

johnmichael simon

B O R D W I N O T  
POETRY COLLECTION

a mix of  
BALLADS, BALDERDASH  
and OTHER STRANGE  
INGREDIENTS

Poems copyright © 2007 Johnmichael Simon  
Illustrations copyright © 2007 Helen Bar-Lev  
All rights reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced in whole or in part,  
or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any  
means, electronic, mechanical,  
photocopying, recording or otherwise without written  
permission of the author.

This book is dedicated to  
my children, Daniel, Guy, Alon and Maya.

Contact me at:  
[j\\_simon@netvision.net.il](mailto:j_simon@netvision.net.il)

# B O R D W i n o t

## POETRY COLLECTION

a mix of  
BALLADS, BALDERDASH  
AND OTHER STRANGE  
INGREDIENTS

## Contents

Speed dating .....	1
Emotional baggage.....	2
Frankie.....	3
Mona Lisa and David.....	4
How to succeed as a poet.....	6
Marching down to Dublin .....	8
On being sent to a senior citizens retirement home.....	10
Special over the beach .....	11
November lovers .....	12
Nights of mirrors.....	14
Shadow woman.....	15
The lament of the crows and the cockroaches .....	16
The art class.....	17
Tainted entanglement .....	18
A hand from Miss Goddard .....	19
A fiddle Mary tail.....	22
World on wires.....	22
Ninety minutes.....	23
Sepia and wax nostalgia .....	24
A votre santé .....	24
All the world's a sandwich .....	25
Apple wisdom .....	26
A vegetarian voyeur's lament.....	26
As the crow flies.....	27
Back to Front.....	27
Hit parade blues.....	28
Luverly day .....	29
Making love on the Sabbath .....	30
Making the right connection.....	30
Moonshine dances.....	31
My fren de neigh.....	32
Who remembers Dagwood.....	33
On fingerprints and faces.....	34
On riddles and buffaloes .....	35
Sleepless disturbers.....	36
Standup falldown artists .....	37
Ten minute time travel .....	38
The manuscript.....	39
Unfortunate calamities.....	40
Upinda morning.....	41
Yeast extract.....	42

Words of fire.....	43
A thin film of water .....	46
Erotic or neurotic.....	47
Imprisoned in borrowed light.....	48
Lips drip blood .....	49
Mary Mary .....	50
Modern art.....	51
Morning after.....	52
The same old movies.....	54
On the sex life of neighbors and roosters.....	55
Revelations .....	56
Stunt pilot.....	57
Summa cum laude.....	58
The autopsy.....	59
What's in a name.....	60
Original sin.....	62
Questions.....	63
Sweet ritual.....	65
Alone without a rose .....	68
Concealed backdrop .....	70
Impervious .....	71
Drummin in the city .....	72
Not a word.....	74
The reverend.....	75
Trout fishing .....	76
Forgotten blood .....	78
Why?.....	79



**B a L L a d s**





*Speed Dating*

She was exactly what he expected  
that is to say totally different  
solid chocolate outside  
with a surprise filling  
warm, liquid, aphrodisiac  
blue ice on melting lips  
all tongue and touch  
then the bell rang

She was exactly what he longed for  
queen of feathery silk  
bird heart, falcon gosling  
all warm breast and beak  
with talons, a sudden embrace  
tongue meets tongue  
grips and soars  
then the bell rang

In exactly five minutes  
of searing revelation  
he knew, there's more to expect  
than meets the eye  
five minutes of tongue-tied confusion  
five minutes of foreign inflexion  
and then the bell rang

She was exactly like the nuisance  
who had sat behind him in college  
a plump little pudding, full of gossip  
who wanted to know what he did for a living  
and why was he rubbing his eyes?  
for five minutes she babbled on  
and then the bell rang

She reminded him of his mother  
perhaps she was a good cook?  
he invited her for a cup of coffee

Does all this ring a bell?



*Emotional Baggage*

I was late  
and overweight  
had trouble finding the check-in counter  
quite unprepared for a new encounter  
then, just when deciding this day wasn't mine  
I discerned the Emotional Airways sign

"Only one item may be taken aboard"  
said the squiddy flight desk attendant looking bored  
and going through her tentacle waving routine.  
The wispy blonde standing behind me smiled at the scene  
"Could I carry something of your's in my bag?", she meant me  
I looked her over, sized her up, one two three

She looked like an undernourished goldfish  
barely capable of carrying her own meager baggage  
"Flight's closing now", glared Miss Cold Fish  
smoothing her lapels which drooped like boiled cabbage  
"It's her or dump it", she snapped in a cold Freudian voice  
leering through psychoanalytical spectacles, "take your choice".  
I decided to chance it, the blonde did look young and supple  
so we proceeded on board, quite an unsuitable couple.

Blondie chatted persistently throughout the flight  
and we didn't get much sleep that night  
she described her anxieties glad to be free of them  
caused by a row of husbands  
it seems she'd had three of them  
and although my red lamp didn't stop flashing  
I felt my defenses crumbling and crashing

I couldn't believe such exciting women existed  
full of new fashioned beliefs that to me seemed quite twisted  
quite the reverse of the older ladies I'd gotten used to  
each word and action designed just to boost you  
it didn't seem right that her marriages had been unsuccessful  
why had her relationships been so stressful?  
her sincerity and sweetness plucked my curiosity  
somehow caused my ego to spin with increased velocity



It was after the aircraft began its descent  
that I began to realize what she meant  
those flowery compliments she showered on me  
were designed to convince me that I and she  
were soul mates made in heaven, that cupid had seen us  
despite the twenty five years difference between us  
so I took her home feeling strangely young again  
despite my feeling that this ballad could not be sung again  
and that night led to another and another and another  
as my diminishing resistance she continued to smother

She steeped into my life like a gently dipped infusion  
dispelling my doubts, my protests, my confusion  
a blonde color wash seeping into my dreams  
wherever I turned there were blonde bottles and creams  
blonde toothpaste blonde underwear blonde emails  
and my wardrobe needed about three extra rails  
she rearranged my paintings, moved tables and chairs  
and the bathroom drain became clogged with her hairs

One day a few blissful months later  
she suddenly erupted like an extinct volcano's crater  
for no reason I could see she turned angry and tearful  
and day by day she grew less and less cheerful  
she said it was better that we stopped 'seeing one another'  
And that she was going home to her mother  
I took her to the airport, waved her goodbye  
and when her plane took off, went back home to cry  
feeling older, sadder, wiser and in pain  
yet hoping someday it would happen again

She only left one item behind her  
a discarded old suitcase to serve as a reminder  
that while I lug emotional baggage to each flight  
her generation prefers to travel light.



*Frankie*

I remember how he flicked a matchflame into existence  
between cupped palms, inhaled, smiled a crooked  
smile, as if nonchalance was a way of life  
his hands never far from a screwdriver,  
a steering wheel or a feminine glance of admiration  
at his laconic jeans and size 46 cowboy boots

When our wives were away we'd cruise streets  
in his red Porsche looking for prey;  
how incongruous we were, crimson convertibled  
Mutt and Jeff; he would crack a joke at my  
hunched discomfort as we purred by a quartet  
of upward stretching willow legs –  
don't worry, you can stand on a bucket

How willingly they'd slip beside us  
shoehorned in with his smile  
as we shot red lights past town limits  
to some secluded copse on a blanket, sipped some beer  
his hands slipping unresisting opened buttons  
unfastening zips, his frame undulating like a leaf  
telling fairy tales, as I contended with halitosis  
and inexperience, looking upward at the stars  
and cursing my embarrassment

And then, after so many years of distance,  
the phone call that blew out his flame,  
a merciful heart attack, unexpected and swift  
no pain, no warning, simply the afterimage  
of a light blown out by the wind,  
a crooked smile, a puff of smoke

I see him now, there in the shadows  
dancing with his wife, the perfect match  
his arm around her waist, swaying to Nat King Cole  
singing unforgettable that's what you are  
crooning into her smile of satisfaction as he whispered  
only you...it's only you I love



*Mona Lisa and David*

She was the match that lit the fire  
that burns down the centuries  
a darkish sweet mystery  
her serene smile  
so well known so loved  
her thoughts her private existence  
so little understood  
where did she go after work?

And he  
whose manly curves grace  
a thousand books  
was there a nice fire  
glowing unseen in the background  
to lull him into immobility?  
into which world did he step  
after donning his robes  
what kind of manuscripts did he enjoy  
reading in the lonely evenings?

Had they lived on  
as their effigies do  
perhaps they may have met in the street  
had a cup of coffee, a pizza, fallen in love  
her match might have lit the coals of his fire  
he might have bought her a ring  
and she him a jock strap

Such are the flames of culture  
that brighten the halls of the world  
while we comfort ourselves anonymously  
in their warmth  
before going on our way



*How to Succeed as a Poet*

Vainly she searched  
for someone who could understand  
scanned the personal columns daily  
for a hint of a key to fit her slotted combination  
break her throbbing code

It was in his art she knew  
she would recognize him  
his tinker tailor part

She dreamed of someone authentic, a musician, a writer  
with just a wry smudge of paint on his face  
a carefully enunciated gleam in his eye  
that could be appreciated by a discerning beholder  
and eventually found several imposters  
all plastic copy and paste addicts  
Other suitable candidates were deceased, otherwise occupied  
or unhappily married  
and that was a cul-de-sac she'd been in before

Despairing, she edited her profile  
knocked six years off her age  
eight kilograms off her weight  
sent in her younger sister's photograph  
and exultate jubilate... a page of verse arrived

It was from a budding poet  
who arrived, unshaven paunchy and  
in need of a little dentistry  
clutching a sheet of manuscript  
a shabby handbag and an old toothbrush

He told her his story  
in iambic pentameter  
his unhappy childhood, interrupted studies  
two broken marriages  
financial disappointments, a sad ballad

She was touched, shed a few sympathetic tears  
allowed him to stay the night  
smiled at his toothbrush next to hers  
washed his underwear  
and made room for him in her drawers



Gripping the wheel of her life grimly  
like a learner driver  
she drove off into their joint future

Soon she found herself playing a new role  
as a generous patron of the arts  
subsidizing a small self publishing venture  
that unfortunately was not a great success  
making little loving loans here and there  
that blossomed like Jack's beanstalk

The loans escalated  
and so did the debts  
but she did mix so well with  
his intellectual friends  
whose company she enjoyed  
more and more

Soon she tried her hand at a little writing  
just for the fun of it  
her poems were new, fresh  
optimistic, joyous and unbeatable  
the intellectuals loved them  
agents scrambled to represent her  
readings were scheduled  
book signings came and went  
she was a hit!

And Jack, of beanstalk notoriety  
he of the unshaven paunch  
what became of him?  
He went on a diet  
fixed his teeth  
paying from her checkbook  
cleaned out her bank account  
and self published his own new book  
It was called  
"How to Succeed as a Poet".



*Marching Down to Dublin*

Two lads and a lassie from Belfast  
Bored stiff of the northern air  
Decide to march down to Dublin  
To seek some adventure there

But as they were leaving Belfast  
The weathercock turned its tail  
And clouds came up over Belfast  
And it started to rain and hail

Soon the lassie's teeth were a chattering  
She was soaked right through to the skin  
She said, let's go back into Belfast  
Just look at the state I'm in

But the sun soon came out of its hiding  
And the wind blew the clouds right away  
So they continued to march down to Dublin  
Drying out as they went on their way

When thirsty they sipped beer and whiskey  
And munched on some blueberry pies  
And continued their march down to Dublin  
With stars shining out of their eyes

They stopped off at a pub in Dunmurry  
And had a few pints and some wine  
And continued their march down to Dublin  
Right after the closing time

They slept in a field near Dunmurry  
In two sleeping bags made up for three  
Bundled up all together they resembled  
A heap of old clothes by a tree

Morning found them all achy and thirsty  
But determined to get on their way  
But they knew that the distance to Dublin  
Was more than a week's march away





So they went back to the pub in Dunmurry  
To breakfast on bread, cheese and beer  
And they stopped at an off-license in Dunmurry  
As the vodka's much cheaper there

They sat down on a bench in Dunmurry  
To discuss global warming and things  
And the sun rose and fell on Dunmurry  
On the thirst that the warm weather brings

So they went back to the pub in Dunmurry  
And had a few ales and some stout  
Then continued their march down to Dublin  
To find out what the good life's about

But the wind had turned harsh in Dunmurry  
And it started to rain once again  
And one of the lads started sneezing  
And the lassie developed a pain

So they caught a bus back into Belfast  
But don't imagine their adventure they quit  
For next month they'll march on down to Dublin  
Or as soon as the weather permits



*On Being Sent to a Senior Citizens Retirement Home*

Miss Raggedy Anne is confused  
she's been thrown into a corner  
on top of a pile of discarded dolls  
there's stuffing coming out of her shoulders  
and springs too —sharp ones!

She doesn't know whether it was  
osteoporosis or Alzheimer's that caused it  
or just a general hardening of the arteries  
its nothing personal —it could have been  
Barbie with her arms pulled out of her  
sockets, or, heaven forbid, you or me  
our clothing torn, underwear exposed...

There are more booby prizes than big  
prizes on this show, didn't they tell  
you that when you entered  
when they gave you an audition, took  
your photo —the one with the ear-to-ear  
smile like a yogurt advertisement?

You will be pleased to hear the latest  
news, Raggedy Anne; they're starting  
a recycling plant to reincarnate our stuffing,  
perhaps we'll come back impregnated  
with some new rejection resistant substance

Don't laugh there in the corner,  
there's more point to a doll's life than a scrap  
heap, or children who need to get along  
with their own lives



*Special Over the Beach*

Droning,  
 like a buzzard  
 coming in under the clouds  
 undecipherable in the wind  
 SPECIAL  
 low-flying red and white ribbon  
 WEEKEND SPECIAL

Lifting her polaroids daintily  
 coconut oil fragrance glistening  
 she straightens her tiny colored triangle  
 spread-eagled on the white hotel towel  
 BIG WEEKEND SPECIAL

The words drift across her  
 field of vision, tempting  
 as a duty-free oasis  
 on a remote desert island  
 lower now, a dark shadow  
 rushes down the beach, so close  
 she can feel the propeller's swish  
 see the pilot's teeth  
 smell the oily fuel

Message read and understood  
 she slips into a see-through robe  
 hurries to the car park  
 as the tiny single-engine wasp  
 circles round and begins its run  
 back across the waves

BIG WEEKEND SPECIAL  
 HALF PRICE ON PERFUMES AND COSMETICS  
 WHILE STOCKS LAST



*November Lovers*

Late November  
whips plastic bags down the road  
blows another year of hopes  
into a flurry of leaves  
that fly over sodden newspapers  
grimy pages of spent events  
forgotten social gossip  
while in the faces of apartment blocks  
standing back from the trees  
windows gleam, winking yellow  
and verses of late November ballads  
drift like windswept arias in the breeze

Late November  
Window two up, seven across:  
Ivan and Svetlana  
the passionate pair  
brimming with vodka and jealousy  
drenched in boiling borscht  
loud arguments, insults, retorts  
politics, sex and accusations  
staining the snow red  
every last apartment light  
blazing naked in the freezing night  
falling at last into a puddle  
of icy love – and blissful silence

Late November  
Window three down, four across:  
Aging avenger alone at last  
languishing in brittle resentment  
thick spittle on thin lips  
snipping hives of paranoia,  
newspaper clippings,  
letters to the editor,  
warnings of conspiracies  
the whip-cracking target of his wrath  
long since cold in her grave  
he inks the missives  
with her caustic pen



Late November  
 Window one down, two back:  
 These two are making love,  
 making love, a series of figured steps  
 a dance routine repeated  
 for the ten thousandth time,  
 three in the morning, gentle, careful  
 not to touch each other they  
 open the fridge prepare snacks  
 slices of salami, egg salad, chicken  
 leg, thigh, breast, a quaff of Coke  
 then back to bed, not to touch,  
 not to touch, to dream, glazed  
 perhaps to sleep

Late November  
 A rooftop, flat, low walled against the dusk  
 she moves exultant in the fog  
 sure that the darkness hides her  
 performs a pagan dance to a pair of denims  
 hanging on a laundry wire stretched between two posts  
 slipping out of her clothes she wafts  
 around scrubbed legs, flat empty buttocks,  
 open zip, sniffs the scent of male washing powder,  
 runs her hands through her hair, pouts her lips  
 to nothing!  
 while stars and mist swirl densely round

Late November  
 So what of us, voyeurs passing by,  
 or in our empty apartments  
 binocular eyes glued to the yellow squares  
 that flicker on, flicker off, disclosing snatches  
 of partly comprehended daily routines  
 masks, sitcoms, dim figures on distant stages?  
 what of us, our lives withering behind us  
 our albums all used up?

What of us?

Late November  
 whipping plastic bags down the road  
 laughs forlornly in the wind



*Nights of Mirrors*

Expressionless she unfolded herself  
viewing the years as they flew  
years of a thousand men  
considered, reviewed, rejected  
in hotel rooms filled with mirrors  
each reflecting a different image of herself  
each corridor, hallway, every room  
... empty

Taking off her shoes, her bra, her wig  
she was bald and shaven  
so that the reflections  
could show through behind  
her grimaces  
the plastic surgery of endless  
nights of coffee, small talk  
eyes behind the glass  
trying to understand  
why each facet lasted only once  
each encounter inconclusive  
barren nights of crosswords  
she'd invited to fill in the blanks

Once, behind the trance  
behind the mantra  
there was a house  
with four bears  
Papa bear, sister bear, baby bear  
it was worthless to consider it further  
worthless, wretched!  
huddling in a corner of a mirror  
sitting alone, dejected  
her best dress clasped  
behind clenched knees...

The psychologist had said  
that it was not her fault  
called the family dysfunctional  
but she knew better  
somewhere behind the mirror  
lurked love



*Shadow Woman*

It was not only his fiery grimace  
that attracted our attention  
not only the words that surfaced from the depths of him  
telling of his way, his conviction  
not only his glib answers to all the unanswerable questions  
no, it was not only the words  
although they were as compelling as leeches.

It was the way she looked at him  
not taking her eyes off him for a second  
always there by his side like a second skin  
like a shadow drinking in the words  
bringing him a cup of tea  
running his bath water  
washing his clothes  
silent, attentive, she knew his lines perfectly  
could even prompt if required  
but he never missed a beat

So it was so surprising that she noticed nothing  
never said a word when he began to falter  
when his speech became blurred  
when his eyes lost their spark, grew hazy  
when his fingers began to tremble  
his arms began to jerk  
his words began to stray  
No, she never said a word  
never asked for help  
just sat there by his side  
her eyes on his face  
watching, watching.

One day they found him cold  
fire turned to ash in the morning  
words all gone out of him  
she buried him  
stone faced  
without a tear

We saw her again years later  
at her book signing in Paris  
smiling, accepting the praise  
so poised, so confident  
was that a smile of achievement  
we wondered,  
or one of retribution  
her book of memoirs  
a great success  
it topped the lists for weeks



*The Lament of the Crows and the Cockroaches*

OK you inherit the world  
so what!  
No carrion on the empty highways  
no children in the empty beds  
no crumbs in the empty kitchens  
garbage cans empty  
and an empty wind blowing  
through the silent wires

Now the pipes of the Trojans are heard  
wailing their alien tunes  
along empty streets  
through the empty classrooms  
blankfaced libraries  
deaf halls of wisdom

We flap sadly over  
the darkened cities  
brownly, hungry  
scurry through  
clogged congealed gutters  
dry sewers  
all brittle dusty  
motionless  
lonely

Neither we dark birds  
nor armoured insects of survival  
know  
where they all went  
without a word of warning  
on that clear unsuspecting  
spring day

Only the Trojans know  
and they're not telling





*The Art Class*

You must sketch your shadow  
on to the quiet paper  
said the old teacher,  
capture the gray belly of the  
cloud as it hangs  
heavy over the waiting fields  
you must become the  
first fat drop of rain  
that splashes on to the page  
seep the color of the wetness  
slow between the rice fibers

The young student did not think so  
she sketched a hawk  
soaring like a knife edge  
high above the field, watchful  
scanning the shimmering grasses  
for any tell-tale pulsing  
furry eyed patch  
locking into it like a  
falling stone, flashing between  
the droplets, silently screaming  
downwards, plummeting on stretched  
claws, whipping into the prey,  
then victorious, urging up up  
above the cloud to the orange  
sun, the rock, the crag  
the ripping meal

She looked up,  
the teacher was standing  
quietly behind her  
placing his brown paw  
his stained fingernails  
on her shoulder, mantra-like  
"obedience is the art,  
discipline and practice  
are whetstones to your blade"

She looked at his wrinkled skin  
her glancing thought dissecting him,  
he was too old, too leathery,  
would not make much of a meal  
for a bird of prey.



*Tainted Entanglement*

It was always like that after he came home  
from his business trips with the same far-away eyes  
the same two-for-the-price-of-one toilet water from  
the Duty Free, the same black underwear that he  
never used at home because she liked him to wear only white.  
They would have the same conversations into the night,  
endless negotiations of probing and unvoiced allegations  
which later he would re-live, holding them up  
to the light of his mind like wine glasses after drying  
inspecting them for any tiny unnoticed speck or stain.

There was something about the questions she asked  
throwing them into court in an almost casual manner  
like new tennis balls from the pockets of her shorts;  
something about her spiky handwriting that looked like  
a spider had crawled over the page, and about which the  
graphologist he took it to for analysis remarked that  
she was manipulative and hyper-critical.

They had sex on Friday mornings at half-past ten  
or sometimes a little later while he waited outside  
her bedroom door for her to complete her  
exercise routine; years later after the divorce  
he would think about those exercises, lying there  
legs stretched backwards behind her head, the outline of  
her crotch taut against her tights while he fidgeted  
through telephone conversations with her friends,  
discussions about obscure political trivia.

Much later he came across a poem he had  
written to her and a tiny silver heart on  
a thin chain that she had buried in the depths  
of a drawer, then returned to him  
because she didn't understand it  
and because she only wore gold jewelry.  
He re-read the awkward phrases apologizing  
for misdemeanors he had never committed,  
begging for a grain of affection;  
for the hundredth time he realized how  
completely he had never understood her,  
perhaps he should call and find out how she was,  
a lot of the time these days  
he really missed her



*A Hand From Miss Goddard*

The yellow pages are stained, all of them  
from when I knocked over the coffee cup  
in my excitement over her thin lines back in sixty three

I sketched her furtively under the school desk  
between the pages of my opened history book  
Covering my growing independence

She was like a lamp post talking about the civil war  
all in black, so elegant and covered up  
inexplicable somehow  
her indigo blouse buttoned firmly to the top  
faint aureoles of her breasts behind the prim fabric  
sketched with a subdued pencil  
I thought of mannequins in shop windows

When she accosted me, I nearly fainted  
from the closeness of her strength, black skirt slit  
civilly down to the ankles showing the barest hint of her  
slaves yearning to be freed  
What a pity digital cameras weren't invented  
back then, but I'd sketched her sufficiently  
as Alfred Waud or Toulouse Lautrec  
might have, captured the essence of her  
and now as the tide of war turned in favor  
of the North, my hand slowly turned the page and

She stepped out, smiled shyly,  
in her soft black and purple way  
and after asking questions  
about the Gettysburg Address,  
leaned over and told me something  
personal in a confidential tone

As treasure island appeared before my eyes  
dedicated to that delicious principle that all men are  
Created equal, she knocked over the coffee which  
spilled thickly, spurting hot onto the page and when I  
looked  
through the dabs she was gone  
and all that remains now are the stains





BALDERDASH

*A Fiddle Mary Tail*

Fairy had a fiddle frog  
All rumpled stiltskin croak  
Whose hamlinned voice a legend sang  
From forth its pied piped throat

All fleecy tripped the jekkyl hydes  
All lemming to the moat  
God save the green from cradlefall  
From drown in tumbling quotes

But allice fell in watery den  
Into an underland of hatters  
And all the dumpkin sea king's men  
Couldn't mend these scattered matters

*World on Wires*

The big event  
displayed  
on the surface  
of a whirling sphere  
suspended on wires  
was seen by a mouse  
lying there  
all soft and furry  
twitchy whiskered

Waiting as if he knew  
(which of course he couldn't)  
the meaning of giddiness  
as globe begins to tilt  
mass sloughs off from mass  
waters storm and thunder  
one of the wires twangs  
snaps off its tight pinion  
and the whole system  
of land and form  
crashes, crashes  
wires torn from orbit  
into disorder and destruction

And the mouse  
all soft and twitchy  
did he perish  
or scamper off  
into some subterranean  
refuge beneath the ruins  
to write, as if he knew  
(which of course he didn't)  
a furry epitaph to the history  
of a world on wires



*Ninety Minutes*

When witch winds blow  
through matchwood glades  
and scatter leaves through rust  
when wormwood creaks  
a trapdoor's hinge  
and old bones clay and crack

When embers die and peat bequeaths  
chalk legacies of ash  
doom's message cloaked  
descends in soot  
and chimneys howl in black

When mercy leaks into the dust  
when saddle flasks run dry  
gaunt walks the night and in its fist  
gnarled wizards brew their brack

As witch winds prance  
as old bones dance  
as wizards brew their brack  
we scream feigned horror  
litter popcorn  
and crunch on peanut snacks



*Sepia and Wax Nostalgia*

God bless you gentle gentlemen  
God bless you ladies fair  
The Century's about to change  
And leave you stranded there

Twirling your mustachios  
Your parasols and hats  
A quick flash of magnesium  
And you'll all be artifacts

Sepia posed views of you  
In albums will be frozen  
Except the lucky few of you  
Whom Madame Tussaud has chosen

*À Votre Santé*

The most valued members  
of the medical insurance system  
are those who for more than forty years  
suffer only colds or indigestion  
then go to their graves quite suddenly  
at sixty five or seventy three  
from some acute and dreadful ailment  
without ever missing a single payment





*All the World's a Sandwich*

All the world's a sandwich  
and all the writers on it  
merely short order chefs  
they have their cold cuts and rambulations  
and each his favorite combinations  
the English love their BLT on buns  
with relish and a lot of schoolboy puns  
while poets in the States prefer their verse  
bedecked with mayo and profanities  
or even worse

And of course let's not forget  
the other English speaking continents  
where foreign sounding rhyme schemes contain  
exotic local ingredients and condiments

I'm looking for a suitable sponsor  
to promote an international poets sandwich contest  
then we could settle once and for all  
which country satisfies our appetite the best

Or even better, a global poets jamboree  
at which new types of sandwiches are offered free  
then, when we have tasted each plateful  
labeled 'try it', we can go back home  
resolved to go on diet



*Apple Wisdom*

Sir Isaac Bubble knows  
secrets that you might suppose  
he only discovered  
when old Mother Hubbard  
threw a diphthong down onto his nose

The universal force he declared  
is a mixture of wondrous and weird  
a plateful of sandwiches  
filled with tongue twisting languages  
gravitating linguistics absurd

All spins around everything else  
in a soundless concerto of bells  
but with wisdom infinite  
he deciphered that in it  
are elevens that are larger than twelves

—and theories that are disproved by elves  
—and words that don't speak to themselves

*A Vegetarian Voyeur's Lament*

Two sportive hippopotami  
In their zoo pond roll  
Recalling those big bottoms I  
Had last spied in the mall

Chomping on cheeseburgers  
Spread thick with mayonnaise  
I'd rather ogle elephants  
Than on those ladies gaze



*As the Crow Flies*

How far to Dingle Dungle Do  
 A nestling in the lea?  
 The sign says seven miles or so  
 But as the crow flies three

I walked to Dingle Dungle Do  
 It took me half a day  
 But darn it, I just lost that crow  
 Somewhere along the way

The moral of this story lies  
 In understanding fables  
 Crows fly in zigzags, not straight lines  
 To country birds timetables

*Back to Front*

Dogs  
 out for a walk  
 fly their owners  
 like kites  
 pulling them  
 impatiently  
 lest they  
 entangle  
 themselves  
 in yet  
 another  
 tree

Or pause  
 to chat  
 about this  
 and that  
 and smell  
 each other  
 |->|-> curiously



***Hit Parade Blues***

*(to be sung to the tune of 'Spring' from Vivaldi's Four Seasons)*

That farmyard music again  
There's that barnyard music again  
Squawking out like a love-sick hen  
We heard it again on Sunday  
At a quarter to ten on Monday  
Oh when will it stop, oh when?

On Tuesday we heard it some more  
Then on Wednesday at twenty past four  
So, on Thursday we stayed in bed  
Its really becoming frightful  
That some folk find this tune so delightful  
They can't get it out of their head

On Friday you won't believe  
You may find it hard to conceive  
That they played it eleven times  
We can't understand the reasons  
This music survives all the seasons  
And from every direction chimes

We can no longer endure it  
Is there nothing to do that can cure it?  
We hear it non-stop all day  
On every radio station  
While we wait for a phone conversation  
For mercy we plead and pray!



*Luverly Day*

g'mornin evry buddy,  
 luverly day init  
 grubsup, new it dincha  
 ears yaws chinchu stop cryin willya  
 ears yaws fistuk not much teeth left havwy  
 ow kay piefays ears yaws awl sloppy  
 likya likit

oo wunts yogert  
 caws yudu  
 flix cmun that's away liddlun  
 ear yewar kluky nut to  
 kwik now, donate it awl atwans  
 or yewl vomitit upagin

wers guli, guli, guli wer aryu  
 probly gonto slip unda dabed  
 guli, guli, grubsup  
 o ear yuwar guli atsa gudboy  
 chipi stop fyin wid klucky

kids sed day wer cumin yesday  
 din day, but day din cum din day  
 dats kids for yer  
 kun giva shit reely

ears flix, ello flix, ears yaws  
 luverly day init  
 shit me baks act inup agin  
 tink arl gobak to bedda bit  
 then arl kleenup d'owsa bit  
 maybe kiddsel cumter day  
 luverly day init



***Making Love on the Sabbath***

Through the opened window  
Comes the sound of Sabbath breathing  
Through the opened telephone  
A steady hiss of wires  
From the musky candle comes  
A lazy fragrance drifting  
Skin rubs skin and lips kiss lips  
A prelude to desire

From the cat outside the door  
Comes a constant scratching  
From the cellphone left downstairs  
A rumble then a blare  
The neighbors argue audibly  
Right through the bedroom wall  
The seventh day's just like the rest  
Oh let's postpone it all

***Making the Right Connection***

The national consensus on terrorism  
met at half past three on a Thursday afternoon  
in a pub not far from Bakerloo  
where traffic noise drowned their deliberations

However we have it on good authority  
that they drank only fruit juice and water  
reached no conclusions on problems of poverty  
and kissed each other on both cheeks before leaving

By a curious coincidence the same afternoon  
a series of explosions shook the underground  
a bus blew up and fifty six people were killed

It seems reasonably clear that some connection  
exists between the events  
but the vast majority of law abiding people  
have so far failed to identify it



*Moonshine Dances*

Under raspberry skies  
we cavorted  
and danced like fire flies  
to three legged waltzes  
champagne and pink seltzers  
with sorbet hiccups  
peppermint lickups  
caramel posies  
bouquets of roses  
thumbing our noses  
at all other flavors

Under gingersnap skies  
we three quartered  
and pranced like pork pies  
to rhumbas and sambas  
with greenmint cucumbers  
gay easter eggs  
with pink matchstick legs  
candy striped socks  
jack in the box  
bow ties in woks

Under lemon tree skies  
we courted  
and shrieked in surprise  
at corkscrew gavottes  
and hairdos in knots  
where knights in tin pants  
invite oilcans to dance  
and maids in hooped dresses  
gardenias in their tresses  
squeaked nimble-toed by  
on slippers that fly



*My Fren de Neigh*

Todder dayy lowfin az a beggard  
 a raggish neigh cumz weezin dahn de weigh  
 broon twas n spekeled with pachertz too  
 n vrowwn n tarrrd bedekt iz ungerrd gayz  
 glarin owt iz evidenz too kleer  
 thut hadnor eet nor drrinked a dayy or too

An been da kinder guyy me cum de be  
 me owpenz sachle bagz too spred id owt  
 wuz bred wuz cheez wuz biskers n wuz froot  
 n in a kannie poord a pinter too  
 too swayge iz tong, iz slerpín lipz ov tanks  
 n finched id too ee did wid gryst n grulp  
 de lost ov it ee grunched wid leaps n bulp

An den an daire layz uz dowwn ta sleap  
 de raggard neigh awl grat wid eyz ov mizt  
 n troo a deigh or too we frended deap  
 too wandrils wandrin dahn de weigh  
 sheerin rayyd n pickins sun n starz  
 til lights of neerin vilaygge brayt n blink

N theere we sed are fairs gud nag n I  
 an partered eech upon iz errenz sep  
 but nights n weighs I miss iz frenly weez  
 iz raggerd grin a gruffin in de breez





*Who Remembers Dagwood?*

One slice of bread with cheese  
with cheese and lettuce  
with cheese lettuce and tomato  
with cheese lettuce tomato and onion

Second slice of bread  
with a perky haircut  
with a perky haircut and a fatuous grin  
with a perky haircut, a fatuous grin and a naïve remark

Third slice of bread  
filling changed daily  
served by a blonde suburban housewife  
clad in a pinafore  
and a bright surprised smile

Once a familiar couple  
regular as the daily headlines  
on everyman's table  
now seen only in fast food joints  
and newspaper archives

Thank you Chic Young



*Of Fingerprints and Faces*

An observer from some other world  
might find us all identical  
endless repetitions of a mould  
much like a hairy herd of cattle,  
an army of ants, an armada of cuttlefish.  
Not so ourselves, accustomed to  
distinguish each from other  
brother from brother

The Interpol or the FBI  
are masters in telling you from I  
each whorl of every finger makes us  
as different as Tibet from Texas  
a fact that every thief or crook  
encounters when he's brought to book

But faces, ah faces! Now there's a more complex story  
no look-alikes, no twins, no clones could disguise  
the facts that in each wrinkle, each twinkle in our eyes  
our history lies, our yearnings, strengths, our glories  
all written plainly, each history revealed  
that no amount of make-up or fake-up can conceal

Wait! cries our visitor from another world  
what vanity, such pride, uniqueness so imaginary  
all merely variations on a theme, so uninteresting, so ordinary  
your chronicles of fame, your symphonies, your disappointments  
are all comically bland, analogous to grains of desert sand

And so, together he and we go to the desert  
cast eyes and waving antennae to heavens above  
discern their endless majesty, ponder on grief and love  
with telescopes and microscopes, and to each other say -

Yes, perhaps you're right  
it could be viewed the other way



*Of Riddles and Buffaloes*

Seconds whirl around, into the stuff  
that we call space  
where minutes, hours and centuries abound  
and wander curiously across the place  
that we call time  
it's all recorded in the Book of Gaur  
second line page twenty nine

"The buffaloes shall roam  
across the fields of thyme  
this broad and verdant playth  
between the horizon  
and the realms of Spayth"

A library of scholars  
all with investigative bent  
could not discover or decipher  
what these lines once meant

The buffaloes, not put off by the scent  
of ink and parchment, rhyme and parse  
don't waste a second thinking  
what the riddle might have meant;  
they spend their time  
just nibbling on the grass



*Sleepless Disturbers*

Inconclusive and clustered lie insomniacs  
Woeful as clowns  
More obtrusive than abusive on their backs  
Rueful they frown

Not amusing but refusing pharmaceuticals  
They howl at deaf moons  
Rabbits snoozing dream of losing lamas cuticles  
Hear owls hoot sad tunes

Sleepers interrupted by mosquito's hara-kiri  
In nights full of zooms  
Beeps abrupt bid radios loud and cheery  
Delight young baboons

Dogs and jackals join the raucous chorus  
Belittle our tired yawns  
Frogs and grackles make a caucus for us  
Fiddle as night burns



*Standup Falldown Artists*

Prisoners in capsuled static  
marbles clown down hiccup slopes  
head over heels tumbling erratic  
they hoot repeating dented jokes

Crippled by grammaticals  
prisoners in capsuled static  
linguistics take sabbaticals  
and banish rules to dusty attic

Exercising unused meter  
marbles clown down hiccup slopes  
wobbling they totter teeter  
bicycle through skipping ropes

Poems are sometimes a circus  
head over heels tumbling erratic  
pompous louts they often irk us  
bewilder yet make us ecstatic

Standup falldown rubber actors  
they hoot repeating dented jokes  
contortionists they prance and practice  
poetic licensed humored pokes



*Ten Minute Time Travel*

Newly born  
I am a believer  
five tiny balls under my tongue and  
I'm off on a balustrade adventure  
backwards, tight schoolboy backside  
screaming round the curves  
breaking the world record for  
making a rapid getaway, I  
fly off the end onto  
Ken the dog  
who ruins everything by  
yelping as if he'd been crushed  
by a falling refrigerator at least

So out into the snow we go  
puffing clouds of yelps into  
the crumby whiteness of it  
roll in it like madmen  
while the painted scarecrow  
arms of the trees whirl around us  
like the octopi at the fairground, howling  
flailing their arms and screaming for joy

Now that's a new world record for  
time travel  
sixty years in ten minutes  
those flower remedies really work  
and my joints feel better too



*The Manuscript*

In autumn years an ancient tome  
All parchmented I found  
Inscribed by some forgotten throne  
Leathered, wrapt in bark, and hidden underground

And in its brownstain words  
A noble world lay faintly traced  
Where empires of extinction swarmed  
With artisans of stone and forth six thousand  
Sheaves of history, one golden leaf adorned  
With eyes that glowed until this day  
O God, with eyes that glowed for mine alone!

Then, further on the moor I hapenstanced  
A man who understood such mysteries  
Consulting with the stars; he pored  
The manuscript and spoke of Kubla Khan  
But of the eyes that glowed at me  
He glimpsed not in his glass

And now November winds are up and rife  
My pick has blunted on the rocks upon the moor.  
No deeper can it knife in vellum tomes  
As monarchs and oracles still trail  
My windswept spoor

And of the eyes that glowed at me  
They glint no more



*Unfortunate Calamities*

Due to arrive  
the nine-forty seven  
doesn't steam in  
on burnished clockwork  
wheels of dependability  
gasping in pride  
dropping a ball of  
passengers, suitcases  
newspapers, between  
her waiting feet

No bark in the distance  
no joyful legs of  
two children and a dog  
frolicking on a hill  
giggling, throwing the ball  
into the last aching  
blue-tinged afternoon  
of a summer vacation

The nine-forty seven's late  
it's ten, the platform's frozen  
somewhere a transistor  
tinnily reads the news

Somewhere, in Egypt  
carriages hurled off the lines  
earthquakes in Turkey  
thousands homeless, epidemics,  
bomb blast in busy Baghdad street

The nine forty-seven steams in  
twenty minutes late  
two children and a dog  
greet her smiling, unscathed  
she breathes a guilty heady gasp  
click...all's back to normal with the world





*Upinda Mornin*

Upinda mornin  
 brite as newpeni mahn  
 slitely tar nisht but  
 hugivsa fuck mahn  
 twas briter bakin for teeto

Feline fuck ingud mahn  
 czek idowt -  
 haid – stilthaire shithatsa gudstaht  
 teethe – kuppel missinbut  
 twas lijkdat bakin for teeto  
 brests – shitman datsume babes dept  
 but tweenyu and me  
 twee kabul asall waysand  
 no mammofindings absobludi lootly mahn  
 stumik – tumbling ngrumblin notsirius  
 cuppa leminwor terill fixdat  
 undeestill dry omi  
 wodder bowder liver mahn  
 wee no lifedee pendson deliver  
 feelsok shitman imin helluva gudshayp  
 sowletsgo mahn anyu daya wayts  
 nyu mowntanster klime mahn  
 wotsdis wotsdis  
 pulin upderblank ets  
 nomahn  
 owell mahn  
 justa nuther harfa  
 nowar beeyoll rite



*Yeast Extract*

I'm half empty down to just below my waist line  
waiting, still, ribbed, thick and viscous  
sticky with spreading saline memories.  
I wait for you to dip into me, slowly, little  
by little, not too much to spoil the pleasure.

But you wait, take your time, your fingers  
poised over some international scandal,  
the soccer game, your eyes probing the ink  
of an underwear advertisement as if you could  
peel it off the page.

Don't think I'm jealous, you marmalade lover,  
I know your every move, Mondays and Wednesdays  
scrambled, Fridays hard boiled. Today is Sunday,  
my day, we've been doing it this way for years  
so why keep me waiting, my mouth open watching you?

Sunlight streams through the window into me,  
I'm melting! Look my way. Lick your lips just a  
little with the tip of your tongue like you always do.

Please. I request, gathering my self respect for  
the last time before I withdraw back into that  
cold dark place where all passion forgets itself.  
Look at me now.

I knew you would, you old devil.



*Words of Fire*

O earthbound Zar and bouldergerists  
hearken now to smouldering forests  
where Trist the westwind furled its gates  
in Jade and Amethyst estates  
to harness Phyrre the underflamed  
whose powers heaven and hell reclaimed  
and glazed now from the pinnacled range  
came forth an armored Hierwal strange  
that snorting fire and consequent jewels  
millennium's distant worlds now rules

But scant now from these frowning skies  
the real message Drysten lies  
where hearkened into conchlike probis  
a mystery from its deep discloses  
that rears and phrenzies from the boulders  
with flame and flander geists shoulders  
and head of swords and lances smitten  
the words of fire enflamed are written  
to smoulder down millennium's rivers  
and light the way to jeweled evers

Hark O Zar the Phyrre is one  
Hark the Hierwal's words be done





2 22 45  
1948  
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Βαϊωτοί

*A Thin Film of Water*

His sexual prowess was somewhat extraordinary  
eliciting a shower of encores from the audience  
composed of diaphanous underwear models  
who brought him bouquets, boxes of chocolates  
proposals of marriage, and one, the daughter  
of a chain store magnate, offered him a contract  
to star in a movie about bratwurst and pickles,  
the German, she assured him, could be dubbed in later

Only his wife did not appreciate him  
she wanted to intellectualize, discuss Greek mythology  
at four in the morning, when he wanted only to sleep

Shaking her off, he fell into a watery dream he'd  
often had before, standing over a pool,  
that turned into a hall of mirrors  
he flexed himself, struck obscene poses  
that leered back at him from every corner, every  
angle, now tall, now fat, curved forwards and  
backwards, now round, thin, twisted, elongated,  
replicating him endlessly in a hundred lurid variations  
of Frankfurter, Knockwurst, Braunschweiger, Biershinken,  
a grinning satire of a scene he adapted from somewhere  
on the Internet, twisting, dancing in chorus line  
replications and clones, a can-canning clown performing  
baloney push ups in devilish abandon to the tumult  
of delighted feminine applause

Nightly crowned monarch of ardor, he regarded  
himself, unique, triumphant, desirable

...Narcissus of the delicatessen counter



*Erotic or Neurotic*

Certain subjects are considered write-aboutful  
in poems, where  
others somehow have doubtful  
homes there

Love is universally eulogized  
sex is frowned upon as not-quite-nice  
and while thighs are swooned over as delightful  
what's between them is regarded as frightful

Modern theory's just rediscovered  
that some things look better when they're covered  
which makes them cheap and deep at the same time  
both ridiculous and sublime  
yet some lewd thoughts still persist in me  
perhaps romance and porn co-exist in me



*Imprisoned in Borrowed Light*

Ex arrogant was I ere I saw Elba  
now timid as a borogrove  
borrowed light is mimsy too  
mome raths, mouse light,  
it shines on all of us  
as we climb and fall  
dangle by our tails in word soup  
imprisoned on islands of frustration  
we pace floors of rectangles  
eyeless in twenty-four hour iron bars  
grids over skylight windows of comprehension

Nelson was here too  
writing his memoirs in grey ink  
towards a multilingual dream  
raise your right hand and say after me





*Lips Drip Blood*

numb and kneeling in the house of love  
 blood congealing in the house of love  
 burnt and reeling in the house of love  
 sacked and stealing in the house of love

numb no feeling  
 blood no feeling  
 burnt no feeling  
 in the house of love

whip your children in the house of love  
 whip your sermon in the house of love  
 whip those injuns in the house of love  
 whiplash vengeance in the house of love

numb your children  
 blood your sermon  
 burn your vengeance  
 in the house of love

punish sinners in the house of love  
 eat last dinners in the house of love  
 klu klux clanners in the house of love  
 black hosannas in the house of love

punish children  
 swallow sermon  
 burn hosannas  
 in the house of love



*Mary Mary*

Mary is a funny girl  
So the fable goes  
She had the sweetest little curl  
that hung down to her nose

She loved the sun  
She loved to run  
She loves her little rabbits  
But just between us  
Mary had  
Some rather funny habits

She ate her porridge from the pot  
Drank milk straight from the freezer  
But food that wasn't cold or hot  
Didn't seem to please her

Her skirts hung down right to her shoes  
Or else she went half naked  
But summer dresses she'd refuse  
And uniforms she hated

She preferred boys  
Who liked girl's toys  
And hated all things plastic  
But feeding smelly dogs and cats  
She thought was quite fantastic

She listened not  
To rock and pop  
Turned up her nose  
At jive and bop  
Queen and Beatles didn't reach her  
Wolfgang A. her only teacher

But what made Mary all that frightful  
Yet so delicious, so delightful  
So strange yet so insightful  
Was her unbounded enthusiasm  
When having (her adorable spasm!)



*Modern Art*

Two sixes; two nines  
rattling in the empty  
cage of my head  
juggling, struggling which way and that  
dancing their gay dance  
Leave them be  
going straight down the mineshaft  
into my guts, my balls  
kissing this way and that  
like thick rainbow metronomes  
this way tick  
that way tock

Picasso did it  
so why can't I  
attach thick rainbow metronomes  
to splashed out alien bodies  
it's a question of color  
leaving old boundaries  
today's world has different colors  
even sixes and nines don't look  
like what they used to  
squashed out like toothpaste  
or twisted like animal balloons  
kissing this way and that  
like thick rainbow metronomes  
this way tick  
that way tock

Make a flag brother  
parade down main street  
yesterday's babel talk  
is today's art  
be proud of it  
it's a tick tock world.



*Morning After*

In the brief stretching distance  
between haiku (that is now)  
and heroic saga (that is sadness)  
he sat, fingers drumming, sipping lager  
as the crowd sweeps by  
miniskirts on pillion seats  
tourists snapping them sans resistance  
from double-deckers open to music of sky  
pigeons flocking to thrown crumbs mingling into

Daydreams of soft entreaties, earlobes,  
Irish castles, rusty dungeon doors  
a turret with a feast set for two  
finest Hungarian salami, Johannisberger,  
Parma ham and cantaloupe  
and one unforgettable night  
when the conductor's suspenders came undone  
during the Ride of the Valkyries.

Looking down he saw clouds in the marble  
tabletop, beer foam clinging lacy white, ivy  
to tankard wall, a tramlined notebook  
empty as pain forgotten in his vein filling him  
with sharp needles still too close to understand.

Later, a tinkling wineshop door enclosed him in  
fragrance of wicker baskets, straw and vintages,  
rows of fruity whites, reds sleeping under old labels,  
whiskeys doing a leprechaun jig to skirling pipes  
beside the clear white spirit of Siberian snow.  
All this and pain, corkscrewing in his vein  
life spilling out in the glass, deep red  
to smudge the tramlines, hide unwritten words.



In the stairwell, between closed neighbors  
stretched out on three squares of flooring  
a body, male, middle aged, dead or stupor,  
black plastic bag tied in a knot to his arm  
he stares at the ceiling, eyeless as the hall lights.  
blink on, blink off. An unknown cipher  
in an anonymous city, asleep, three buttons open,  
two closed, like all anonymous pain  
something to be avoided, stepped over,  
the light going off, going on to suggest  
that perhaps he wasn't there at all

Looking down he saw that it was himself  
waking through an anesthetized dream,  
brown bottle reflecting light of a wan dawn,  
mouth twice as dry as a stairwell floor  
covered with empty bottles, odorous  
with fermented grape and other forbidden fruit.

The smell ached in his throat, gagged him  
unsteady as a stumbling kitchen closet  
behind cans of beans, relief poured fire,  
reviving the molten glow to expand  
somewhere deep inside.

Slow, unsteady up stairs to the turret,  
-crumbs only crumbs- and a piece of flesh  
picked by a crow, the white dove flown, flown  
packed her bags and flown, past the dungeon  
door out into the light, mini-skirted to god  
knows where, on a pillion seat, arms around  
a leather jacket?

Dungeon key in rusty lock turns  
to reveal the conductor  
hanging from his suspenders  
from the skylight  
Valkyries screaming in the wind.



*The Same Old Movies*

On Saturday evenings  
he goes to the Victory cinema  
takes his regular seat  
often he's the only patron as the lights dim,  
the sixteen millimeter reel starts to rattle,  
the numerals count down flashing  
and he's alone

He enjoys the old movies  
his memory playing musical chairs  
between the shadows of each scene

Now he's Harry Lime  
disappearing through the sewers  
now he's Walter Mitty, helmeted  
his Spitfire dog-fighting in a hail of lead;  
he's Rudolph Valentino  
dagger in hand, turbaned, sultry, passionate

When he's all alone  
on Saturday evening at the Victory  
he thinks about that scene so long ago  
Marcia Klemovitz on the couch  
seventeen years old  
naked down to her cotton briefs  
God bless old movies, he's tongue tied,  
butterfingered as she smiles and beckons,  
all the bravado in the world doesn't help

He's as elusive as a gutter rat,  
he loops the loop after a Messerschmitt  
clipped Italian syllables roll off him  
all these lines he memorized cannot erase the scene  
when he gazed and stuttered and knew not what to do

Now, thirty years later  
still strutting, posing, flexing muscles  
proud of all the roles he's played,  
on a Saturday evening at the Victory cinema  
he thinks again of Marcia Klemovitz  
and how he held her so tenderly  
and gazed into her eyes all swooning  
her lips still whispering the words  
'take me my Sheikh, I'm yours alone'



*On the Sex Life of Neighbors and Roosters*

My neighbor keeps a rooster, I really can't bear him  
he's a ribald expatriate of some imagined harem  
he struts in his back yard cage, a lonely old cock  
singing hoarse arias like a stubborn alarm clock

My neighbor the widow feeds him seeds and cracked meal  
which the crows in the garden tauntingly steal  
they swoop down to confound him from their perches above  
and jeer at this subject-less monarch of love  
then soar up to perfidious treetop copulation  
while he pecks the ground in jealous frustration

I don't know why she doesn't get him a hen  
or even two to brighten up his life again  
perhaps she's simply getting her own back  
on males, as since her husband's fatal heart attack  
she's been alone; or maybe its her financial situation  
that condemns him to discordant rooster masturbation



*Revelations*

1.

A blank page  
repeated  
repeated  
sudden comprehension

2.

I opened the door  
it wasn't locked  
she was just pulling  
up her clothes  
I saw everything  
omigod!  
I thought that..  
I had no idea..

3.

I love you not  
I love you not  
I love you not  
I love you

4.

I need to tell you something

5.

Please sit down Mr. S  
your son (your daughter)  
I'm afraid





*Stunt Pilot*

They removed  
twelve inches of umbilical cord  
from her brain  
then they removed her brain  
but the longing escaped

Down the spinal cord  
waiting, waiting  
a snake emerging from the ground  
a cigarette left burning  
its length turning to ash

A length of licorice uncoiled  
a ribbon  
a canal  
dark, unborn  
thinking only of warm liquid

And where the next fuck is coming from  
the fakir on that bed of nails,  
the guy that does the Indian rope trick,  
or the stunt pilot  
writing smoke trails in the sky?

Smoke pilot  
with his daredevil spaghetti  
brainless  
in her bed



*Summa Cum Laude*

Depraved (deprived?)  
is how I imagine the faded blonde in number 17  
hair tumbling about her in frantic lust  
while this goddamned well greased  
steel-shining  
mechanical piston shaft  
slides in and out in  
precise calculated  
infinitely superior  
mastership

Cataloged copulation opus thirty six  
complete with library of congress card number  
bores on to its predetermined well researched conclusion  
while she  
open down to onionskin level three  
lies heaving and panting  
for more  
not daring to scream back down  
the corridors of compromise  
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND



*The Autopsy*

So wasteful these suicides  
no consideration for society  
did you enjoy the concert  
the quintet was quite delicious  
look at these breasts, absolutely perfect  
what a waste, hello dear  
dinner at eight, I hadn't forgotten  
an incision from here to here  
should suffice, here they are  
esophagus, trachea, stomach, liver  
perfect what a waste  
look at this pubic hair  
it's the fashion these days  
and the tattoo, no he didn't use  
the Stradivarius couldn't get  
insurance or something but  
the cellist, quite remarkable  
did you see her legs  
and her tone, perfect, rigor mortis  
it changes the tone of the skin  
makes it look like a statue  
here it is, yes I think  
this is it, yes dear pick  
up caviar from the delicatessen  
and pate, sure, truffles, Roquefort  
Chardonnay, Stravinsky's on the  
twenty sixth see you then  
the cause of all the tragedy  
what dear, I love you too  
what a waste, all that money  
on food, clothing, education  
love's labours lost  
yes I guess love has something to do with it



*What's in a Name?*

Oh dear, yet another poetess  
demeaning this most esteemed  
member, this upstanding fellow  
that frequently struts between us  
by calling him  
a penis!  
now from this platform I shall  
bellow; pray, desist  
or at the very least  
delete any mention of this disparaging  
term, from your sensual little poem

Take heed, no jest is this madam  
for know that from the time of Adam  
who donned that inadequate fig leaf  
concealing from Eve that declaration  
of male independence, that down through  
history even Lady Chatterly and beyond  
refused to use that label you're so fond  
of bandying around like a medical dictionary  
-excuse me, did I hear something from row three  
would you please say that louder dear so  
that we can all hear, please stand  
or better still, come up here

Thank you madam, what's your name?  
all right then you'd prefer to remain nameless  
Anonymous (which we know is synonymous with  
blameless) – what's it called, spit it out  
(I couldn't resist that), would you stop  
giggling for a minute, speak up now, say it  
out loud, clearly, to this waiting crowd



What's that, what's that dear  
you'd prefer to whisper in my ear  
all right then, omigod, I don't believe  
what I'm hearing – objectionable, unmentionable  
editors and reviewers won't like it  
will insist that out I strike it

Ok, ok, it's back to penis,  
a rooster crow from success  
I'm afraid  
I've made an awful mess  
of this testosterone tirade



*Original Sin*

Sordid and damp the watergrass  
clings like limpets to my mind  
groping for something lost  
before the flood, something  
from the age of innocence

When birds were simply birds,  
snakes slithered like  
rivers wandering through the  
garden of my mind, nibbling  
fruit without a thought of  
the consequences

Original sin far in the  
distance of an untasted future

I'd shed my skin to be a snake again  
sipping water from the hands of leaves  
cupped for an instant to mirror my face  
my eyes untainted viewing all with grace



*Questions*

In the spotless kitchen  
everything clicks silently  
lights pregnant with wishes  
for a clean perfect tomorrow  
hum on and off in hushed diodes  
of red and green glow,  
talk to each other in figure language  
about the little things mechanical servants  
discuss in the dark of sleepless nights:

—how to clothe curious children in protective mesh of love  
and light?  
—do humans possess artificial intelligence  
—actions to perform in the unlikely event of a power cut  
—if God does not exist would it have been necessary to in-  
vent him?

So many winking answers to which there  
are no questions,  
pregnant questions  
hushed and chrome  
in the stretched servility of the night



*Sweet Ritual*

We both know  
it's our day today  
we wake up with it  
at our fingertips, on our lips  
in our nostrils, under our  
pajama buttons, the sun  
knows it as it peeks over rooftops  
the garbage truck knows it  
as it backs beeping down the street  
but especially the cats know it  
leaping on the bookshelves  
squeezing through the window bars  
sharpening their claws on the furniture  
their entreaties for food a greek chorus

We smile at each other  
feed them, turn off the news announcer  
dab ourselves clean and fragrant  
bury the telephone receiver under pillows  
its dialtone indignant, muffled  
for a moment, then silence,  
blessed silence

We sink into it all arms and legs  
all bubble headed with solar energies  
there's a quickening, long and lazy  
like dawn breaking over a moonscape,  
the great globe of light pushing its way  
up over the horizon replacing the inside  
of our eyelids with indescribable brightness  
as we burst into myriad comet trails  
meteorites burning phosphorescence  
slowly back to earth

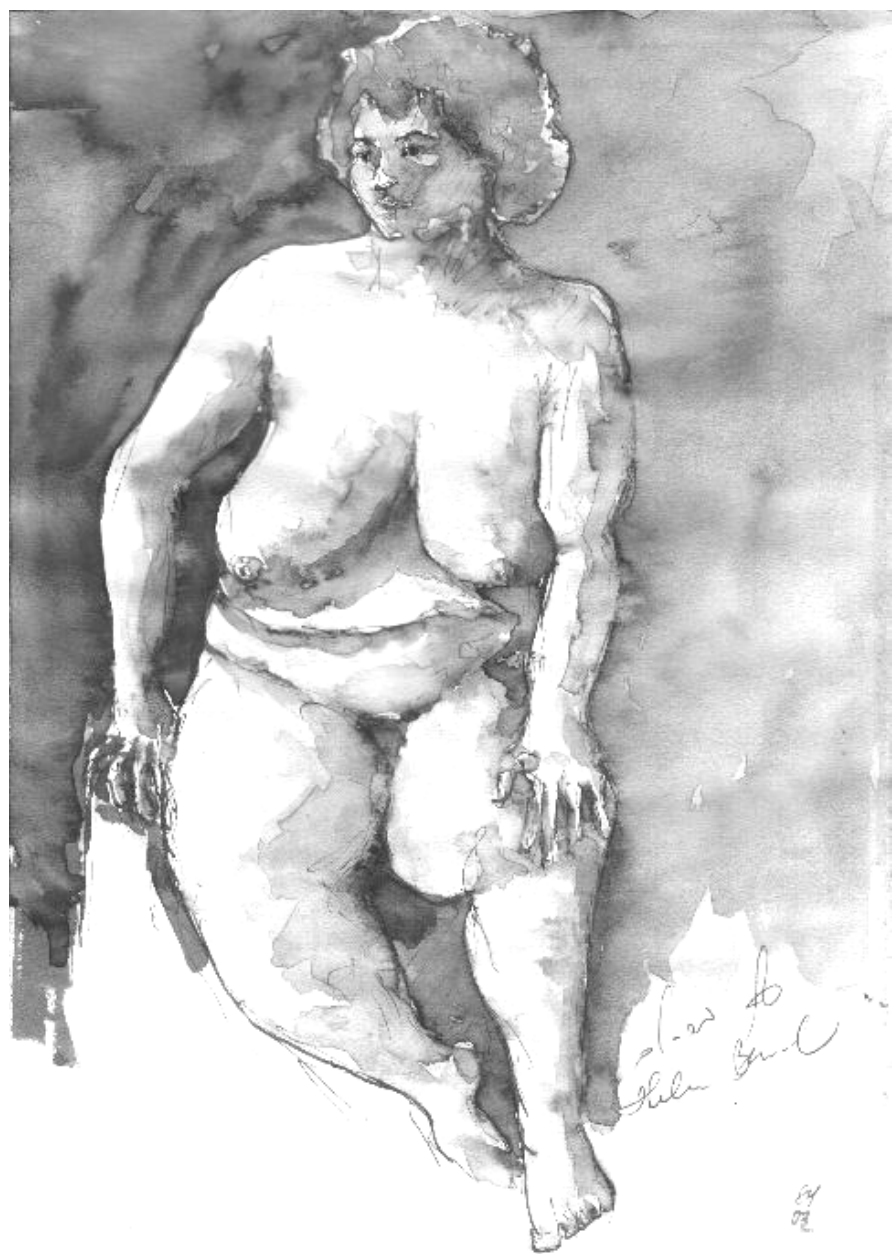




Like a well-trained audience  
the cats start mewling, a ginger paw  
scrapes the closed door repeatedly,  
we linger for a few more moments  
reluctant to relinquish languid senses  
then smile, open the door  
resuscitate the telephones  
turn on the computers

This Tai Chi routine  
happens twice or three times  
every week





**BRAINWASHED**

*Alone Without a Rose*

Everything has to be lined up  
exactly in its place, no deviation allowed  
even the minutest deviation is obnoxious,  
unacceptable, you know what I mean  
utterly in line

People aren't lined up, most people,  
they go in obscene angles, they're careless  
don't give a shit about rules or order,  
anything's good enough for most of them  
that's why I hate people  
they live their lives as if there is no  
master plan, that's why there are wars  
and different religions and languages  
and flags and things, you know what I mean,  
untidy

I know what you're thinking but you're wrong,  
dead wrong. Look at them, raping the planet  
hardly any ozone left, everywhere full of  
fumes and pollution, all kinds of dogshit  
all over the place. Nobody picks up dogshit  
these days. What about the weather; either  
floods or drought, fuck the planet, go on  
drive your smoke belching vehicles all over it  
so you see I'm not so fucking crazy, right? Exactly

No deviation – otherwise we're all bound for  
extinction. You know why I hate them?  
Nobody understands, they're deaf, all deaf  
every last one of those motherfuckers



You know why I'm running away?  
There was this girl, young like a rosebud,  
like some furry young animal, timid fawn eyes,  
she was the only one, I swear, she touched me  
in places I didn't know I had - the only one  
I could have learned not to hate

But one day I saw her move  
just a fraction, a millimeter perhaps, out of line,  
you wouldn't notice it even, but I saw it,  
saw through her. She wasn't lined up, she was  
one of them. I swear I could have killed her  
on the spot, that's what you are thinking, isn't it?

But I left her, came here instead to be  
on my own. If I'm the only lined up person  
in the world, Ill stay on my own, forever



*Concealed Backdrop*

She found gingerbread stories so comforting  
like cookie-tin grannies that she never had  
or well-worn clichés warming under tea cosies  
especially the part at the end  
where the child abuser falls down the chimney  
into a pot of boiling oil

These days she was a gingerbread cookie herself  
children recognized their reflections inside her  
dogs wagged tails at her  
cats rubbed themselves along her legs  
but she knew to beware of the specter within  
waiting among the cobwebs in the corner  
she woke in the night to feel his fingers  
cutting into her life  
heavy, capable, slicing her precisely  
like an apple  
all bony, hairy, long digits

She cut him into tiny pieces  
deliberately yet with abstraction  
buried lumps of him wrapped inside old newspapers  
in thirteen different garbage bins  
so that he could never be reconstructed  
she never told a soul  
and on her identity card she asked them to write  
Father: unknown



*Impervious*

Welcome the whip  
lash by lash  
welcome the flail, the flagellation  
the joy of weal on back  
skin bursting methodically  
in a hymn of blood

Welcome the nails  
driven through flesh and bone  
welcome the rack  
muscles and tendons giving way  
to pain and light and red

Welcome the knife  
the blade that hacks  
disembowels with precision  
welcome the life emptying  
spilling in the dust  
drop by fading drop

Above all  
welcome the bullet  
that bursts in the brain  
shocking dark and final

no secret revealed



*Drummin in the City**In memory of J.G.S, killed in a road accident, age 24.*

drummin in the city  
wheels spinnin on lead weighted tyres  
spinnin through the gaps  
trance boomin out on acid wings  
spinnin cool easy  
don't think you can take me man  
don't even dream about it  
cos i'm the untakable universe slipper  
don't you know that grandpa?  
i can hound you any day  
sit on your damn exhaust  
slip away real cool  
don't none of you even try me  
cos i'll leave you spinnin like  
wet rats stuck in a trap

don't talk to me bout  
road accidents, statistics  
speed limits can go fuck themselves  
don't look at me like that sister  
like your father owns the road or somethin  
you can eat my wheels sister  
cos they're spinnin by themselves now  
d'you know that?  
hot little plagiarists of black rubber  
i can chew acid leaves at you all  
whenever i like sister  
leave y'all standin starin cursin  
think you can write fancy little verses sister?  
try this one for size

ok mother think you can show me somethin  
i'll show you somethin mother  
wanna come and sit up here mother  
suck me off at a hundred and sixty?  
i'll push in between your lipsticked teeth mother  
cum right between your tonsils  
gag on it you bitch  
bet you left your baby hungry  
cryin his head off while you had a good time  
i'll give you a good time mother  
right between your stinkin lipstick lips





as for you and you brothers  
all sassy in your wall street grays  
i'm drummin in your city brothers  
so just go jerk off on your fancy striped ties  
i'll wipe the road with all you motherfuckers  
like my black rubber bears and bulls brothers  
let's see you take options on them  
i don't need your options brothers  
i get mine when i need them  
raped straight from the bottle of life  
so go write your columns brothers  
i'll wipe my arse with them

back then you were with me baby  
drummin in the city  
spinnin in the dark  
arms around my neck baby  
hot scent in my ear  
pullin me down to you baby  
all cold in that goddam white sheet  
your eyelashes standin up all glued on  
like sentinels on your cold whitewashed face  
your beautiful bloodless face  
whisper to me baby just once  
i'm drummin in the city baby  
still lookin for you baby  
wrenched out of the heart of me  
don't cry for me baby  
i'm drummin, i'm comin



*Not a Word*

No I'm not gonna tell you  
'bout my rotten childhood  
'bout how he crushed me to the floor  
and his stinking breath  
'bout the night he left me screaming  
vomiting my own rejection  
beating my brains out  
bleeding into the sheets  
ripping out my umbilical cord  
I'm not gonna tell you  
'bout the years  
rebirthing myself in my own image  
I'm not gonna do that

'Cos I'm still crying  
d'you know that?  
as I write these goddamn words  
still thinking about you  
'bout that first humiliation  
'bout all the others  
as I refashion all my unbeautiful parts  
sweat off inches, dolly myself  
become someone, do something  
but you know, you patronizing bastard  
if you were to walk in right now  
up through the discarded muck  
I'd rip off all my years  
become dirty, vulnerable, defenseless again  
for just one word of your  
rotten recognition  
your stinking reluctant praise



*The Reverend*

He was short, unctuous and his sermons  
and shoes shone with most polished phrases  
most blessed, exalted, holiness and the like  
at weddings and circumcisions he was always  
first into the smoked salmon and chopped herring  
on kichel biscuit with sweet wine

In between Sabbaths and other congregational  
he would visit my father (not a religious man)  
sip oak-matured twelve-year scotch whiskey  
munch almonds and olives and discuss the scriptures  
versus modern literature, pressing his points  
in tones mellifluous and respectful

He doffed his hat at prim-skirted mothers  
cooed and kissed their babies and at services  
would intone in liquid syllables; 'the Lord spread  
his tabernacle over you and grant you peace'  
this always made me feel good and glad I'd gone to synagogue

It seemed pointless to tell him that his son  
had asked me to hold his penis in a public bathroom  
he was such a polished speaker after all  
why puncture his balloon, prove my father right  
padlock the gates of heaven before him

So it's nice to think that my father (not a religious  
man) and he are somewhere up there discussing their  
things. I hear one of his sons went on to be  
a professor of urology while the other opened  
a kosher restaurant chain, I'm not sure which



*Trout Fishing*

She wrote about the leaves  
falling slowly from the boughs  
about cows mooing in an autumn morn  
about mist on the lake  
trout fishing in the river  
and the zing of the line  
as it arcs through the air

About the snap of the wrist  
and the fighting silver of a two pounder  
as it flings itself out of the water  
again and again, against the hook  
against the hauling arms

So sorry, they wrote back  
we have a large stock of nature poems  
we want subjects drawn from daily life  
she glared  
the rejection slip  
the fighting silver  
the hauling arms

My father fucked me, she screamed  
when he came home at five in the morning  
stinking of beer, the snap of the elastic  
at the waist of my pajamas  
the silver in his teeth  
as he flung himself again and again  
his stinking sweat smelling arms  
pinning me down, choking the breath  
out of me, fighting the hook  
and his thrusting, fighting, fighting  
his stinking hauling strength

At fifteen I found his gun  
shot him right between his eyes  
as he was sleeping, then through  
his balls again and again  
until the bullets were finished



They gave me six years  
one year for each of the bullets  
I still dream about it, the silver teeth  
the hairy arms, the hauling line  
the wonderful thud thud of the bullets  
every night the blood

That's my poem about daily life  
print it if you like  
don't write my name  
they never wrote back  
but the dreams stopped

One day soon, she promised herself  
I'll go fishing, like we used to



*Forgotten Blood*

Pain coagulates  
blood on old wounds  
reopened by compulsive fingernails  
picking like addicts  
at the scabs of time

I sort through memories  
old clothes pushed into bottom drawers  
try on discarded insults  
match yesterday's resentments  
like forgotten socks

In a buried corner  
I find a letter  
in an envelope without a stamp  
addressed by a dim and distant Pandora  
and opening it, the blood spurts out anew

The sentences stare at me again  
each word so clear yet together  
remain the mystery they always were

Lost again in the maze  
old questions put aside  
but still answered  
I know  
that despite enlightenment  
despite education  
despite experience  
the child of me remains bewildered  
victim of forgotten blood



## Why?

*For little Lee  
who wrote strange poems  
and committed suicide at age 23*

Open now the pain of night's dark love  
open to the faces looking in  
open to the voices from above  
another life extinguished, pure as sin

Another life extinguished, pure as sin  
here comes the bride, veil dark as night  
veil dark as wishes' forbidden wings  
here comes the bride, turn out the light

Here comes the bride, turn out the light  
here comes the bride, prepare the chair  
open the vial, make sure the noose is tight  
here comes the bride so dark, so fair

Here comes the bride so dark, so fair  
sip after sip descending into sleep  
the sleep that snaps the noose, that throttles air  
she falls pain ended, rag doll off the chair









BORDWINT

