

WORK
POEMS IN VERSE

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The vital link between modern poetry and the fixed-form tradition it both comes from and reacts against, in both cases a source of strength, has been lost as the years intervene and separate each generation of poets further from it than the previous. The great Modernist poets wrestled with that tradition, whether to reinvigorate it, as Wilfred Owen, or to break and change it, like T.S. Eliot and that wrestling, that tension and challenge is the knot, the seed of creation. It is with that in *mind*, not to copy it in some weak-kneed nostalgia, that I have approached this manuscript as I have.

I also took this tack for my own personal benefit. It was for me the clearest, most direct way to a mastery of the tools of poetry; compression, euphony, meter and rhythm, alliteration, and all the types of rhymes. I can see myself moving into more self-determined forms based on a command of these tools, a knowledge of fixed-forms, and the growing needs of my own poetic voice.

THANKS TO FRANCIE COGAN, ROBERT GRUDIN, SUSAN
JACOBSON, STEVE MCQUIDDY, JOHN HAISLIP, SCOTT
TAYLOR, ED BEARDSLEY, MIKE WINCKLER, ELIZABETH
BICKFORD, RICHARD, MAXINE, AND KEVIN HOPKINS,
ELIOT ROCKETT, AND CAPTAIN NUTTY

"Let me borrow five bucks til Monday."

TABLE OF CONTENTS

vi

INTRODUCTION.....	1
POEMS.....	12
SONNETS.....	13
GREATNESS.....	14
MAIREAD FARRELL.....	15
THE LAUNDRESS.....	16
ORPHEUS.....	17
Hades's Question.....	17
Orpheus's Reply.....	18
THE EXPATRIATE.....	19
CASSANDRA.....	20
Apollo's Gift.....	20
Agememnon's Gift.....	21
Clytemnestra's Gift.....	22
SEX.....	23
THE BALTIC.....	24
POTHOS.....	25
SACROMONTE.....	26
The Wedding.....	26
Pilar.....	27
Emilio.....	28
Gabriel.....	29
Manolin.....	30
Belen.....	31

	vii
Chemistry and Spirit.....	32
TWO LONGER POEMS.....	33
STUDY OF A WOMAN.....	34
THE ALB.....	37
Syria.....	37
Adam and Christ.....	40
The Desert Circle.....	42
JACKSONVILLE: A NARRATIVE POEM IN PROGRESS.....	47
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	88

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a collection of poems in metrical verse. Included are sonnets, blank verse, rhymed stanzaic verse, and selections from a long narrative poem in different meters and rhyme schemes. My reason for choosing to write in metrical verse instead of free verse is my belief that the latter is no longer capable of responding poetically to the needs of either the writer or the reader. Contemporary free verse is the short lyric. The calcified canon of rules for the construction of this lyric are so limiting that they act as a form of poetic censorship. Coupled to this the lack of concern with euphony, compression and rhythm in contemporary poetry assured me that I would have to look elsewhere to find the tools for responsive creation.

I looked to those poets whom I most admired and tried to understand how they came to write as they did. I looked at T.S. Eliot, Richard Hugo, and Dylan Thomas. All three of these poets had one thing in common: that, though they did not write the great body of their work in fixed form, they quite obviously had a tremendous familiarity with it. They had learned fixed form and had thereupon modulated it according to the exigencies of their verse. I decided that the way to gain those tools I needed was to write a series of poems in fixed form and in metrical verse.

II

The original plan for this thesis was a sonnet cycle. My first fifteen or twenty sonnets were, however, narrative. I altered that original plan when I discovered what was wrong with what I was trying to do. It was impossible for me at first to carry a narrative line in the sonnet form. I was laboring intensely at the basic principles of the sonnet: meter, rhyme, and the demanding turns of the image or metaphor to its final resolution. I was attempting to deal with the Orpheus and Eurydice myth on a narrative level through the sonnet and set in gypsy Spain, too grand a task at that time. What I have done instead is a corona of sonnets, called Sacromonte, which treat the Gypsies of the Grenadine barrio where I lived on both a social and a metaphysical level. This took care of my need for both the sonnet and for that particular social, physical and symbolic setting. Though there are other sonnets included, I consider this corona my highest achievement so far with that form.

The narrative I have carried in a form best suited for it: the long poem in varying meters. It is giving me a chance to be expansive, to experiment with character and meter, to use native information (it is set in Jacksonville, Oregon), and to try my hand at a long, sustained plot. Having written a number of plays previously sharpened my sense of what is and is not necessary in a narrative.

III

The thematic content of this body of poetry is difficult to determine. It is only after a poet has been writing for most of a lifetime that it is really worthwhile to try to determine what constructs of ideas govern him or her. If I were to isolate two prospective themes, I suppose they would be pothos and sex. Pothos is a Greek word used by historians of Alexander the Great to describe his superhuman longing to go beyond. This is the theme of The Alb. It is also one of the governing ideas of the Jacksonville narrative. The other, sex, concerns itself with the almost genetic, evolutionary, and spiritual responsibility to those who have gone before us and the tension that creates with the individual who seeks freedom. This is the governing idea of the Sacromonte corona.

There are some themes I avoid. Romantic love, though it is important in my life, has no place in my verse, at least not at this point in my life. There is very little perspective or context for it where it will not instantly be subsumed into the cheap system of love literature. Topical political subjects, standing outside of any complete system, outside of any frame of understanding, are unpleasant to me. I also feel a personal repugnance for the cheap landscape-as-emotional-metaphor poetry with which the contemporary short lyric is so bound up. This type of a landscape is just

the opposite of the Byronic landscape. It is inescapably⁵
personal and domestic: little. Landscape-as-metaphor in
general is a valid way of thinking poetically and I myself
use it in Sacromonte. I avoid, however, its connection with
domesticity. Those themes, love, contemporary politics, and
land, remain, due to lack of interest, taste, and skill
level, outside of my repertoire of subjects for verse.

Another main reason for avoiding the aforementioned
subjects is their cliched status in the mind of the reader.
Waving the flag of The Home or Politics or Love is such a
familiar action that it is immediately assigned in the
reader's mind to a worn path leading to the river of
forgetfulness.

IV

Although ideally there are no real restrictions on my
audience, it would be futile to pretend there are not when
there are. It is tempting to say that the poems will appeal
to the educated reader. However, having been around the so-
called "educated" public for five years, that seems like an
absurd statement. I will say that it is the sensitive
reader, that is, the insightful reader who is receptive to
both beauty and ugliness, who will be the readiest to read
my poems. In the United States it is believed, far too
readily, that these people are found mostly in or as
graduates of academic institutions. Academic institutions

6

are becoming more and more mere vocational schools and less and less places where the pursuit of truth is a focus. Therefore, the academic institution is not the exclusive font of the audience of poetry. I believe that it is high time to get beyond the mindset of intellectual geography in regard to artistic audience. With the right approach I believe that poetry can be reintroduced to the public domain. One need only to look back to the heyday of the union socialist to find a time where the worker and the artist were not contradictory terms. John Dos Passos and Carl Sandburg were read by the steel worker and the professor. The art of Kaethe Kolvitz and Frans Masereel was as well known to the German and Belgian factory hand as to the instructor at the Institute of Art. With the slightest bit of initiative the publisher might find out that the working men and women of this country do not have as poor an opinion of their own intellectual ability and artistic sensibilities as the publisher does. The advent of television and convenience technology has, admittedly, done more to rob the people of their self-sufficiency, intellectually as well as spiritually, than any tyrant could.

As to whether the vocabulary of my verse might serve to pare down my audience I would say that of course both the vocabulary and the mere label of poetry (read: pretentious, incomprehensible, effeminate, superfluous) will limit its readership. It would be ridiculous, however, to maintain

that this will happen mostly among the non-academic readers.⁷
I know personally many educated people who read the word
poetry as one or more of the above. It is the quality of the
artist and the quality of the reader, and not his or her
social and economic station, that determines whether or not
a given work of art will be appealing.

It is within this context that I am writing my verse.
It is for someone with a heightened awareness of his or her
spiritual place in the world, a sensitivity to both imagery
and to the sensual texture of words, and a predilection to
view the world as existing in a field where reality and
imagination, form and content, signifier and signified, all
cease functioning at the instant of the creation or
apprehension (also really a form of creating). If this
capacity is one that requires education (and it is not) it
is a cultural and not an intellectual or academic education.
In the United States these cultural tools with which the
"common" people validate their lives have been all but lost,
willingly traded in for the promise of ease, offered up
through the Moloch of the media after the Second World War.
One of the duties of the artist in this country is to
reawaken the people to the fact that those tools were never
actually taken away, that they were merely left to disuse
and can be, with application, used again.

The appreciation of beauty is largely non-
intellectual. How many degrees are necessary to appreciate
the beauty of a sunset? Alexandra, who owns the store with

the green awning in the Sacromonte, has no more than a grammar school education and, as I recall, she seemed to have no real problem. In fact she was one of the most accomplished and devoted Appreciators of Sunsets that I have ever known. When a logger in Oakridge comes to the Sportsman to have a beer after work does he ask someone with education to help him appreciate the emotional efficacy of Johnny Cash's "Give My Love To Rose" when it comes on the radio? It is a matter of prejudice, not education, that needs to be overcome in order to broaden the audience for poetry.

V

I have been influenced, in one way or another, by everything I have read. The bad and mediocre poets have warned me away from cliches and made me aware of the necessity for compression and rhythm. Good poets have helped me toward an understanding of euphony, the intricacies of meter, the value of my own life, and the necessity to say something important with one's verse.

I would like to speak specifically about two groups of poets. The first, from whom I learned tangible lessons about the techniques of poetry, are T.S. Eliot, Richard Hugo, Dylan Thomas, and Federico Garcia Lorca. The second, from whom I gained concepts and tools for making sense of my world and my role in it, is made up of Walt Whitman, Robinson Jeffers, and Nikos Kazantzakis.

9

In Spanish poetry rhyme is easily achieved. So modern Spanish poets sought other devices. The device Lorca used so well was assonance. It was assonance, after rhythm and rhyme, that I worked on. It was Lorca who influenced me toward an already existing goal: Spain. Through him, through his volumes of poetry *Poema del Cante Jondo* and *Romancero Gitano*, I developed my interest in the gypsy and gained additional material for a spiritual geography.

Dylan Thomas influenced my verse through both his alliterative tendency and his opulence. I let myself go more than I might have, on sound in general and alliteration in particular, because of the rich, muscular vibrancy of his verse. Through Thomas in particular I came to the realization that only through the study and practice of fixed form would I be able to achieve such an ungodly but controlled superabundance of language. He was also responsible in part for my practice of allowing sound to always win when the struggle is with sense. I learned to trust my subconscious urges within poetic matrix.

This is something underscored by Richard Hugo in both his poetry and in his book of essays called *The Triggering Town*. He was also very indebted to fixed form, despite his rarely writing in it. He is very renown for his excellent rhythmic sense. He also let me know that my life was valuable.

Through T.S. Eliot I became aware of how off-rhyme and internal rhyme can create a music that seems to rise up out

of the poem while defying any attempts to isolate its
origin. This is especially evident in the poem Ash
Wednesday. Eliot served to underscore the influence of Lorca
in that way.

10

VI

There is really not much perspective for me to
determine what is "unique" in my verse, as though novelty
were a prerequisite for worthwhile art. Everything I do
shall be mine by virtue of its merely being held within the
context of my consciousness. J.L. Borges examines this in
depth in his "story" "Pierre Menard: Author of the Quixote."
My consciousness, with its intricacy of interrelationships,
influences, and sensibility, will turn anything that it
touches into something different than it was before.

If I had to note the aspects of my verse that are
different than the common run, aside from the metrical
nature itself and its relative wealth of sound, I would have
to insist there are too numerous to mention. I can, however,
speak of one aspect that I believe takes poetry one step
further on or, if you will, adds one more tool to poetic
creation, if a sensibility can be considered a tool, and
that is the hegemony of sound. Without sacrificing meaning,
though I believe strongly that the world will not tolerate a

11
lack of meaning and that all vacuums are filled, I have and
will continue to take, sound to more vibrant and muscular
extremes. Most of the value of my verse will lie, however,
not in its "innovation," that soft and flashy goal of so
many poets, but in its human timelessness. I do not worship
the old forms for some supposed inherent superiority or in
sheer awe of their authority. The sonnet is no more noble
than a screwdriver. I hope, through mastering fixed form
verse, to abstract, like Cezanne, those truest forms, those
enduring qualities, that will endure. If that sounds too
Platonic, well, "I mock Plotinus's thought And cry in
Plato's teeth, Life and death were not, Til man made up the
whole."

POEMS

SONNETS

GREATNESS

The coal of greatness raises terrible winds,
our bones a living grate to hold the coal,
and, snapping taut, the mortal sail, our skin,
must hold along that sinewed seam, the soul.
The force that first rebelled against the lack,
that turned the stars upon their elemental poles,
is that which burns along our sugared track
and lights the mouths of gesture in our skulls.
The starry magnitude within the breast
begs doors be blown apart that light might pour
into the dark and wriggling world, the nest
explode with eagles, singing as they soar.
Across my voice that eagle wind has blown
its burning flint, its raw, essential stone.

MAIREAD FARRELL

Gibraltar never grieves but gathers light,
its streets like open veins of airy fire.
She crossed its burning lintel from the night,
within her bones a darkly dreaming choir.
The light that struck her folded back across
her face and shoulders. Wings, their edges clear
as burning liquor, bright and cold as frost,
shot their blazing arcs in fierce career.
Gibraltar's sun sent light to give her wings
but still the darkly singing choir dreamed;
between the bolts an Irish shadow lingered,
ancient dark of faces, ancient stream.
The blaze is gone, the ancient darkness said,
God have mercy, Mairead Farrell's dead.

THE LAUNDRESS

Throughout the quiet day, the lion's cage,
the washerwoman looks with savage eyes
to where the blue is senseless, meaning skies
revolve in endless thrall from age to age.
Desire sought the timid world's mouth
but found a promise only, cold and weak,
the kind of promise stammered by the meek
when banks of fire threaten from the south.
This is not a petty absence, ache
of meat and words, or lack of coins and dust:
this world's only made to suit the just;
it's never kissed those thousand fires awake.
But out beyond the ringing world, desire
resolves itself in fierce symphonic fire.

ORPHEUS

Hades's Question

Orfeo! Boy, you carry song that reigns
within your veins like kings with dreaming crowns
carry down a thousand towns of pain
that life of bone that bears the blood of sound.
Your song is flag and flown through breathing skulls
that, nation-driven, carry home its tears
like symbolled shell to rock by crying gulls,
that godlike urge returned at last to fear,
but born enthroned in echo, bound to rise
in private towered tongues, in angry skin,
beside the dying cooking fire, in cries,
in women's eyes, in men, their broken limbs.
So why, when wheat is echoed in the bread,
descend to cry for straw among the dead?

ORPHEUS

Orpheus's Reply

That we who now are two were one at dawn
is known to every king and every serf;
the jealous hands of giants lift us torn,
we scratched like leaves against the door of birth.
We threw ourselves like voices down the dark,
like drumming thunder hunts the flashing seam;
at issue's moment voice and speaker part,
we stood like slate although the world was green.
Now some are seeking birth again, or death,
with trembling eyes of honey, mouths of salt,
but others feel a magnet in their breast,
along their tongue they feel the current's call.
Above, I felt the blinded world list;
the vault of heaven turns inside our kiss.

THE EXPATRIATE

So long ago, it seems, the truth was broke
and lifted from my mouth. Its jagged mount
went rust and bitter. Absence made me choke
and speech ran sterile up the rootless fount.
I felt my words turn tool to every thought,
the two together formed a bright machine,
efficient, hard, it rendered what it caught,
the blooming vine to ash to match my mean.
But what if one should come whose blood were hard
as words? Whose mouth were shut with sun, a wall
within the flooded tongue? If dealt the card
of anger could my bones endure its call?
I would not speak but for a vagrant truth
my ghosted jaw let rise up through its roof.

CASSANDRA

Apollo's Gift

To pay you for the rape he sent the snake,
as though it weren't enough to know the god,
the snake again, to kiss your ears awake,
you knew the raven's terror when it cawed.
They called this theft of blood a girl's wish,
a fancy, given shape by deep desire,
but this you kept, the torn-up slip, and this,
the blood medallion: a cry from tower to spire.
You walked the howling colonnade of tears
and in the wind you felt the spit again,
you tasted salt and saw a field of spears;
the starward-growing, sea-born tower's end.
From stone to stone your people praised the wind
They robbed your pregnant mouth to hide their sin.

CASSANDRA

Agememnon's Gift

The ocean, where it bends to shining verge,
horizoned gate of day's decisive turn,
diurnal juncture poised at final urge,
had said that night should be a black that burns.
At midnight iron keels broke the stones,
the shore went up in torches, drowning stars.
He brought the burning beach to scorch the bones
your people kept ashamed beneath their scars.
The horse was gift enough to end your wait,
to end the blood and bronze that fed your fears,
to break the silver gates again, to end
the salt of seconds, sown these seven years.
Your broken people rowed his galley home
matching, salt for salt, the bloody foam.

CASSANDRA

Clytemnestra's Gift

Every month the moon will face the fire,
flush with blood and spill, the sky a shroud,
on such a night you saw the thirsty pyre
burning, first of seven, through the clouds.
Again the salt and fire threw a groan
of blood and tears across your secret mouth
and hungry birds released from towers of bone
began to wheel in darkly from the south.
That carpet might have been a trough of blood
or branch of withered fruit with bitter seed,
your life has been a paralytic flood
that drowned each terrible song your wounds had freed.
But with this final tide the fires will fade:
a sudden mercy hides inside her blade.

SEX

Who has kissed a woman even once
not holding in his hand her lovely breast
and who has ever sent the spirit dressed
in anything but flesh to join the dance?
Behind the world the fish of constant birth,
insurgent sequined blaze of green and gold,
is flashing in the flux, the flex and fold
of arms and bellies, lips that touch the earth.
We bank on grace. We need to feel our lives
fill up with light and water, stiffen, arc
from earth to sun to earth again and dark:
We long to dance. We do so. Grace arrives.
I joined the aching jasmine of her hips,
the sweet and stinging absinthe of her lips.

THE BALTIC

The wind at night is baltic, blue as stones
that rise in salt alarm along your wrist,
and when it blows through broken doors you groan
and focus on the fear inside a fish.
And when, within the drunken water's skull,
a sickly fire grows to test the tree,
if heroes scatter off like gelded bulls,
an angry mother sets her child free.
The moving air is hateful as a hymn
to any voice imprisoned in the earth;
the birds that summon stars to kiss the wind
repeat the awful accident of birth.
The small and sugared bones that make your hand
are cool and sweet for sleep as shaded sand.

POTHOS

The granite column full of rising light
succeeded giving form a hunger's truth.
It struck against the bluish black of night
and answered with the pomegranate's fruit.
I sent my heart to join its smoke with stone
but questions only fill their makers' hands.
I felt a hidden ocean rise and groan
but fall before the arid voice of sand.
It's only when, inside a living tree,
a silver hammer strikes a sunken gong
and sets the numbered water running free
that thunder fills the tank of stone with song.
My hands are bright with secret words for birth.
My body burns to fill the aching earth.

SACROMONTE

The Wedding

The way the Sacromonte blooms each year
is like a wave that booms along the shore,
it heaves its glassy back against the air
and strikes its fist against the world's door.
Against the gypsy rocks it's Spring that bursts,
a foam of flowers blows along the hills
and spreads beneath the trees a gorgeous curse,
the curse of Life, that sinks its share and tills.
What pain, that God should send such awful sons
to force the frightened maidenhood of Earth
and fill her children's mouths with bitter songs,
their hearts with wounds of joy at every birth.
At first I came to Spain a wedding guest.
I stole the bride. I woke between her breasts.

SACROMONTE

Pilar

"I stole the bride. I woke between her breasts."
The rest he didn't say: I spun away,
I stamped, I struck the stoney ground, caressed
the night til darkness burned as bright as day.
No hand can pluck and crush the glowing rose
(my dancing governs salt, the voice of seas)
that blooms within the march of breathing groves
nor touch my body, hot as olive leaves.
My strength is like a coal. When winds arise
and blow its sleeping ash to sudden flame
I dance and fill the air with hungry cries.
I know what never dies is old and lame.
When others bow their heads and tell their beads
I laugh and dance. I know their words are weeds.

SACROMONTE

Emilio

I laugh and dance. I know their words are weeds.
I make my own from trees, from drunken light,
from streets and loss. The soul's a poem that bleeds
and wets the people's roots, they grow toward sight.
At night I close myself like flowers close,
the night is broken-mouthed with breast and whip,
but day demands a votive verse, a rose,
a sheaf of wheat, some sign that cheats the crypt.
My arms are open wide as if to say
the day is fruit, my children, eat your fill.
I do not draw these visions out of clay,
I dreamt and God made manifest his will.
Drink from this, said Christ the Morning Star,
he held his voice, a white ceramic jar.

SACROMONTE

Gabriel

He held his voice, a white ceramic jar,
within the trembling choir of his hands
and made us drunk that night inside the bar
on wine from grapes he'd grown in dreaming sand.
His chambered life was pregnant like the vines
and trained with blood to twine around the tree
whose every leaf was wind and mute with signs,
its every hungry flower drunk with bees.
As every drunkard's heart's a broken gate
and all the bravest men but wounded birds,
so we were hung on golden nails to wait,
within our skulls the scattered salt of words.
That night we sang inside our living loss,
the wind that blew around us knew the cross.

SACROMONTE

Manolin

The wind that blew around us knew the cross,
it knew the banished gypsies, jews, and moors,
it always follows those who wander lost:
the refugees, the powder-blackened poor.
It also follows those who turn away,
who, in their crib, enveloped by the wind,
cried and cursed but grew and could not stay.
That wind would trap and empty Manolin.
His blood is gypsy, though, and bright with flutes,
the song of knives within its angry wine
runs crying down his arm to bear its fruit;
his grief the furthest grape that bends the vine.
Behind that broken tower night will rise.
The dead are stars. They fill the night with sighs.

SACROMONTE

Belen

The dead are stars. They fill the sky with sighs.
They fill a girl's heart and hips with wine
that pushes out the breasts and swells the thighs
like Autumn swells the grapes along the vine.
I dreamt of lemon flowers, loud with bees,
I dreamt of cisterns, bright with flashing fish,
my body grew and could not be appeased,
I called the lightning down my chemic wish.
But when it struck a thousand voices rose,
as dark as empty tombs that beg for kings,
from ancient ground an ancient river flows.
The dead say "child". Child starts to sing.
Believe you're free and wings will be your chains,
our bodies love like mountains gather rain.

SACROMONTE

Chemistry and Spirit

Our bodies love like mountains gather rain:
the clouds ascend and darken, thick with seed,
they strike a ridge and, trembling with the strain,
they flash and groan, their sudden waters freed.
And so the chemic winds of speech will rise
and find some bodies mouths and others mute,
from some a song will ghost the bones with cries
while others scratch the stones around the root.
Sigh and grant the dead their wish,
accept the rhythm run through falling suns,
that circle drawn will give its strength to flesh,
the spirit's notched on gut the dead have strung.
A single sudden music made that clear:
the way the Sacromonte blooms each year.

TWO LONGER POEMS

STUDY OF A WOMAN

It is often the back of a woman you watch,
how the muscle and bones form the chancel of grace,
how the skin is a silk that is color to touch
and more honest by far than the stage of the face.
It's the bodying forth of a music of form
in whose physical rhythm the heart is unveiled,
in the salt of whose stops is then instantly known
what the weather of faces can only conceal.

The grammar of shoulders is perfect mathematical
motion,
the fan of the muscles resolves like the waves of the
ocean,
an arabic scale of lines from the breastbone to collar
that logically bears its own beauty to sum at the
border.

That impulse of rhythm continues in musical order,
uniting the wings of the arms to the back and the
shoulders
in circles that end at the ribcage's radial halter,
completing the formal harmonic, resolving the torso.

Bellies reflect all the storms of the face,
quiet but dangerous changes of grace,
harbor to graveyard inside of a smile,
sheltering cove to a desolate space.
Born from this belly, the eyes of the child
turn when he's older to gain it with guile,
learning the secrets that hold it in place,
and the door that unlocks to a fiery aisle.

The haunches flank and guard the gestured door,
the final, salt-spun chamber, dreamt of words
that end their nerves at mute religious verge;
those muscled columns give upon the core.
Their mobile claim prohibits, grants, or stays
the votive hand whose visionary reach,
more hungry than the acrid field of speech,
is priest for sleep as often as it prays.

With every kiss the rushing wind of birth and death
suspends the drum and marries stars to eyes and breath
but when the world catches back its stumbled step
that instant born along its sudden line is kept
and lives in every sun that locks the angled edge
within the flinted oil, down the dolphined ledge,
and deep within the light that lifts a woman's hair
and names its sudden waking down the curse of air.

And when the spirit marries back the flesh,
then every part is locked within itself
and every self within the godded mesh,
the net that is the dealing, not what's dealt.
It's then a woman's body carves a wish
from air and fills it with her self
and beauty strikes as sudden as a fish,
the stricken spirit risen up in flesh.

THE ALB

"Yes, every man can himself
 save the whole world. I've
 often had that thought, Father,
 and it makes me tremble. Have
 we, then, such a great
 responsibility? What must we
 do, then, before we die?
 What way must we follow?"

- Nikos Kazantzakis

The Greek Passion

Syria

Informed with pitch my bones began to cry
 like witches. Run the sleeping iron down
 to tinder underneath the aping calm.
 The soul will fall away a diving sky
 to eyes that fix the absent ward of hope

to walls an ill-packed god has taught to shift.
And while the soul recedes, that burning bag
the flesh, that rag that caught upon the sill,
whose voice is rising wind, expands the tongue
to throw the empty land its broken words.

The swollen light of freeways plagues the dark
with lurid circles, throws the loaded stone
behind the spinning crow, beyond the rim
the certain gravel smiles, above the ear
those leather-sudden faces cough and crack.
Invasive fingers traced the hardened links
and all to nothing gave from core to verge,
a split in flesh released a wordless curse
that absent angels chewed behind the pews
in sack-blown alleys drunk with frantic eyes.

That symbolled night regained the heavy air
a thousand times. I drove it down again,
again it strove against my trembling lamp
at last to break the glass and take the smoke
to task to wreathe about the body's face
the snake of days whose sun was ending's end
inside the devil of a friend whose hand
was trailing cold along your wounded line.
The hidden face was dark whose wish was lie:
your father's face is wax and holds the sword.

And all those faces laddered up my spine
 and spoke before I slept, repenting breath,
 that square of black that nailed my quail heart
 to light, the greenish light of failed life.
 There are no two, there are no two, the coin
 is coin before the faces flash their cells,
 behind the silver eyes the jails wait.
 The light near sleep is bad, a word will move
 behind it, stretch it tight against your sight
 and strop its blade against the autumn side.

The ruin wind had angry hands. For years,
 whenever light went mad, that wind arrived.
 The alb, uncovered, counted all the knives
 that hid in drawers and leaves. I pulled a cloak
 around it, dark and heavy, held it tight,
 at last to let it welcome in the wind.
 And when the wind began to pluck and tear
 I clenched my wild thought and bore its touch
 and stood its wooden words to kiss my breath.
 I had no dark damascus.

Adam and Christ

Strength and sudden
choice occasioned savage passage, banished
dogs to distant winds and caught their voices
up in wires. Quiet came as king to rule for
Sight, whose bones began the evening singing,
pinned against the rock's receding language.
Quiet came, a king to walk the borders,
leaving me to name the grasses, fasten
down the sparking seams of gold and silver,
learn the tongue that governs secret weather.

Language tripped the rolling locks and heavy
doors flew open underneath my growing
voice. Portcullised tunnels gave their treasures
out like merchants struck by christed lightning.
Every time I spoke I named and gathered.
All the paths between the stones, the water,
caverns, slate and dust, all the objects,
forces, fields, martyred by the chaos
laid their fires out before my words and,
shriven, took their place behind my gesture.

Body followed Mind and found cathedral.

Part to part and part to whole: how language
knows the truth is what it doesn't say, the
line that's never drawn, the interstice. Does
Object stand to indicate the object?

Never. Part to part and part to whole: the
body burns with longing for itself, a
pothos of the known for not, the self for
other. Power never comes unyoked from
burden. Suffer stars to turn within you.

So I did. The turning outward followed:
sound of walnuts striking sidewalks, temples,
printing presses, rain on pavement, anger,
women aching, arching backs, a car that,
sliding sideways, strikes a wall, the papers,
sweat, trees recieving crowns of fire,
mountains sloughing ice, the ocean, friendship.
Hand to face I touched the earth and calmed it,
lent it reason, taught it change and order,
covered up its anxious eyes with singing.

And yet the borders howled with wind, my naming
 held the gate that gave upon the desert.
 Quiet, growing old and tired, summoned
 me to where the light removed itself from
 rhythm. Beyond the gate, he said, your kingdom,
 yours it is for I am leaving, ceases.
 Loud, unruly vision waits. Naming
 nothing, meet it. Let it touch you.
 Saying this, he disappeared. I shuddered,
 leaned against the gate.

The Desert Circle

The telephone desert
 of streets, its electrical sky and ambivalent triremes,
 was haunted no less by itself than the day that I left
 it.
 Alarms in my blood were the hammers of wind on the
 bells of
 my eyes. I had vanquished the yards and the acids of
 heartbeat
 and still the enormous, tyrannical alb was the chain of
 its spikes and my mastering bomb. When I opened my
 mouth to

(stanza continues)

arrest its exquisite ballet and order its prised
and prisonless rhythm a hand of my own and
undisciplined
making reduced my imperious crook to a harrow.

The alb had become what it always had been, a
conductor
of winds and a siren for ships, that transformed my
unwilling
and innocent bones into graveyard for truths, and
deliverance,
sea-wracked, escaped me a thousand to one. I had
ordered,
it's true, but the order was consequence crippled,
arranged like
the deck of a ship of its cards that were cut to
explain a
geometry: solitude. Seed-cones from trees were their
own and
expensive and wind, as the agent of spending,
collecting
the cry, the ecstatic release of the loins of the
end-all,
relinquished its bursting to rocks at the foam's edge.

When blooming began at the booming, conjecture grew
roman.

I lowered my eyes to the dogs I kept hem-woven,
turning

to dogs every kiss of the wind and my life tasted
bitter as resin.

The asphalt gave gravel to sand in my walking, the
sun and

the moon gave the stars to my waking, the poles gave
the pines to the scrub of the rocks and I entered the
desert,

a field of loss like a radio wave on the ocean,
the lesser and chattering desert consumed by the
silence.

The alb had prevented the truth from embracing
my soul and

I wanted that wound, that consumption of spirit,
that fire.

The branches that lay in the hollow of sound started
 hissing
 and roiling like snakes in the sand, as though fire
 egg, as
 though birth were the bridge between earth and the
 ether, transmuting
 the flesh of an ape to an angel, but neither, not ape
 and
 not angel, but changing itself, as though juncture,
 transcendence,
 the instant of altering, that was the soul.

Surrounded

by seconds, the moments directly before the components
 emerge and connect in the rain or electrical dust,
 I drove to the arcing release of choice which,
 divested
 of logic, allowed the embrace of the altering fire.

The alb, transmuted to heat, a reflection of heaven,
was raising a spiral of sparks to the stars as its
ashes

descended like seed to the sand. I relinquished the
other

for self and collected the nameless, unnameable light
of

the absence of dialogue. Heaven descended to marry
my blood to the borderless circle that circumscribes
home. The wheel I'm bound to, the wind and the naming,
the world that welcomes the clock and the wire, the
locks that

unlock in the bones of the cross: in the motionless
lunge of

a mansion, I rose from myself to the barbarous rock.

His visions never came like cheap tableau,
that gift of time with stage enough for lie,
they never sought his empty eyes in dreams
around whose secret flags the light can bend.
No golden trumpets blew to part the clouds,
releasing singing angels, streaming light,
and joy that draws the water forth from stones.
Instead the stupafacient hand of God
would strike his forehead, paralyze the boy,
and hold him still while glory bloomed
like flowers through the trembling landscape. He,
the roaring god himself, made manifest:
no picturesque and gaudy angel came
but God himself, the wind that fills the breast,
explaining how the mountains rose and why,
explaining how the oceans rose and why,
explaining how the earth drew forth from dust
and how the governed dust itself wil govern,
and why it is that men are given speech,
that sight is angel-wrapped in shaking stars,
that most are given speech and sight in drops,
for sated souls are thick and thirst's a gift,
a godding gift for spirits who so soon
give up the stars themselves to wield whips
(that towered try a lie of burning hands -
there was no urge to go beyond the skin -
and no one rose but those who bought and sold).

And so his visions came to him like wind
 and standing still he moved like eagles move.
 He froze, his arms extended up to God,
 his face would twist with joy and now with fear,
 with anger, pity, dread, and now with thirst,
 but he, the body, still; a cistern, still.

"Why I saw him only yesterday, in front
 of Beekman's Bank on California Street.
 I was comin' out, I beg yer ladies' pardon,
 from the Table Rock Saloon, having had
 a tonic after closing up the shop.
 It could have been as late as eight, or nine
 the latest, having worked a little late.
 So anyhow, I'm comin' out of the Table
 Rock and turn the corner onto California
 and who should I see but Lathrop's son, God rest
 his soul, the drunken sot, I beg yer pardon,
 Nicolas the mute. He's standin' there his arms
 all up and stiff as a starched and Sunday collar.
 First I thought that he was a wooden ind'in,
 that maybe Denny Horne had got one for
 his store except his store's on Main, but anyhow,
 he's standin' there like makin' ready to catch
 a sack of grain. But his face is not so stiff,

it's movin' all around, it's almos' like
he's talkin', though a course he ain't, and never
has so far as I remember. Worse
of all is this - he's pissin' in his pants.
I beg again yer ladies' pardon, truth
must sometimes take importance to our manners.
And so I wait awhile, watch him talk
without a word just like he's talkin' to the Lord
himself at Peter's Gate, to see he's safe,
you ladies know to care fer others is our charge,
we mortals here on earth. I figger maybe
he's prayin' to the Lord to take it easy on his father,
bless his sotted soul, I beg yer pardon.
Then, sudden-like he's back on earth, I mean
he's movin', lookin' down at where he's made
a mess of himself, then sights me standin' there
across the street and stumbles over to where
I am. He stumbles like he's drunk as a pope,
forgive me Mrs. Kent, I ferget myself,
though a course he ain't. And he comes up like this
and opens up his mouth as though to speak.
Ladies, I must admit that I was frightened
when out come such a caterwaul of sounds
and no two together made a word of english.
I found myself just layin' on the ground
and come around a secon' later to find
that he had disappeared no doubt up Third

to where his dear departed father, drunken
sot, I beg yer pardon, God have mercy
on his drunken soul, he was a friend a mine,
and he had lived together since his birth,
his father's sad, untimely death that left
him orphan now to wander this earth alone."

It's T.J. Kinney spoke who owned a store
that occupied the Brunner Building there
where California Street met Oregon, a hardware store
and grocery started by his father Ben
whose father came to stake a claim when gold
infused the streams with light but not the same
the hearts of men who felt that metal call.
But some, like T.J.'s granddad, stayed the storm
and took a surer claim of land and made
a living free from luck or if not free
at least a bit more dignified and clean.
And Jacksonville grew up upon the bones
of men like Kinney men and on their wives,
on women like the women Kinney spoke
to, Mrs. Kent the teacher, Mrs. Hope,
a farmer's wife, and Mollie Britt,
the photographer's daughter, handsome and quiet.

It's Kinney spoke who then excused himself
and left the ladies standing out in front

"I'd best be gettin' back,"
he said, "and mind the store. I',m short a man
and so today's especial busy, 'course."
And saying so, he turned and left them, full
of thoughts about the boy, his brother, gone
these almost fourteen years, their father, drunk
and angry after Judith, loving wife,
had died in childbirth, a sickly child
born upon her dying breath who then
grew still. The smell of whisky's drunken fist
had shut his mouth and forced the words inside
and he a drunkard too, of sorts, of fits,
a god-drunk fool, or sick, in need of love,
a real family, any, all, depends
on who you talk to. Each of them, of course,
with different thoughts, concerned with different
things,
their joys and living needs and sorrow all
convergent now in contemplation, brows
in furrows all but all by different plows.

The mountains rise to reach their making God,
to reach that surging breast of which the clouds,
the forge, the boiling pot, are merely echoes.
Mountain just the same as man and sun,

as ocean, iron, horses, just the same
the mountain pays its price upon the cross.
From deep inside the breast of God we came,
a scream, his voice released the running word,
and we are it. So Jesus only one
of many Christs: the cricket Christ, the mouse,
the rain and sunshine Christ, the wolf a Christ,
and each to take their turn upon the cross
and turn, transform, return to fill that mouth,
initial womb the breath, with air alive
and sweet with sweat and birth, the burden borne,
and now the cross unlocks and, feeding God,
we rest, undone, resolved in bearing fruit
whose bud and leaf are bitter death to tast.
We feed our hungry god, the air is honey.
We are like the eyes and ears of God,
returning echo tells the shouting mouth
the breadth and depth, with such a stone for walls,
with roof or no, if water runs or not.
O God! Your echo comes to kiss your ear:
your pain and longing, joy and fear, have found
exceeding good the sharp, the soft, the hard
and flat and deep, the now, the truth,
the borne-to-being all your breath has blown.

It's this he thought. The night was April fourth,
his father's death almost a year before

was heavy on his conscious mind. He left
the house he'd lived in since his luckless birth,
his mother's death, his father's drunkenness,
to walk the streets and think about the stars.
Perhaps, he thought, the hand of God will come
release me from my worried guilt, release,
a word of comfort, wind as dear as blood
perhaps would fill his chest again and thrive
his thick and guilty breathing, flooded tongue,
perhaps tonight the visions, if they came,
would find the secret lock and he would speak.
If he could only speak what good he'd do!
These people he would touch with love and force,
the mystery forking wildly down his voice
would free their fleshy souls and set their minds
at liberty; what they did would be
a little clearer, cleaner, free from fear.
The vision came as clear as falling rain,
a sense of rising, mountains rising, bees
and clouds and anger, rising, souls and trees,
it all was rising, pictures gone beyond the eyes,
to skin and words, to bone and longing soul
and these, the words or feelings, pictures, surged
around his tongue and hands. The voice of God
released him from this ecstasy of sight
but still it ran like liquor down his bones.

Night. The gaslights burned along the street,
the empty street. And sudden from the dark
steps Mr. Kinney, oldest friend in town
his father ever had. He sways and grasps
the streetlamp with his drunken hands
and peers at Nicolas. The urge to speak
was strong like wine around his humming skull.
He made for Kinney, straight and strong as oak
to tell him God was different than he thought
and Kinney swayed despite the solid pole
he clung to. Nicolas approached to speak.
He opened up his mouth believing speech
would not deny him this time, near a decade
gone since first he felt the hand and strangely saw.
But when he opened up his mouth the words,
the feelings, pictures, truths got all confused
like burning gasses blue with heat above
the logs within the fireplace will spit
and flash and roll beyond the ordered calm
of warmth. In such a way the sound escaped
to form a gorgeous language out beyond
a mortal grammar, good for Gods and verse
but not for men like Kinney. Like the flames
a fire makes might rob the room of air,
the speech the vision-drunken boy had made
had stolen all of Kinney's thought away
and left him in a heap upon the boards,

a growing stain between his legs.

In front
of City Hall the ladies stood in thought.
From where the hills stood south in midday sun
a gentle breeze was blowing into town
the smell of pine, a resined warmth and spice,
that formed a rafted bower in their thoughts,
a common bower, built inside the air,
and from it rose a single singing voice.
Though made by several separate throats
each one of which was different in its pitch
and different in its timbre and its tone
according to the way the years had struck
each lady's heart (the way that fingers strike
the strings that stretch across the same guitar
each a little differently) a single voice
was rising through the leaves, a single singing voice.

"That evening's sky," thought Mrs. Kent,

"was blue enough to match the sea.

Along the snowy streets I went
as much at peace as I could be,
when through a frosty pane I saw
the painter Lathrop's shaking frame.
His anger rose to set his jaw
and pull its muscles tight in pain.

His life had given him a lot
to curse the distant heavens for...
It's true, I can't know what he thought
that night I passed his awful door...
It may have been his wife and how
he brought her here to start a home
from Indiana where his plow
had broken when it struck a stone.
The factories, too, were like the corn;
they grew at first but turned to dust.
He loved his land and he was torn
but work was work and work he must.
They loaded up with food and tools,
the buckboard creaked beneath the weight,
they were, he said, just common fools,
but something in it felt like fate.
They drove to where the wagon trains
most often start their journeys from,
St. Louis where the arid plains
stretch out to catch the setting sun.
On all the long and weary trip
the only troubled time they had
was when the Ogallala's grip
got tight and made the settlers mad.
And when they passed along that way
they felt the very air grow tense.
The guides, though, knew just what to say,

they gave out gifts to mend the fence.
Oh, also, when they crossed the Platte,
all swollen with the summer floods,
a couple oxen bolted flat
and drowned when they got stuck in mud.
They made the trip to Portland fine
and filed for a claim of land
in Jacksonville which at that time
was calling out to fill new hands
with pasture, stock and timber, wheat,
with game, with all the living gold
of healthy soil, rain that's sweet
and steady, winters not too cold.
It seemed ideal, made to plan,
the gold was gone from Jackson Creek
but while it shone it was a light
that summoned to the Siskyou's peaks
the hungry few who rode at night
and blazed the way to settle down
for sturdy stock with empty hands
who felled the trees and built the town
and tamed the brawling, wild land.
So Lathrop and his pretty wife
came south to start a farm again,
to build a tough but solid life
far away from robber winds.
The plot they chose was close to town.

He cleared a space and built a barn
but town was growing all around
and soon would reach their little farm.
So what he did was build a home,
a garden so that they could eat,
a pen so when the cow would roam
she couldn't reach the growing wheat.
But wheat he didn't ever plant,
he had a better plan by far:
he'd sell the town his idle land
and with the money forge a star.
And so he did, he built a forge,
and had a business bending steel
and all his work possessed the edge
of how much joy a man can feel.
His wife was pregnant, full of life,
and all his grills and railings wild.
He loved her more with all the strife
she went through bringing him a child.
His business grew, he specialized
in iron railings, window grills,
with raging angels in the skies
and beasts that ran upon the hills.
He painted, too, did signs for stores
and made a decent living so,
you couldn't pass a single door
in J'ville Lathrop didn't know.

Oh, what a decent life they led,
the business good and many friends,
a sturdy house and spotless bed,
but no one sees around the bends.
So years went by and Judith grew
to child again with Lathrop's love
but apples on the bough are few
when winter settles from above.
When hunger's great the axe will strike
and fell the tree to reach the fruit,
so God will take a woman's life
to save a child, that's the truth.
So maybe what I saw that night,
the night I passed be Lathrop's place,
was all that anger, all the fright,
resurging into Lathrop's face.
He struck the boy a dozen times.
The older, Jack, was trying so
to stop his father's drunken crime,
to save his brother from the blows.
That night I saw the elder, Jack,
pick up an iron frying pan
and dash his father from back.
He hit the ground and off Jack ran.
It's been just shy of fourteen years
since Jack's been gone from Jacksonville,
his family history, one of tears:

a mother dead, a father ill
with drink that caught his broken heart
a twelve-month past and brought him down,
a brother shorn of words, apart
with fits and strangeness from the town.

It reads just like a tragedy
of Shakespeare's type, without an end
except for death, finality,
where eyes are closed by a stranger's hand.
A stranger's hand. A stranger's hand."

Forgive me my son for the anger and hate in my bones,
for the blows that I dealt you that drove out your
voice from its home.

Before I can rest in the terrible bosom of space
I must prove to the stones that my spirit is worthy of
grace.

So I search for the smoke of your words through the
ruins of air
to return them at last to your mouth in the form of a
prayer.

I am raging my son down the angel of tears in your
heart,
my hands full of speech that were once overflowing with
hurt.

Mrs. Hope was a woman, courageous and bright:

"He weren' any reguller Cath'lic I'm certain
that emptied 'is heart out in back of a curtain,
though sometimes he'd inner St. Joseph's in daylight
and wander around like a soul full a hurtin'.
I'd see 'im a-Sundays, his son an' 'is wife,
with 'is eyes full a happiness, piercin' but bright,
and they'd go han'-in-han' to the Methodist church
an' together they'd worship, their hearts full a light.
Inside a St. Joseph's he'd walk as though searchin',
a man who could see where the vultures were perchin',
he knew there were birds that were willin' to hasten
our lives to their ends when they fill up with cursin'.
There were somethin' like midnight that lived in his
face,
yes, an' even in sunshine it left a faint trace,
not personal sin, not the evil, age-old,
that emerges in Man an' deprives 'im a grace,
it felt more like a war that was waged in the cold,
the desperate fight of a man to take hold
a the truth where it hides between nerves a hot silver
and bowls made a stone in the rooms a the soul.
His struggle at first absolute in the metal,
he bended the iron to roses and nettles,
to angels whose voices, as angry as lions,
would rage like a storm and then sweeten and settle.
Then Britt taught 'im paintin', the colors an' lines
were more full of the violent sweetness a time

than the truculent metal whose powerful heart
would never submit to the needs a the mind.
"A path on the earth is a flower-strewn carpet,"
said dear Father Blanchet one day from the pulpit,
and that's why he'd walk in the garden so offin:
he searched for the Reason in bees and their targets.
One ev'nin' at twilight, the air was so soft,
in that garden a roses an' water an' rock,
I saw 'em together, the Father an' Lathrop.
They'd walk for a while an' then stop so's to talk,
an' then Lathrop would gesture, then let his arms drop,
an' the Father would crouch an' then spin, almos' hop,
an' then Lathrop would clap an' together they'd laugh
an' their faces get red til it seemed like they'd pop.
With time I discovered the reason for laughter,
why Lathrop spent hours beneath St. Joe's rafters.
Though not by my nature a curious person
I discovered what Father and Lathrop were after.
There's somethin' that's needed in a good Cath'lic
church
in the makin' a which Mr. Lathrop were versed.
It's the altarpiece paintin' St. Joe's was without
an' J'ville had few enough painters a course.
They were laughin' about the potential fer doubters
to falter an' stammer when faced with the power
created when spirits are caught in the struggle
with God an' with fear in a soul-changin' hour.

When a man has a whiskey you can't mor'n shrug.
If you look down yer finger yer beggin' bad luck.
But Lathrop began, with the death of his wife,
to be drunken so much that he lived in a fog
It's the pain of his loss he was tryin' to stifle.
It hurt like a wound from a Remin'ton rifle.
His hand, it got slow, and his wits started dullin'
til iron an' paintin' seemed burdensome trifles.
The altar is still just as bare as a skull.
It's a still as the ocean right after a squall,
like the instant between when the lightnin'll strike
an' the thunder that follows to bury the lull.
Well he died, Lathrop did, in the trough a the
lightnin'.

He died like he lived, full a anger an' frightened
an' left with his death on a night-secret easle
a half-finished ghost a the thing he was fightin'.
So when Margaret Day said she noticed a breeze
in St. Joseph's one evenin' that smelled so like bees
an' turnin' aroun' said she saw at the altar
a man who had fallen down onto his knees
an' was tryin' to paint there a gold-colored psalter
with transparent hands that continually faltered
and let go the brush which would turn into water
it's a thing that I tend not to question or balk at,
for spirits remember the man, what he fought,

an' they sometimes can never unlearn what they're
taught.

So they wander aroun' an' they try to make true
what the man in his waking-time would and could not,
what the man in his waking-time would but could not,
would but could not.

Oh my son, oh my son where you sleep in the cloven
sheet,
in the axe-hewn, impossible chamber of riven speech,
and the molecules liberate light from the whispering
planks
and the creek is undone in its secretive, glittering
banks,
I awaken and flutter, a butterfly borne in your breast,
in the bones of your chest, in the acid disciple of
rest
to recite, revirescent, the mandating canticle's verse
that a father reborn in the tongue of his progeny's
curse
is a stop-water churn til the boy raise his eloquent
hand
and unlock the arrested-by-death in a duty of sand.
I charge prophet-in-prince to the laboring rim of the
wheel
in the spin and the call of the padlock-springing heel.

Oh my son, oh my son where you dream in your hauling
sleep,
continuing wings shall unlock in your hands when you
weep
because only when holy is heat through your minister
clay
can my soul tumble off of the troughs of the husbanding
wave.

Amalia Britt, the daughter, not so far
from forty sexless years, with girl's name,
was woman still, her maidenhood a scar,
a broken circle, candled through its flame,
that burned above the drying crate of sex
and caught each sweating shadow in its frame.

"When you were boy I'd known the deep effects
of Spring on flesh for nearly seven years.
I'd felt the chemic honey need collects
along its maiden legs despite the fear;
despite the blood, despite the jealous God,
I opened out whenever Man came near.

But God was wrapped in Father's coat, his odd
and close affection storming through the house
could bang the shutters to, his word a rod.
My name is small and figured like a mouse,
could Mollie lose the sailor on her sea?,

my name has closed around me like a noose.
But you, my Jack, as lithe as alder, sweet,
I watched you swell and stretch the mortal sail,
I longed to wrap myself in such a sheet.
At twenty-four my family watched me ail,
thinking I had breathed a foetid air.
I knew that I was woman. I would fail.
The passion in my heart was acid there,
it sought to move across the gradient,
to flow from me to where you stood, fair
Apollo, you, the sun, from heaven sent
to balance out the pull of secret tides,
to calm the waves inside that shook and rent.
I tried to show you how I was inside
by showing how my flesh is echoed soul,
my breasts and calves, my hair, my summer smell,
but you were boy; unbridled, frightened foal.
In vain I tried to cast you in my spell
and free myself from fate, the spinning wheel,
joining broken Ixion in hell.
But you were not Apollo, though you reeled
off his gunning spool the running sun.
You cannot always govern what you steal.
Your father, dark Apollo, owned the sun,
the font of heat whose heart's the voice of light.
He threw you down. You woke to what was done.
You ran away, my Phaeton, stolen bright

way yours by right of clenched and shining fist,
the farther-running burning back the night.
But I? The men I'd never bent to kiss
were dark and dreadful down the sunless branch
and dying down the rhythm of a wish.
O brother Robert, Chronos, more than man,
my Jack has gone to grow a greater star
and time has tumbled backward to your hand.
My maidenhood remains a lifeless scar.
Before that moon within has closed its circle
making me, in chastity, a whore,
I'd have you use this sacrificial sickle,
bloody partner to my godding need,
and free us both from father-fastened bridle.
But this is Jacksonville, in Oregon,
where all the mythic stars are underground
and all the ancient heroes dead and gone.
I cannot live to hope to hear the sound
of clanging swords on brazen shield boss
and naked saviors singing down the town.
And nineteen-two's a year of certain dross,
no deed on earth will shudder through the stars
and gild the clouds with either hope or loss.
No, Father's no Uranus, locked to laws
that Chronos cuts him from, that touch the sea
and gender there the burning rise and fall
of junctured man whose cross is do and be,

who knows the mythopoeic voice is his,
who knows with every stitching breath, he's free.
No, I am simply Mollie, this my dress
and this the City Hall and this the street
and this the Earth whom many winds caress,
and Jack, who's gone, a simple girl's dream,
a simple loss, a simple aching loss,
a simple aching loss, a withered dream
that's made me less, that's closed the seam
that should have, aching out, allowed the stream
of life to roar eternal turning torrent
down the locked and pebbled drought, a loss,
a simple aching loss, a withered dream.

My son, oh my son, it is better to choose, when you
can,

the peace of the rain, of a glacier, of wind in the
mountains.

It's better to love only Man, never men in their
seasons

or women, whose weathers uncaptain the ship of your
reason.

Don't minister love to the face that decays with the
gown

but only to that which remains when the pain's
underground

with the cables of speech and belief. If, unlearning
the heart,
you commune with the soul, if you conjure the whole,
though the parts
be unlocked into dust by the sun, you will then know
the one
that expresses the many, the gendering Word. You must
run
at the edge of your need or be tangled and caught by
the net
of your love. In this desert of soul is the prophet
well met
who insists on unwrapping the flesh from the bones of
the drought
or will they, uncrowned in the heat of their
marshalling doubt,
be undone? Will they call for the fish to be burnt in
the furrow?

That common bower built inside the air,
in front of City Hall, that smelt of pine,
was moved by stronger breezes from the south
and then dispersed completely by the pop
and clatter of Wendt's delivery wagon rounding
onto Oregon from California Street.
The German, George, had run the dairy, west
of town, out east of Ruch, since 1880.

Passing where the ladies stood, he raised his thick hand to wave and bellow out "Hallo," the Rhine was still a river in his voice, and turn the wagon onto Main. The cans as big as beer kegs sang with every pothole. Nunan passed, a dapper figure dressed in foreign cloth, the merchant's surrey cut the gravel like a keel cuts the sand, and Beekman crossed on California. Down the street Judge Colvig's wife came out of the Post Office, waved, and crossed the street. The town, in short, came back alive as if the very peak of day were too intense to let the people of the town walk unmolested down the street. They had no bower like the ladies had or maybe out of some respect they had but didn't know, they left the ladies all alone to finish up a business that their presence couldn't help. The town came back alive, as much as J'ville could.

"Goodbye now, Mrs. Hope, I hope the trip back out is pleasant."

"Oh, as like as not it will be, thank you, Mrs. Kent and keep those ornery rascals quiet during lessons. Miss Mollie, tend the roses, give my greetin's

to yer pa."

"Thank you. Goodbye. Give my love
to your Mister. Goodbye, Mrs. Kent. Goodbye."

"Goodbye, my dear."

"Goodbye."

"Goodbye, Mrs. Hope."

"Goodbye. Goodbye, Mrs. Kent. Next Sunday, God
willin'."

Almost one. Nicolas woke to light
pouring through the dusty air from the skylight
of the attic where he slept. He'd moved th bed
up piece by piece the night his father died.
He slowly drew the covers back, sat upright
slowly drew his trousers on. The lamp
was out that hung upon a nail driven
deep into one of the rising beams that locked
peak into the attic roof. A wonder
that, during the night, it hadn't set his shirt
on fire, hanging, as it was, so near
it on another nail. He must remember -
always put the light out. He was bothered.
Visions he had worn the night before
weren't absent in his sleep, just altered, strange,
or stranger anyway than merely hearing
God. He couldn't place it, couldn't stop
its furtive fliting through his tired mind.

He went downstairs. The corner of the kitchen was still heaped with the food the ladies from the Methodist

Church

had brought two days ago: a sack of beans, and flour, cheese and bacon, sugar, salt, and coffee. He dug the coffee out and lit the stove. The cracking jackpine perfuming the room, he stepped outside and stood on the porch. Jackson Creek was purling small and cold inside this day in May, already warm, that drew the blooming flowers through the hedge. A debt of words was smoke in angry hands, his head was buzzing. Still, the dreams were shorn of sense. He stepped inside and fetched the boiling coffee off the stove and dampered it down. He brought a cup and brought his shoes and socks outside. He dressed and drank, the butterflies, blue and white, were flying arabesques with honeybees in gold and black like music. He walked the yard, a pasture nearly, down to the creek and drank his coffee watching patterns form and change in silver script across the water's flowing face. He walked the creek bank north to the property line and east along the row of manzanita, behind the little barn, the broken-down corral, and south along the neighbor's fence and past the shed

he'd never seen unlocked except when Father went with lantern, drunk, to wrestle someone, something, living there. He'd watch, afraid, from the living room window, his brother Jack and he, and hours later Father staggered out and locked the door behind him tight. He passed the shed and walked across the yard to where the hedge of buzzing azaleas, colored like the meat of salmon, held the porch in place, its wooden columns wound around and green with silent ivy. Inside, he poured another cup. The coffee hissed against the metal kettle's lip. He set it on the cutting board and stepped outside again. The ruins of air, the love of mountains, a prayer that broke across a crying angel's voice, these things were dreamed but unremembered. He shook his head. Despite the heat of early afternoon, the day retained a morning coldness. He put the cup inside the door and shut it. Til the boy raise his eloquent hand, the boy a prince, and wrapped in the cloven sheet, the sheet his speech. These ghosts were haunt beyond his knowing. Ghosts? One? Or many? Decode the glittering script on the silvered paper. He shut the door and stood. He'd walk! He'd walk the town and tempt

the truth, gazelle to lion, pull the truth,
an always hungry creature, out of eyes
and doorways!

He walked down Third Street, like the
rest,
a road of packed dirt, rutted by wagons,
mud when rains came, mud in Spring,
to E where, cross the street, stood Campbell's house,
Campbell, whom his father shot but didn't
kill one summer night so many years ago
who hated him and all his kin since.
The back screen door knocked against the jamb,
a hollow sound that carried through the morning
air. He ducked his head and turned up E
toward Fifth. He crossed the creek where, up above,
two jays sat chattering in a pine. He tried to reach
the sense inside their piped and reedy speech,
and tried to reach the sense inside the scrawling
water,
but failed both. He walked again toward Fifth.
A wagon clattered into Meyer's lot,
its left, rear wheel wobbled, scraped
against the hub. Meyer fixed the wagons,
farmers', townsmens', orchard owners', miners',
despite the train and crawled over the Siskiyou
wagons still were how they hauled their trade.

Beyond the lot the squat yellow brick
of a house where Old Dowell prowled nightly.
Too small for regulation haunt, it hunkered
pitifully, two thick columns framing
the door, a tiny balcony above -
his daughter lived away, his dreams of the Senate,
dust with the papers printed twenty years
before. He passed the stern and silent church
the Methodists bowed before their grim god in,
his father, mother, Methodist, reserved,
though not without an apple in the voice,
a plum or peach inside the way they moved,
a little bit of sin, that is, of life -
a loss, caress, and music, a good laugh,
and singing, lovely how the hand can move
a brush and cause the colors to rush like waves
across the cloth, a little sin, though sin
is not the real word, the smell of roses,
something solid for the soul to move through,
and, passing through, to eat, a little sin
is like heavy, fresh bread. Beyond, up D,
a block before his house, rose the Catholic
Church, where his father walked with Father Blanchet
through the Church's rose garden, for Lathrop a refuge,
where God was greater, not just hammered spirit,
blood and struggle also, lust and gold
and anger; full, so full he needed man

to scream and laugh through. He went each Sunday,
though, to Methodist services. Why? Perhaps to pin
his soul against a simple, ugly rock
else wild earth would pitch him heavenward,
torn to pieces by the godded wind.

A shiver ran through Nicolas's frame, not born
of fear but just as though electric signals
moved through diodes, he a juncture for a windy
spirit's surge, he always opened out,
a fact of nature. He turned up Fifth toward California,
passed the County Courthouse, remaining peg
that held old J'ville down, that, slipping out,
would toss it up to wind to join the dust
that blew from Dowell's cellar, that blew from Medford,
Ashland, all the towns with rail, all
the towns whose roots were thief to J'ville's gold,
the robbing roots that looked just like the rails.
Behind the Courthouse where the fire wagons
parked the Sheriff, Johnston, stood against
a lightpole, shotgun cradled cross his arms,
and watched a group of men shining brass
on the engines. Other men, in ties, with satchels,
talked on the front steps, county men,
lawyers, politicians, plaintiffs, men
with grievances. Tow ladies passed with parasols.
He walked on, past The Ladle, a hash
joint, Thurmond, giant Dane, behind

the counter talking with a couple of workers
in town from Tree Top Orchard and with Washington,
the barber, black, one of the few in town.

There were problems later sometimes for folks that
talked

with Washington, but Thurmond didn't care, too big
for threats. One time a couple a roughs had tried
to rob him - dead now. Thurmond never carried a gun:
his gigantic fists and a knife he'd bought
on the Costa Brava, these were enough. Lathrop
and he were friends, through everything, friends,
two stubborn men who once stepping forward
never stepped back. Thurmond turned
and saw him, waved a strange sad hand.

He ducked his head and walked on by.

He stopped where California Street turned road
and headed east to Phoenix. The intersection
of two roads always woke a bird

behind his breast bone. He watched to town
spill fields down the valley, the road
spun a dirty ribbon toward the sun's cradle.

Despite the warmth of midday, Spring, a line
of smoke rose from a chimney in the valley.

The smoke of words were gathered from the ruins of air
and, held by an angel, were carried past a mountain
to my mouth. He thought. The sun spun, escaped.

Came back. He raised his eloquent hand

and stared at silver, the people passing
passed him wide. Just the town loonie,
someone said by way of explanation.
Nicolas made the flowers sing inside
their ears. Oh my tiny angel, oh my angel.
California street, laid out like a gauntlet,
opened up before him west. The McCully House,
with its columns and carriage house, was quiet
on the left. He passed it, passed the Judge's
wife who walked toward him on the sidewalk,
song of drums on the raised wooden slats,
who nodded, hello. Across the street, beneath
the oak, stood Miller, unshaven, talking with Kinney
who saw him oddly, pushed his beaten hat
back on his tall forehead, whispered something
to make Miller look. Oh. The mountains,
not the men, not the women. Oh.
He stepped down into Fourth Street, crossed it,
muddy trough, up onto the boardwalk
again, where he skirted a group of ladies in Spring
dresses who jerked the hems back, away
from him, as though he were a dog with mange.
Oh. People passing on the boardwalk, a press
of folks with business to attend to.
He passed by Washington's barber shop, closed,
its weathered sign had nigger scrawled across it,
crossed out. Across the street a group

of ladies from the Methodist church were talking.
Next to where they stood was Miller's Hardware-Grocery,
his wife swift and easy behind the counter.
He looked up to the second floor, all dark and empty,
where Veit Schulz once ran, dead now,
one of the two breweries in town, the other,
run by Helms's son out of the Table Rock,
still in operation evidently.
Next to Miller's, Nunan's fancy office,
roll-top desks and clerks with green visors
chocking up the figures, sending wires -
wheat to Brookings, pears to the Medford depot,
apples out across the Coast Range
to Cresent City ships and round to Boston,
New York, maybe Europe for all
he knew. Down again, cross Third,
and up, where, opposite, the U.S. Hotel
where Madame Reboam still held court,
lived her dim husband down. "Dumb as a pig
but fierce in love." She said so grudgingly
but lack shone cold in her bright eyes,
her drying flesh was witness to her loss.
The Hotel itself was aging, breaking in
and falling down. It lost some sparkle,
vice, adventure, President Harding was long
gone down a swirl of blown leaves
but still the peeling columns, dusty rooms,

clapped magic through the minds of many;
deals made and love undone, the marriages
to quiet constancy or wild catastrophe
were good to think on, strong drink
for the ailing many. He turned up third, away
from Beekman's Bank, Old Beek himself
behind the counter, Beek, who grew from rich
to richest selling J'ville down the river,
up the valley, really, having refused
to loan the town the money needed years
ago to draw the trains. He sold his town
to fix the railhead in Medford where,
how strange, he owned the land they'd put
the depot on. So Jacksonville was drying
out. It blew away a little bit
with every strong wind. Old Beek didn't mind.
Old Beek was very rich. Nicolas
truned at Main to come up behind
the Mason's Hall where, in the gravel, Wendt's
wagon was still parked, empty of cans.
He looked up the wooden stairs that clung
precariously to the windowless hall of the brick
building
that led to a door the Jewish families entered
for rituals, mysterious and dark. They chanted
Fridays down the dim evening, gave
the trees and earth the secret silver of chimes.

Sometimes Nicolas came out at dusk to hide behind
a bush or underneath the stairs and catch
the thrown silver signets of their words
and in the deeper dark of the creek unlock them.
There were six families worshipping there,
three were German, two were Russian, one
was a Latvian family, down from twelve
or so ten years ago. Those who chased
the silent Chinese out of town in a mob of guns
drove frightened blood through every vein whose name
did not have bearded birth in green and northern
weathers. Every borrowed name, or changed
in the cold stone shadows underneath cathedrals,
hewn above the fencing mountains, shook
with the drum of hoof and torch that rise
in angry doubt and poverty of spirit through
the sick child when his breathing cradle starts
to cave beneath him. He turned up Oregon.
A man tied a horse to a post in front
of City Hall, threw the reigns across
the horizontal hitching pole. He watched
them wind around and stay like the end of a whip.
He kept to the east side of the street, his heavy
shoes clocked every step on the boards,
past the Oddfellows Hall beneath the Synagogue.
Harley, a boy his age, across the street
in Kinney's store, loaded the window with boxes.

Two men burst from the Table Rock saloon and passed him noisily on the narrow walk. At California he looked quickly across Oregon to the Post Office, quiet, then quickly crossed to the opposite corner and kept going north up Oregon to his house, truthless, truth a panther this time, still and dark and cunning, cruel, who waited somewhere in the dark branches above his knowing. Almost frantic he passed the depot, arrested, frozen, it seemed the hand of God held a brush and drew it over the world and as he blacked the mortal day the absence took a shape. He saw inside the dark, a purpled greenish-black, a familiar hand ignite a stick-match, draw it toward his face. The face beneath the tilted hat was near enough to touch but secret still, unrecognizable in the drastic shadow of the burning match, the forge glow of a lit cigar, the hieroglyphic whisp of smoke from the dead match. Nicolas saw his own face in the tip of the burning cigar that turned to grey and white and dropped in ash, releasing smoke in a figured curl that sent him rising to the top of the train car, torn to pieces as it escaped into the rushing night air through the top of the coach window. Suddenly back, he stumbled, righted himself.

The Rogue Valley coach had pulled into the depot with a metal-to-metal whine and screech of the steam-whistle. Young John Barnum hopped down onto the platform, pulled the door open and the passengers spilled out, milled around the platform and headed off to do their business, little enough these hungry days. John, who was always kind, saw him, waved. He smiled, overfull, ducked his head and walked on. No truth was manifest but mystery married mystery weaving flowered boughs to screen the truth completely. When would God tear the curtain off this veiled world? He walked past the street his house lay on, and, half-unconsciously, drawn almost, ascended the twisting, rising road beyond the iron gate to the hill his father rested in, the Graveyard, crowned with tangled manzanita, red madrone with peeling bark that crunched beneath his feet. The day was hot but the breexe that blew through the shaded grove, past smooth soft stones, was cool like a woman's hand on a fevered brow. He made his way through tall grasses, on the beaten paths, alone. He passed the digger's shack, empty, the door open. He heard the scrape and pat of a new grave born on the shovel's end far away

through the trees. He turned his back to it,
skirted the hill in the opposite direction, made
his way to the shallow dell his father rested
in, or occupied more rightly. Something
told him resting wasn't peace to father,
yet. A simple stone: George Lathrop -
born in 1849 in Ashland,
Ohio - died in 1901 in Jacksonville
in Oregon - God Rest His Soul.
Carved by Thurmond with rough but steady hand,
with a quiet, terrible, nordic strength and sorrow.
Lovely. Nicolas lay down in the green grave
and held the stone in his arms and cried and fell
to sleep. O father.

The moon was bright, its edge
was blue like burning liquor, dizzy in a break
between the tangled limbs of the secret trees.; its
light
had seared an arc of white fire across
the sleeping figure's back and shoulders - wings.
Nicolas felt that frightening lightness, felt
the lift of flight. It shook him bolt awake.
"Father!" He shouted, echoed off the hard
boles of trees. Wind arose that blew
the leaves and needles, dirt and dry sheets
of bark in a sudden scarring dark of storming

air. He felt himself thrown down that dar
like flying, like tossed through the angry roil
of waves on a rudderless ship. The wind was roaring,
roaring! Stumbled running carried him
out the gate in a hail of blown gravel,
a cloud of dirt and dust and sand. The gate
swung to impossibly quick against
the wind and a bolt of red-gold fire
raced along the meeting edges, flew
into the sky. The wind stopped, the blown
debris settled, the wild fire ont the hill
flickered out.

He understood the dreams.

His father came to him in sleep to promise
vack the words that fled his voice when anger
flew against it, like the mice that flee
a barn when fire strikes. Beneath the sky,
sturdy now except the stars that flickered
like a thousand votive lamps, no doubt
a simple bowl and wick, a brass reflector,
each a human heart, as simple, burning
though itself to find the light that's born
of flame, the instant of transformation: soul,
its purpose once achieved to rest like smoke
in wind, the rest is artifact or ash,
was warm and still. But out beyond the guilt,

beyond the fierce reversal of his father's
sin, beyond the hard-to-carry love
of stone and God and iron, out beyond
his father's pleas to leave them be, the men
who hurt because they're hurt, who need the word,
the sacrificing kindness in the blood
that, spattering their hands and faces, reawakens love
and pity, sorrow, deep regret and longing,
reawakens tears that trigger hands
to reach and hold, caress and cherish, even
past this bloody christing need is duty.
Duty. Different then from love? Perhaps.
To carry Adam down the deep elective
wire from the humming engine forged
of brass inside the skull of genesis,
through human minds, transforming junctures of
divine conduction, toward an unseen but urgent
end. Duty. Duty down the burning
wick, the duty lies along the secret
dark of rust and ground carnation. Where?
A bolt was drawn, a rolling tumbler fell
in place, his mind unlocked, another fire
flew along the parting edges - home!
He ran to the sound of his shoes against the gravel,
heavy leather thud. And then the sound
of gravel rolling off the road into
the bushes. Then quiet. A cricket. Nothing.

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