

Death on the Don

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Calesius C.B.

Cover photo: Aerial shot of the Don River and environs, Toronto, Ontario

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Some old-time religion

(at the triumphal arch in Medinaceli)

Hard door: point out, recall the true Iberian god!

Not the princely Roman one who takes the foamy sheen,

Laughs with the men in stream beds through the heat then

Flies to smash wild Dacians and suck their women's necks –

If his names were carved on your great curves

The winds have licked them clean.

Nor the sadist of dark interiors

And cracked bespangled ankle bones, not him.

But the one you show dead on when eyes look through your frame

Just as it's set,

Just

(off-line and tricky from the weekend town

grouped 'round its monument to Pound),

Hung on the axis of the flow between the beating horns,

Those horns that catch the rhythm played to

Calm the green babes winding through their grasp.

Bring back you stony door the first-born god!
Who'll boom when others are a puff
Or withering walls of sentiment.

* * *

So we're not, these days,
Inclined to the mystification of Nature. All right.
Animism in steel urbania is like
White Belgians become Sikhs or put on a Rasta hat.
Yet the majestic and (most) benignly powerful
Needs manifestation and there are few candidates left
While the claim of our old Mother pulled and bent is clear,
 Profoundly known by anyone.
 Smelled,
 Hummed, a
Sigh that floats down forever on a chord of authenticity.
Thickly felt.

Note: Some old-time religion was inspired by certain scholars' conclusions regarding the site of the Medinaceli arch. The monument's valley-side view of geological formations would seem to be no accident; the observer's eye is drawn to mountains that bear a striking resemblance, on at least some takes, to a bull's horns - an image of considerable religious significance in pre-Christian Europe.

That same variety

Coal-haired women chop onions red and white

On a plantation near Campinas

For forty years.

Yams and beans as well.

Stooped men stir lives with spinach, eggplant

Glittering spice

In Topkapi's caves.

Are they lucky Turks?

Compared to foraging Neanderthals perched above froth lips

On the Bay of Biscay (Cantábrico, also called -----)

By now and then, anxiously in awe,

Down the generations of bone and echo.

And thin girls start lives on the icy stone

Of monuments to a sandy deity

And withered crones end them,

Mumbling, in between, 'mongst vines.

The quantities and commonalities should make us loose, loose,
So let breezes through our frames.
Unconcerned but devoted, let us be
Freer than minnows in the green immensity.

Columns of men in stretchy pants and doughnut hats
Extend to the horizon. Beyond even.

Fanatically devoted, riveted,

Putting an egg's cousin in a hole 'midst green.

Y hablan así sus papis, and in ways unimaginable

Et les gens continuent à faire ses bruits variés aujourd'hui, i.e.

Babel's still a crumbling mound of bricks.

Or there are 6,809 sounds of a shade.

And that's variety, they say,

Like marble bellies in a Catalan beach town,

Grandsons of German pilots passing Russian tankers'

progeny,

On a beery walk in quest of flesh. History's like that.

Or never mind the humans –

Think of an Australopithine band

Crunching shells in the acacias' shade

Robed only in Now (for the heat).
Or those five wolves that patrol a corner of woodland
Just south of Scugog, 6,020 years ago.
 And there's the rat in the junk pile headed for three,
 If he's lucky, gnawing on a can.
While pine's arm brushes chippy flanks
Of its field-side boulder friend,
 Separating worker tribes
 With chunks of moth and leaf to bear.

So loose, loose, in the colour and its shades,
Let breezes through our frames
All-devoted and detached,
Freer than minnows in the cool immensity.
 A drunken moon on sea.

Understanding in the cemetery

To the green deceduary
They eagerly murder in their bright blackness,
Now safe in needled softness
To high rattle through taut throats
For stone families a single antidote.

Pellet-sprayed and poison-fed,
Yet by them no gloating melody's performed
But answers pinioned and sharp,
Proof in a clear willingness
To declare day's burst midst parallel distress.

For they see too, if in parts
(Like hunching charcoal suits in petal-handling grief),
So surely wonder at the
Grave human congregations
Dumbfounded by the sweet Whole's transformation.

A bored kid the lesson grasps
It seems, one nephew whose love for Aunt Agathe
Was indisputably right
But darts now to shadow, tree
To tree, an ink-jet friend whose clutch crackles glee.

The Idea

Now, who remembers dripping fingers
 Soaking their new fuzz?
Up in the gold-trimmed arms
 While nervous parents stab at meaning?
Yesterday is clearer. Wwwwshsh
Imagine
A current of air, a clear ice fire
Rushing through your channels and corridors
To zap the secular sin,
knocking scales from eyes.
The way pointed afresh, through a peculiar union
Of Reformation with the field and office, factory;
Your soul, as though dunked in River Jordan
Comes up seeing forms and fellows
 As they are.
 Naked, Clean,
Sandblasted of their caked sarcasms and
Putrefied self-mockeries
Spread on for the sake of a car

Or that pair of boots
Or dread –
Its causes well-remembered in the crowd.
P.J. Proudhon's poem, a
Flame of generations. Wave,
Red Tom Müntzer's hymns, Rothbard breaking backs,
And Joe Fanelli, his seed sown. We're
Born again.

What Virgil's good for

Of course he was in the wrong
Dressing Augustus for the ball,
Perfuming chambers where old limbs were left to stink.

Sorry, this is so
No matter what credentials of pre-Christian purity
Some Florentine might hand him in a book on Hell
Or misgivings he might expose himself.
Publius Vergilius Maro can't side-step the charge of hack,
 though
Maybe you can say that he was drugged by an idea,
As was his younger buddy Hobbes
(Unlike their sober gods,
Who shatter worlds then save us all, praise be...)

 Still,
Don't bite the hand that worked on more than politics –
No matter if the priest who switched your back
Had Roman tastes in verse –

But breathe the country smells and dusty lives
And riant bellies pushing out the fruit;
Come on, into the resinous arms you go, reluctant slicker type
(The ones that quiver,
Scrape their fingers lightly on your cheek),
Then watch the vines wind through the roof beams in the back.

And who's to doubt he longed for hearts of iron to cease?
(And who doesn't want to be redeemed?)

So mouth those soft songs that you learned
But know to keep a watchful eye,
Alert to kick down walls when men put up a hive
Which is a room that houses prisoners
Held by crafty keepers for their sweet.

Restoration at last

Sand, water and feline sensibility begin:

Di Lampedusa has the old Prince
Feel a trickle of grains, the measure of Time,
Carrying his soul 'away'
Until the moment is close
And then it becomes
"Great pressing waves" of "a spiritual roar
Like that of the Rhine Falls."

Of course biological death *and* social demise

Play here
Poorly, oh so poorly, fudged and softened
By alliance with the bourgeoisie,
Incarnate in a marriage of bright blood, new bucks.
Bland tale?

A failure, given what's followed. Or a bridge?
Shabby, threadbare,

But a ropey link across the falls?
To another spot where all that made aristocracy
Gleam can really live again?
Where oily swirls of sun and leaf,
Burnt skies and up-curved lips
Painstakingly stroked, re-touched
And running rivulets in D
Are as they are, not clinked and gavelled
In a chamber of the counting crude.
Since some who come from down below,
 Reaching through the leaves for air celestial
So as the middle to surpass,
Will not weigh up and measure spirit's gusts.

Then taste, cerebral passion rise again
(alone the glorious of old flags).

And prince and weaver lie down together again.

‘Aboriginal’ study in time and space

Single painting on a wall of Indian things:
Kane’s? (Where’s the pestering bugs?) called
Great Lake encampment of Algonquians.

Or maybe oiled triplets, in time, melted their edges
In a viewer’s head to one ideal re-enactment,
As a grinning curator friend alleges.

Doesn’t matter. The band is settled, not rattled,
Though thunder pillows pile the horizon
Suggesting, post human calm, cosmic battle.

Trees and trees but not deciduously thick:
The thin girths of birches and coniferous friends
Knitting their fans over wigwams’ sticks.

I want the scene to be 1690
When such a party could have launched its southward slip,
Mississauga’s challenge to a ‘New York’ confederacy

(Just newly short on gains and fortune).
But that time-line fails for Kane's lifetime;
How about the 19th's middling portion?

Anyway, it shares in a carnal vision

One-half our contemporary. For:

Inspect Park Rondeau's camping clans two centuries on

Having for some days

Rejected their own crimson tide and

Dropped an asphalt hordeness

So as to kiss the crests and drops of undulating green

With relatively tender feet,

With their own domed and crested huts

That imitate the earth and sky

(albeit skinned synthetically).

Playing Potawatomi a sprint from Erie's wash?

Here, the Carolinian Black Oaks' thighs bulge fat,

Pampered remnants of floral paradise that greeted those

Who did descend when Iroquois' eviscerating tide dripped back.

The tourists play and cook and imitate, inherit from inheritors.

The warning rain-bags bulge beyond

While here, right here,

Soft lungs of breeze and Lord, that sun, stream through!

Ontario turned back

And then it was accomplished:
Old Time pleaded with, cajoled over years' dreams
Till he squirted us backwards
On the same Erie's green shores
So that our stuff and our souls
Are alone from the 21st century,
Sentenced to watch for warriors
Across the aqua crests and pumas that still,
In stands of oak and maple, track their hoofed fill.

Revenge

The signs of the conquered are
Their wild, near-random blows.
They mount no organized resistance, but
Lash out wildly with sharp things.

For this they can be reproached
If their victims have cream skin
And only apples, bread between their teeth.
Then an outraged lamentation's fair.

But look at the cases on their merits:
The bull who nails a stabbing, Spanish fop?
Cat's lightning hook into an arm through bars?
Bull's slave cousin who with rib or roast

Delivers hot bombs laced with death?
Ursus' clamp about a camper's sun-burnt neck,
His bear life license drawn
In a yahoo's pocket seven days before?

I've known anger even from the tissue of the octopus,
That drained of salty consciousness
Tried slipping down to clog my throat
And drown me on a barroom floor.

Spartan alternative

A question or two:

Frigid mornings in a cloak, sprinting,

Pounding and stretching, beaten

By Eurotas' stone knuckles

So that one's ready, later. Ready.

To be, as Tyrtaeus said, a beautiful corpse

That gleams right back the bright blade's grin.

Because of love, particular, reedy, un-universal love.

Greater than pleasant purposelessness?

Or a waste of human life?

There's verdant growth over the walls;

A beautiful place

Where smooth-skinned girls lean from dance

Greet Orthria in the bud,

Nonetheless convinced of the hardness of things.

"Life's no rose garden,"

Men might say in the mess to the young

Hanging around for counsel.

We see the logic of lives before: Enlightenment;
Or Christianity that's had trouble being serious;
Or belief in the brotherhood of the workers;
Or the maxims of the mall.
To be polite, astute and brave
Is to prepare in time for the grave, to
Not waste words but say things straight –
A column cut to bear the roof
Through blaze and rain unstinting.

It's harder than you think, a verdict,
Since our egos we all must finally forgo
Like lavender scents and toddler smiles
And in the meantime, do something,
So there's no wailing in the end
That no grand goal was set
And the chances frittered away.
Because a final, bitter thought might be the Judgement
Signalling, amidst smog,
Hellfire for the wasters.

Dressed for it

Now the Prophet (peace be upon him)
Has been credited with liberating
And enslaving women, for transforming chattel
Into owning, choosing beings
And for weaving a net
That forever holds them down in second place.

Let's not enter that debate right now
But observe that when it came to sex
He gave substantial thought to things.
The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, e.g., that
Women should hide their hair, avoid tight clothes
And cover their arms to the wrist.

And like men, avert their eyes
When this can practically be done,
Since a gaze into a stranger's face repeated
Is akin to a match on gas
(Exceptions: those glances incurred

Between a woman and her male physician.)

He thought this was how it had to be
Because of the way men are.
Laugh, but the other day I watched a report
About a woman professor from San Sebastián,
A political scientist passed over for a post
Because, she says, she's no Basque nationalist.

Without speaking (in ignorance) to the merits of her case
I merely acknowledge its weight,
Involving, as it does, freedom in academe.
And yet, as this woman appeared on screen
In chestnut waves and skies of milky neck,
I could think of just one thing. Or four.

No doubt the Prophet (peace be upon him)
Had men like me in mind when he drew up his rules
Or had God told him that Western fashion
Would one day conspire against women
As they sought public equality?
Of course, he also prohibited mixed baths

(And it's well-known that when we're all together,
Splashing in the pool, lust can disappear
In the sharing of renewal). So
Having erred on this point, he's easily dismissed,
Leaving us to tutor men in ways to act while
Silk-tight breasts and crimson lips graze their hungry mouths.

Coastal dreams

On the hilly bottom of Lusitania
Residential sales make a seaward dam.

Think of the lives and hives
Innumerable, devoted to

Transaction of this promised joy
To be squeezed from sandy parcels

And served in summer scoops.
Look, take a look!

But it's a challenge; the gates
They impede impecunious eyes.

Stuff down a swell of gloom.
Mortar, bricks, chrome-

Hardened contours of a dream

(Grabbed up in a wallet's snap).

Romp and tromp, jog and heave,
Stare through bars,

Taste droplets of their promise and their lie.
On the street, women hurry to their counter work, to clean.

Grenades of sharp corolla do burst everywhere
But wild pines droop, their own oases shrink,

Waiting for the fangs of iron and claws;
(Nesting birds show an optimistic streak...)

Next day, perched above Atlantic's dawn
Think of a swan-stern carrier whose occupants

Imagine that they've spied the tumbling edge
Far out, below Aurora's skirts,

And only then, inside, will a soft space clear
Like when we chase the ball across the beach

Or float way out

Rolling in our cold-wave bed.

Iberian camp out

Visiting the fisher people and vegetable hands

See the grey brick blocks down to the sea

Amongst crisp fish emporia

But for sleep choose

A grove of old pine (European sort)

Whose arms begin so high

Only the squirrel-men reach

And at night make a guardian roof

Of broccoli hands.

Bathing at dusk

Under melocotón glow

Men work brown lines down the shore

In step with the god

Holding contraptions that search

In historically conscious hope

Of a metal disk Caesar-stamped

Then later: blaze and Levantine breath as

A running girl drops a ten-cent piece

Amongst fine white grains.

Poseidon's revival

At first, it seems he's had to learn small pleasures,
Now that slim columns to himself no longer
Sprout from rocks above the crystal green;
It's true, the structures feverishly planted
All along the realm's fine edge, so many of
Them graceless, thick, and bare, are dedicated
Wholly to the swarming men. So what to do?
Moreover, it grew clear to him, years ago,
That crumbling walls with a violent shudder
Was hardly worth the effort spent,
Since loud acts earn no credit anymore.
Men ascribed them to another for a time
And now talk smartly in the language of
Fault lines, foundations, steel and more concrete.
He does slip up, lash out from time to time;
It's hard to never lose one's cool.

But overall, it seems, a lesson's been drawn
From the old men who stroll the tide's salt wash,

Enjoying the smart tingle on their soles,
The breaths and puffs of fading, tired sun,
Accepting such calm caresses as remain
To their leathered lives, ceased seething for the flesh
And madness that still crosses their sand path.
While he, for his part, has given up the wild
Intoxication of men's worship, settling
For mild and cheerful company, something
Certain others can't hope for anymore.

Perhaps.

But out near Alacant, away from crowds,
Look at another man alone at dawn,
Hills at his back, tanned body to the knees in surf,
Buttocks browned by Apollo's arching run,
Waving knotty arms in exercise and praise.
For him, the impostor of the Christian
Interregnum's good and dead, brittle dry,
While still the laughing east-bent sea shines bright!
He mouths remembered sounds, intones short songs.

Next, watch pious families bring new babes
So gently on, wade deeply into cool
Caresses to present what they have done,
To have birth cradled by the one who can
Still crush but softly strokes and aims a kiss
At them – this grouch who learned to bide his time
While scribblers, preachers shot their waning strength.
And the palms of old friend Pontus moisten
Plump white skin and pat girls' glistening hair!

Moods and notes from Portmania

So when the glow had gone
And two hustled past the practical waterfront
In search of dinner and the song about brine weeks,

Did a tight soul concentrate?

With bream and shrimp like a toddler fist and
Prickled green wine kissed down
And the grey walls past shoulders,
Pollinating with their crumbling selves –

How about then?

Were eyes drills and sponges in the park
Where squat the trunks who've counted centuries'
excursions

And cacti soldiers suck spray air
While waiting for review?

Or on that terrace morn over the Tejo in its silvery end ...
What primed those needle jabs,
Raw fitting of two moods?
So that not all the body's thirsts

Were ready for the moments as they burst.

At times, almost. There were fierce tries.

But don't go mad in a head's dank corridors of cause.

Split walls run pigments

Stairways step up workers' crags

A beard who'd wailed to sail back home

Moaned in bed till he was pressed

in her neck's flowery caress.

Pombal's (unofficial) issue includes a yuppie architect

A brick was flung at men in shades

Luandan seeds sprout up a girl

De Camoes fighting syllables and weakened by red wine

slipped then banged his ageing spine.

Figo hooked a ball into the mesh

A host drops to a shrivelled tongue

The 'new' and 'graceful' dragged things out

Young brains and long-cooked passion

planned a new political fashion.

What's clear is that
The painted, complex layering demands:
Long breaths, clean gut
A self that is all focus
And no fast tides of inexplicable sadness
So as to smooth digestion of the whole
(Or as much of the whole as possible).
Too hard, sometimes.

* * *

Back east, laid out for cooler eyes
Was the Red Sea path to People's House.
Coniferous arms swept under balconies
As camera lovers made her fake pelt their focus on a fount,
Ceausescu's windowed ghost behind.
This spot's not ugly, regardless

Of what bulldozers wrecked to smooth the route or
What a critical architect thinks when he says,
“Man’s the measure of all things,”
(Baffling minds who know how human brains, not
Chauffeurs from the sky, made pyramids sans salon
And up they fill us still.) Anyway,
To have come before, when
Scarlet sickles scraped those walls!

And more: the bread halls garbed in angel shirts,
Adequate bedrooms’ chorusing taps,
Sea blue baroque at Hotel Bulevard
(That the party culprits liked so much, where
Carpathia’s Helmsman must have had his coffee more than
twice).

Next, think of that old man on the train
Winding toward Ovid’s grave
In a pressed snow collar, coat and tie,
Shave stroked early in the morn.
But cloth sprouts tumble down his shoes!
Likely he’s a member of the past
And stood, wings wide, upon Constanta’s grass

When back in heady '68
A sculptured work was christened by Importants,
Its cool stone skin proclaiming Victory
(Her hand holds up the pretty branch)
By the flanking toilers, fighters, potato growers.
No doubt his thirty-something heart swelled up,
Sure of Truth, seduced by Asian trends
And Beauty's material glint.
"This is a graceful, mighty thing," he said,
As palms snapped sugary air.

Now a gashed road tutors unshod kids
Who dance around its maw and teeth
Beside this city's salted black.
And *what you do to the least of these*
Is kept for thick-bound, flimsy texts
While off the sidewalk gel-heads joke and jostle onto seats,
Their private, purple futures in their hands.

Ticket to Eternity

(A poetic and political drama following Lord Byron's The Vision of Judgement, set well into the 21st century, when the prominent can be cloned and Death cheated of his prize.)

They'd debated whether it was ethical,
The specialists, pastors and philosophers,
Leery of endorsing gross spectacle,
Determined not to bless another's errors
And nervous about what could prove terminal.
They'd thought their solemn chats might block the fiddlers!
In the end assorted doctors ploughed ahead
And poof! cloned human beings, not sheep instead.

Now, technology's a man who, just up,
Walks slowly, weakly, dragging sleepy-eyed...
Then begins to jog, determined not to brake.
Next, shows lightning speed, old laziness belied
(Other walkers, runners, sure to overtake).
To slow him down, some well-meaning people tried
But he was at the apex of his sprint
So at these folks just snarled, truculent.

I say this so readers will appreciate
The gains in genetics so quickly seen;
At first, plain babes for *that* need to compensate
Then some designed to manage their own hygiene,
Still more, destined to from law school graduate,
Others ‘tigered’ with a putting eye for green.
In short, the well-heeled no longer sought adoption.
Their state spurned cloning? Then some island option!

This was but the dawn of manipulation
For it wasn’t long till famous women, men
Were the subjects of bold duplication.
At first, what failed was the transfer of acumen,
e.g. Gates II flunked a math examination,
To the poor Trump III gave Hotel Sheraton.
But when some Chinese learned to ‘restore’ memory
Humanity was in for grand eternity.

I repeat, not everyone could be so blessed –
Most people just admired the new jewelled gates
Without an invite to their name addressed.
Not knowing excellence, they stuck with the Fates.
Blame our planners for this selective caress?
They damned old heaven for its bargain rates;
Their present task was to preserve rich cream,
Not sow a future running with the mean.

As well, we learned to speed development;
Quite soon, full adults grew in just three years.
This meant wives right back after interment,
Barristers patched to resume death-stopped careers.
Personality change? An impediment,
("Improve Chung Wok's great work!" cried his lab-coat peers)
But generally people had the impression
This was in truth fleshy resurrection.

Now some institutions were uncomfortable,
Had made high sounds against manipulation,
Wouldn't partake in worlds so terrible –
To give in might sink their reputation.
God, said Rome, had not made life extendable,
The Left feared a Nazi super-nation.
But both, in certain cases, could be convinced
With extended need for some pope evinced.

Still, my objective is not the general;
I'll soon end this lengthy introduction.
You ask, was this brand new world bearable?
But not for me your moral reduction.
My goal: sketch a paradise half-credible
Years after the cloudy zone's destruction.
That is, had I repeated Byron's scene
Hip readers would have punched me in the spleen.

As they say in Spanish, I'll go to the grain:
With the help of this new technology
A hundred institutes entered fresh terrain.
The Centre For Research in Ideology
(Soon to be christened the Socialist Hall of Fame)
Was one renowned, internationally,
For its bio-samples of key faces.
Its acquisition methods left no traces.

The head curator was soon F. Mitterrand,
One M. Gorbachev his skilful, eager Vice;
They let Deng Xiaoping run the restaurant –
Bob Rae (Ontario) ensured that there was ice.
In grey Genève there was a président
Whose selections board tried to be precise.
For it couldn't leave such delicate things
In two men's hands, even two once nearly kings!

At times, induction was as good as sure.
Rosa, Chomsky and Habermas shot in
(Though the second said it was to deplore
When he comprehended what they'd done to him)
As did Allende – a quick vote from the floor –
And Palme, who'd have been named to seraphim
If those who judged each candidate's story
Could have justified said category.

Not all who decided liked the huge Fidel
But there were some souls CRI couldn't do without.
About scandal they asked Craxi to tell
But to the truth he still was not devout
So from new heaven figuratively fell,
Shouting: "My word, comrades, you shouldn't doubt –
Old Italy was complicated then,
Its engine room required crafty, wily men."

You see, in cases where merit was unclear
(Or there was doubt about prized information)
Candidates could be 'revived' to appear
At the committee for clarification.
Permanent decisions were taken here,
Either elevation or cancellation.
The latter was of course done humanely –
The committee, to a soul, abhorred cruelty.

Which leads us to the case of Tony Blair
And that of Mr. Ion Iliescu.
Two, in the same week, were in the glare
While members, to their mission, sought to be true
As well as to the applicants be fair.
One had died in flight, the other, felled by flu;
Both, re-grown and recollected, were keen
To not relinquish new spots on the team.

All were allowed to call living witnesses
Who might help out, cast light on unknown truths
But inviting right-wing heirs or heiresses
Was not considered the best kind of ruse.
CRI members, most, embraced ‘market approaches’
But the claim the Whites were right, they would refuse,
So when Blair brought Dubya to boost his claim
Members sensed something amok in that new brain.

First, the re-sprung Tony made a brief speech:
“I fixed the worst of the Iron Handbag years
(The very worst and that within my reach)
While ensuring those with money had no fears.
Neither war nor critics made a (deadly) breach
In the new Labourism I revived from tears.
But don’t say *everything* I did was fresh, please –
Recall old Labour and the Vietnamese.

“Nor as a modest, Christian man do I
Wish to take great heaps of praise and credit.
I’ll just say, some fresh insights were in part mine,
Like: poor people should get their bread on merit
And bending truth for freedom is no lie!
Some say with these tunes I was a mere parrot
But surely you all see the original part –
In my progressive framework resides the art.

“Moral colour given to things before just done,
That’s what I offered to this world we gained.
When Newt said, let the poor scrape for food and fun
It wasn’t with sufficient love, I’ve maintained.
Bomb for oil, sure, but for the blasted, freedom won.
What? Liberty’s tune wasn’t born in my brain?
True, but have you heard the spin I put on it?
Heartfelt crooning was my crowning merit.”

Most Social Dems preferred to keep Blair out,
For their own reasons, multifarious for sure.
So out stepped Chomsky to organize the rout,
The man, all knew, who victory would ensure.
In life they'd branded him a renegade lout
But knew he was the sharpest on the floor.
The anarchist wore a pleased expression;
Shredding frauds was his favourite recreation.

So who, from 'inside,' would back the PM?
It was the rule: things were carried out that way.
Many sighed with looks hard-pained and solemn,
Stepped back 'fore they were called into the fray.
Use witness Bush, his mother tongue Erratum?
No thanks, they said, this was a case too grey.
At last a lawyer named Felipe stepped forth;
"Justice," he said, "calls someone to lift the torch."

A few snickered at Felipe's willingness
Suspecting that he wanted company,
That is, not all believed he'd learned through the press
About those killings in Basque territory.
For the GAL,¹ in life, he'd never seen arrest
But was annoyed at doubts about his story.
Some felt he wanted Blair as a vehicle
To more widely distribute ridicule.

"I opposed the first 'preventative war'
(Along with others following in its wake).
Mass death I've always chosen to deplore
(Even when I backed the point it had to make).
If this sounds confusing, here's more:
Of my ideals crude motives ne'er did partake.

¹ The Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación (GAL) waged a 'dirty war' during the mid-1980s against armed Basque separatists, carrying out assassinations, kidnappings and torture. Several victims, to be sure, turned out to have no connection with ETA, the Basque group the GAL were combating. While it was determined that the GAL were established and funded by high-ranking officials in Spain's Interior Ministry, Spain's Socialist Prime Minister Felipe González (head of the government in this period) eluded prosecution.

In key moments I merely moved the former
Till they were safely stored, around some corner.

“But they were always kept alive, aflame,
Beacons to guide me (later) in the night.
Post-office, they re-stated their great claim.
Among their ranks: a man in any plight
Deserves good counsel – this I will sustain.
I’m talking of a democratic right.
Oppose a man but render him protection;
Does this sound a trifle Manichean?”

“It is of course the only way to know
The Good, by giving Error ample space...”
Now González would not have upset the flow
Of his instructive discourse, nor cut its pace
But the Chair (a man about time so thorough)
Jumped in: “Get back to matters on our plate!”
Anyway, all present knew the basics
Of lib-democratic legal ethics.

“De acuerdo, de acuerdo, I’ll procede
To prepare the very best case possible.”
Replied the Chair: “More, we could not ask, indeed.”
Thus F. González went off to huddle
While I. Iliescu waited to plead –
Had his case vanished in the muddle?
For the moment, no one paid him any mind.
He had expected them to be more kind.

After a recess for study and coffee
Noam stepped forth in checked jacket and brown tie.
Waving a thick pile of clippings, he smiled thinly
At the throng – and those hoping to not (re)die.
“The problem stems, of course,” he said calmly,
“From the guidelines on which we try to rely:
Is the ticket a character well-burnished
Or the inside data to be furnished?”

“On various levels we can tackle this:
Were genuine ethics the entrance here
This hotel would be virtually soulless
(Forgive, but restoration primed my humour).
We’ve one or two angels, true, but the rest?
Don’t grumble how ideals shaped your endeavour:
You statesmen all wear stains upon your hands,
You Profs sold intellectual contraband.

“Assuming this place exists for research goals
It should simply state clear criteria:
One isn’t in by (exaggerated) laurels.
Why not, for example, recruit Beria?
He could cast a lot of light. Forget morals!
Now don’t shout, don’t melt in hysteria;
It’s an example, really nothing more.
And none of *his* cells remain to restore.

“Of course I’m accepting here the argument
That this institute is actually worthwhile.
“My real view,” [no line of this document]
“Is that those who work here in a mood febrile
Should first *distribute* the new sacrament,
Make this thing free to all, without a trial.
That is, shut down our reproduction shop
Until workers can choose fresh life, or not.

“But for the purposes of this afternoon
I won’t insist on a best-case position.
Nor waste our hours making the assembled swoon
With detailed, fiery, blood-spilt description
Of the lands Tony bombed, playing high-noon
With his friend (long retired with distinction).
I’ll assume in fact no one wants him here
‘Cause he was a principled sort, without peer.

“Nor will I lean on related scandal.
That is, I’ll make no case so lily white
According to which proved lies so rankle
That our committee should shut the door tight;
Such won’t flee my lips or feed my babble.
That perspective strikes me as far from right.
Of course when Tony said, on 18 March,
That Baghdad could still avert war, it was farce.

“But I understand that often in the House
Members and PMs say what they’re required to.
The ‘45 minutes’ as a way to douse
Tony’s aspirations? Neither will that do.
(Recall the hoopla there, a bit vacuous?
Reporters scrambling to learn if Tony knew
Who’d made up the stuff about Hussein’s power
To launch huge weapons in less than an hour?

“Does it matter if an intelligence scribe
Or some political hack, some time later,
Wrote in what every Jim knew to deride
As beyond that burned-out, Iraqi crater
After sanctions had done their genocide?
When he signed, Blair became the claims’ maker.
Can chattering classes ever complicate
What a janitor will fast elucidate!)

“For despite my wishes for our sweet world
I’d guess most of you wouldn’t ban statecraft.
Nor will I attack absurdity unfurled
(Or at least make it the main plank of my raft)
Though the Churchill imitation we beheld
That March day in the Commons made me laugh.
We must resist ‘dictators and tyranny
That threaten our way of life,’ was Tony’s plea,

“Spoken with a hero’s quiver in the throat.
(By the way, Winston I’d happily admit,
Berate him amply, then offer my vote,
Though he’d consider our club a demerit.
To one real fight for freedom he was devout –
Something great, even if we qualify it.
I’d only grill him for his ample sins,
Make him first ride some metaphorical pins.)

“But Tony, well-suited to our small age,
Pulled on a huge coat that just looked silly.
On this embarrassing sin I’ll turn the page
But note that had he found another study
His admittance might be simpler to arrange.
I am thinking of MacDonald, Ramsay;
That is, a thrilling break up of Labour
And a Tory pact would have stoked our fervour,

“That is, Tony’d be in on the excitement card
While most of you would want his second hide.
Social democracy he’d *so* have marred
No institute of this sort could let him die
Though like RM (lost for good) his name be tarred.
For that, a Labour Party with some pride
Would have been required, a majority
To rebel. And it’s not 1930.

“Thus a crackling story so full of verve
Can no longer be anticipated.
So with your usual reason and reserve
Grasp the crux of my case expostulated:
Blah Blair offers nothing, through act or word.
With bombs, granted, he’s lightness serrated
But lightness nonetheless: Labour drifted right,
Dressing liberal clichés in costumes of insight.

“He’s one more type who joined a war in order
To obey, extract some crass advantage:
But the line would run to the German border
If you let in every sort with that baggage.
Could he be your slick, well-placed informer?
Please! You all complain that I disparage
But here’s a rep of all that’s mediocre.
Much too blah to even be truth’s broker.

“Anyway, we know the things that Tony knows;
The chair of that commission saw to that
(Even if, on decision day, he froze).²
Let the candidate mount his counterattack
Let him justify himself in supple prose.
Just remember, ex-PM, be long on fact.
Let’s go: what was your great contribution
To the democratic left’s evolution?”

² Evidence presented at the Lord Hutton-chaired enquiry showed the British government’s “September dossier,” written to make the case for war against Iraq, had been altered to exaggerate Baghdad’s capacity for deploying weapons of mass destruction. Blair himself signed the forward claiming that Iraq could strike within 45 minutes and chaired a meeting that decided to ‘out’ the late Dr. David Kelly as the expert source who had informed journalists about faulty intelligence fuelling the dossier. Hutton issued a final report (2004) absolving Blair.

After this long discourse from the anarchist
Revived sorts and 'first-timers' scratched their heads.
Tony sensed his was a fading chance for bliss
(or what now passed for bliss after you were dead)
So he gathered thoughts, unclenched his well-squeezed fists
And noted that he would extend the thread
Begun in his initial contribution.
He thanked Chomsky for his elocution.

“As leader of New Labour I recognized
That our movement was *in fact* the centre.
But accommodation wasn't energized
By thought, by reflections of a mentor.
Socialists felt embarrassed, trivialized
By their role as capitalism's defender.
Lots did bits of what I've in Britain done;
But feeling guilty, they had little fun.

“People from the left, they need a doctrine
if they’re to feel their actions are correct.
I supplied the careful argumentation,
Strong legs and back so we could stand erect
And not just duck stones from the loony faction.
The Third Way is not entirely sans defects
But I don’t claim to be Albert Einstein,
Just a sharp observer, like E. Bernstein.”

Now someone shouted from the audience
That the German cited had opposed *his* war
(In ’14, Bernstein, it’s true, scorned credits).
Then the chair sharply reproved the floor:
Heckling, with him, would not find tolerance,
Interrupters would fast be shown the door.
Mr. Blair was battling for his (second) life;
“Here should reign our warm compassion, not strife.”

An encouraged Tony might have discoursed more,
Boosted by his learned German reference,
But fast his Spanish counsel grabbed the floor.
Felipe sensed his role lacked prominence
Or thought Sevillian wit could soothe furor –
In any case he raised his hand for clearance
Then beamed that grin so many knew so well.
Did he have a hot anecdote to tell?

“I think,” noted the abogado from the south,
“My client has made a fine argument.
What’s left is data from a witness’s mouth.
You know,” he flashed again his winning glint,
“I’ve trusted many rightists, some devout,
Some ex-fascists who the Roman church would dint.
But George Bush is a man who tells the truth;
In any case he is, today, under oath.”

Felipe was, its true, a little nervous
But this was their last chance, and anyway
He knew if old Bush was no genius
A lawyer could lead him to the words to say.
If only Chomsky wouldn't make a fuss!
And how to make the Texan's presence pay?
Just then, Felipe sensed thick clouds parting;
A light bulb in the room had started working.

George W. Bush, alive at ninety, sat down.
Still not wise or astute, he had lost nothing
Over the years and could still well recount
Events of his two terms, with ample bearing.
Over his tie he wore a gold-fringed gown
And black slacks, once repaired for tearing.
He seemed more than happy to be there,
Eager to help his long-time ally, T. Blair.

Felipe asked him to describe the man.
George B. smiled gaily at such a request.
“Why of course, absolutely. I’m a fan
Without reserve of this son of Britain’s best,
Who tells the truth, speaks always with élan
(Had George known that word before getting dressed?)
He doesn’t cuss and drinks with moderation –
To me that marks a man of distinction.”

Now Mitterrand rose, waved a thin finger.
The Frenchman, with a look of thick disdain,
Observed that unlike Cardinal Ratzinger,
“We don’t consider personal foibles terrain
On which to stand and judge. Our investigator
[Must be González] should keep the talk germane.
Loyal to his wife or a prowling tramp
Good for him – it’s no matter in this camp.”

George now paused a second, as if he *had* planned
To speak about a beacon of family life.
To him a man could hardly be fathomed
Independently of his habits, his wife.
What strange types, these Europeans, blast 'em;
Then he thought he wasn't there to cause strife
And said, "A good man is all I meant,
With no plan to divert the committee's intent."

Next, Felipe asked George Bush if Tony
Had "invented" data about Iraq
Before that war began in 2003.
Had he misled his nation to attack?
What to say to this familiar query?
The former president could just react
As always when they tried to squelch his honour,
Start out by staring down the nasty rotter.

But before he could there was a disturbance
In the room. A messenger whispered something
To Blair, who called Felipe, who looked askance.
Someone sent George W. a mobile ring
(He apologized, then took the phone from his pants).
A quick communication, then...coughing.
By the time the rest were ready to resume
George W. had to stop. "Il a un rhume"!

At ninety years he could not be refused
So when George suddenly said tomorrow
Would be better, the chair, while smelling a ruse,
Nodded and feigned sympathetic sorrow.
The witness was naturally excused,
Soon sunk in tissue he'd asked to borrow.
Many present wondered what was happening;
Tony Blair's camp offered not an inkling.

So out he went, the grey ex-president
Wheeled in a chair to a car to head home.
No one felt, for Bush, special embarrassment;
Ex-emperors could count on being re-grown
But still, first life was precious, 'heaven-sent'
As it were, and no one had yet clearly shown
That remade, you were the *same* man as before.
Did Blair II *feel* the Blair who'd gone before?

In any case, it was understood a first-lifer
Sought to hold the mystery that he had,
Didn't treat this 'turn' as a mere appetizer.
Anyway, the process could turn out bad
Or surprise, one's cells vanish in a fire
Or one's family find it all too sad.
Often, revived types' partners and children
Sensed their names remembered, themselves forgotten.

That Bush cherished his first-life was surely fine,
Yet many marvelled at the cold's suddenness
Close following a message delivered from outside.
What's up, wondered a socialist from Inverness?
Have they a tricky scheme? Have they no pride?
A Swedish minister finger-wound her tress
As Neptunish Papandreou, who'd grown a beard,
Observed to Michael Foot that things were weird.

So during two days while George Bush rested
The hearing was suspended, no one was heard.
Historic types milled around, interested
By issues like the value of Bush's word
Or if in life Blair should have been arrested.
Others, tired, bored, about their aches murmured.
Mitterrand worked on a new history text;
Gorby wrote a speech for big shots at Fedex.

Then someone suggested Bush be located
So they would know just what was being hatched.
Miterrand signalled to an aide huge pated
But Mary Robinson was fast to react:
“Would that be fair? He’s an old man, wasted,
Needs to rest. For us, to behave and act
With fairness all the time is essential.
I am sorry if I sound parental.”

So no paid henchman went off in pursuit;
Those present respected G.W.’s repose
And chatted, drank coffee, nibbled fruit.
That very day, day three, Blair’s face unfroze
When news arrived that Mr. Bush was en route.
He felt better, fresh things would be disclosed
(Revealed his spokeswoman who brought the note.
They might, she smiled, even be spared a vote.)

Excitement resumed, members who'd left were called.
Only Mr. Iliescu wondered
When they would get to him. He was appalled
At being ignored, preferred to be badgered
So boasted to a few they'd be enthralled
When at last he was carefully questioned.
"In your first life, Ion, you weren't so vain,"
Commented Irish Mary, tiring of the pain.

She suspected things had altered him a bit;
Before he'd been a modest, patient man.
Why couldn't this Romanian just wait and sit?
"Relax, sit down, mon vieux," chipped in Jack Lang.
"If I got in on style, you'll win with merit.
Now enjoy the show, goes the old *refrain*.
Something interesting is bound to happen now;
I believe George might try and prompt a row."

In came Lenin then, followed by his nurse,
Looking desperately for what he couldn't say.
His restoration had been among the worst;
He recalled little, stumbled, seemed to pray.
But looked authentic, had been one of the first.
“Can't...seem...to...Ah, betray, betray, betray!”
Used to this, they paid the Russian little heed.
Though for Ion the sight was cruel, indeed.

I might just sneak out and leave them poorer,
Thought he, grab a TGV and go back home.
“Easy,” warned a Norwegian growth reformer,
“You'll have your chance with Professor Noam”;
Re-born Gro spoke like a nursery teacher.
Bored Iliescu let off one more moan
While the others prepared for a resumption
Of Tony Blair's tough examination.

Then came Bush, looking relatively fresh.
“I feel much better now, thank you everyone.
Elders have a slower pace; I need my rest.
But now I’ll resume. Ask me a question.”
He seemed sincere, ready to make redress
When Felipe leapt up with elation.
“We’ve received a document of great import
Whose contents must be revealed to this court.”

The Spaniard waved a stack above his head
While Tony grew a grin from ear to ear;
They knew the course this case at last would tread.
And Cherie’s face had lost all trace of fear.
Meanwhile, bodies filled the room as hot word spread
(Interest inflamed by the fate of a peer).
Heads bent toward the platform of the chamber –
Did most favour a crypt or a manger?

Don Felipe tried to look serious
As he waited for the room's slow silence
While Mitterrand grew a visage imperious –
He'd been told about the paper's contents.
As dark as when he'd been first victorious
(By fifty, grey had ridden o'er his countenance)
González buttoned his blue jacket and,
With thick eyebrows up, shrugged and waved a hand.

“The courts have pulled the rug from under us,
Or rather, you,” he said, to the committee.
“You have, with the re-made, a sacred trust,
Our Europe today decided wisely.
No candidate can be turned to dust
As of this morning, our contacts tell me.
This rights-enshrining step is but minutes old;
I cannot wait for its beauty to behold.”

“Behold? But there you hold it, to your chest,”
Shouted some sharp wag in the room, laughing.
“True, but our wise court moves from east to west
As you well know,” shot back González, grinning.
“Right now of course it sits in Bucharest;
Translations of the verdict might be printing
But officially, right now, there is one version
And it, naturally, is Romanian.”

The committee, rattled, discussed its future
While others in the room called out options.
A single copy seemed irregular;
Perhaps this ‘verdict’ was desperate action.
Urged several: press on with the procedure
Till the court sends official confirmation.
Others were certain that this case had finished,
Turned thoughts to that night’s cheese pie with spinach.

Still, Felipe wanted to erase all doubt;
Tony pined to lead his fresh existence.
Neither sought to extend the verbal bout
One second past the actual requirements.
Further chatting might produce (symbolic) rout;
How to wipe out these last impediments?
Then George, sharp enough to read the case,
Swept up the minor mess, put things in place.

“You said Romanian? Ah, now it’s clear,
Isn’t that similar to Bulgarian?
It’s gotta be, those countries are pretty near
(Though we can check with the librarian
or whatever brains you have on staff here).
When some folks called Bush a barbarian
Others helped me out. One is standing over there,
One of our friends freed from the Russian bear.

“I’m referring to Mr. Iliescu
Bulgarian president in those days”
(Now the scandalized crowd groaned “awe!” And “ooh!”)
But what could they expect from G’s closing phase?
So a head of ninety isn’t fresh and new!
Anyway, George didn’t care about praise,
He had a plan that would smooth the trouble,
Tackle lingering doubt (or burst its bubble).

“Ask our Ion to read some paragraphs,
Important ones, confirming what we said.
For him it’ll be easy, mere arts and crafts;
The tongues are similar, like pizza and bread.”
It seems the gifted, even in their gaff(e)s,
Utter words that exceed intent, as though led
By guardian spirits pulling strings.
Thus such fresh and easy brilliance springs

From worn-out, broken mouths to forge grand ends.
“Yes,” declared Felipe, leaping from his chair,
“Translate the decision summary. Friends,
Such timely help will end a man’s despair.
Mr. Iliescu, please, and we’ll surely make amends
For delaying still your chance to declare
(Might you not in fact be just as happy
To skip all risk and fly off merrily?).”

A bit peeved at being called Bulgarian
He nonetheless quickly read and translated;
He was, after all, utilitarian
And wouldn’t smirk at helpful favours traded.
About Ceausescu, his one-time companion,
There’d be no talking and revealing, granted,
But with cash (?) and this timely verdict
Ion could quit the CRI’s dull precinct.

Indeed, the decision was as they'd said:
Clones were from birth fully endowed beings.
Later, translated versions wouldn't be read;
The committee was gathering its things.
Tony cried and laughed, Cherie looked enchanted,
Chomsky shrugged and started reading clippings.
And then another surprise announcement:
Or was it more of an appointment?

Tony had just been offered a new chair
At the William J. Clinton Institute;
He had no need of the CRI's slim fare.
He'd be in sunny San Diego, to boot,
Placed on the board of Wes Clark's CalifAir.
With old George he exchanged a crisp salute
And then left, surrounded by his entourage;
A Mercedes was ready in the garage.

So into heaven Tony drove, then stepped,
Largely on the strength of a court decision.
No weighing of merits or promises kept,
Almighty God replaced by men in session.
He was one of the glorious Select
(Though might he in years need re-election?);
Outside, recognized, he was clapped and booed –
Ah, thought he, some human beings are so rude.

Glory and swollen fears

The Scythians have a custom of twanging their bowstrings in the midst of their drinking and carousing, as though they were summoning back their courage at the moment when it melts away in pleasure.

Plutarch, Life of Demetrius

Then tied

No, welded

To glittering traces, beings of our epoch might note

An unpleasant effect: a shivering

An absolute terror

In other words, that Franco-Thai cuisine and medium-wool blazers

The electronic boxes (flashing and assorted)

Plus

Training in the supposed lie of stratospheric goals

Leave us quaking.

Trembling things

Transformation of life goals:

Lycurgus

Senses that 'compartmentalizing' isn't possible

In the long run

Thinks: eventually a comparison will be made between

Hearth's ease and the rigours of campaign

With the latter bound to lose

So keep the bread black, he says

And the broth a strong concoction

Exercises in the shadows of the walls

Fierce, limb-wrenching and virtually gut-breaking

So the comparison is hard so battlefields and Spartan home

Differ in few respects

And both offer a thing, a concept difficult for us

What the surplus wrung from Helots allows

Mention it later

More interesting, maybe, are

The compartmentalizers

Thinking not just of those who see Aeschylus in the morn'

Have a good meal

Weeks later fight to defend their homes

(Though virtue-full they are, in enviable ways)

But Alexander, say, his boys, living well on days off

With chats, wine and friends into the purple night

Then thrust against death on work days, as it were

The very next day even

Comparisons unmade until the muddy Hyphasis

Pushed for a time by something bigger than fear

And not just booty ripe to grab

The popular cause, 2000, seeks: fuel injector

(Rather than nerve wrecker)

A certain mood of urgency

Or muscles on both ends of a rope

Pulling humans to struggle

And back to patios for a wine-stained lunch

One end a little stronger one day

The other another
Required also: the antidote to terror
To that cheap certainty that cushioned safety is the only
Recompense
Find our grandchild of glory and virtue as alternative
Not founded it has to be said
On the degradation of Persians, helots or slaves
(Even bankers)
So that
Silk outfits, Franco-Thai cuisine
Assorted gadgets
Lose privilege, exclusivity
And fear shrinks its space to
Sit in more appropriate relation
Of a size to be useful and overcome
Its doping days done

Perspective and idea

At last I'll recall
A Julian memory that lived
As cleanly and clearly as its moment –
Which is to say, is no babe of embellishment.
I am either sitting on the foot
Or standing near my parents' bed
Awash in gushed-in rays that are, simultaneously,
An awareness of summer as eternal.
School is out of sight at both ends.
I am, you could say, a little boy escaped from the cave,
Conscious of our star, for some instants,
As pure Idea
Even as its material emanations caress cream skin.

Yet there's the laugh.
As I learned to read calendars and feel slipping weeks,
In other words, grew from relative ignorance
To modest knowledge of time and world,
This pure awareness shrivelled to a snapshot

So that the summer I love is,
Year on year, a running yellow haze
That cools almost as it starts,
Dissolved.

Ice and time

Imagine how ice can cut, hurt, be
A slick brick whomping a head
Or a cube fragment jaggging down a throat,
Stab-stretching a gut-bound tract.
Could it be any comfort later on to know
Cruel surfaces have dissolved or liquefied?
As though the pain were nothing when and because
The fragments' molecules spread out,
Retroactively softening the old knife's jab.
Look, now it's a puddle, a cool drink in your gut!

This is a thought, a thing to tell yourself.
But in the ranking of absurdities
Not unlike the sympathetic notion
That a Salvadoran farmer, his head hacked off,
Might be restored to his smooth-backed daughter, to
His corn and golden squash
Just because the thespian who ordered death squads' crimson aid
Was later altered by fierce time and heat,

Softened to mush
To the point that even commanding coffee
Was piteously beyond him
(Thus rendering compassion his due too).

Celebrity guest

The ceremony is hours done;
Friends and guests swing back and forth
In their raucous bands of chat.
Some manna in the form of heavenly snow's
Been sucked up in the back.

Lobster garbed in a tart green robe
Is gone as well; now comes the main
Plunked down on shiny table backs:
Lamb platters, potatoes parsley sown
In garlic-drenched auras and wearing gander fat
(Human cheeks, at least, exude high joy).
One man, sparsely bearded, youngish, almond-eyed,
Rarely setting down his glass
(that cups receding waves of white Bourgogne)
Is briefly drawn away
By a nervous, hostish type to carry in banana-shaded
Cardboard crates that hold good drink, some more,
Pale straw, grape sea.

Attuned to things is this youngish guy,
Imbibing words and scents of love dressed in a braid
While rolling out taste buds and feeling
Chord streams trickle down his back,
Squeezing this located instant hard
In part because it will not come again,
In part because it is a bursting, coloured scene that
Shares its full reality with other scenes now
Written, writing, to be drawn,
Painted, painting, to be spawned.
Table now and (in a sense) sans fin;
 Laughter now and (in a sense) sans cesse.

He's had reasons to suspect his temporal end is close
Since organizing carpenters and smoothers of concrete
At a building site Palermo/Moscow-run
But tonight, all the waters' mingling
Brings him their relief.
Unlike the others present, he is seeking
Neither to postpone nor to forget.
 He's in be-gendlessness.

A Trinitarian theory

I

God is stripped amidst Netherlandish glass,
 His voluntarist attributes shorn in
The poison dust of joyful, clinking study.
A brain, expelled from Zion, hums a tune
While unravelling links of blue and red cause
 That resemble the guts of a cut cow,
Pausing to receive guests known and brand new, then
Attend to bread-winning exigencies
Demanded of all in bourgeois paradise
Where freedom and doctrine buoy and weigh damp air.

II

And I've raced a bicycle on French-acquired earth
Around the corner from the river-head
Below that risen stretch where spread,
I've read, a gardening plot of happy birth
 For beans and corn and babes,
A base for hunting, slashing escapades
Waged by Mississauga's men.

This place I've watched, stared down its angles,
Back and forth, through the marsh's brambles
And I claim no time-defying vision
But visit to breathe and express contrition
And search the brush for Fox's den.

III

This year the Christmas angels, as promised, exhale golden air –
A grade of perfection thought one rung up
From the swallows plunging in their wild tear
Down turrets of far-off, spring Castile, each voice to erupt
 Over thyme's sloped course.
 Mine, after years' rest, is thin and porous.

IV

Of course we are wilfully repeating:
Earnest flailers filing from the pews through fragrance,
Yearning to rekindle mood, a meeting
With the variegated scheme that promises a common sense
While the captured priest, roped by ritual,
Offers, pained, a liberation theory (that is reasonably liturgical).

V

It helps that what was the village ground is ‘natural’
Despite centuries’ devouring expanse
By progressive hardness, facilitating an easy trance
Through which the image is dependable –
Less conjuring required than in, say, downtown Cleveland
(Of a longhouse from a condo-stand).

Here jumps the cheery sketch of stalks and ears,
Wigwams, girls and bulbous kettles,
The chatter eased to quiet as the evening settles,
A rack of fish flanks hanging up to smoke
Or flames to lanterns lighting water under stroke.
Plus a sense of how things’ disappearance
Jerks then calms the fears.

VI

While the second splendid defrocked Jew
Calmly fuses academy and temple,
Explaining in a system why hushed requests
Float uselessly on currents,
Lending reason to the case that there He is!
(Or She), in the grasses that approach the shore.

In Eden, the prize of disobedience
And the sheer indispensability
Of love imply the only counsels given.
Spinoza: Decipher and show empathy.

VII

Still, the chasm vibrates sickly
And I have strained to smell or in Bach's chorus hear
Or in the flashing of the candles see
A hint of how, to humans could endear
 Itself the passing back to blankitude,
 Immersion in totality and nullitude.

VIII

At dawn on Saturday
Red Fox trots, distracted, down the trail
Perhaps considering the effort eating will entail
While reflecting on the hare that got away.
I surprise him or her, in that instant,
Tell myself his ideas are constant,
Never focused on the spectre of projected end
Yet sufficiently aware of the dangers of demise;

I think of all the foxes crumbled in their only paradise.
For two seconds this one holds a coiled posture,
Then sideways cuts my pleasure –
Choosing not to on pacific me depend.

IX

For anyway, how have I
(Or any other human stick) learned to be virtuous?
I decided, early on, Sunday's account was to deride
While politics teaches abstention as (largely) meritorious –
With paper through its crack the single act
Leaving as objectives: cash and... arid fact?

X

Yet there are places where the manifesto on the mount
(Or plain, says Luke) feeds social reformation:
Favela chancels bathed in revolutionary account;
Quartieri fiorentini, by the Friar, eased of cruel taxation.
The program half-enacted, here and there, now and again
But Kingdom sustained beyond the masses' ken.

XI

When thoughts of an Ojibway speaker
Standing just below the risen stretch
Gel as though the disparate seconds could, for instants, match
And I achieve a single posture of that formerly fleshy hunter
(Never mind how the terrain's been changed,
Banks and rocks and background re-arranged;
We're in the same location on this world,
It's the different/equal river running metres from our noses
And again, I've assumed an identity of poses).

Crow sings, Heron stalks the rejuvenated marsh.

Futilely I'd deny the sliding tones from tingling to harsh
But there's a glory just before the counter-coup's unfurled.

XII

To make wedges of variety adhere
And reconcile, to blend the coloured strands
And soften our fears without insulting lies –
For this a scaffold's built across three points:
Knowing is our praising, div-natural boughs
Aren't less than tinted glass and formulae;
Beings never wholly cease, adequate

Ideas enter the sole eternity; and
Since equality is radical, attend
Nazareth's bright oracle. Now breathe. And calm.

Easter 2008

Understandably they twist –
Those who know what can't be true –
And see either objective spirit
Or heat fired by hallucinatory states
Without grasping that the body-raisers
Have a case, real and metaphorical.

For Paul thinks something miraculous is afoot –
That voice-rimmed beam slapped hard –
So flesh re-dressed in glowing skins
Is his rosy culmination.
But more trenchant are allusions of another anatomical sort:
After wrenching, stinking death amidst the dung and bones
There surges up to bloom in perfumed freshness
A communal body of the growing Christ.

Hangover Verse

At first, from a library window

Despite the cars, the air is lilac jam.
Last night, disparate themes held hands easily
But fingers disentangled in the morning.
Hans Kūng lies splayed across the desk
As leafy holdouts shirt slate cliffs.
Women sway, rustling threads;
Oh, their slopes of almond cream!

Insist:

We shall maintain in the third millennium
As frenzied gulls dive scavenging
Above the town's hard belt of track
That we're the kin of hunting fisher-folk
Who camped beside the Humber's throat
And that the dying bubbles of an iced Pinot
Are concentrations of the universe.

Clearing head

Moreover:

I believe the paved and metal suit

Can be lifted from a raw-scraped trunk

I believe the verdant belly winding north past Bloor

Is a resurrection candidate

And sense that in an instant's christening burst

All that's been was potentially there

I see the plan, known as it unfolds

Was not of course a 'plan'

I believe that love precedes the human brain

And lives outside of it

(For I've seen baboons raise up an alien babe

and buffalo wheel 'round to save a friend)

While:

I doubt the abyss, real as it is

Propels us into war

I know Nietzsche didn't read Prince K.

(Biologist, cooperation chronicler)

I see, in eight-year old eyes, how
 Child-like we enter the Realm
Though I accept the struggle
 And feel the blood-soup maelstrom underneath
But sense our Mother, with ange-babes' aid
 Can ride through poison times
Go on unfolding shimmering laps
 Of liquid, being and light

Artist's Agoge

Part One

I

Recollections

His first vision is a heated flash of
Mute exploding beams across the window glass
That soon give way
To limbs that sprout from out a bulb.
It's the window spider, translucent,
Flooded by the sun
So that its organs are shadows
Inside the halls of life.
Meanwhile, there's a web of sparkles, begun in silk
Drawn across the universe in strands of light.

II

Outside, again in sun, hemmed in by hedge,
On the lawn near the bursting flower bed,
The boy witnesses a second thing.
This sight is mixed with sound:
A hum from deep inside the house's gut,
Mild shaking, quivering,

The windows jiggling, rattled by a wind,
The door still closed but whistling as well,
The boy too gripped to even cry aloud until
The vision fades back to a soft June day.

III

Post-church game,
Still in the slacks of stiff solemnity,
Guarding the goal
Without shin pads (unlike the other keeper
Who's bound like a lawn wood sentinel
Sunk in a spongy plot,
Held by responsibility in place).
The boy is free to take a dash of orange ball on stick
And is often back in time,
His electric wanderings forgiven.

IV

Fishing

A slapping hand cuts short the clock's knife wail;
The boy throws on his clothes to stop the predawn cold.
Across the rented yard in black they go
To where in gentle, sucking slurps
The wash strokes stony ground.
Soon the wooden craft is cutting perfect skin
That in an instant heals itself behind.
Father, son, settle on their bobbing seat
(Still no sign of red-rose fingers
That'll stretch their waking bones to flip the night).

V

With day's first dribbles lines hang near the weeds,
His father sips hot coffee, rod wedged 'tween the knees
But he won't loose a grip on his.
The pike will steal
But bites aside, the joy is in the warming up,
The tiny sounds of jumps and falls,
The re-assuming of the shapes:

The blanket over beach and forest coming off,
Furred rocks and rotted bow of an old hull ashore
Huddled where they were that sparkling day before.

VI

Football

Later, in the hour of other sports,
Apollo still drives good and hot
But sinking, tells that he is heading for his rest,
And they dash around the rose-crammed patch
Tended by some wrinkled Baltic hands.
Father and son they make a ball
A missile soar a hundred times
Lightly through the clouds
(And sometimes off a car)
Then sink to pluck it from the fragrant grass.

VII

School visions

Bright lit air and ice-cold floors,
Tense instruction, books aloud in crowded loops!
His, a steady voice that rarely trips,
Smooth like a brown sauce
(He sees smooth, the very word, in a shade of brown).
But reports go home that words are sorted in his head
At a speed a year delayed. To him it's like a
Nasty dream in which cruel poison smiles insist he's dead
When clearly he can talk and taste.
But there's no waking in this sterile air.

VIII

His confidence is bent, near-snapped.
But the teacher (topped by a wasp hive liable to collapse
If its paper wall should be so much as pricked)
Continues in her crisp and cheerful way.
Another moment from those tortuous years:
A paper pyramid to be constructed, walls not meeting, near
collapse,

Glue pools seeping sickly to the surface
Like dense petrol in a dying African land.
His despair's described as carelessness and then:
Tear-pulling penalty of recess missed.

IX

The Fires

This day his first (remembered) visit to the foggy place
Where fires roast around his feet
And quivering earth shakes gut-ward through the toes –
A land from which his rescue is in doubt,
Or so at least he fears.
The earth in places splits,
Winds pour from out its holes
And smells of burning things assail his nose –
What he imagines to be sickly
Odours of a world's shit crackling into smoke.

X

Practice

Early snow crunch before the light,
Black-white the hard-packed ground,
Sack slung back, the stick allowed to trail,
Trunk thick with wool and down –
He loves this moment's ice fresh whiff.
His head is clear, the sounds are scarce
And the people are so rare and calm.
The veranda snouts of houses slope, their shoulders crouch,
Their eyelids are squeezed tight.
Nor do they shiver, as did his that day.

XI

Then through smoked arena corridors,
Past hamburger breakfasts on the pan,
He stretches warming bones into the colours and the pads,
Skates wildly to the clergy-coach's tap-tap voice
(That sometimes slants into an edge),
The clap of landing pucks
That in a freezer passed the night,

The happy ring of goal posts and the crash of glass;
Voices leap toward the rafters way above,
They are like flitting swallows 'midst the beams.

XII

Rapture by music

At 11 or so he sits in church
And floats on currents of the Crucifixion,
Bottom on the hard, smooth varnished wood,
Soul beyond the coloured glass,
Toward the source of light steamed through.
The weaving, feathered tones of tenor, baritone
Carry him into a sort of rapture
And his soul is one with one who asked his friends to
“Wait ye here, while I shall pray.”
So the boy imagines that he's Him returned.

XIII

Cologne

Quiet room, leather-padded desk and rug,
The clergy-coach's smells a heavy cloak.
There is a red-blue banner on the office wall
That jerks the visitor's first glance. Also
A Jesus dangles in his death above the desk.
Man's hands are pointed, white and grainy,
Longer than they seem when retired in dark folds
Or plunged in Bauer hockey gloves.
The eyes go back, so far, like
Void-thrust holes in space abandoned by the light.

XIV

Dazed he feels at leaving,
Jogging through the stamped-on snow,
An unremembered long walk home,
Not recalled but for the ankle-nipping fires
And slicing cold descended from the sky
Yet further out, vaguely there (and this is new)
A coloured sun of smiles and gentle trees

Hanging at the edge of sight,
At the tips of vision's reach.
A saving dream, perhaps a promised land.

XV

He makes it to the house
That's shaking more than on that long-gone day.
Once inside, he's Jonah in a host shivering with flu.
And his father's sounds are angry groans,
A voice from deeper in the fish's gut, in madness sunk,
Demanding its release.
From time to time that night he goes into the basement maw
To see if in foundations of the house the cause of trembling lives
But it's a muffled world down there, quite still.
And then his worried mother shouts him up.

XVI

Resistance

What ensues is a series of escapes, charges and retreats.
When times are calm he finds the strength inside
To show that those who doubted he could think were wrong,
Meanwhile hoping, as he's read in magazines,
That sinking into 'business' is defence against the dark
(Which nonetheless can never leave him all alone,
Showing up just when he thinks it's gone for good,
So that he then must give in to its pains,
Ride them out until they fade away. Knows
He would do anything for an antidote.)

XVII

Saviours

Two things, two revelations, are stumbled on with age.
Thing One: that splashing colours on a page
Push back the dangers if they threaten to begin
(He does the test repeatedly)
And oust the memories of bony hands and lying faces

And sea spray scents drawn close.
Painting, sowing brand new universes,
He is small and light, hitched to a fast crow's tail
And while he thinks of what to swirl on white
The feathered jet is at his beck and call.

XVIII

But if he draws a blank for long, repeats a boring thing
Or it is clear the brush is on to fakery, the
Black bird dumps him on the ground.
Thing Two: it comes later, years gone by, and
Carries him still higher than the bird –
Though on its trips he exercises less control.
They're more like being catapulted 'cross the sky
With no idea of where he'll land. The cause?
Her high straight back adorned in blonde,
Set cream and berry skin, and Nile-green eyes.

XIX

And so assorted worlds and forces,
Storms and fogs and ground on fire,
Memories and dreams and talents fresh uncovered,
Uplifting winds and feathered carriers
As well as books that he's discovered –
They all play out their powers
On his growing soul that flies sometimes,
Convinced it could touch godliness,
At other times drops broken, sunk
Into a hole, mired in the muck of gloom.

XX

A Painting

Greens, reds and yellow whites in ribbons
On a universe spread across his wall,
Each a swathe of eternity:
The well-soaked pregnant field,
Blood river of a slaughtered flock,
The sun-pierced clouds, new light.
What happens when the paths cross paths?

This they have to do, no avoiding that.
Three bolts that ran as if they'd never meet would fail; the
Dashing crow would dump the rider from its back.

XXI

But what can spring from intersection?
Where new-born plants and stumbling fawns
And wiggly tadpole babies squirm,
Met by breaths of sun-lit air
And fierce juice-dripping jaws?
This isn't purely a question of biology
Or the clear-cut laws of light.
He must devise something that makes it all cohere,
That merges in smooth colour, and thus
Bring meaning to collisions in this space.

XXII

Eros at Dinner

To the background bounce of piano
One side of her hair winds like a darkening road
To a yearned-for place behind her ear,
While the other is a straight cascade of known destination
Tumbling down a shoulder slope.
And she's an eater, an extraordinary eater
Like many young women whose growing years just closed,
Devouring onion soup and slabs of pesto pizza
While he holds back, restrains; his stomach
Can't share the stage with an edgy soul in flight.

XXIII

And the flaming tips of candles jerk
Just like his breath when a question goes astray
Or it's unclear what he means or
An answer falls like lead.
But this is rare, it has to be said:
Mostly the lights blaze steadily,
As do his words that flirt with fire.

She smiles, says witty things, and knows the themes he does,
Is taken by the storms that break across his face.
And both are helped by their good friend, red wine.

XXIV

But love just out of reach
Could be the worst madness of them all.
On a desperate tour of the east end,
Well past New Athens' dining rooms,
In the Irish working enclaves' midst,
He grapples with the knowledge of another boy
Who will not go away. Through the boxy streets,
Then down into the earth to coast along
Conveying tunnels underground that carry ones who work
As well as those who bear and curse sharp pain.

XXV

Then, spat up, he walks still more,
Under a bridge that in the night could be a mountain fort
Or a giant prop for Martian films
Serving as a shelter 'gainst exploding rays.
He ducks in here, and is not first.

Others spreading pigments, marking their complaints against the
world,
Denouncing the invaders, colonizers –
Their fires light up dirty walls,
Illuminate piled sticks and broken slabs of furniture.
He can only think of journeys through her hair.

XXVI

He melts in ice that glints at him, her green eyes beckoning,
Even as men ask him, "Sit and tell us what you think."
For a while they speak a tongue for just his benefit
So he will not be lost, the guest,
But soon see interest isn't there, his mind not on their war,
The struggle, the rising underway.
After a gulp of water off he goes,
Lurches past some sidewalk tables, then is
Through a door into a room where shadows hop
Suggesting crooked deals done back the bar.

XXVII

But he can't really drink
Though of course he imitates the exercise

(Booze flows through him best when he feels happiness,
Bears him further into relaxation land, the province just beyond).
Now he struggles with a book
And wonders at the life that Polish peasants had.
Then closes it, stuffs it back,
Knowing no diversion in the world will work for him
While his head's a blubbering slave.
He'll need to win or find another way.

XXVIII

Holidays

Bone-dry streets are whipped by arctic breath,
That robber of hats and package bender.
He tries to walk but beaten back
Slumps down on cushions in the living room.
From here he sees his sharp-faced mother
Working on a floppy white-fleshed bird.
On the sofa is his father, camouflaged in brown,
Sipping from a glass that full, matches sofa skin as well.
While the tremors in the walls are faint but there,
Causing smelly needles on the tree to twitch.

XXIX

Smiles a sunny soccer nephew in a frame
And on the wall's a cottage in a snowy painted scene
And the portrait of a long-faced, Latin-looking man.
The wallpaper, two years old,
Still looks as fresh as flowers, showing pudgy babes and
Fountains gushing pleasant wet.
A sister's coming soon,
Armed with a boyfriend set to eat,
Keen to talk about the scores. He imagines dinner
With another *her* and knows his belly churn.

XXX

Another painting: the Ducks

In that very winter month he depicts a scene:
Lake between here and a tree-smudged shore,
Site of a great attack.
A wave of fearless robot ducks comes on,
Their broad bills set to ram and
Upturn boats into folds of freezing blue,

Their safety-tire bodies poised perhaps
(With the generosity of victors great)
To tow the fallen back to shore,
To the safety of a life as slaves to ducks.

XXXI

The sky's carved ice,
Ducks' coats gleam red Lakota paint.
In six days the work is done, during which he hardly sleeps.
On the seventh, he takes green grapes and mother's pepper steak,
Gulps down a litre sack of milk.
For many who see the work a nervous laugh is stoked;
They catch the humour but shiver at the turgid blue,
The waves of cutting blades,
Ferocious colours of dread warriors. Are these ducks
Mars' cruel brood come to bring about our end?

XXXII

The Break

In the small grey Gremlin X he sits.
While they're parked in summer dusk
She announces she can't leave that other boy
("He would not take it well, could do something terrible")
And goes, leaps lightly up her porch.
He was sure she loved him more, would've bet a world that way.
Begins to turn it over in his head,
Looking for the moments when he failed,
When he did the weak thing, could have said the right. And
 knows
His flimsy cable is about to snap.

XXXIII

Another Painting

It's a garden in the country heat
And cooking air has begun to blend the denizens
As though they're members of a melting stew,
Their shapes now *just* retained,

Flowers tangled at the neck, running colours through the ground.
So that some vegetables wear paints they generally do not:
One pepper takes on pink, the other burns its yellow
While a jawbone blue aims wily smiles
From near the bottom corner left,
Sole canine fauna in this stemish land.

XXXIV

The painter almost envies a cucumbral form
Reposed, content, its one head on a leaf
Its other poking brother pumpkin in the gut,
Who doesn't seem to mind.
They are the way they are, these plants
Bunched together on the earth;
Nature can do nothing but present itself.
And the heat is palpable in this tableau
Painted with a certain hazy cream that is
A see-through robe slung 'cross the air's broad back.

XXXV

Anguish

Like an unused mannequin he sits
Propped against the wall, in bed,
Limbs flopped, wax face a shell
But inside, he boils up a wicked storm.
Listens to the music's rise and fall,
Waves he senses as his very ache,
Soprano stretches that rub in the salt and
Soothe him all at once.
And make him think of fields that in a season grow and smell, then
Turn to cabbage graves beneath their cold cape.

XXXVI

He dreams of an ice sheet
Boxed by snow-packed fields
That in the distance turn to bluish trees.
And here skate lovers, 'round and back,
First two of them and then a growing crowd
In their shiny jackets green and red –
Bright spills on the white.

Around they go plenty of times;
In the dream he wonders how long relief will wait.
Pain can't be fooled for even one short sleep.

XXXVII

The weight of sadness lifts at last
But slowly, centimetres at a time.
And then, only then, do letters come
Saying that she misses him, misses him so much
(But no word that her decision could reverse,
On pages hue of mango meat).
Only that she thinks of him, misses desperately his smile –
And he knows “desperately” is just a word, full stop
Since the barriers aren't much, at all, just a
Jealous, whining boy to ditch, and a dial.

XXXVIII

Forgotten

Over weeks come those letters in a string
When her appearance could have thrown him back,
Flared the passion in his cut soul.
But only come the notes on mango sheets,
Not enough to tip him now.
Seeing her one year later he is cool,
Can't fathom where the land of madness
That he knew had been,
How he sank in those Nile eyes.
Oh, the grinding, steely effort that he made!

Part Two

I

The Descent

But a single sickness recovered from says nothing of the rest.
On Queen Street he is running, feeling the gathering wet,
Then it starts to rain,
And what he cannot understand
Is how this pounding juice can fail to smother
Those familiar bursts of fire springing all around his feet –
Tongues lash at him, don't heed the rain.
He jumps and dances in between
Looking hard for safety spots
Where pavement hasn't cracked and spread in orange breath.

II

What's more, the buildings at his flanks begin to shake,
Shiver like they're cold.
Perhaps they're not as sturdy as his house
(Were surely never built to bear a splitting of the earth,
This is no California where quakes are factored in)
And might come crashing down upon the multitude of heads.

Then people start to shout,
They run toward him reaching out their hands,
Faces wearing that concern put on when children fall.
But he can only kick in drunken dance.

III

Interned

Somehow, he doesn't know, the fires are doused
Or they burn out
Or he is pulled beyond their grasp
Because he sits alone in a yellow room of ding
Until a man of doctorness comes by, another full of nurseness,
And they question him on various themes
In friendly voices wrapped in light regret.
They never broach the matter of the flames –
Which strikes him as quite strange.
He refrains as well, and soon sleep comes again.

IV

He reads like a word-starved man,
When the family isn't visiting,
When he isn't in an office chatting, trying to explain the things.
The Russians: Dostoevsky, Gogol, Fathers and Sons;
Dickens by the bunch (he dreams of Skimpole in his sleep);
Miloscz, that man of Polish verse;
Hockey books and Oscar Wilde and Hemingway, why not?
Still, when the eyes grow tired, boredom
Can be thick as white sauce cooked until the milk is gone.
And no one grasps just what happened on the street.

V

At last, to illustrate with paints,
He recreates the scene,
The fire blooms, the cracking of the road.
He points out, to emphasize his sanity,
That up till then he thought such scenes
Might have been manufactured in his head,
Hallucinations caused by stress or chemicals within the brain
But these explosions sprang from out the street itself.
The proof is other people all began to shout,

Dashed over hurriedly to free him from harm's grip.

VI

Unimpressed the doctors seem, but claim to like the work,
Red-brown and grey buildings (whose shaking one can see),
The orange tongues lashing all about, and ineffectual rain.
"Why aren't you included in the work?" asks one importantly.
The stupid dork, the painter thinks,
"I'm painting what I see."
But what strikes him, pins him down,
Is when they say that others on the street saw only rain.
At that he quiets, thinks carefully.
After all, he's a rational young man.

VII

Then later, armed with painting things,
He drifts off into wars and women's faces, winding snakes
And stretches of the great deep blue
Where he'd like to dive in search of fish;
He spills colours over backgrounds of brown rock,
Puts grinning crabs on beds of kelp.
An uncle years unseen comes by,

Leaves him extra sketch pads and a book –
He draws the uncle in the body of a seal
Upon a seal-and-human-crowded beach.

VIII

'Recovered'

Paints a mountain, sleety cold in parts, green and soft elsewhere
On whose back wind many paths,
Some ending in the face of rock impassable,
Some dropping hikers to an earthy death.
One path makes it to the summit
Then turns away in air, suspended in the clouds of fluffy gas.
And he paints a hockey game spread over paper's icy white
But the players lug a melon on their sticks.
His mother laughs at this the day before he leaves;
He smiles and chucks his oeuvre in the bin.

IX

At times he strolls right past her house
She of blonde hair and Nile-green eyes
(She is elsewhere, where he doesn't know)
But only in the winter when there's snow,
When powder climbs the telephone poles, and
Blue Spruce bends beneath the weight.
He has no summer interest in this house but
Paints it with a snowman and a carrot nose.
Is known to duck behind a trunk when a mother
Or a grumpy brother recognized steps past.

X

Death

A couple years later his father's told
That cancer rages in the glands.
Chemicals, they fiercely blast
But there is no recoiling on the monster's part; it slashes back,
Scatters poisons in its path,
Surges toward the precious spots.
And his father sits and drifts, absorbing

That one mood of *his* dank yellow wall.
Stops eating in three weeks, is asking
Meagre questions, then falling into space.

XI

The son reads baseball scores aloud,
Two-hitters as if they mattered like two months before
Till the nurses bring the travelling bath
Or there's another pre-death test.
He leaves when the old man sleeps
To walk great rings around the hospital
Meeting faces that don't know.
Until at last in morphine's shroud
A troubled, laughing life evaporates.

XII

Later in the yard he hangs around
Garden spots where the old man worked a spade,
And white speckles sailed through air
To dot a window pane
While boots still on the back mat crouch.
In the afternoon, a fall one going cold,

A pink and orange blaze stains clouds
And like a juicing onion makes the painter look away.
Then back inside, his face endures
A thousand pinpricks till the warm dam bursts.

XIII

Dash of Success: He Exhibits

Women mill around in suits and jeans,
Their hair takes sparks of light,
They chatter to a din
Inside a room of canvases.
He's light, well watered by cold fizz
Fashioned from a field in Catalonia;
Bites sparingly from trays of cheese,
Pâté on wheat and shrimp in spicy stew,
But tries to never let a cava shipment pass untouched
(On platters dealt by slender things well-gelled).

XIV

He doesn't know most of the faces spreading compliments
But likes the way the pictures hang.
His mother's nervous on a chair – unlike her progeny,
She won't grow calm on bubbling tides but
Chats politely, proud but strained.
He, with a dash, into the bathroom goes,
Accepts his back-slaps, liquid smiles,
Snorts lines of snow run on a paper by the sink.
Slaps on the back, a liquid smile,
On the toboggan fast to happy land.

XV

After: lines so sharp, a dark-skinned woman,
Handfuls, purple-nippled breasts,
So sharp, a black spot on her cheek.
He's on his back.
Plants dangle down a window at eyes' far-reaching ends,
She smells of cherries sugar-cooked.
He pushes from a furry rug
That itches through his undershirt,
Reaching with a ravenous mouth, feeling like

His ass is tethered to the centre of the earth.

XVI

But later, people suede and denim in the street,

In and out of doors,

Let vague smiles run beneath their cheeks,

He wonders what they want to say.

In a store:

"What'll you want?"

I can get you that.

The new one comes from Buffalo."

"Pick it up on Tuesday then."

Well then. That's it. Transactions named and done.

XVII

Paid Work

At a certain point he makes a calculation:

His money from three paintings sold is running out.

He's surpassed already that red Dutchman who went down to

Arles

To feel the yellow joys and blue –

Has in a lifetime peddled more than him,
Which doesn't change the fact he's running low.
So he takes a job in a centre where young men,
Some women too, arrive to end their hacked-off days
Surrounded by tall Monet prints of
Flowery ponds and brightly gardenized walks.

XVIII

He cleans up things, chats deeply with these thinning men
Whose necks explode in boiled wounds,
Who read, play chess, receive their mothers and go mad.
He drifts down evening streets of watered lawns
Thinking of new things to paint
And patients he has got to know,
The shapes and shades the universe might have for them.
Like green wound thick and golden yellow of the morn,
A growing mist of brown and grey,
Near-lightless ness preceding the long sleep.

XIX

One day it is announced: the state is tightening the tap
On places of the sort where he mops up.
Though cash comes in from rich old men
And doors won't close on *his* bodies yet,
It's said many other shelters have to learn the art
Of squeezing dollars from a stone:
Houses where the wives and lovers go – the kids in tow –
When manly threats spill over cauldron's sides; old folks homes;
Centres for those boys and girls hard bashed too many times,
Run south from mines in search of peace and fun.

XX

So on the street on a Saturday near noon,
While an Indian sun blows light across the sky,
The bodies eight or ten abreast move fast and chant.
The protest has begun.
Though he understands this isn't done for kicks
He is ecstatic, energized through his slim form.
He is a person who always had his moments
In a quiet place alone,

Transforming little sections of his entrails into
Shapes and tones. Now this: bright noise and crowds.

XXI

Enveloped in this brash enterprise
He forgets and reaches out,
Grins and spins on lively heels,
Shares glances with the others called today.
A confidence among the crowd grows up –
Participation is an intimacy of sorts, he thinks,
An opening of skin.
While he sees quiet shame and smirks in many on the side,
Their faces down in answer to the challenge to join in.
They hurry with their loaded bags and things.

XXII

Among the early Christian bands
Making hearts a public place
Was the goal of those sincere, he's read,
To strive as one for loves that could shine pure –
He wonders: is this underway right here?
The smooth-paved street is clear of cars,

The pains of joints from a poor sleep gone.
He asks himself if simply marching on a road,
Proclaiming mutual aid and shouting
Out defiant words, has saved a wretch like him.

XXIII

Impressions

Two paintings strike him at a show:
Guardi's *Fantastic Landscape*,
A wild day of blues and browns,
A little boy lugging some wood,
Minute before a ruin sprouting trees through cracks.
(He knows that in its wind,
Its men in lonely boats,
This work's a landscape of the mind.
The blues bearing shades of all the blues there've been,
The humans, figments by the stone of years.)

XXIV

And too: Pannini's *Roman forum*, 1749.

An earthy patch crossed by people on their way.
What were fine public buildings, polished columns
Of a breathing world, now piles upon the ground.
Low enough, they're seats for passers-by as well
While for the viewer, dream-inducing ghosts.
Not rocks-cum-seats nor civic monuments,
But dream-inducing ghosts.
While he absorbs their moods
A hopeful seed is planted in his head.

XXV

Theory

"And when the contents of the material world,
Once our partners in millennia-long life,
Had been infused with meaning
(And spirit we could no longer simply feel),
Once this material had been depicted 'as it was',
Then turned inside out and bent into myriad shapes,
The perspective of the artist became itself a subject

For the artist.

How a thing might be, became how a thing was seen.

For many, paint became inadequate."

XXVI

And thoughts can be like grains of sand

In an oyster's thigh, sharp-prickly there

Till some protection's spun,

That might turn beautiful – but only might.

So he agonizes, fiddles,

Makes a chair with cans of Sprite and glue

Mounts it on a wooden plank

With a sign that says: Don't Sit!

From a junkyard gets an elevator box,

Puts inside a cot with drawings on the wall.

XXVII

Does a giant sun,

Half of it a photo by some satellite,

The other half drawn by his little niece.

Nails a rubber tire to a wall,

Staples rope to make it seem a swing,

A machine gun underneath and snapshots of Black boys,
Then on a slow walk home
The world of fiery pavement bursts again.
He wakes beneath a bush, then
Stumbles painfully back to his soft bed.

XXVIII

Europe

Knowing that he needs a change
He goes to Europe with his savings from the job
And the sale of one large canvas to a patient's mom,
Added to some money that his father left.
Tours all the museums that he can,
Feels he ought to follow what's been done.
But is most shaken when
Sitting on a balcony he hears
A leaping voice say she is known as Mimi,
And that she takes her suppers all alone.

XXIX

Museums

Is drawn toward a room that's black
With tongues of fire leaping high behind
Where a young Orpheus reclaims his love before two thrones,
Dog heads lolling not so menacing.
Nymphs run faster than their thighs and waists might hint
Then fight against the lusty horse-like men;
In a Flemish forest the herdsman plays his flute.
He walks on fields sown thick with Irises,
And settles down outside a bright café
Beneath the orange Dutchman's starry bursts.

XXX

The strangest thing is in that glorious crumbling town
Where sailors stop to do their things.
Antea, one hand gloved, one not,
A long mink shoulder-thrown,
Looks expectantly at him, and
But for the black night hair and charcoal eyes
She is the one who left him years ago.

She holds his arm, whispers in his neck
While they stroll past
The bleeding star that dives in Naples' bay.

XXXI

He also notices, in the Louvres of Europe,
When he's not studying a work,
That many float along and through the halls
As if the air and ceilings were the pretty things.
Babbling in his home tongue,
Garbed in fabrics of a Lubbock afternoon
– Blue-egg sweaters and tennis shoes –
They present themselves with silly grins.
They've saved enough from labours in the bank
To fly and drink and walk and eat and sleep.

XXXII

Meanwhile, the Europeans are unmistakable
In their leather feet and charcoal hose,
Their studied striving for sophistication –
But they too can do an empty drift,
Coast through rooms, admiring floors

As if they're being shown a neighbour's house.
It's the republic of the window-shoppers
Spread its rule throughout the world,
The pumping of a universal temperament into
Ancient chambers it can hardly understand.

XXXIII

Then in a city on his southern swing
He comes upon a crowd where cops are heaving
From a building all the occupants;
Young people wave their flags half black half red.
He joins a growing mass trying to impede the blue shirts' press,
Sees batons in the sunshine flash,
And finds himself beside a woman
60 years of age at least, her hair stretched in a bun,
Body garbed in brown wool fuzzed and worn,
Lined hands steeled by a thousand sinks of wash.

XXXIV

Stands angry, teary, shouting at the sky –
A squatter's nana she could be, recalling battles great.
So he holds in while he can,

Knows the heart-full feeling of a march again.
When ranks are smashed he
Drifts back to fling some chunks of brick
Brought specially, it seems, to give the blues some rouge.
The water from a hydrant on the street spills cold.
He finds a wad of pamphlets tossed but
Doesn't read the Mediterranean tongue.

XXXV

Back in the New World – More Theory

“In our complex life
Where information fills the pages and the waves
But cultural coin goes out of circulation
(Alongside a ‘dumbing’ of the middle class)
There are two possibilities:
Art is difficult, quite difficult
Making references just small elites can grasp;
Or art, seeing how the land lies now,
Abandons reference and representation
To live in that clear realm of feelings, pure.”

XXXVI

Option two

He considers the panel of light,
Wall of orange red
Striving to be unlimited in its stretch,
Possibly lighter toward the sides.
The colour of joy?
A primordial second in the gaseous heat?
The first moment replayed at the end?
Or is all that just the made-up stuff of words?
Rather, *feel*, don't say. Internal glow.
He tries, repeats. The lemon's wrung. Move on.

XXXVII

Option one

Then he turns another way,
Reads some Cantos and the Hollow Men,
Ponders the dark sins of usury and simony,
Digests a singing history of Confucius and his friends,
Wears verses round his neck for weeks,

Takes them to his bed to sleep.
Looks for books to sort out what is meant and
Finds with each new understanding....
That the mood grows purer still.
Just needs four lifetimes to do it properly.

XXXVIII

Thus a plan:
To blend the schools and extract the best –
At this time there can't be anything but.
Something high, beyond the glimpse of casual looks
While colours send smooth messages
Directly into hearts and spines
And themes are sung in tongues we know
So nimble brains can follow through!
Boy still arrogant, he'll tie it all together,
Bind things up while his dreaming days endure.

XXXIX

The Dream

So away he goes, beginning with ambiguous shades,
Spirits of the piece.

Chooses grey, something like the puffy lightness

Of a day with modest fog, not dark,

Then adds a glowing orange wash.

He works on this, tries to get the blend just right.

Leaves a tableau corner for another shade

Continues on the strokes of grey,

Settles on something provisional

Then in the foreground: women and some men.

XL

He gives them airs of being... lost? Not lost,

But unaware, some faces seeing but not taking in,

Others fixed in interest on an object on the ground

Or a scene not far away.

A faint but silly smile he gives to one.

Then he climbs back up to work on the tableau's corner shade,

A golden/violet sun he's had in mind,

With hints of green.

His mother calls him several times a day
And then brings roasted dinners in a bag.

XLI

On the side

He reads politics written clearly as fall air

Describing an old world renewed

Where people toil at the labours necessary

Six hours in a day. Where

Spots to sit and sleep and read,

Do push-ups, stretch one's back

And see an opera are all priorities.

And time – sweeter than euros, bucks, and yen –

Is spread out glittering on the street to grab.

XLII

He puts himself right in that world, imagines

Sweeping roads in the early morning dark

Till noon, or loading rooms with bags of milk,

His life assured biologically,

Allowed – the worry that he hasn't done his part well shed –

To forge his holy self, 'become'.
Others too of course to benefit
(With hopes that not too many in their leisure time
Give themselves to paints, not many, anyway –
Fill the world with poets, sculptors, okay, fine).

XLIII

Hockey, football, co-op dining halls,
Walks in trees 'cross rocky slopes to study
Pinkish sediment and troops of ants.
And yes, of course, the chance for everyone in this.
Plus more ways to feed that surging sense, the
Feeling he remembers from the pushing mass
And the people gathered in a Spanish street
Where the cops were emptying those homes.
To shape the great directions of the days
Through the clash and concert of all souls.

XLIV

But these are thoughts to fill his other hours.
Returning to the canvas mist of lightened grey,
He strokes the sought-for mix one sunny morn,
Finding there at last the sense he wants
Of soft diluting fog.
But the figures, shouldn't they be doing something there?
Indeed, he thinks, they mustn't daze and blank,
They have a purpose at this moment of the day,
Should carry packages or wear a uniform
To indicate objectives in their lives.

XLV

For within the realm of bourgeois busyness
There are a million studied acts.
But how to paint them? A human selling mobiles to a third, while
 a second
Counts her change? Another scrubbing clean a car?
He works on store signs down the street,
Each one brightly lit, draws
Letters scripted with great care
But words form babble, absolutely lacking sense.

He makes three cables out of wire and
Pastes them underground. But then can't say he's pleased.

XLVI

Fiddles with a figure carrying a lyre,
Running down a tunnel subterranean that intersects a wire.
The man, descending from the surface of the world
Heads toward a fiery room where two figures sit enthroned –
This Orpheus is eager to return, disturbed by life above...
Yet while a day of work can end with certainty
That something nicely fit is on its way,
In the morning's breaking hours doubt insinuates
And jabs a painter's liver hard, conjures up a face
Sophisticated, heaping on the scorn.

XLVII

While he holds out at the job that pays two times a month
There are distractions, certainly,
That can only do him good.
Concentration on a dirty sheet, that helps,
The rhythm of a mop, its progress down a hall
At times can ease his reddened soul.

And he seeks the company of others tied to different threads,
To make the realms cohere as best he can.
Redoes his Orpheus some 20 times, takes giant breaths.
But this tenacious world will have its say.

XLVIII

In short, the pattern looks quite like the early days:
When things are going well the black bird takes him in the air,
And there's no danger he'll be thrown toward
The fire flowers at his feet.
Madness follows on the tail of doubt, the sense that
Time is being wasted or he is less than what he must.
Often he can hold together, think that
He is on a thing that can make synthesis, but almost
 imperceptibly,
With years, these moments die like hair across his scalp.
Near every day's a dangerous tread.

Epilogue

December winds are javelins in a back,
And it's not true that wild storms in your head
Can cancel them or dull their point –
He knows it's not like that.

But neither will the demons on the inside
Give way before the jabbing spears from out.

A wifely stare of scorn burns through his gut,
Reminding him that they can't fit,
The boy's smart-aleck gaze torments him a one thousandth time;
But most of all his work slides past, the things he's made,
They miss by miles and moments, sometimes seconds, just,
Even when keen watchers say they don't.

Now he claps the snow-white pavement with his feet
As if with so much force that it would crack
And open up for him.
Some fifty years upon this earth, he's kicking to sink down.

Street lights are ghosts behind his shoulder, readying to leap,
The cars are ships plying an iceberg sea,
They bay and cast their desperate beams;
He stumbles on his narrow path.

And where he was weak, from pain and cold and
Sleep that's never calm,
He now feels powers building up. What's left inside
Now bunches in his thighs to drive him on
Through streets that would seem cavernous
If he took the time to look,
Moaning streets that thicken in their whiteness
But cannot slow him down:
A last thing drives him on.

Where the bridge arcs over old ice-hardened Don,
A soft sun looms, not the one of hot bright June
To cruelly burn a gazer's eye
But the glow of welcome promised him before:
Gold-violet and some traces still of green.
He can see it even if it has sunk down;
He'll have to reach, he thinks.

Arrived, a different, fuller picture spreads:
Through birch trunks he is moving, suddenly,
No more effort required of his legs.
Gliding over twigs and leaves and earth
He sees, beyond the trees, a clearing where
A group of deer steps gingerly.
Beside him moves his family,
Behind, in front, across the thinning bush,
Fly smells from flowered spots.
It's spring?

He hears so clearly now; sounds whiz in his ears
Bringing the image of their source,
Scents to his nose, reporting on their home,
His tough skin tickles from sharp drops of pollen and sweet sap.
The deer, they break toward the trees
On the clearing's other side.

Quiet. Breath. Flakes pad the thick block ice.

Then plant sprites of the Don,
All kindly sorts though woken from their sleep,
Peel back their cloaks
And spread their arms
To take a damaged son.

Writer's wrap

Iced Christmas stars exchange their looks with three-year eyes.

A biface chips anachronistically

Until it wears a nasty edge that helps out with the fire.

Vole torpedoes squirt beneath a bridge of toddler knees,

Leaving promises of long fraternal ties.

Words that aren't the verse describe a plum

That's dangled from an Andaluz cat's cape... which is itself the
poem.

Slick disks and hockey sticks enhance a polished Reformation

Floor...after Pauline counsel to the Roman lads is chewed.

Zealously and smoothly calm, I present one burning soul

Before a red-black temple in Castile sin cruz.

Where a small boy paused for cookies, cider swills (1967),

His progeny sits down 'midst boards and chewed-up glass ('06) –
The rubble's owners' dust dissolved.

Hunched and snowed, Oom Jim proclaims the whole-grain Word,
Oom Peter coffin-heaped behind,
Both sure they are redeemed by that dark tree
And a stabbing crown scrunched down.

A pale sphere hurtles over John Mann's head in right,
His mitt, detached, leaps at the whistling bird.

Sweet daddy's smooth puffed face is burned;
Octaves careen from ceiling curves.

Remember a tempest brewed o'er fields at rest?
The ghosts flash foreheads to the light
As tinkling cows bounce home.

White walls fold back to show their gilled, grilled beasts,
Served smiles, Algarvian braids swung down.

Recanted is all hack-work done,

Remunerated worship of Leviathan
Especially his warm, care-giving face.
From freedom, understood, is goodness sprung.

And what if I'd lived on a small-roofed London street?
Not England but in Neutralia's heart,
Where morning sisters of the stalk have propped our reddening
 ball,
Their local painting labelled with a cruel, imported name.