks catastrophe.

VECTORS OF ADVICE

Pitch rises. 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 traced
in wraith-tail up the surface
of the argument.

Two arms separate
in ninety degrees of difference,
each pointing a favorite direction
while, close at hand,
another orders buses
to leave the street for sky
and shrieks its stunted arrow up.

I sit on curb by sewer mouth
wait for a bus, space-borne to Vega.
Signs tell me not to stand.



TOWARD MAGRITTE



KRISHNA IN THE AFTERNOON

One of my many selves
sits on the grass
with the children,
driven by wonder
at the marvels that come
through our eyes, to sing
in the chapels of our heads.
Where the two brows
come together, perched above bridge
of the nose as a bird,
Krishna alights,
and the sun on the cymbals
bursts within him on the darkness
we have yet to break.

Suddenly, wind rises;
the finger cymbals are stilled.
I am another self
with a workday tomorrow
and today, as the death
of my incense, grown down
to the burning of my hand.

SHAMBALLAH

Only those whose eyes
are unaccustomed to unlikely scales
of measurement or commonly
indiscernible planes of existence
will never see here
domes, pinnacles,
and tentlike structures with the gold
on their ornaments
gleaming.

For those
of a lesser keenness,
this is but a pocket lodged
among massive peaks and crags,
which only offer fallen stones
and sand; perhaps the weathered
remnants of a Chorten,
yet this is the Capital.
Here we are taxed and numbered
in accordance with our several purposes;
all of us everywhere: sheep,
whose heads lift frequently,
lest any breeze be freighted
with the shudder of a dying gong,
or the long growl in the monotone
of mantram, resonant within the earth.
Here

padding tap on bronze
incites to riot, awakens anxiety,
hardens and tightens
to the knot of murder.
Here also:
the chorus,
as if from caverns underground,

climbs into zest of purple
at the apex
of a summer noon.

Here

the genesis
of any impulse ignites
on a syllable.

EXEUNT

The wind is blowing the stars away.
Tonight they flow down
gulleys windeing between the clouds.

Will nothing block
their passage, keep, at least
one statement in its place,
one tack rammed into Time
from which, in due course, some
will tear out and, slotted
stream away, leaving our mortality
one fragile scrap?

Clear out the clouds!
Herd islands coagulate in fog
towards any of the four directions

but with no snag of stars
in straggle of stray hair, loosened
by accelerated pace.

Crowd back the ragged edges
from that bank of why,
spare us our stay of stars
in millions!

THE FEATHER-PAINTING LUNATIC



KIDDING THE WIND SIDE DOWNWARD,

a seagull signalling in yellow
winks heresy in green, affronts
the sky in gash of color
unexpected in a gull
then falls straight down
beyond the roofs to wing games

of as-yet-untinted birds
whose white ignites decision
in the wayward rush.

What happened here?

Someone ladder-paced himself
some stories well above
the altitude where paint revives
the victims of the wind and sun
on rungs that scuttle
into clouds above the highest buildings
swinging the gallon can of dregs
that just supplied the last
dip of that decadence
which splashed the mauve and violet
on this gull's fellows, while lifting
his own glad green
to grace and boldness.

No one has seen it done.
The ladder rears in evidence.
The empty gallon dangles in bold
flaunt of subversion hung
before the eyes of all.

Ask among the streets
to find him in the city's coils,
if there is anyone around
who, to delight his evenings
will stand on two springboard
bucking stilts with paintbrush
in his hand to decorate a gull.

A grin, spread ring
of gold across a face
will answer before you hear
the poetry that no one wants.

THE WHEEL RESUMES

The ferris wheel moves up
after a stretch of waiting, lifts a car
into the clouds and out of sight. You must not center on
a single rocking item, for Time will come
to swallow it. A quarter of an arc erases it
in slow rotation of the spears whose barbs describe
the wheel and write your memories about its rim.

We know the ink that tips the stylus,
smart of the second stuck where no resistance breaks
the scar inscription, ink that sours upon
circumference, sawing stability
with grit of stars. A carnival like this creates
nothing unforeseen, engenders no surprise.
The upward hitch is imminent. One day another car
will hang upon the starspit of a former one.

STRANGE FOREST

Where were you
last night when your fingertips
groped over glaze of paper
under hypnosis
 that your bandaged eyes
might see where they had travelled?

Where were you
when you shrieked the shrill
of birches from the black of spruce
as if your skin met scars
and screamed somewhere in an alien wood
• where you had sprung a trap
among the dried trees that rise
from wounds, seared by a holocaust,
a decade gone?

Where were you
when the lithe trees tensed to surface
of the paper and your fingers
plunged in forest depths to be
as easily withdrawn as are
the infant fingers that the knothole
jams when panic knobs the knuckles
and the hole snaps shut?

Your scream unlocked your trance.
We bared your eyes and still your fingers
worried at a distant grove rooted
in the shadowed gaps among the trees.
You tore them loose,
examined them as if for blood.

•

Were you in wilderness
of fern and moss beyond the advertising
tableau for a car, afraid
of every path that failed you
in the distant dark?

You left your fingers
captive there when you returned
and wrestled with the woods
to get them out.

THE FULL STOP DOOR

I must get out, yet find the doorway sealed
with brick and mortar. I have long appealed
against the striate rasp, the grosgrain grind
rib-run down clapboards till my louvred blind
crisps corduroy crazed, will not be healed.

Ridge-ridden downspace where an ample yield
of stripes, gaps, serried slays fall into field
of washboard abstract that seems to blind
unmoving maps with motion,

my sight cross-crannies exit so concealed
that frenzy falters, and the mind, once steeled
then grooved, smooths flat, builds thoughtreals so designed
that nothing moves them parallel and lined
in downfall like my own which has congealed
unmoving eyes with motion.

WATER BABY

I seem to have you limp
in my hands.

Like water
you are hard to hold.

An arm leaks stealthily
down through my fingers.

A leg, flung over a thumb,
kicks convulsively, almost
pulling the rest of you
after it, out and over,

and then my forefinger
goes through your eye.
Your nose sinks inwards.

I wish you would stiffen
up for once, bone yourself
back to some semblance
of a human body,

and lend me an arm
that bends
only at the elbow.

I go on wishing.

CELEBRATION OF THE SELF

Eyebrows bearing down
upon a questioning stare;
grim mouth;
face whitened
by a cataract of night
about the ears, thick
with its catch
of stars.
Jaw set;

hands heaped
beneath it on the hilt
of broadsword;
shoulders
cascading a garment
in continuing
downward tumble.
All these
repeat themselves,
pinched into one as a hinge
between gigantic
wings,
as overflow
of energy,
caught by an instant
in an image.