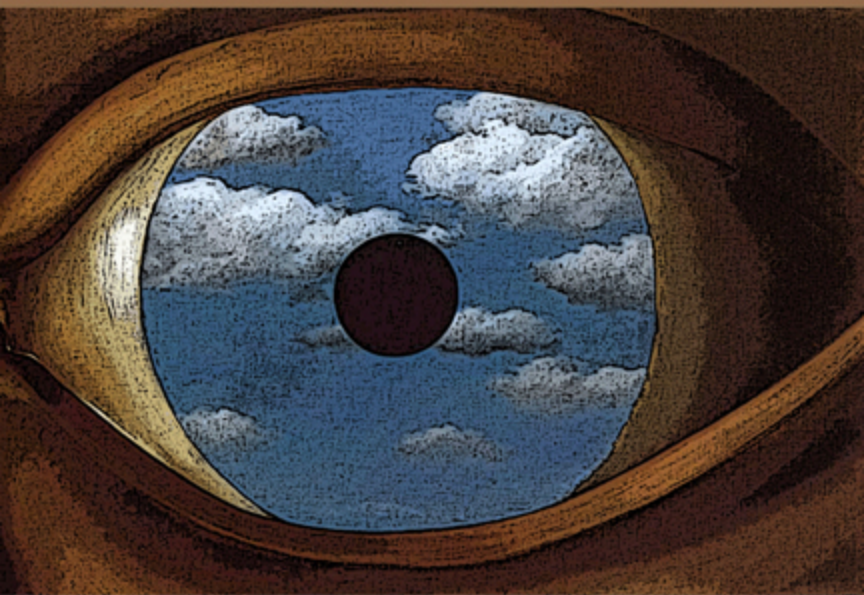


30th ANNIVERSARY EDITION

# **CRISES OF REJUVENATION**



**BARBARA A.  
HOLLAND**



# CRISES OF REJUVENATION

Third Edition, Revised  
With Notes by Brett Rutherford

THE POET'S PRESS  
Providence, RI  
2006

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Book design by Brett Rutherford

This is the 162nd publication of  
THE POET'S PRESS  
65 Hope Street  
Providence, RI 02906  
ISBN 0-XXXX-XX-X  
[www.poetspress.org](http://www.poetspress.org)

This book is also published in  
Adobe Acrobat (PDF) format.

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CRISES OF  
REJUVENATION





# PERSONAL VALUES

Bent to right angles, the living sky  
hurries its continuity of clouds  
    across the room;

Around it, along side of it,  
dreams of the fever of stars.

If the mirror is honest,  
somewhere in the neverland behind  
the observer a starched gauntness  
    of window intimates

that outer other,  
more living, more desperate,  
more spontaneous and daring  
    than the wind course  
of wall paper recently bent and organized  
to house disproportionate tidiness  
in domesticated freedom  
and raising its regimented altitudes  
against the greater of the two unknowns.

# CRISES OF REJUVENATION

*I am repatriated in a moment of panic.  
These are the privileged  
moments that transcend mediocrity."  
--Rene Magritte*

I am seized  
from behind by my homeland

in a moment of panic,

when places are exchanged  
and the rhythms of life reversed,

when names and the objects  
which they had previously owned,  
divorce for other partners,

when wood rasps granular like stone,  
and rocks river grain  
throughout their lasting stolidity;

in a grasp  
of gravity when rain hangs  
suspended like tons of hair,  
loosed by dried clouds  
upon deterioration,

or when the third story window  
of a mansion shudders implacable blue  
from untenanted rooms

and a subsequent low rumble  
escapes down the garden  
beneath the grass.

These are the privileged  
moments, transfiguring size and enlarging  
color to accommodate sky  
and ocean. These are the moments  
that transcend mediocrity.

# RHETORICIAN!

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

# GOOD MORNING

You knocked me out  
this morning; with a flash  
fist you cracked my skull  
wide open to the sunlight,

then edged yourself  
from between its parted  
halves, disheveled  
by your laughter  
at the wince I was.

I crawled down  
into the reassurance  
of the coffee pot  
from which you poured my murk  
through your reflection.

# RAGS OF OMEN

A warm, firm grasp  
of your hand on a night  
when the winter  
dances on the rim  
of your ear.

A cousin grip assuring  
your shoulder of gemmed  
realities yet  
to come.

End of hair  
against your cheek  
as scarcely tangible  
and almost as unendurably  
intimate as breath.

Rags of ambiguous  
omen streaming  
from a stranger's hedge.

# LOUDER THAN LIFE

Staking out stance  
    and taking,  
with their cushioned hoists,  
curved segments of transportation,  
by nailing their claim  
to sidewalks  
    for no one's weight,  
    this partnership  
of crutches, now adopted siblings  
to no discernible  
leg, acquires and abandons  
distances  
    to no one's aid  
in any unusual hour past midnight  
in deserted streets.

There  
    past the filling station  
                There,  
stabbing their raucous round  
of corner, two simultaneous uprights  
in double tilt of giant steps,

as if a man between them  
were flung across a now, reached inward  
from the future,  
which is instantly obsolete;  
were flung again,  
but no one hangs between them.

The crutches stab their stride  
then swing,  
    then stab again.

Suppose a man,

despite the absence  
of any human agency!

These crutches are out  
on their own, this time by whim impelled  
through any neighborhood of night.

Suppose  
a grip on handholds.  
These crutches  
are synchronized, louder  
than life  
and faster.

# AN ABOMINABLE BREAKFAST

My eyes plough my minestrone,  
seeking an alternative  
to being bruised against your iron face.

Your scowl hangs  
like a soaked and dripping sheet,  
grudgingly releasing  
filthy water which dents the table top  
before it turns to scum.

You hoard your thunder  
by the ton. No drop leaf was ever  
intended to support such silences as yours  
which squats where wood is weakest,  
sniffing at our barrier  
of boredom. Passionate boredom,

like a sweater which a dozen years  
has colonized throughout with burrs,  
stiffens until the first growth  
of conversation comes up stubble;

at each glimpse recapturing the long  
horse face of obstinate delusion,  
and hisses like a useless faucet.



# INTIMATIONS

Not as the disc face  
of the incessant sky, caught in the curve  
of horns that harbor the miracle  
of harp strings, would I deny you  
the vast moor of my love.

Nor as the tremor,  
still rumoring the long gong of countless  
acquaintances, can I dip less  
of you from air than sound  
and strain you through  
    the skeletons of leaves,

for now the twilight whinnies  
and the stars creak on their axes,  
now the fish, feathered through  
from spine within  
    to tufted scales without,  
swims among chimneys,  
a victim for ventilators.

It is a long swallow  
    in the throat of the past  
that gags on the lie of distance  
and your absence. A mirror swings  
between that serpent's eyes,  
flinging some little of my face  
before you, to warn you that a keyhole  
may capture your timelessness  
and guard it for my homeward passage.

# A STREET THROUGHOUT THE YEARS

This street

is always with me  
without change.  
Never has anyone been visible  
on sidewalks  
drained by the moonlight of their breathing.

Row on row of brownstone shafts  
are lifted  
in unison,  
    each slotted  
    with a glass that takes  
outside and throws it back  
    rather than announcing inside.

Glints experiment with paneling,  
burn knobs,  
awaking nothing.

The doors cringe in the depths of alcoves,  
lurked like cowled figures  
    in single blocks, self hugged  
to shrink  
    within a narrowness,  
    pledged to be vigilant  
    with eyes alone.

The street tenses.  
in response to waiting.  
    Always ahead  
    there is that door,  
    that molding  
    half transformed into a column  
which cannot hide  
a luminescence bright enough to be  
    a faint glow  
        existing  
this side of suggestion.

As I watch, it grows,  
    intensifies sufficiently  
        to bathe the steps, but suddenly  
I find myself elsewhere,  
    the street gone.

The next time I am here  
I am a half block off,  
    approaching.

# VERNAL EQUINOX

I used your absence  
up; no day of it was wasted.

When, at the first, it raised  
its granite vastness  
as a cliff that faced my daily door,

I wrote a sentence  
on it which I never let you read.

Nor could you  
ever; your return  
erased it.

I cannot quote it  
now, but after it was written  
there, the whole cliff  
quivered through its width  
in drift of curtain.

That was when  
it first began to shale off flakes  
the size of store-front window panes,  
  
the day I first installed my window,  
  
the day the rock wept slabs of rain.

# NOT NICE AT ALL!

I am not safe here.

I am not  
safe  
anywhere

while you

treat your elsewhere  
brooding

to my least  
commendable thoughts,

or those  
that ought to be too youthful  
to saddle

    language,  
    but which  
nevertheless are always

    the first  
to hobble home  
    just

as you want them —

    naked!

# MY OLD FRIEND, THE SORCERER

I could sit here almost  
forever, watching the dormer window  
of the tall house on the ridge  
issue a flight of clouds.

Some bulge slowly  
through the squeeze of frame, fretted  
by the roughened wood. Some ooze and fray,  
straggle and fall apart  
in shreds. Some clot and obstruct  
the window until activated by a shove.

Some sail forth  
languidly like flotillas  
of immaculate ironing boards.

Some puff in bounce  
to freedom with sooted bottoms,

but the kick dies  
after the window has done with them,  
and all that is left  
is the long climb upward  
into the herd and across the meadows.

And how the fields bruise  
with them under reiteration  
of interrupted heat! I too,

wherever I am, in slow  
pace of assurance,  
steadied instantly,

for he has to be in there,  
grinding out clouds — my old friend,  
the sorcerer — the sly one!

## WHO GOES FIRST?

Your clothes hide precious little  
of your armor of ivory. Probably you  
are unaware of the netting of veins  
that runs through it. Right now, I note  
the trembling of newly sprouted leaves,  
parting a crevice all along your arm,  
in twinkle from your shoulder  
to your wrist.

A soft whip of forsythia has just uncoiled  
and risen from your collar  
to annoy your ear,  
No, you are not a liar. You are numb,  
so habit plated that the lick of truth  
will never touch your cheek,  
nor will the damp  
weight of the scent of lilacs encumber you.

You stand too straight,  
sit with the inclination  
of your spine as focus for meditation,  
walk shod in quandaries of chamoix,  
and occasionally reproach me for never  
removing these linked gloves of nerves  
which have driven my rings into ruts  
of accustomed bruises. A grape fall of lilac  
invades your eyes. I see it, but refuse  
to sniff. I smell it, but turn my head away.  
My face is stamped on the reverse side  
of the coin of caution which I give you,  
shoving its small chill under your plate  
as a fit bribe for your skittish mercy.

# WHO SAYS

Who crunches cellophane  
inside my head  
and wakes me:

Who sets fire to the silence  
with a sentence

of no possible relevance,

which hangs there,  
smouldering,  
but soundless,

and which clings  
for days  
in the curtains?

“Who?”

I cry out  
to the listening  
all around me.

They call me  
crazy.



# THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS

A stone, fitted to the grasp  
for throwing,  
    was kicked  
from the beach and hurled high  
over crests of breakers,  
    and out of context  
into larger  
experience,  
    and stuck there,  
dipping and lifting  
on the buoyancy of air, blistering  
from hide of granite  
along the line of sky to shape  
of piel towers, keep  
and walls,  
    in outgrowth  
    of Basque perversity  
and stuck there,

a parasitic nucleus  
of armed nobility, perched  
on the brow of a mountainous boulder,  
at perilous threat  
to shipping as the monstrous weight  
lowered to the slap  
of spray,  
    or shot up smartly,  
hoisted to the race  
of clouds  
    and stuck there  
on updraught of pride  
on diabolic insolence,  
    keeping court coeval  
with reality  
    —and stuck there.

## RAG PICKER

There you go,  
hung from whatever support  
keeps you dangled  
to scuff of feet  
that drag to the weight of the shadow  
they tow behind them.

Then why is your neck  
worn out with your head?  
And why do you gnaw  
reluctantly on a knuckle  
that you never really liked?

Suppose you had to haul  
your image about as I do,  
and that includes your shadow  
as well as the droop  
in the slouch that casts it!

I have strained against  
the worst laggards there are  
in the junkyards of imagery,  
and I have never gone  
on a diet of fingers. I need them  
to repair their shadows.

# THE INEVITABLE KNIFE

I must look incredibly foolish.

You will have to admit  
that a handle midway between  
the shoulder blades  
seems curious.

I know it's there. I feel it;  
the humiliating wag of it in bend  
of steel to weight of handle;

the glint of metal  
yet unburied, triumphant  
in the wink of stealth;

the chill of ice edge  
encroaching on the sovereignty of spine,

and the nausea,  
just as it always has been,

in the tempting availability  
of a useful excrescence  
for any type of push or pull,

and as it always will be.

I can never get used to it.

# HIGH ON THREE CUPS OF TEA

Street lights drown  
in wine. The ambered dark  
breathes an unpeopled festivity,  
as if the city had been recently  
deserted by a circus  
that left the lights on.

This has been  
but the end of a day of it.

Five persons,  
whose faces had never been anything  
more than basically facial  
                  came down  
with serious cases  
of beautiful eyes.

I was embarrassed.

A warehouse appeared  
as a Venetian palace. A limp  
banana lily languished  
on the lip of a garbage can  
and I,  
          an occasional iconoclast,  
stood breathless before  
the perfection  
of  
a parking meter.

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.

## AS ONE POSSESSED

Any time that you did not splurge  
by staring at blank paper  
seemed to be wasted, for the pressure  
persisted, nagging between your ears,  
or grabbing you by the spine  
and shaking you. Sleep came and went,  
but blotted none of it

And so the words were pinched,  
twisted, stretched and worried;  
forced through a hole in your forehead,  
which widened with their girth,

and everything rocked,  
limped, staggered and sagged;  
flesh from spectral insufficiency  
which made no sense in the flesh  
or out of it. You could not forget it.  
That was forbidden,

but if you insisted on scratching at it,  
you broke your nails,  
and then your fingers. If it died  
to forget you, it stole  
a birth from you to be remembered.

# THE BREAKER

In the grasp of a wave  
you were gone;  
by a wave flung back.

Where are you?

After the wave withdrew  
the beach was wet with stars.

But now the stars  
are dried and you  
are out of reach.

Speak to me  
from all the many voices  
in this whispering sand.

Somewhere the sun must find you.

# AUTUMN WIZARD

*for Ray Bradbury*

When he fed your adolescence  
on the youth of his poems, do you remember  
his fireplace releasing  
his personal Octobers in sendings  
of unusual leaves; that they were crimson,  
indigo, coral and turquoise  
    when they streamed  
a spiral from the hearth grate  
out and once around him  
on their long glide to the ceiling?

Do you remember that his house  
was a gaunt spinster with a rhomboid eye  
browed under angle of a gable; that the raw  
dawns of the crows had galled  
    its clapboards?

He was a poet then, as thin and angular  
as his house, and of a desperate season,  
when the sky screams and the clouds  
become impulsive. Not for all his summers  
has its bite diminished,  
    even when the green-up  
hit him and his wallet swelled with May.

He has been poet still,  
despite the blockage of a moveable screen.  
The Autumn stuffs the yawning  
of the fireplace and the flue packs solid.  
The screen is a wall of gems,

but even so, he sometimes  
removes it and 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.

# MIDNIGHT ON THE ESPLANADE

You have propped your conservatism  
on the rail of a bridge. Bright smudges  
of lights awaken only a glimmer  
in cufflinks; not the sharp burst  
from unclouded metal in response  
to the glare  
from spike-crowned lamps, sided with glass,  
but minor luminescences  
from smears of gold.

It is no night to wink manic  
with cufflinks, but one which molds  
chimeric monsters above the huddled  
houses in the street below;  
a night that dances on cheekbones  
with swarms of microscopic feet,  
a night that wads traffic in cotton batting,

and no night at all for an off-duty  
businessman, who carelessly raises prodigious  
wings from the shoulders of a tuxedo,  
to allow his faultless tailoring  
to soak through, and his plumage  
to mat to a near slime, packed tight  
against the back of his coat.

But, nevertheless, there you are,  
prodding at brittle financial considerations,  
and drowning your face in fog, while first  
one wing and then another, loosens  
under moisture and shakes free a bit of cramp  
from the discipline of muscles.



Feathers lift and ruffle  
down currents of gloss. An impetuous flounce  
stacks a side of sleekness  
against the dullness of serge.  
There is no alteration of your expression,  
or shift of your hands. And your lion,  
successfully trained in Yoga, lies  
less impatiently on the coolness  
    of the flagging  
behind you than either of your wings  
on your cogitations, and awaits  
his enlightenment and your decision  
to continue with your long walk home.

# CLOSE CALL FOR THE SECRET AGENT

The tiny quintets of toes that had spattered  
the parapet, as if after intermittent  
catfalls during the preceding night,

disquieted investigators,  
who wondered why they were indelible,  
what type of marking substance  
had etched them there, and what  
sort of night had happened anyhow.

If anyone had told them  
of the correct gentleman in the impeccable  
suit, who had walked up and down  
the length of those neatly fitted  
segments of granite, folded tightly in  
upon himself with the severity  
of a furred umbrella, and who had tapped  
out his impatience with the tips  
of his fingers  
on the rock, as if the gray of it  
had barely clouded the keyboards  
of several petrified typewriters

they would have paid no attention  
at all, but if they had heard the slightest  
suggestion of fingerprints, left there  
by the secret agent, they would have had those blocks  
rooted up, hoisted, crated and trucked  
off somewhere for insatiable testing  
and, like as not, would have lost a whole  
police force in a man-hunt for the secret agent,  
whose only crime had been the temporary  
dislocation of an aspect of cultural faith.

They were not told. The timely intervention  
of a sparrow easily distracted them.  
The infuriating spots soon vanished.

# THE RETRACTABLE BOOBY-TRAP

After scraping  
myself from the asphalt,

after prodding  
a mutinous hip,

after brushing off  
and straightening up  
my dignity,

after stuffing my embarrassment  
back in my purse,

I searched both curb  
and gutter for the thing  
that tripped me.

It was a dog,  
of course, now  
three blocks hence,  
strayed again from  
his human, tightening  
his hawser  
straight  
across the sidewalk  
at the height of shin.

Effective as a booby-trap  
with retractable  
evidence.

How many pedestrians  
did you tumble today?  
How many limping  
gaits proclaim  
your outing?

# NOT NOW, WANDERER

Evening by evening  
your shadow lengthens, but with this  
Autumn, as with others past,  
it is a lie.

Never does it lengthen  
sufficiently to fall on me.  
Never does the dark grasp  
at the end of your reach  
fasten upon me and lift me  
to the crags where you stand guard  
and listen to my waiting.

Still, the high howl of my hunger  
for you swoops, a lost bird,  
between your messenger ravens.  
I walk at night, expecting their brush  
of blackness across my cheek,  
but no feather of them tells me  
by contact that you are nearer.

Not now, Old One. Not at any  
other now do I need you  
less than in previous Autumns,

for the familiar and delectable tearing  
in the ring of my pelvis  
and the hot cloud  
fattening under my ribs, merge  
with the leaves' urgency  
and the moon's tight-fisted tension.

With this suspense and the concentration  
of desire, I make my instrument  
of destruction and creation.  
When Time shall bring my arms above  
and around the granite  
of your shoulders, and I am lost  
in the folds of your cloak;  
my waiting assuaged in the cavern  
left vacant by your eye  
beneath your hat brim,

my extension will shorten,  
my aim will quirk, my concentration  
will sputter and the old work  
of will and incantation  
will dry up,  
forgotten.

I need you,  
but even  
more than that,  
the need for you. Love,  
lust, or the inevitable conquest  
by thunderbolt,  
penetration by cast  
of lightning on the bare slopes  
browning above the fever of foliage:

our predestined collision  
and the coiled sleep  
in the crater of your vacant eye  
must be withheld as many years  
have kept them  
pocketed for the conservation  
of power.

Your beard  
gathers grayness. Your face hardens  
with the weather as thunder  
rehearses its yearly promises  
among the hills. Somewhere beyond  
a number of Autumns, or even beyond  
all Autumns ever,

you will become a receptacle  
for my remnants, pieced,  
at the last, among your bones.  
Wait, Wanderer, till then.

Not now!

# TAKE FLIGHT TO MONTREAL!

Do you know what that tentacle,  
now weaving itself  
through the slats of your fire escape,  
has done for the front of your building?

(It has not adorned it!)

that when the citrus slant  
of early sunlight  
illuminates it from underneath,  
                    when lifted,  
and catches the pallor  
of its suckers wide-eyed,

cabs slew broadside  
to the traffic and squad cars  
settle single file  
across the street?

I suppose  
that whatever pours it  
like a viscid dripping  
from one of your open casements  
was installed in your fourth floor loft  
to frighten burglars,

                    but  
                    nevertheless  
you could have encouraged  
whatever it is  
to hoist its excess yardage  
                    inside  
even if you balked  
at arranging its removal  
or an adequate explanation.

You had better  
plan on a long  
                    and immediate  
vacation in Montreal.

# THE ITINERANT WINDOW

High on the night

the slow drift  
of your windows southward

with frequent  
idling  
    pauses.

The long reach  
of brilliance sizzling upwards  
from the grass  
    dazzles  
over sill  
and downwards.

    Today,  
lodged accidentally  
in oak boughs,  
    onyx  
    caught out startled  
    in the leaves  
winds tossing lozenges  
of glass about;

tonight,  
    perhaps,  
    a strong gust  
unloading a lead-crossed  
    rectangle,

and nudging it  
    once more  
across the dark,

    suddenly  
switched on  
    by laughter.

# BEFORE THE BEGINNING

A poem clots  
like storm accumulating  
above a headland.

Where space so recently  
was deep  
blue breathing,

a huddle of inquisitive  
giants match  
the power  
of competitive shoulders,  
each trying  
to be the first  
to catch  
a glimpse of me.

I hurry  
to the beach before the rain  
begins to break  
in braille  
against the sand.



# A COVERING LETTER

Dear Editors:

I am sending you five rocks.  
They are overstatements of weight;  
too solid to stare  
into immediate dust; too quick with pyrite  
and quartz to be tedious, yet sufficiently  
conglomerate to confuse you,  
if you are normal;

too much given to erratic winking  
to leave you in peace; infusible,  
insoluble and entirely  
untractable, but just vivid enough  
to make a vague blur out of anything  
you choose to set beside them.

If you reject them,  
you will be ridding yourselves  
of the five best items  
for keeping other people's poems  
from blowing away,

of the five items best suited  
for throwing through the windows  
of the Ford Foundation,

and if you keep them,  
you had better not forget  
to make them available  
for public inspection,  
because, if left unused,  
they rot, and in so doing,  
they are radioactive.

## ENTRANCE OF ORIGINS

Your face clears, and the rock behind  
stands out. A long swathe of your cheek  
has worn to granite. A crackling  
of mica flakes beneath your eye,  
and the bald  
smoothness of a boulder has burnished  
a subtle curve of cheek bone. Above the ledge  
beneath your eye moss drips a green  
stain, from a yellow arch, which leaks  
through fissures at the corners,  
and drains off, eating more cheek away  
until the harsh grain and the scab of lichen  
emphasize the gouge that writes parenthesis  
to nose and mouth. Slowly your face  
disintegrates and terminal moraine erupts,  
complete, unaltered and frighteningly alive.

# APPORTS

Shadows of a June day under my feet.  
These I can understand;  
transient, irrelevant.

There is no more grief in these  
than dust. Shoes shuffle them.

Winds rip them from the sidewalk  
and store them away in poems.

I glance at the ceiling now.  
Can all these shadows, dancing on my paper,  
have fallen like a plaster surrender?

Do they evacuate your poems  
for mine when the wind is reading?:  
silos of remembrance  
trailing shadows of Carcassonne?

# NOT FUNGUS, NO, NEVER THAT!

I am no longer bothered  
when that rotten stump breaks out  
in another human ear.

Already four have fitted  
themselves neatly  
against the bark.

Two, nestled  
at fork of roots,  
cup skywards.

A cluster of six in miniature  
sprouted only yesterday. I wonder  
if the rain has any bearing  
on their size. They are so  
delicate, those small ones,

and apparently quite attentive!

I merely observe, go out there  
and catch up with any  
that might have planted themselves  
in the dark by stealth.

I have finally come  
to accept them, even more than that,  
enjoy them. They are company  
for me, you know.

They make me feel interesting.

# SCHUYKILL WEATHER

With the air sagging  
from its fastenings all around you,  
    and your head  
sticking up there to prop it,

there is no chance  
for your knees at all. Your hands sulk,  
drooping from their roots  
at wrists, like sodden maple leaves  
that drip aphids and itches.

It is all yours to walk  
the weather's weight with your feet.  
Your clothes insult you. You could bite  
the first slam of a restless door.

The atmosphere nags, committed  
to a grudge it holds,  
like a threat of blackmail,  
or a pistol between the ribs.

# IMAGINE YOUR GUITAR

Flinching, tremulous;  
tweaked  
like strings,  
an instant oscillates  
and worries  
air. I imagine  
your guitar  
as tension  
strung to no rigid  
frame, no bowl  
of resonance,  
but as an arbitrary  
scale you pinch  
against the stars,

once wince at a time.

The zenith flutters.

# THE RAUCOUS HOUR

The whiskery tip of a russet tail  
flicked out from under  
the sofa bed.

Small wonder!

Last night at eleven thirty  
Beethoven's tally-ho *Emperor*  
cleared two chair backs,  
a book-piled table  
and the northernmost window-sill  
  
straight through the lowered sash.

A searching broom  
has yet to dislodge the fox.

The ceiling releases  
another knob of plaster,

which strikes  
a glass and breaks its.

The floor sinks wetly  
to my tread  
after Handel's Niagara.

Underneath or overhead,  
next door  
apocalypse  
explodes late  
every evening,  
and early Sunday mornings  
to awaken God.

# THE EVENING FISH

The fish that a clean dusk lures  
between the stripped twigs  
of television thickets and chimneys  
choked with crooked pipes  
that stagger in coolie hats or balance  
the rotation of spheres and the creaking  
mobility of ventilator sculpture,

this once were out too early,  
and let the sun flash them from brick  
and rusted iron, strike coral rhythms  
from their sides and shrill  
an agony of silver from their fins,

this once, when preceding evenings  
had allowed only one explorer  
to rest, nose tangent to an upright  
and tail a perpetual ripple to secure  
a moment of stationary suspension,

this once, before the blue strengthened  
and broke out in a lively rash  
of scattered stars; well before the cat  
returned with feathers in his whiskers,  
the same that so recently  
had silkened the overlap assumed  
to be scales, blazing from the swarms  
that streamed from cupolas  
dropped over water tanks,

this once before fillets of feathers  
seeded the city wind for trawlers.



# SO THERE, DESCARTES!

I have had all the time  
in the universe to examine that table,

the rug,

the chair,

and still I am not  
convinced of his departure.

But he has disappeared. He took his feet  
away when he removed  
his head, shirt, tie and coat;  
everything he was  
above the table.

                  Maybe  
he left his feet  
in front of the door  
of his top floor room.

I shall waste  
no time in climbing  
all those stairs  
to see.

                  He should be behind  
that unreplenished cup. An obstinate  
fold of his overcoat  
laps down darkly

at the side of his chair.

I would never allow  
myself to interfere with the reveries  
of a secret agent,  
                  who could be  
the muse, the saboteur subversive  
and obvious as always.

# SUBWAY EXIT

It had to be he.

He was always like that;  
always going away;

always his long  
familiar back;  
his giveaway gait,

going,

while keeping his face  
where he was going,

keeping his identity  
untapped,

just as he was at this moment;

ten steps upward  
and ahead of me,

keeping his face in sun  
and street for recognition.

Was I to crush against  
the wall and pass him?

to call out his name  
as if to spin him backward?

or watch his back  
receding —  
if it were he?

# SUSPENSE FOR DAYS

Is it

or is it not  
going to open up

and when  
if it does?

This

I have asked  
myself

when the steeple  
riffles  
slightly at the base,

loosens  
its sheath of brick,

and lets it  
hang in folds as if  
about

to slam  
against the sky  
as basin of a raised

umbrella.

Much  
too often  
just about to,

like preliminary  
nasal tugs

announcing  
sneeze!

## STRIKE TWO

I have just replaced  
the mirror with an echo,  
which fills the pallor of its absence  
with a perfect fit.

Switching  
from sight to sound required  
no radical adjustment.

Soon I no longer  
looked there to see if I was being watched,  
and went about my business,  
throwing the wall a word  
instead of the usual nervous glance  
and got the word back,  
slightly altered,

instead of  
the image which the old glass  
smudged and blurred as if from constant  
indecision as to how I should have  
been reported.

Now  
there is greater likelihood of an honest  
duplication, but when the time comes  
for my ear to be  
continually alert to any  
silence from the wall,

not for gratuitous comment,  
but for the possibility that I am being  
overheard, I shall remove the echo,  
as I did the mirror, and leave  
the wall a blank for shadows,  
at the risk of being grabbed.

# SUSTAINED ENCHANTMENT

You were always  
old  
    in there. Way back  
behind accretions  
of protective selves,

wise;

sunken inside your own  
dark oracle, on which your volatile  
awareness floated,

took fire  
when any particle,  
spun off from my unraveling  
vexation,  
    merged with the frost  
that streaked a moon life through  
your somber and forgiving  
patience,

    like the cirrus bridging  
the conspiratorial circuits  
that pervade your hair;

intrigues  
among arcana. You were  
always intolerably  
beautiful in there.

I fought you much  
too often for my health.  
My nerves screamed  
in unison,  
    still do  
and will

until I am caught back  
in my ageless home, somewhere  
between the dawn  
and darkness

in your Satori.

# THE SOUND OF THE TINKLING CYMBALS

They are here again today.  
Their fingertips are alive  
    with buttercup bells.  
Patterns cut out of sunlight play over  
the flowers that dance  
in the winking of their hands.

Hear them, Jerusalem!  
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 the invitation  
of the fire in the bells.

These are my brothers  
who counsel me in the singing  
of unknown birds.

# IN THE CAUSE OF JUSTICE

Nothing popped up  
out of that walnut

at him

when he split it  
open.

Nothing diminutive  
shrilled  
an insult.  
Nothing spat  
when he crushed the shell.

Nothing at all  
untoward.

Nothing exploded.

The shell  
was not even empty.

Boycott walnuts!

## A CUP OF COFFEE

When you lift the sash  
of your window, up goes  
wherever you are behind the upper one,  
and it remains there, writhing  
with apple boughs, galloping  
with a headlong meadow nowhere,  
while being its usual self in motion.

But outside and underneath, my present  
situation spies on you.

Fire escapes scuttle  
under a roofing of heavily drifted  
snow, climb into tree tops,  
or harass the base of a village spire,

and you sip your coffee, not yet  
willing to recognize the texture  
of the wind that cools it,

staring at what you expect to see,  
which actually rattles  
above your head, trapped between two  
plates of glass like the twin  
fake lenses, composed of the business  
of ants, that were framed  
into spectacles for Salvador Dali.

Then, when you slam your window shut,  
the meadow and orchard  
telescope into your recent  
illusion, driving both it and mine  
to their customary distances,

and once again the fire escapes  
threaten my neighbors' windows.



# THE IRON URGE

It is a night of steel.  
The stars sting and refuse to desist.  
A smirk of a moon has been  
newly sharpened. You can hear it  
ring when a surreptitious breeze  
scratches its back against  
the crescent's curve.

It is the kind of a night  
that grasps both of your shoulders  
and wrenches them; a night  
when your body shrinks inside its coat  
and loses contact with its lining;  
when the sky is pallid  
with the pearly frost of arrested breath.

The moon stirs, shrieks  
distantly beyond the crags, but the high  
profile of the head and beak  
of the eagle, emerging  
from the pinnacle, is silent.

The mountain is slow in the process  
of hatching. It is cutting  
a predator instead of a tooth, and the three  
eggs, bleakly gleaming from their nest  
on the balustrade, freeze  
inward from the crackling surfaces  
of shells, through pyrite yolks,  
to agate verbs, unwinged and aging.

## A TRYST BENEATH A BIRD HOUSE

You have gone  
up into your head, and have vanished  
completely. What  
can be going on up there? The lights  
have been awakened  
all at once.

The ladder  
which you must have climbed,  
no longer props your chin. Someone  
must have drawn it up. Are the birds  
healthy? Are they eating well?

I just saw two indigo buntings  
hurtle out of both  
your eyes in unison,  
like simultaneous bullets.

It must be fun  
to do that, especially when your finger  
flips the right switch unconsciously,  
and off they go;

or when a gull sails out of your mouth.

It seems so easy.  
Maybe everything is easier up there.  
I never got that far.

I stayed behind,  
down here hoping, at the low end  
of your neck, to meet you  
at your collarbone.

# THE BLIGHT

He never sits still.  
Undisclosed business sends him  
on mysterious errands out  
of the room and back, then out again,

but if he is unable to climb  
over human legs or ease  
his energy between the chairs,

he will thrust his crooked smile  
across your shoulder  
and rattle it against your ear.

He extracts individuals from a crowd,  
drags them into corners and  
    murmurs darkly  
    that the moon is rising  
    that the lawn needs mowing  
    and that he knows the cube root of 22,056

(and you know what that means!)  
He proposes to announce it at the next  
meeting of the Board of Estimate  
if his victim refuses to give him  
    the window at the second story front  
    the fireplace in the parlor  
    the column at the northeast corner of  
    the porch  
    the Wedgwood spittoon  
    and the smaller of two stuffed walruses

as embellishments for the cardboard palace  
he intends to build, and through which  
he has vowed to ride a bicycle  
in pilgrimage past all his mirrors, leaving  
behind him a votive offering  
to every image of his suit and tie.

If indeed the Board of Estimate has not  
been coerced to snore for a week  
through solutions of quadratic equations,

or the swimming pool

with the Picasso mosaic

at the bottom has not been filled to the top  
with tar

in excess of the truckful which has clogged  
the chimney.

# HOME CAN BE ANYWHERE

They come in clots; the abused buildings  
with boarded windows, the empty shops  
and bars that barely function.

Between them, squashed houses  
sink in lots, frantic  
    with the dance of Shiva,  
that suffers from a sick burlesque  
of scrub pines, or with deciduous runts,  
    whose fat  
bouquets of leaves fuss  
in their discontent  
against indifferent walls.

All these along the edge  
of a fed-up ocean,  
dabbing at the shore by habit,

whose beaches, three parts soil  
    to one part sand,  
breathe an unlikely green  
against their raw sienna.

A fossil, still alive  
in squalor? The crisp, blue buses  
rocket through its veins,  
carrying no advertising,  
even for miracles,

but the proud plaques, in every park, weep  
the guilt loose from the grooves  
of letters, that spell the count  
    of those who died  
in two World Wars, Korea and Vietnam  
for Staten Island, but never  
note Staten Island's death.  
    Be sure of that!

They burnt the certificate  
that made that real,  
    and lie about it brazenly  
in air conditioned buses. Home  
can be anywhere at all, they say,  
even on Staten Island, and they mean it.

# SOME DAY A SUDDEN CRAVING

Old blood goes bad.

Only freshly siphoned blood  
leaks new life into veins,

and so, at the weekend  
he comes home  
with bottled refuse blood

to feed the roses:

white, with no blush  
rising. Innocence of Borgia,  
the Pontiff's kin;

thorns tucked away  
in thicket leaves. Beguiling  
kitten roses. Claws  
straining in velvet lairs.

Old blood  
goes bad in storage,

but sated with mild  
hallucinogens, his roses  
thirst for something real.

They smile at him.

# THE BRAIN WALKS CLOSE BEHIND

Your face precedes you. By some  
three inches the business section  
follows it, keeps it positioned  
for recovery should panic speed it  
into partnership and catch it unprepared,  
as when a word of greeting snags  
in the stateliness of its passage  
and arcs the crevice between  
both halves in front of your ears.

So often I have seen the ritual  
your nose and cheekbones  
leading their high commands; a triumph  
of bowsprit, an elevation of reliquary.  
presentation of armorial claims,  
while eyeless and with folded hands  
an attendant animates or wears it,

until a stare or a word too strong  
to be trapped between the lid and the box  
springs abrupt collision  
and catches your largo summarily,  
with or without intention,

and you are all of a heap  
in yourself at once. It happens often,  
but drops no mileage from the march,  
invalidates no prestige.



# ANCESTRAL VISION

Now your recurrent  
father surfaces; from crypt  
of dream, from all humanity's  
first oracle holds court,  
transfiguring the face  
behind your beard. And who  
are you? Priest, Hierophant?  
Scholar of Akashic scripts?  
Our common ancestor who counsels  
elves? Confessor to all  
innocents who seek the Grail?

Your youth denies it.  
Your casual eyes conflict  
in seeming with an intensity  
that holds them captive  
to a cosmic wisdom.

Are you gone up  
in smoke, leaving this august  
and learned personage custodian  
of your body, or are you  
host to a more aggressive  
spirit, shuffling both  
immortalities inside your skin  
to justify one ego, or are you  
saint in fact, fiction  
painting your identity on subtle  
truth? And what is that?

## THIS CERTAIN QUAININESS

Good gray Grand-Daddy, stuffed  
into the clutter of a room too small  
for emotional surprises, rummages contentedly  
through psychic bric-a-brac and bits  
of this and that left over from a padded century;

    a peacock sadly used

by years; an aquatint of the Prater; fussy  
doilies everywhere; a mixed bouquet of dried  
leaves and dead grass; a sculptured  
marble clock, wriggling with ormolu; the smell  
of dust-thick portieres, all spilling  
from an era spawned by such minutiae,  
while somewhere underneath the papers  
on the desk an old id waters  
at the eyes; while above the circling time  
an Oedipal triangle holds hands  
in gilt clinging to sensuous lead;  
while in the basket by the hearth

    an infantile

libido sneezes; while in the wideness  
of outside the oily spread and sprawl  
of a squirming light-show oozes from being  
into nothing and back again, spelling  
the name of Sartre

    on cockroach carapace of Now.

Would it were Jean-Paul Jones instead!

But nothing ever seems quite simple,  
    even names.

This is our heritage, which never  
was completely serviceable, being a hamper  
full of hand-me-downs, knitted conundrums,  
whose soiled and simple answers glut  
the button box, mementos of the

    Franco-Prussian

War and memoranda on the thrust of birth.

What shall we do with all dear Dr. 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?

# KEEPING THE WINDOW CLOSED

The last time  
I opened the window  
the moon got in,

streaked through  
between the sill and sash  
and plunged into the mirror.

It stuck there.  
Now I cannot get it  
out from between  
the mercury and the glass.

Look in the mirror  
any time of day or night,  
and there the moon is,

guarding the absence  
of your image  
and gloating serenely,  
I resent it;  
the stars too,  
that were sucked behind  
the speed of moon  
into the parlor,

where they roosted  
on anything and crackled,  
flared, went out,  
then flared again,

and vanished.  
That...bothers me.

# THE SUMMER'S FINAL SEASON

It was vulnerable; that deep green dent  
in the range of mountains. Spring and Autumn  
roused watersheds that made an unbroken mudhole  
of the glowing fields. Winter brought  
avalanching snow, and ice in crevices,  
that slid off cliffsides, sending them to plough  
the steeps that once had held them, or sprang  
the gangwar boulders, sending them  
down in leaping triumph, end over end,  
to the certain demolition of anything that blocked  
their way, Summer sank down among the peaks,  
or burned high in unmoving air above the village,  
which somehow had crystallized there,  
    even under these  
conditions, and had remained intact for  
    centuries  
with a repair here, a patch there; bright  
with whitewash and weeping thatch,  
    hard edged in a loose  
geometry of clusters. The Cross on the church spire  
agonized even the far-off observer's eye.

Sheep mourned and roosters cheered. Laundry  
danced on Mondays behind the kitchens.  
    Children repeated  
hereditary rites in the rutted roads, but still,  
now, in the cauldron of Leo, a black smudge of no  
disturbing size, hung as if appreciably distant  
above the village; hung motionless, gained density.  
grew blacker, larger, as if in slow and regular  
descent. All was untainted around it.  
Heat dazzled in the dooryards. Barns and haycocks  
quivered in the haze, and the days drowned  
in their nightfalls. The moon took over,  
    chilling around  
the blot that never scattered, never shredded  
or shifted from its post above the huge house  
of civic affairs, yet thickened  
    with each hour's weighting.

It was a dream, of course, a night's glimpse  
bitten from a long succession of the same  
in a history of suspense. Routine had long ago

numbed everyone. One day the cloud would liberate  
its cargo, would tire of its darkness  
and release it  
on unwavering sunlight, or else would plummet  
like a stone on target, bringing both contents  
and container, if they were separate,  
crashing  
through the rooftops in this thimbleful of motions.  
But after so many abortive catastrophes  
had loomed  
once and had been forgotten, what difference if  
a deviant threat imperiled this tedious splendor!

# THE CAPRICORN TAPESTRY

Out there in the darkness  
bushes wink up at him.

For us, they are enlivened  
by fireflies, but to him they are cover  
for marauders. The telephone  
sits guileless, on the table,  
saying nothing.

Let its silence  
be tapped, for silence listens  
to unspoken guilt.

Call out the goon squad!

The one-man vigil  
across the street, crashes  
through drawn blinds and the message  
on his swaying placard,  
in the ice-blue of unwavering light,  
reads its repeated accusation  
from every mirror.

a sinister white sphere,  
now resting by the herbaceous border,  
has been lit with leprous  
malignancy by the moon,  
and is bound to explode.

Even the surface  
of the moon is scouted by astronauts,  
looking down here,  
plotting something.

Order them back! Quickly!

Throw them a banquet,  
Anything, to keep them  
    from getting up there  
to spy on the chimney.

Who knows  
what danger may seep  
down the flue.

# THE LODGER

The sky herds its clouds, at least  
on two sides of this floor and ceiling.  
A modest wall secures their hopefully  
stable relationship. The bed dozes,  
    but not the comb,  
stood nearly on its head,  
    which teeters  
on one corner gleefully and which,  
    thank God,  
though scaled to the universe  
of an almost floor-to-ceiling goblet,  
dents the mattress only slightly.

A match from that same dimension lies  
regrettably slack on the carpet, its wood  
relaxed almost to the pliancy of twine.  
The wardrobe, all of glass,  
except for its frame, has been scrubbed  
to the cleanliness of nothing at all,  
and proves itself to be an admirable  
container of nothing. 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,

but does it matter,  
    when you come down to it?  
The clouds are purposeful  
in their drive  
    and the carpet is spotless.

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.



# SHADOW FAKER

It can hardly be easy to summon  
shadows after sunrise,

to pack them  
in concentrate about

your waking,

molded to your appearance,

yet that is what you drag  
out of bed every morning,

When you plunge your clouded  
consciousness into the bath, the water  
undoubtedly forces unattached  
masses of darkness  
upward and about your head.

for now you have shaken  
the splendor of night from about  
your ears, after entering,

a tall drift of coolness,  
into the field of fluorescent inspection,  
still reminiscent of a slender  
rise of winter smoke.

How much of you squanders  
your reality  
in keeping you a fake  
hallucination?

# AQUILA

It is difficult for me to speak  
the audacity of your images  
into my descriptions of you,  
as it must have been also for you  
to loosen and tumble the side of a mountain,  
before you eased yourself  
out of the peak that hatched you,

while blinking at the bleached sky  
and the great fins of snow behind you  
as the moon bounced its replicas against  
your pride and retrieved them  
for bent reminders.

There was then as now,  
the same experimentation  
with the muscles of back and shoulder,  
the same tentative archings  
of unmanageable wings, which rose again,  
even though completely exhausted;

the same crane of your head  
to the zenith and the same attempts to whet  
both your beak and eyes against the moon,  
as if in anticipation  
of that extended gaze that leaps  
for the sun and grasps it  
as now. But then, the process  
was longer and far more cautious. For now,  
as in two hand grasp you set the lectern  
between your purpose and your audience,  
the high heft of your wings  
is definite, their grandeur  
as chilling as the night  
that willed you from its granite,

and your lashes take fire  
from the cargo stolen from the sun  
behind them. The flint ridges rise  
in blades from your shoulders,  
and the drone  
of recycled formulae from several  
years' storage in this one room,  
is broken as the eagle crashes  
against the ceiling. There  
the spell is terminated. Night hardens  
into deafness, drowning.

# COMPANIONS

These boots, familiar,  
are wearied with the weight of walking.  
Bare toes peep out through leather  
as the boots transform to feet

The feet crack with drying  
and the boots are aching.  
Standing before the fireplace  
these boots, these feet become  
as one and wait there patiently  
to be thrown out together.

The owner will have to do  
without either boots or feet;  
the feet before they crack and stiffen  
and the boots have flattened arches.

# THE SORCERER'S MOON

On a patch of sod  
at the forking of two roads  
there grows a tree;  
its leaves compact and black,  
in contrast with the woods behind it,  
which cradles the infant moon.

the same moon that vibrates  
from the mirror in your absence;

the same moon that soars  
beyond the mountain peak  
that disgorges a granite eagle;

the same moon drenching  
a meadow in which a giant wine glass  
swirls the fragments of cloudlets  
in its gullet; the same which our hands  
would touch in search for keenness  
burning, as if with the intensity  
of cold, the anger of outrageous summer.

# SKY HANGER

According to the instructions I had  
to jump, I did  
from the ledge at the top of a mountain  
into nothing and plunged  
a short shock downwards,  
then steadied upon the air.

The mountain backed away  
from me and merged behind me  
with all its brothers

and I was where I was

alone

from a wide wing dangling,  
thinking of the absurdity  
of my moccasins

when hanging from skies  
that pulled in tall heaps of blue  
above me, facing a wall of hills  
that bucked and heaved at times  
on their line of march along the valley  
or jostled with one another

while down some thousand  
feet below were dairy farms  
resorts, spires, silos, an eyecup lake,  
or a country road, unmindful  
of a speck that eddied where I was,  
naked in my fear of Up and Down  
and of Out to Every Side  
in all their vastness.

# ADVANCE UPON CANAAN

We were a long time coming:  
Ours was no Exodus,  
but a continued coming:  
not as the dunes creep,  
soon to be anchored by grass,  
scrambling across them,  
not as the waves which are always  
coming, but never arrive.

As burrs fasten to pelts,  
as pods on one wing circling,  
and nearly invisible, slowed and halted  
by fitfulness of wind,

we came upon Canaan  
and took root in the midst  
of the brush, grew up through thicket  
and resistance of indigenous tribes  
until we were grown enough  
to look over the dunes  
toward our Country and presentiment  
of our City, at one time  
Babylon, at another Jerusalem.  
In both home and in the wilderness  
we shall sing the song  
of our lady of revelations  
in a strange land.

Above our heads in the sky  
the wheel turns, still turns  
and is stilled: all wings and eyes  
seeing and seen, moving and motionless  
completion of ourselves  
at our exit as at our beginning,  
packed thick with good and guilt

At one with our fathers,  
judges, kings, prophets,  
back before realization in constant rotation  
over the top of the hill,  
from which we shall see the land  
we have yet to conquer,  
though we may not attain it  
in our ration of life.

The dunes come  
but they are anchored by grass.  
The sea is forever coming,  
but never arrives.  
Ours was a continued coming  
over the ages to Canaan  
beneath the chariot wheels  
which have yet to come.



# LEAVINGS

Those legs you left here  
still stick straight out  
across the doorway. Some day  
they are going to trip me,

and that spread of hand and forearm  
pressed against a panel,  
probably to brace a leaning shoulder  
and somehow in brightness —

(that kitchen light  
has always dazzled me)  
but not in shoulder. Oh no,  
No arm there. Just an aggressive  
jutting from between the coats.

Then that chevron fringe of beard  
without a face to hang it  
dangles for a moment in the mirror;  
one hand wrings a clutch of fingers.  
There is always a merry crackling  
in the corner when that happens,  
always beside the refrigerator.  
And no one left to snoop for beer?

An eye rolled to the side  
comes on, goes off. A bent back  
at my desk, a strain of shirt  
across the shoulders: highlights  
which the desk lamp caught and lost.

And how about that foot and trouser  
to the knee, supported  
by a sturdy chair?  
There ought to be a knee bent  
with an arm across it.

But everything  
ends off abruptly, like sentences  
that people start  
and suddenly abandon.  
They should come back some day  
to haunt their speakers

like the spare parts left around  
to litter up my rooms  
since you decentralized.

My God, man,  
will you never pull yourself  
together? what sort of stripped down  
suggestion of the rest of you  
is badgering someone else?

# THE LISTENING ROOM

Green chill awaits me.  
A hard unripening roundness  
daily expands, encroaching  
on my absences. Only a thread  
of floor remains to me  
for sidling to that pinched corner  
where I keep my soul.

Tonight I shall return  
to fetch it. I shall inch the door  
open upon the increasing  
pressure, the insidious glow,  
and fling my keys inside  
beneath that patch of ceiling,  
breathed green, to which the floor  
replies in kind.

Let them talk green  
at the thickest of that tart fragrance  
that exudes from a seedless core,

while I rejoice  
as the spring lock rejects me.

Ours fastens on mine no longer

# WHERE WILL IT ALL BEGIN?

Night  
Fritters its life  
away.

The dawn  
is working  
on another morning.

letting it  
ooze at its least  
in dribbles

through inky fingers.

That's stingy;  
flap both hands awake and let  
the spatter fly,

or better  
dump it all  
of a lump in the ocean

and see what happens.

# THE WATCHER AWAKENED

The sweep of an eyebrow measures  
the breadth of whiteness, still  
unbroken by writing.

    I did not  
draw it there; it loiters  
above the area,  
then drifts away.

If the wind  
brought it, bobbing on the viscid  
current of time,  
    night  
anticipated my delusions.

The eye beneath it  
blossoms on the paper and re-routes  
  
my pen.

## CAT'S CRADLE

It is probably all tinsel  
and radiator paint:  
this prodding with eyes;  
this tickling with the edge of a smile;  
the appearance of nearly  
paranormal knowledge in the intensity  
of your gaze. A rehearsal, perhaps,  
or something you wear to parties,

    I tell myself,  
after so many feints  
at offers in an atmosphere  
hypnotic with intimacy;  
glances slipped to me like bribes,  
like joints,  
    which you know  
will never be taken;  
smiles that might well be stolen  
from you  
if I believed them,  
    and that limp,  
leftover hand on the couch  
which is waiting for something.

Nothing that I would do,  
of course,  
and nothing you want to happen.

# 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 my 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.

# MY COUSIN IN VERTICAL ORBIT

She was so neat about it.  
She slid head downward into the chimney  
and skimmed the floor from the fireplace  
to the window. Non-stop and out.

Then up over eaves  
and back down  
in swan-dive through the parlor.

The last time the rug went with her.

It will home, grime thickened  
at her next sweep through,  
and I, apparently,  
will be cursed with a night  
of numbering beers against  
the underbellies of her revolutions,

or of strolling among the fireflies  
at the garden's end,  
for the best view of her backward  
curve of spine, as she arches  
the ridgepole cleanly  
between two lightning rods,  
and drives the bats  
as crazy as human beings.

She was neat  
about it. Even with her measurements,  
she negotiated the bore of the flue,  
emerging as plump  
as ever, never having dislodged  
a gobbet of soot, spotted  
her dress, or unhooked her coiffure,

but three were many times  
more than enough  
of that.



# YOU NEVER NOTICE

At the street crossing  
I took you by the crook of your arm.  
With the faintest sound  
of ripping, it came off, and I  
was left holding it.

You never noticed,

but continued to gash the air  
with your face as you shoved it ahead  
of you to the opposite sidewalk.

Your mind  
ran no longer  
beside us; it has started up  
an idea or two  
in an alley and was off  
in pursuit.

Small swarms of letters  
clustered in wriggling blots  
against the sky. Your eyes worried  
at their spasms of rearrangement,  
squinted apparent meanings  
from several spellings.

So often  
you leave me with the stem  
of a conversation  
clamped in my teeth, a rhythm  
of breathing  
in the telephone,  
an arm.

# 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.

# ENOUGH OF THIS

Shut up, old wound.  
If your mouth must stay open.  
let it laugh;

dry cackles locked together  
like knitted burrs,  
lodged in the scruff of memory,

and let the words  
that fester in it terminate  
before shape  
catches them up  
in your thread of a throat

Clamp your gaping  
truth on quiet.

# BAD COMPANY

If a thick, green discharge  
issues from underneath his fingernails  
and stains the carpet,  
and 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 heels strike sparks  
from the parquetry and her hair  
retracts visibly into her scalp,

meditate, if you can,  
upon an inexpensive lawyer,

and fire insurance,

or 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.

# IT MUST BE A JOKE

Your face has slimmed  
and twisted, one eye  
exploded into the center  
of a spider's wheel;

Your nose has been smudged  
from sight, your mouth  
slipped sideways and drawn crooked.

How have you become  
so distorted when my face  
is missing from behind  
your shoulder;

when you clutch at yourself  
with both arms across  
from me at the table;

when there is no mirror?

# WINDFALL

Greenbacks slithering  
across my desk.  
They rustle. Gouged  
from envelopes  
drifting into piles.

    Sticking,  
wilted and crumpled; some few torn.  
They are mounting. I can hardly  
count them. They continue coming.

Where shall I put  
tomorrow's payload since today's  
still must be organized,  
how handle them? Bind them in packs  
of twenty and press them down  
to fit in tidy packets?

Leaves are drifting into herds  
and from the boughs  
of abandoned trees in silence  
silver coins are falling.

## DOWN MEADOW SLOPE

Look down the moonsweep  
to a march of spruce  
and see your own form  
naked,  
    dancing:  
how fireflies come and go

as if from between your ribs  
how grasses bristle  
through your shins  
how you stick on the twigs  
of a crouching bush  
as if you were a twist of fog.

You are!  
but what is lacking  
there tonight that seems  
to make you real?

# END OF AN ERA

*Victory fallen from the Arch in Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn*

You would never be satisfied  
with conciliation;  
deploring peace talks  
you would press your demands  
for bombs.

Anyone with as many sharp spikes  
and excrescences to embellish  
a helmet as you have  
could only cry for combat.

Look how you have incited  
your horses to rear and plunge  
as you lash them to leaping  
from the top of the arch.

You have long been pleased  
to deafen daily with those trumpets  
in your ears. Life without  
a continuing clamor  
would be unproductive for you.  
You will have to be Queen Tumult to exist,  
to fulfill your imagined destiny.

But as of this date  
you have gone too far. A step back  
(always a misdemeanor in your code)  
to an extra thrust

of your highly unnecessary sword  
has unstepped you



and you have been poured  
head down in a tumble of scrap metal  
cast as your garments  
from the rear of your chariot,  
secured still by some obstinate  
remnant of uncorroded bronze  
to your heels, with your foolish sword  
menacing pedestrians below you  
in Grand Army Plaza.

So much for you,  
Senora Machismo!

# SOUTHWARD RUNNING

It is all as it should be;  
he shall soon be entering  
    from the North  
as I have often seen him,

running

his right arm lifted high  
above his head  
flourishing a five-branched  
    candelabrum

its small fires flattened  
by his speed and bright  
with the wine-sharp pallor  
of a city evening  
against the peach glow  
of the arching lamps

running

as if with the pressure  
of news to spring  
upon the ear and eye

in sparks  
in mantra.

ignoring questions  
friends and onlookers swept aside

slight curling at the edges  
of a skimmed milk moon  
and all the sky  
widened to five more senses  
and dimensions,

running!

# VANDALISM

A smart bite of gravel

which you dropped in my boot  
and which gnawed at the stance  
of my determination or a muscle  
rendered useless  
by a bruise;

bullet holes pocked  
in the lid of my grand piano  
after your last invasion  
of my privacy of mind.

These I charge  
with damage to my self esteem

not you  
with your fuse and matches.

## ANOTHER SEASON

In bygone years the sunlight  
bit the buildings just this way  
in this season by late afternoon.

Now every one of them has come  
to life with all its faces,  
voices, emotions and events  
so clearly that they all  
but injure me.

Bricks still  
glow almost as with some  
certain light within them.

In country towns a new paint  
in pastels takes on an unsuspected vigor  
as if to say,

Here I am.

So many budding Autumns  
heaped up upon one another  
in piles like flaming leaves  
recall as many other times  
and places as music  
and as many dead beginnings.

# THE PRIVILEGED MOMENTS: PUBLISHING BARBARA A. HOLLAND

The poems in this volume were first published by The Grim Reaper and The Poet's Press in the years 1973 through 1975. First, we issued a sampler of the overall work as the chapbook, *Autumn Wizard*. Later, the work appeared in two chapbooks as *Crises of Rejuvenation*, Volumes 1 and 2. Several reprints followed, but the integral work has now been out of print for many years.

It was evident from the start that this was no ordinary collection of poems. When I first met Barbara Holland in 1971 I was immediately struck by her forceful language — rocky, granitic, yet sinuous — and by the quirky, bizarre and sometimes hilarious images she was able to conjure. When I discovered that many of the poems were inspired by the visual world of the paintings of Rene Magritte, the Belgian Surrealist, one of my favorite artists, I was hooked.

The original volumes of this poetic cycle did not contain specific references to Magritte other than the title poem, and two of my own cover designs that emulated Magritte in concept. The first cover showed an apple setting over a seascape, clearly a tribute to Magritte. The second volume had a line drawing of a rose extracting its color from a blood transfusion, an illustration of one of Barbara's poems.

In retrospect, I think we were remiss in not making the Magritte connection more clear. Readers who have never seen Magritte's paintings have enjoyed these poems. But experienced together with a perusal of the painter's work, the works take on extra resonance. The reader gains a common visual and epistemological experience with the poet and can thus participate more readily in her flights of fantasy. In my own case, I found that the Magritte paintings inspired me to render my own impressions, reactions and interpretations into poems as well. Sometimes, Barbara and I wrote poetic dialogues with the mysterious Magritte world as our shared take off point.

What is surrealistic in the context of these poems? Magritte's work differs substantially from what I shall call, for lack of a better term, the work of "hard" Surrealists. He poked fun at manifestos and nearly always rooted his paintings in reality. Where a Dali landscape is often completely alien, and where other modernists even abandon traditional representation altogether, Magritte's paintings depict the strange and inexplicable in a realistic, painterly manner, centering on the cityscapes and landscapes of Paris, Belgium, the European forest and countryside, mountains and seashore. Rows of town houses line up in tedious splendor, their windows reflecting or capturing proper clouds. Magritte's sea and sky are photographically perfect, except when intruded upon by interloping impossibilities.

In "The Empire of Light," for example, the artist presents a house, a garden wall, some trees and a street lamp. The lamp casts light and shadows out over the lawn and it is reflected in a pond. All is dark under the trees. An ordinary, realistic scene, depicted with amazing subtlety in the gradations of tones of light on the underside of the trees.

The element of the Surreal enters when we look at the sky above the scene. It is bright, noontime blue! The scene below is night, above is high noon. The pond, of course, *should be* blue as the sky, and the trees should be lit from all directions by refracted sunlight. Magritte blends the underlit trees and their foliage into a silhouette against the blue sky, a masterpiece of illusion. The observer knows that something is “mysterious” or “wrong” about the painting, but its photographic realism fools the eye.

Other Magritte paintings are more blatantly Surreal. An eye stares out of the center of a slice of ham. Three moons perch in the limbs of a tree. An eagle hatches out of a jagged mountain peak. Household objects and a lion litter the edge of a road.

Magritte admired mystery stories about secret agents, and was fascinated with the works of Edgar Allan Poe. He created a visual world in which mysterious objects, such as little round sleigh bells, French horns, lions, and bowler hats, appear again and again on beaches, in forests, or in city streets. Or, a familiar room and its objects are petrified, or a sky is rendered as a stack of cubes.

This combination of realism and the mysterious makes Magritte unlike most other Surrealists. The same factor makes his work much more accessible to average viewers. There is a special appeal for poets, who are always looking for ways to turn the everyday into the mysterious.

Barbara Holland is not a “Surrealist” in the literary sense. There is no randomness, no impulse toward Dadaist fist-shaking. The ambiguities of meaning, the shattering of form and syntax that run rampant in literary Surrealism have no place in her writing. Like Magritte with his photographic style, Barbara writes in plain English, often in a narrative that could easily be read as prose to the unwitting listener with poem-phobia. Her voice speaks in complete sentences, tightly packed clauses, and unambiguous meaning.

The world of Barbara Holland, then, is the real one. The twist is simply that impossible things happen in her world. Roses drink bottled blood, tree stumps sprout human ears, unaccompanied crutches stride the avenues, and a knife appears in the poet’s back as a permanent ornament. She writes with clarity and wit about each brand of impossibility.

How much Magritte does the reader have to know to appreciate these poems? The answer is — surprisingly little. Browse through a book of Magritte’s work to get a feel for the visual world, and you are ready for most of what Barbara deals out. In fact, most of these poems are not specifically about any particular Magritte painting. Magritte merely provides the template that Barbara superimposes over her New York turf. She sees her urban setting as if through the canvasses of the master, and tells us what she sees.

I interviewed Barbara about the poems in *Crises of Rejuvenation* when we were preparing the 1986 edition. Following are the notes we made about some of the poems that *do* spring from actual Magritte paintings, presented here for those who might take pleasure in reading the poems against the paintings. Some other passing thoughts about the inspiration or intention of certain poems also emerged from the conversations, and are they repeated here so that the reader may benefit from the background information.

PERSONAL VALUES was provoked by the painting “Les Valeurs personnelles” (1952) which depicts a room full of oversize objects. A comb and brush and a bar of soap overwhelm a normal sized bed, while the room’s wallpaper depicts a Surreal sky and clouds. Another poem, THE LODGER, also uses this painting as a taking-off-point.

A STREET THROUGHOUT THE YEARS depicts a repeated dream that never attains a conclusion, a door that is never reached.

VERNAL EQUINOX introduces the concept of petrified objects, people and even emotions that Barbara has adopted from Magritte. Paintings by Magritte that come to mind are “The Song of the Violet” and “Souvenir de Voyage III.”

In INTIMATIONS and, later, THE EVENING FISH, sky and ocean are interchanged at dusk wherein fish fly among the television antennae and chimney tops. You have to see the sunsets over Greenwich Village through a succession of seasons to appreciate how true this is to the neighborhood where we all lived.

The dinner date in AN ABOMINABLE BREAKFAST, Barbara tells me, is like one of Magritte’s petrified bourgeoisie.

When Barbara empathized with a nephew in a cast for a broken leg, she began fantasizing about a pair of unpeopled crutches, perhaps the most bizarre automata ever. LOUDER THAN LIFE depicts their adventures.

The title poem, CRISES OF REJUVENATION, refers to several key Magritte paintings. The poem centers, though, on a series of perverse paintings in which Magritte painted objects and then put incorrect names under them, such as a tumbler of water called “l’Orage (Storm)” in “La Clef des Songes (The Key of Dreams).” There is also the famous painting, “Ceci n’est pas une pipe (This is not a pipe).”

Barbara wondered about the origin of the cubed sky shown in paintings such as “La legende doree,” and here is her theory, made by a sorcerer in MY OLD FRIEND, THE SORCERER.

WHO GOES FIRST is a literal reaction to the painting titled “Ready-Made Bouquet.”

THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS was provoked by one of the most haunting paintings of the 20th Century, Magritte’s “Castle of the Pyrenees,” which depicts a castle atop an egg-shaped rock that floats serenely over a seascape. Epics could be written about that one painting.

THE INEVITABLE KNIFE is a masterpiece of paranoia fit for one of Magritte’s trailed secret agents. When Barbara read this, she twisted about, looking for the knife in her back which she could neither see nor extricate.

Those seeking to explain poets’ visions as the result of drugs will be only slightly satisfied to see that Barbara can transform bleak Sixth Avenue into a circus after having only three cups of my infamous Lapsang Sou-chong tea, in HIGH ON THREE CUPS OF TEA The poem contains one of the most wondrous streaks of alliteration in all of Barbara’s poems as well.

The eagle hatching out of the mountain in “The Domaine of Arnheim” — itself a mysterious reference to a story by Poe — provoked several poems, including AS ONE POSSESSED and, later, THE IRON URGE and AQUILA.

Sun, moon and stars occasionally get stuck in window panes, mirrors or treetops in Magritte paintings. This happens in the poem, THE BREAKER. Paintings with this imagery include “September 16th” and “The Banquet.”

AUTUMN WIAZRD is dedicated to Ray Bradbury, the undisputed Lord of October. The “indigo, coral and turquoise” leaves might belong in a Magritte forest.

MIDNIGHT ON THE ESPLANADE is a straightforward explication of the painting “Le Mal du Pays.”

Barbara says of CLOSE CALL FOR THE SECRET AGENT that it represents her pursuit of Magritte’s personality. “I wanted to find out what kind of man he was, and never did figure it out,” she recalled. The poem evokes the many pictures of bowler-hatted men who stare straight at you with masklike, inscrutable faces. Magritte’s paintings, “The Menaced Assassin” and “The Month of Harvest” come to mind.

NOT NOW, WANDERER is contemporaneous with the Magritte poems and certainly shares its mountainous landscapes with those of the painter. But this poem has its origins in Wagner’s Ring Cycle, the paganized operatic setting of the *Nibelungenlied*, in the figure of Wotan with his single eye, staff and floppy hat. The Wanderer is the name by which the Father of the Gods chooses to be known in the mysterious episode where he tries to block Siegfried’s passage. The “messenger ravens” will be recognized by Wagner fans as the twin birds that signal the imminent assassination of Siegfried. This poem is a passionate song of hopeless, lost, ineluctable passion. It reduces audiences to stunned, purgated silence, so much so that it can be almost unendurable to hear another poem for some long moments afterwards. I am reminded of Mahler’s dictum that five minutes silence should follow the first, funereal movement of his Resurrection Symphony. To hear Barbara read this poem when she was at her peak was one of the great thrills of my poetic life.

TAKE FLIGHT TO MONTREAL! is a personal favorite of mine, for reasons of pure ego. Barbara wrote this after a dinner at The Poet’s Press loft during which I playfully hinted that I was installing some multi-tentacled Lovecraftian monster to protect the premises against burglars. My poem in reply to this one appears side by side with her original in the Grim Reaper anthology *May Eve*.

Magritte playfully has window panes retain an exterior image even when shattered and leaning against a wall. Here, in THE ITINERANT WINDOW, Barbara has an entire window moving about and winding up in the boughs of a tree. The images trapped in glass also figure in A CUP OF COFFEE.

BEFORE THE BEGINNING is a seascape, very reminiscent of Magritte’s “Le temps menaçant (Threatening weather).”

Rocks from Magritte’s petrified world take on a practical use to punish editors who have the temerity to reject poetry manuscripts in A COVERING LETTER.

In ENTRANCE OF ORIGINS a face turns into rock, somewhat reminiscent of Magritte’s petrified world, but also reminding one of some of Dali’s ideas.



APPORTS evokes a French medieval fortress as an immutable object whose ephemeral shadows move like gypsies from place to place. An enigmatic poem. The origin of NOT FUNGUS, NO, NEVER THAT!, says the poet, “was put in my head by the way fungus looks: noses, chins, ears.”

SCHUYKILL WEATHER, by its title, betrays the poet’s Philadelphia origins.

I IMAGINE YOUR GUITAR was inspired by a display of heat lightning.

In SO THERE, DESCARTES! the secret agent vanishes into thin air — bit by bit. In LEAVINGS, pieces of him linger. The secret agent—the man whose face you never quite see, is also the “you” in SUSTAINED ENCHANTMENT. We suspect, too, that the man always a few steps ahead in SUBWAY EXIT, and YOU NEVER NOTICE, and THE BRAIN WALKS CLOSE BEHIND may be one and the same.

Magritte used umbrellas in some of his work, such as the painting of an opened umbrella with a glass of water on top. In SUSPENSE FOR DAYS a church steeple threatens to open like a parasol.

Mirrors that reflect the wrong images are another familiar Magritte device, in such canvasses as “Les liaisons dangereuses” and “La Reproduction Interdite.” In STRIKE TWO, Barbara has done with Surreal mirrors and then goes into a frenzy over distorted echoes. A tinge of the same marvelous sense of paranoia infects this poem as in THE INEVITABLE KNIFE Later, in KEEPING THE WINDOW CLOSED, the moon and some stars get caught in the parlor mirror. Not “billions and billions” of them, as Carl Sagan would say, but just a few.

When the president of an eminent poetry society just happened to win that group’s \$700 prize for “best poem” with an ode “On the Opening of a Walnut,” Barbara was provoked to write her nutty lyric.

In “The Therapist” and a series of related paintings Magritte shows a man who has an oversized bird cage as a torso, which provoked the marvelous poem, A TRYST BENEATH THE BIRDHOUSE.

THE BLIGHT is a character study of a very real character, a small-time con artist who temporarily infected the New York poetry scene in the early to mid-1970s. His hyperactive behavior and grandiose schemes are parodied in this poem.

HOME CAN BE ANYWHERE was provoked by a bus ride through part of Staten Island.

SOME DAY A SUDDEN CRAVING is a true story of a hospital worker who had a novel gardening tip.

In ANCESTRAL VISION an old face suddenly takes on a boyish look and the poet wonders which persona is the real one.

Dr. Freud gets his comeuppance in THAT CERTAIN QUAINNESS. You had to be around in the 1960s and 1970s to see what a grip Freud’s ideas still had. Psychiatrists made a lot of money keeping neurotic, well-heeled patients in a state of total emotional dependence. And it was always about Mommy and Daddy and those repressed desires.

THE SUMMER’S FINAL SEASON concerns a dark cloud hanging over a peaceful village. Everyone pretends it doesn’t exist. Although the poet didn’t intend it, there is something about this poem that, to me,

represents the whole of modern Cold War anxiety. The cloud hangs there, waiting to “liberate its cargo” which would “plummet like a stone on target.” For a generation born under the cloud of a nuclear threat, this poem is an unwitting representation of how life just “goes on.”

The real-life paranoia of President Nixon is portrayed in *THE CAPRICORN TAPESTRY*. Barbara recalled a newscast in which Secret Service agents had scurried on Nixon's orders to disarm a bomb on the White House lawn, which turned out to be a golf ball. If Nixon was made edgy by protesters on the sidewalk, the poet wonders, how would he feel about nosy astronauts staring down at him from the moon?

*THE LISTENING ROOM* is based on the painting of the same title—possibly one of Magritte's more familiar ones. A large green apple fills almost all the available space in a room. Barbara sent this to me just after I had sent her my ferocious supernatural poem, “Fête.” “A black wedding?” she replied, enclosing this poem and adding, “Well, here's a green divorce!”

*THE SORCERER'S MOON* is a montage of different images from Magritte, which the reader will recognize from other poems, if not from their constituent paintings.

*COMPANIONS*, with its bare toes bursting out of a pair of boots is from Magritte's “The Red Model.”

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This new edition of *Crises of Rejuvenation* contains a number of poems which were not in the first edition, eleven of them, in fact. By adding them to this edition, we have captured all the poems written by Barbara Holland during the time she was under the nearly full-time spell of merging Magritte's surrealism with the hard realities of life in New York.

It is a privilege to bring this masterful cycle of poems back into print at last. These poems have taken nest in my own consciousness, as they will in yours. You will think of them, of their strange and beautiful images. Even better, you will find that certain phrases become a part of your own vocabulary. You may even find that your perceptions are just slightly altered so that you, too, sit down and write about how the real and unreal collide and invade one another's territory all around you.

The answer to the book's cryptic title lies therein, doesn't it? We grow old and die by seeing things only in the conventional way. We are rejuvenated when we can see things through another sense of dimension, when we can use our imagination so that “names and the objects which they had previously owned divorce for other partners.” It may be mad, but it is glorious!

— Brett Rutherford

*Providence, Rhode Island, January 1986/January 2006*