

12 lyric excerpts

from

What tempts us to tomorrow

Michael Phoenix-Greene

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Will's Digression
for the Damp Lady

SHE LOVES me, for I sing her every Form
Dis-covering her landscapes, year by year
The fibrous jungles of her hungry fear
Her sea of Moods, that wait the changing storm

Shall I appease these passions with a verse?
Seek to calm her with a written page?
Or let her have her Will, collect her wage
And Shake me! Take me! Turn to re-verse!

My sonnets, then, must melt to mating cries
And couplets, uninvolve into caress
For rhyme can't cure her Frenzy, grant her rest
Nor ink and paper, dim her wish to die

So! Stripped of all contrivance, I become
Catharsis of her flesh! Her savage drum!

August 1971

Anachronisti
or
Memo from Philistia

for Wallace Stevens and Pablo Picasso

WE PASSED a good law – banning trees and flowers
And gave Council-grants for things of tin and steel
Which – guaranteed to rust in Fall – remain
Intact throughout the Winter, just like real
And maintenance-free! except a Spring-time scraping
For Summer show – some scrubbing pads and paint
And Presto! Plates and girders, spanking new!

But still, a few will frequent Autumn lanes
Those lame-brains, who, from skirling leaves, infer
A brief yet stirring Existential cry
Who, shy of wires and hydrants, fiercely sing
Queer phrases from some 'Period of Blue'
And praise the blown stems, old, and out-of-season
That strive to hold their Summer's work – but lose!

Autumn 1971 – January 2012

Injunction to Pray Where Hope Has Fled

for Reuben Aaron Cohen, 1948-1981, z.l.

A LITTLE more; and yet a little more
We wear our flesh to tatters, every year
Our day-to-day Despair, our lonely Fear
Score deep, there lying mark, on Nature's store

The drunk, the tramp, the whore, the long-lost boy
The suicide, upon his aerie height
The cursèd creature, in a hostile night
Puppet to the wind, Death's latest toy

We all have faced this dark hour of the Mind
The Soul, a blank – the Heart, as heavy lead
When even G-D Himself seems sick or dead
Or deaf, uncaring for our pleas, or blind

Where clever devils cheat Him of our love
We contradict! Projecting prayer above!

October 1981

To Be Continued

*for Mary E. Barry
for Daniel, d. – , z.l.
And for all children, everywhere*

THE APPLE SEED becomes the apple bough
At whose budding, for whatever reason
Leaf and blossom loose their earth-blown vows
The ruddy young, to stay one wind-bound season

And by swift Death, or weather-slow decay
These fated, firstling reds return to ground
Their sweet flesh withers, splits, and unto clay
By Moon, by Magic, apple seed is bound!

And you, my new-found friend, do you recall
That apple core you dropped, from your own hand
At our last parting, darkly, to let fall
A seedling transplant, in *this* wilder-land?

An apple seed becomes an apple bough
Fulfilling, unaware, the apple's vow!

March 1983

Beyond the Burning Bush
or
G-d's Golden Light

for D.C.L. Mc "P" my Lorelei

MY SENSE, unlike my vision, seeks a cause
A moving far-point, coalescing near
Excellence, made perfect, by its flaws
And Silence like G-d's Voice, resounding, clear

So Moses must have felt, that Midian day
When holy fire lit the Laurel's golden mane
And bowed, in knee-locked awe, to hear G-d say:
"A world-gone-mad, by This now driven sane!"

I think on Laurel; and the dimmest part of me
Cascades to brilliance; a glade beneath G-d's dawn
My mind prance-dances, as a Moon-tossed sea
Then, womb-like, quickens, radiance to spawn

So! My glad heart, before your advent, doomed
Leaps free! To sky-clad GLORY! JOY-untombed!

December 2010

The Phoenix and the Dragon – Downfall of the Paragons
or
I Sing the Life Triangular

THE PHOENIX and the Dragon, both are here
Come to this height, to fight our common foe
And we should all feel glad, yea! We should cheer
But something ain't quite kosher, don't you know?

Now the Dragon, he's the noble beast of change
And the Phoenix represents the life eternal
But the Dragon has been acting quite deranged
And the Phoenix comes across a tad infernal

Just today, the Phoenix slipped a toxious drug
Into the Dragon's morning crock of whiskey
So when the Dragon slugged the Phoenix, they just shrugged
And said, “This weather makes us both a little frisky!”

The truth you'd hear? The grit within the pearl?
Clearly, they're both wooing the same girl!

November 2011

Loud Silk Ties and Several Good Dutch Beers

for Norman Handelman z.l.

TODAY, my Tateh would have made his C-note
That would have pleased him; he'd have felt a winner
And sported a loud, brown-silk tie, just to gloat
And bought us all a decadent birthday dinner

Forty years ago on a night of grief and tears
He said, "Put on your shoes, son, let's just go drive"
Then got me pissed on several good Dutch beers
My tea-totalling Tateh, in some disco-dive

His brothers died young; he saw near ninety summers
He was hard and tanned, smooth as a Junior Mint
At birthdays, he'd yell: "It's your fault! What a bummer!"
Then wink at me and call me *shlechter-kindt!*

Yah! Today my Tateh would have hit that C-note
My loud-proud Paw! My Greenie off a boat!

15 April 2012

In the Magic Realm of Pay-Per-View

IN THE REALM of Pay-Per-View, the *only* crime
(Just ask the Paper Tigers, and their squeezes)
Is self-denial – *not* having a good time
The new Gospel, according to the 'Drunken Jocks for Jesus'

Come! Cruise the streets, when the bars let out at three
And hear the loud and snarling epi-tomies
Of weekend Demons, who will opionate for *free*!
Then ride the Vomit-Comet back to their homies

Is there life after birth? Hey guy, don't even ask!
It's price, not worth, whereon we set our store
Souls chained to the Wheel, to each his appointed task
The great cycle of Dying – Death – re-Death, *for ever more!*

In Pay-Per-View, make small your whispered tread
It would not do at all to wake the Walking Dead

22 June 2012

Polyphemus

for Michael T. Harris, the Lone Ranger of literature

O! I HAVE wandered starfish lands
Hurled the mountains in the sea
Built altars to the ravaged sands
Embraced the man I could not be

My charred eye roving for a name
I burned the bluebells, as they rang
Nailed my voice to lists of Fame
And scorned the lute-god, when he sang

If I felt you turning in my brain
Or heard the hurt thing in you, sigh
I answered to a different pain
Mauled your wings, maligned the sky

Yes! I saw the beast-brand on my wrist
And empty as a cutthroat's purse
I poised the dagger in your fist
And waited for your final curse

I did not know the lame could stand
That the bled sun blessed the blind, from birth
Nor that you, with green, and tendril hands
Could bind me, singing, to the singing earth

*Midnight, 12 May 1969
On the occasion of the author's 21st birthday*

Lion Eyes

WOKE, broken, in the mangled morning
My warning-spangled ceiling
Sharing the glare in my red-beast eyes

Tear off the grey sheet
Naked – yes! Trousers
Confess the need to hide

The snide, thought-spotted mirror
Mocks and prods: “Why not caper naked in the street
Beat your meaty schlock
Against shocked faces
Cry 'koo-koo-ya!' to the dawn
Lace your limbs around a friendly tree
Till, endly, comes the moral-mob
Lobbing nails into your eagle-flesh?”

What's left of meshed mind
Screams for SILENCE!
I begin my frantic ferreting

For cures

What cure shall it be today?

The cure of soft

And easy conversation

The cure of fists

Against some face

The cure of will-full flesh

Against my flesh

The cure of dulling dust

That lulls the brain

Or the cure

I have not tried

The cure that kills

Yes! Finally, finally kills!

How many forms have I assumed

Ripping clippings from my tattered past?

I've been the bastard-tout

Shouting bits of bittered boyhood

Tits and hungry cunts

That blunt the greed

Needing faces

Not as other people need

But as bases

Thankless planks – knitted as fittings

Fit for the steeped stage

Whereon my spindly rage

Will wind, flitter, then dwindle

Dying, finally, to the chitter of applause

On tour, New York Poets' Guild, New York

Summer 1969

Dilemma

for Andrée

SOMEBODY bungled at Simpsons'
When I ordered a catalogue-girl
They sent me a crutch, made of ivory
With an inlay of silver and pearl

And I gazed at it long and I saw how it shone
And I wanted it *faithful* to me
So, being alone, as I'd no one to phone
I removed my right leg at the knee

That evening I went to the theatre
To show everybody my JOY
But nobody named me a free man
They sighed and said, "Poor crippled boy!"

And the worst of it all is that Simpsons' recalled
And, instead of my elegant peg
I've a willowy blonde, who's not overly fond
Of caressing a man with *one* leg!

Barcelona November 1971

Arko
or
A Warning to the Demons

for my Mother, z.l.

Hark! Ye foul fiends of the Pit!
Spawn of bat and monkey shit!
Minions of the Fallen Foe
Psst! There's something you should know

Something that could give you pause
Gnash your fangs, clench your claws
Look! Up the Eastern sky
See your Doom come from On High

Over sea; over land
Yah's Word, steel-bright, in his right hand
Wingèd, Haloed, Spurred and Shod
Michael! Warrior of G-d!

November 2004