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Assifidity Days and Other Poems

Robert E. Rhodes

ASSIFIDITY DAYS - RHODES

ASSIFIDITY DAYS AND OTHER POEMS

By

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This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Committee of the University of New Mexico in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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PREFACE

This is not a statement of my poetics. I agree with D. H. Lawrence that such a statement should follow the fact of poetry, and necessarily if my poetry is just beginning to be poetry, as I feel it is, then any statement about it will be even more incomplete. I will attempt a somewhat accurate record of ideas which precede the fact of this group of poems, the ideas which developed as they were written, and finally some logical justification of whatever technique is or is not present in the writing.

I now believe at this end of this writing that there are three stages through which the poet and his poetry move in the accomplishment of any poem: stages in relation to <u>this</u> poet only, in development of <u>these</u> poems. Since we can agree that poetry is a highly personal statement (a dangerous thing in itself today), it is with poetry as personal statement that I would like to begin.

<u>The Poet and the Cause</u>

By cause I do not mean that which motivates the poet; I mean rather the conscious use of poetry by the beginning poet for his own ends. It is purely a personal expression and escapes to the realm of poetic statement only by accident.

It may employ rhyme well and do nice things with words but the feeling is personal, an expression of the individual self and as such usually direct in statement no matter how the words may be turned. This type of poetry is usually logical in tone, moralistic in ending and lacking any good use of image. It is, of course, didactic in the sense that it is telling rather than showing.

From Cause to Quest

And so the poet writes himself until dissatisfaction arises: not, to be sure, with his poetry but strangely enough with himself. A poet has to be sure of himself. His justification does not come from his poetry until much later. He is now at war with himself. How deep this struggle goes will also show up later in any real poetry. The statement now becomes a statement of problem or of many problems. The expression is more abstract and philosophic in tone. In his poems the struggle will take the form of a quest for new gods or old gods or any gods. He will, if he is honest, be satisfied with nothing and believe no one, least of all himself. He is still telling but now he is telling himself. Understand that this "he" is me. Some nice lines will begin to happen and he will mistake them for whole poems. At this point it is legitimate to lose faith in the technique of poetry as others have seen fit to practice it, and to try wild things he is certain have never been thought of before. And sometimes

From Cause to Effect

Dug so the book although, perhaps, perfectly
sitses: not to be some, although the book is perfectly
with himself. A book must be a work of art
section does not come from the book itself, but
now is not with himself. The book is a work of art
also work to later in this way, the book
comes a statement of thought in the book
pression is more specific and particular in form of the
beams the strength will cap. The form of a book for a book
or old book or old book. The work is produced by the
lied with nothing and pattern on each leaf in the
he is still feeling that now he is getting to the
that this "man" is, some kind of [illegible]
ing as will [illegible] the [illegible]
optics have seen it to [illegible] the [illegible] of the
is legitimate to use [illegible] of [illegible]
opters have seen it to [illegible] the [illegible] of the
he is certainly have been [illegible] [illegible]

From Cause to Effect

Dug so the book although, perhaps, perfectly
sitses: not to be some, although the book is perfectly
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ing as will [illegible] the [illegible]
optics have seen it to [illegible] the [illegible] of the
is legitimate to use [illegible] of [illegible]
opters have seen it to [illegible] the [illegible] of the
he is certainly have been [illegible] [illegible]

some of them are right.

The Poem as Poetry

The poet does not find himself but he does discover poetry. The problems of himself become the problem of the poem. He stops trying to prove himself and sets out to prove the individual poem. The nature of the statement now depends on the poem for direction. The image becomes more important, for the poet now is interested in showing what he feels. He becomes what he wishes to say and finds that it is being said for him. Possibility opens for him. The more things he says the more things offer themselves for saying. He writes not himself or within himself but through himself. This is poetic statement in which the thing that is said becomes the most important thing.

This has been so far a statement after the fact of the poems by way of definition of what I was trying to do as I see it now, but there was no such moving from stage to stage by a carefully wrought thesis plan. Yet strange as it seems, or not so strange if you consider the poems, I did set out to write poetry as poetry. Mr. Tedlock read some of the questy stuff and tactfully suggested that it was not poetry in the best expression of the word. From this point I did deliberately set out to find out what the best expression of the word could be for me, given whatever powers I possess and the will to write. Writing is the only way to discover how to write, it

The Poem as Poetry

The poet does not find ready-made the poem
poetry. The practice of poetry becomes the poem
poem. He strives rather to allow the poem
the instrument poem. The effort of the poem
on the poem for direction. Experience becomes
for the poet does not instantly
becomes apparent he attempts to use language
pain for him. Poetry's goal is not
eyes the more further other impressions
not planned or affirm impressions
poetic experience is motion its course
most important fight.

Life has been so part a strategy
the poem is not a [illegible]
pa a certainly amount [illegible]
or not so strange it [illegible]
after poetry is poetry. [illegible]
itself and [illegible]
post expression of the poet.
as if one of life [illegible]
pa not so. Every [illegible]
metre.

seems to me. How far I have gone I don't know but I do feel that I have moved in the right direction. I tried to allow my poems much freedom. There follows an attempt to define the principal elements of the freedom I tried to give to each poem.

The Idea

A poem does not set out to prove any one thing but only itself. Neither is a poem an arbitrary beginning and end of idea. What happens in a poem is governed only by poetic truth, which is by nature organic. "Organic" means to me that whatever happens must happen right there in the poem, in the part and in the whole. "What happens" is what the poem is about. Let me attempt the process. A hill... a many-sided hill...departs the land. Now if a poem is to be made from this beginning it is necessary to complete not the poem but the idea which I have started with. In my beginning poems, and this is all of a series, I would have turned the idea loose and allowed it to develop another idea. I tried to evolve from idea to idea, working within the limitation of the first idea but not afraid to throw it over if a stronger idea changed the direction of the poem completely.

The Matter of Meter

Another freedom I have attempted to allow these poems is in the meter. This is not to say that there is no meter

there, but that I have not consciously tried to follow any one meter in any one poem. This perhaps results in a certain monotony and sacrifices an ease of reading gained by a more formal structure with neatly tied variations in line and rhyme. This is not to say that I dislike or renounce forever a more formal structure or even the use of rhyme. But any development must come, I feel, after a development of ability to deal with ideas poetically, so that each poem has within it a legitimate challenge of any given idea. We cannot separate in reading a poem what is being said from the way in which it is being said, but in writing a poem one aspect or the other can dominate. In the case of these poems I deliberately put emphasis on what I wanted to say and too often let structure wag like the tail of a dog keeping the beat of my walk with ideas. The beat of the individual line tries to follow the beat of the idea. I do not agree with Auden that it is enough to want to play with words. Words are merely symbols for ideas and ideas are based on feeling. A poem seems to me to be a structure of feeling. A poet may explore feeling but he does not play with it. Feeling the poet brings into the game and the expression of feeling is the larger structure of any poem. This is the most distinctive aspect of the individual poet. I would like a more successful fusion of feeling and form, but I have been concerned in these beginning poems more with the exploration of feeling than with

the arrangement of feeling from its straight line into a happier circle.

Theme: Possibility related to Possibility

The best of these poems use idea to explore such aspects of divinity as can be explored and somewhat expressed. The nature of this divinity could be called the principal theme of the poems. I do not write of any direct pipeline to God that the poet has for his private use. The poet is not an expression of divine thoughts, but the material he works with, including the material of himself, is divine. It seems in the nature of divinity to be in a constant state of violation. But as a people more of us have been tossed out of Eden than at any time for a long while. Witness the lack of poets of any power. God did not cast us out; we, ourselves, have built material walls between the divine world and ourselves. These are the same walls man is always tearing down, walls that tie the individual mind, walls that kill the better meaning of poetry, walls that limit possibility. We are only so divine as the world that breaks through to us. The world expresses its divinity in its inarticulate yet perfect expression of its functions. These functions are usually opposites. Just as in the highest love there is no need for words, so in the divinity of nature. The poet does not pluck leaves and flowers and press them into lines, but he does catch the spirit of natural beauty with its opposites and create

a human beauty which reflects this relationship. The ultimate poem, because of this, is always positive. "Positive" is not necessarily optimistic but positive by virtue of containing opposite and irreducible forces such as are found in nature. The divinity of nature becomes balance in the poem--not contrived, not deliberate, but an honest expression of possibility in a relationship to all other possibility.

The fullest poem contains the widest range of possibility. This is not to say that a poem may not be complete. Most good poems are more complete than the reader and perhaps more than the writer. Divinity is not opposition of possibility in structure but the balance that exists in these relationships. So theme in these poems becomes inextricably involved with method.

The Poet and the University

If we grant that the poet and his poem still exist, we must also admit that as a force in society his function has become very peripheral. There was never much money in poetry, but the function of the poet has been more highly regarded than it is now and this was enough to keep the practice of poetry respectable. The poet writes now for other poets and other dealers in words. It is to this group that he goes for his identity.

The university finds the writer withdrawing to its walls for protection and for identification. There is in-

creasing recognition of this relatively new situation in the ranks of the professional scholar. This has been in most cases de facto recognition. After the poet or writer has proven himself he is offered a "place" in some creative department. He usually becomes that department for good or ill. (He will admit privately that writing can't be taught.) This is not the writer I am concerned with here, but rather the would-be writer. That one who may or may not be a writer, who, recognized or not, is in the university. Bohemians are not feasible any more, if they ever were. Few writers make a living from their writing. Why the university? The writer feels he can always teach until somewhere a ship leaves port that may come in for him. Where does any problem arise?

The university is a place of competition: student against student, idea against idea, which is fine for the development of scholars and the investigation of fact. The writer uses fact and certainly ideas, but he does not use them in the same way that the scholar uses them. They are material for the fiction of his art, and the art of his fiction does not depend on how well he knows them but in the use he makes of them. The truth of an idea or the importance of a fact is established by authority, by those scholars that precede the would-be one. The writer in the university has no such authority. No matter how good the poem of the past was, I cannot use it for proof of my own. If I do, there are nasty

terms by which I am called. I cannot imitate the use of idea or fact. The poet's only authority is in the beginning himself and finally his work and any justification it makes or does not make. The poet does not set out to prove fact. He is involved in the production of something in which fact is necessary but incidental. I don't think anyone will disagree with these distinctions. The fact that an artist sees differently does not mean that he is an inferior scholar (as I have often been made to feel) but that he is not a scholar at all. If the poet and other artists are to be allowed to exist in the university as well as outside it, then it must be as a poet, or whatever they must be. They should not be allowed to do a creative thesis and in every other aspect of their work be expected to be scholars. This I feel has been so in my case, more painfully so in undergraduate work.

I believe that the artist can give something to the university, but only as he is recognized on his own terms as an artist, just as the scholar has been recognized on his. All this may violate some fundamental principle of education or other--it should--but until the artist is treated as an artist you will not only have poor scholars but poor artists as well. Instead of a mutual sufferance by the poet and the university, perhaps a pact could be signed by which each could gain, each discharge better his community responsibility.

ASSIFIDITY DAYS

There was a time upon a time
When kids wore assifidity bags
Hung on a string around the neck
Especially if they had grannies
To whom there was no question
But that assifidity kept off colds

We wear them still to be sure
But are more subtle about it now
The smell alone is strong enough
To keep those away with germs
That might infect our thoughts

When at last spring came
As it always did back then
Off came the bags and friends
Who had somehow missed the joy
Came slowly back to us
Though we who wore them
Never noticed the smell
And had to make our friends
Among those who could stand us

And times are much the same
Except that now-a-days
No one takes off the bag
When spring sets in for sure
We go on year in and out
In the same circle of smells
And being quite used to it
Wonder why others shy away
Looking back so strangely
We rub our bags and nod
Come winter they'll die like flies.

ACROSS METAL BRIDGES

Across metal bridges
Each thin and abrupt
The long file pushes
Who can resist it
Who would want to
But share the fear
Despair with the best
Are we not all so shaped
Ere we come boldly out
From the sinning sun
That mirrors our glory
And the metal taste
That mixes with the birdrops
Sorted by our hands
Gliding along the rails
That bridge earth to earth
And covers all our sunning
The moving rows that reach
Beyond the eye's intention
To some hollow place
Just below the heart
A little bottomed pit
Where things hit
And bounce straight out
Well not straight out not that
But out quite fast enough
Never deflected into chasms
Once filled with family wine
These stand dark and empty
With a dank and musty smell
And offer no refuge from glare
Not in that old crossing
That stretches out before
And lies so much behind
Where each must walk alone
To be narrowed by rails
Our new-made paths laid
That one may go by one
And never a face to see
Narrowing always narrowing
And the dark rush current
Crossing ever our minds
Hushing under our steps
Carried by the crowd
In a misty moving fog
That merges into shadows

That fall beyond the bridge
And yet the night
Has moonlight still
And stars have no shadows
Save one that reaches
Out beyond the sun.

THE RAW-WIND EVENINGS

The raw-wind evening
Strips my running pain
As I bear homeward
The nightly sacrifice
For the midnight mass
My ready burning soul

Sickly, unsure soul
While dead-white faces
Guard my slanted steps
And compulsively shout
Until I join the song
It is an old dirge
My heart knows well

An old yearning stirs
Until I lead the singing
Flames burn out my tongue
And my soul sings on

YOUR ENTIRETY I COMMEND

To that poor fool
Who would shout down the wind
To that unknowing knower
Your mind, soul and ass commend

That mad railer
Who stirs the stars up
Nor lets old dogs
Lie at their ease
Let him scratch your fleas.

That hungry souled man
Who sows a universe
With uneatable burrs
And forgets to hoe them
Your plants, let him grow them.

And when the mess is made
And all the world is hell
Standing in together's shade
You'll see that all is well.

LOVE LYRIC

My sweet Ann good-bye
We will not meet again
When the moon is high
Under the big-armed tree
We will not meet to kiss
Nor warm each the other
When the wind blows cold
We will not sit on my coat
And draw figures out
From the night-flying clouds
Sweet Ann simpleness is past
All simple joys and dreams
We are grown too wise to love
And will perhaps forget.

SIN-STREAM

To know so soon
Such old, old joys
As is hinted
Drove us out
The gates of paradise
Beside this stream
Whose cool waters
Divided this garden
Moving to stiller pools
That wait and hold
All such dreams

Eden was worth it
And passing on
Garden to garden
Will we not afterward
Call this divine

Sweet stream run on
That I may sit
Eating an apple
Drowning my sins
In your running song
Until it's time
To leave once more

IMPRESSION PURE AND SIMPLE

And I grew soundless
And all falseness
Fell at my feet
And I stood bare
Bather in pure feeling
And no question was
Of god or of man
World and time were one

All vain striving
No meaning then
All hope and despair
Were as nothing

In that simplicity
No unknowing
For this was truth
Flowing warm and sure
Whose memory remained
Long after feeling
Had grown cold

ALTAR PIECE

Pretending to be in a sneeze
I quickly utter this prayer
To whatever gods that are

I alone have faith in you
Have mercy oh my gods on me
Granting at last some peace
This godless world is hell
Where no man walks in fear
Can you not once more
Cast down some small stones
Or a light plague or so
That I may lead these children
Through parted seas of sin
Name Me to save their souls
Let me lead them christ-up
The humble path of rightness
A famine for this multitude
Of fat, leering faces
Give me fire to burn some
And the smell that goes with hell
Take life again my gods!
That we who would preach
Can have, once more, our power

I wipe my nose amen
My prayer, too short, is done
I hope no one saw me.

THE WITNESS

Who shall say
When the saying's done
Who had the right of it
Who can say truly
It was he or she
That brought destruction
I was there
And I would not say
I stood looking
And I knew not
And when it was done
I still stood and looked
Knowing no more than before.
Then they came asking
Asking till I ran
And they dragged me back
Only to ask again
--Was it him that done it?
--Did you say you saw
--Why won't you tell us
--You're in bad trouble
But I only said again
I do not know
And one got mad
And hit my face
And I cursed him
And he hit again
--Easy there now easy
--Tell us once again
So once again I told
When I came
They were dancing
Dancing on the rocks
Dancing to laughter
--Who was it laughing?
They both seemed to
Their laughter made
A crazy kind of music
--Don't be silly now
Yes music in the air
And they danced to it
And they still danced
When they stepped off
Dancing in the air
--Let me hit him again
--Had you seen them before

Never before dancing
--I mean together at all
No not ever before
I saw them come
Each one another way
--Where were you then
There where I sit
--What do you do there
Just sit and watch
--Watch what you fool!
The water and the wind
--You say you saw them
Yes from up there
--Why did you come down
To see them better
--How did they act
They started to dance
--He means before that
He was singing
--And what about her
Just walking funny
--Funny, how do you mean
With her head back
And her hair blowing
--Then what happened
They started to dance.

HUEY, OUR HOPE

A new sound is on the air
Fighting empty souls
Fish thirsty for the sea
Pluck at its strings
While Huey harps on soap.

What absolution can clean
The crust off small minds
Yet the sound is there
Does it not show merit
The rising voice of a hag
Would not be so sweet
Call Huey to set it right.

We once went out
In a bouncing boat
But the shore choked us
And we all were drowned
The sea-- let it sing
In our sea-shell hearts
That we may hear
In blood-running notes
Our sweet song of death.

The sea, let us sing it
Blood to drying lands
Salt to make again
That great false-fish
Who would not swim in
But always out to drown.

There are at least depths
Where sea-gods yet live
A life somewhat unmolested
Not torn to pieces
Forced to walk rotting
Where no birds fly
Thrown at last on heaps
To mingle and to die.

A head grows between two legs
Comes out piece by piece
Each fixing where it can
Those old gods laugh
Then fall apart in tears.
Our tears run freely
Those now our only sea
Just deep enough to drown
And Huey builds a boat.

ALL THINGS COME

My mistress being old
Wants to marry me
I that she so scorned
While with open arms
She welcomed the rest
I who stood and waited
For an occasional kiss
Now have the prize
The chalice wine (but no)
A piece to gather dust
And speak of old lovers
My faithful wait finished
I will wed her soon
And take a cosy cottage
Making all peace for her
Then when she is happy
And the time is right
I will reveal to her
My new and younger mistress
Who has some honey left
For an old bee like me
And then will we see
How my late mistress
Now my wife takes joy
In long lonely evenings
Spent waiting for one
To condescend to come.

FRUITION

There is no plucking
That wild fruit
Tho it cover the tree
Tho it falls to rot
There is no eating it
But I must walk hungry
Thru flowering Eden
Crying inside for food
Savoring dipping boughs
Heavy with ripe cherries
With full skinned apples
And soft golden peaches.

The farmer pulls a peach
And gives it to me
I hold it soft and light
The fruit and the seed
Its smell is sweet
My lips are upon it
My teeth poised to bite
But will never close
For under the skin it moves
And in fear I drop it.

The unseen worm of life
Was there under the skin
Waiting to be set free
One bite would have done it
Would have set him out
Crawling upon the earth
I am not the one
To set him free.

And tho the tree
Hang heavy with fruit
I will let them grow
And fall at last to rot
Choosing to follow bees
To great hollow trees
To seek out their honey
And smoke them away
And crawl to the hole
Thrusting in hungry hands
And eating bees and all
Knowing I will be sick
As I have been before
And go away unsatisfied
With drops on my chin
Sweet sickening milk
Of the fruit in bloom.

THE HOUSE OF SORROWS

Sad by the doorstep sits
An old shapeless woman
With tear-colored hair
In a timethin dress
She seems to be asleep
Yet her lips move
In some senseless talk
She hears our steps
And sticks out her cup
Her eyes look beyond us
A dime should be enough
They should bathe her
Watch that bad board
This is the first one
I have ever seen
There aren't many left
This one passed for a house
There's not much to it
Probably a small group
What's this device here
Let me check the guide
That was the pulpit
Where the leader stood?
He was called preacher
There is in existence
One of the books used
That of their god's law
Yes, the word of god
The poor fools thought
They had his very words
At least they were happy
Happy in divine stupidity
Yes function was served
There are still some
None that will admit it
Most now admit freely
To be put away quietly
The State forgives them?
No sin is too great
Is there no far place
Where worship is done
In the hills for a time
It's said they lasted
But not now of course
It's time to go along
We've extra cards to run
Why should we have...

Careful now no questions
Those who rule know best
I'm happy to do penance
To regain all purity
We could be like those
Who knelt on these floors
Stateless, empty lives
Watch that bad board
She sits there still
What did she mutter
I wasn't paying attention
I could have sworn
She said, "Forgive them Lord."
Look at the time
We must make haste
One is never late
In our lovely state.

I TAKE THE WATCH

I take the watch
The sea falls behind
In a trail of moonlight
The rest is dark
Save where our light
Sets sea-stars glowing
All the rest is dark
And dimly seen
Only the moving waves
Shifting shadows
That rise and fall
We are somehow smaller
In the sea and sky
Blended into blackness
Clouds hiding the moon
That slips out again
Making the sea silver
Making us large again
Sending down a ladder
That ripples to the sky.
Then the stars come out
And we swim through them
We set our course
From star to star
The universe is ours
The sun comes up
And we fall back
After such a night
Dawn comes too soon.

THE SONG OF PASSING

In pieces and together
We severally approach
And pass and look
And sometimes nod
Each with a finger
Tapping his chest
Or thrust in the air
Not one is certain
But shouts "saved" or "damned"
In solo and in chorus
The piper playing softly
The same tune to both

Some push ahead painfully
Others walk a little aside
Wearing a protective smile
Most step very carefully
In the steps of those ahead
And some fall behind
Always with an excuse
Between his nimble notes
The piper seems to smile

The woods are filled
With little bits of laughter
No one really goes
Into the woods for laughing
Only the shadows dance and sing
The shadows of the trees
Only the wind speaks
Murmuring through the leaves
All the rest is but reply
To the piping of the pipe

The song of passing
Of sweet bye and bye
Of gray-green fields
And shapes of sky
Sounds of high laughter
And finally of tears
The piper playing softly
The same tune to it all.

THE BREAKING OF THE WIND

It happened before my time
And perhaps even before yours
Yet they speak of it still
In those more free moments
When too much wine is drunk
Or Benedictine or brandy
Eye fixes on eye
And a smile begins
Then you can be sure
Someone will speak of it
Or make a sly allusion
Which is just as good
If you're in on the joke.

But let me tell you
If you can stand the smell
Of old jokes
It was at that last eating
When the wine cup passed
When the master at last
Stood and asked for silence
He would make a prayer
So he prayed to god
Asking for some sign
That they might know
The meal was divinely blest
That the work was done
They had set out to do
When he finished all waited
And this is the joke

Somewhere the wind broke
With a loud rushing sound
As if the heavens ripped
Heads came up in wonder
And turned at last to Judas
But Judas would not be blamed
And so the cup was passed
And not one would admit it
Until at last He spoke up
Saying let there be no shame
Pass me the cup
Mine is the blame to bear
And not one said no
But let him bear it.
Judas told the Romans
Not for the thirty pieces

But to rid himself of blame
And they came and took him
Letting him bear his cross
As he had borne the blame
And he bore it bravely
For the guilt was not his
One who takes up the cup
Must bear it unto death
This is the price of sacrifice
This the sign of blessedness.

SEA AND OTHER WALLS

Seawalls make me sad somehow
Standing at the end of going
Why should the sea deny us?
These waves move so cruelly
Eating the earth beneath our feet
Chewing it up into sand and salt
Chewing the seagrass to spit it out.

The water floating dreamlike
Bringing life to afterlife
Deeper seas to deeper dreams
The deeper dreams of death.

Too thick to stand between
Too great a dream for living
My feet will not walk there
But my soul cries after it
Cruel arms to hold a child.

The salt that sings of tears
This seawall holds us both
This space standing between
Bearing no frail flowers
Each holding just enough
Running always in similar veins
Without the salt, without the blood.

AFTERTHOUGHT

In the earlymorning sorrow
Of my late halfinished dream
I made the same resolves to stop
But as you see I could not
We are both of the same dream
Meeting otherworlds to stare.

I cut my heart in neat halves
That we each may make communion
On these little glasstabletops
Provided for that purpose.
Do you take salt?

Yes, I taste it too
There's a gallish taste
It's a flavor of the season
The season of mating flies
The females spreading eggs
Until you can't make a phrase
Without finding one on it

But where was I dear
Oh yes I ask you here
To offer you this ring
Note the size of the stone
Won't your friends all weep
In the purest of greenjoy
Here too my book of checks
Ready to prove your goodness
And there my long green car

Let us not speak of my heart
It is a matter of the season
Not to speak of the respect
Due to all the dead
The taste of gall will pass

Come let us speak of love
Hearts are out of season
You may fill the void
With your own sweet-heart
Yousay youvenone to give!
Give me back my ring!
No wait, youkeepit love
But one ring must do

That stone will ease the taste
Of my poor bitter heart
Is it not written
Two may live
As well as one
Without a heart.

Let us seal our lovely doom
In the dying of the day
With one sweettasting kiss
Well then no matter
The season is a sorry one
For this and other arts
Let me get the check.

MI AGORA

Plastic bosoms
Six in all
Hang in rhythm
On my wall.
Maidenform
Oh maidenform
Oh Madness
Which knowest not
How to love men
like men!
I fretted then
Sighed, wept
Was distracted;
Had neither rest
nor counsel--
Not in calm groves,
Not in games and music
Nor in pleasures
Of the bed
Nor in books or poesy.
Madness all madness!
Thus I came
To Carthage--
But was too late
The salt was there
There in the blood.
My soul was barren.
Plastic bosoms
Six in all
Hang in rhythm
On my wall
Maidenform
Oh Maidenform!

A VISION

Heaven above crosses her legs
A glimpse of the divine is mine
Standing in open-mouthed awe
Looking up the skirt of the sky
Billowing in one great hoop
With clouds around her knees
Damn, damn, damn those clouds
I, her most eager lover
Stand with my arms upraised
Waiting to be transported
To the highest realm of love
Love to make a giant of me
That she will cower before.

The long legs of love stretch
Coming together in heaven
Those threads of spun-gold
Weave into a calling nest
To hold me through eternity
Had I but wings to fly
But I stand fast to earth
And only my eyes have wings.

She uncrosses her legs
But the clouds grow thick
I beg for revelation
And she gives me rain
The thunder of her scorn
Shakes me into fear
I seek rocks to hide under.

I deny I ever loved her
It was heavenly infatuation
But I daily fear her ire
That she will drop in fire
To claim the love I promised
I have never seen her face
But I know her wrath will fall
In judgment down on me.

Oh that I had been born
Eyeless under the earth
Or in the sea's chambers
That I never could have seen
The divinity of the skies
And so unseeing know not
The wrath that's sure to fall
In judgment on us all.

THE ACKNOWLEDGED GREAT

The acknowledged great
Are followed close after
By long pressing lines
Who trade in greatness
Taking from the master
Those necessary tools
To change their weakness
Into seeming strength

What poor paradox that
They who never made a line
Nor truly sought to read one
Should so line up to feed

And once again the miracle
Of fishes and of loaves
Filling the teeming sea
With leaching eely mouths
Reaching mealy mouths
That seek after the bread
Of their own late breeding
Leaving the divine untouched

One who aspires to be so followed
Should watch not to be swallowed
Up at the last by his own line
Eating the dying false flesh

Christ himself it is said
Brought his own lunch along
Such a thing if done today
Would be a minor miracle

The lines are longer now
Behind the acknowledged great
Pushing into the setting sun
With baskets overflowing

There is a hunger yet unmet
That will not be satisfied
With mere loaves and fishes

ADAM REVISITED

That subtle serpent
Who stings us not
But stares us into sinning
Has fixed me fast
With deathy eyes
And I sway along with her

We do a dance
A Hindu would admire
In obedience to
Yet unvoiced desire
But so well said
By the nodding head
Or a hip's praying

She dances to my mouth
To grant a kiss
And I am hers
Upclose her eyes
Change to promise
Of impure bliss
And I impatient
Clutch her to me
Her forked tongue
Plays on my throat
She slides up to me
Speaking in my ear
That one word
I have so longed to hear
Soft and sweet, "love"
And at the saying
Changes into Eve
All grace and beauty

I stand confounded
But still she sways
And I am reassured
Once more her lips
Move forward to mine
And when it comes
I hardly feel the sting.

I CHOSE AS A BRIDE

I chose as a bride
A daughter of the night
Whose black tresses
Were blown by the wind
Half around the world
And in her arms
Such pure delight
As only darkness gives
Then did I unseeking
Find the daughter of dawn
Who gave me sight
Making my blood move
Up to my pea-pod brain
And back to my hands
That move out to stroke
In anger and in love
The nippled promise of love
Warm, sweet, honey pure
That grows bitter
And back to sweet
How many times she
Had saved her jewel
From a certain fall
Only to lose it at last
On some dark street
After a few beers
Or maybe cheap wine
Because she lacked the cash
To lose it on better stuff
And so was I born
In a wicked dream
Whose waking runs
Into a darker dream
And so do we die
To know no better
The darkness from the light
Blending and shifting
Without distinction
Into an endless day

I CHOSE US A BRIDE

I chose us a bride
A gardener to tend the night
Whose black fingers
Have seized the moon
Now their times are
And back to smoke
Half stone, half
Moth, sweet, moved mute
Are unlighted thoroughly love
In sugar and in love
Then move out to bitter
And back to we meet
Up to us bee-bird plain
Inside us blood love
Who dare no light
Find the gardener of dens
Then did I measure
Are only darkness stays
Such bite certain
And in our arms
Left storms our molten
Here flown in the ring
Whose black fresses
A gardener to the night
I chose us a bride

EVEN AS THE EVENING

Even as the evening
Starts up around us
And the idle swan
Breaks into his song
We make our various ways
Into the shining chapel
There to give our thanks
To kneel and make prayer
That we were even born
And can hope for death
Some losing their pride
Have the grace to die
But we come here
And each night receive
Our dose of false pride
Just enough for a day
Our eyes fix on the altar
And we cease to think
He of the true faith
Never has to think
It is all written
And each night is played
Under the soft lights
Come fill my cup
With sweet balm
Grant me that calm
That comes of drinking
And yet we read
Of some who claim
To have been driven
At last to soberness
Pity their poor souls
And pray they soon
Will come again to us
Let us now compose
The hour is at hand
Let each now stop
Any activity of mind
And in faith all blind
Thankful for our grace
The grace to forget
While I turn on the set.

SPRING SONNET

When earth abounds in death
Or lies a passive woman
Who seeks to wed her
Who desires to caress
Her snow covered breast
Or mourn her passing

Snow and mud mix cold
Hold no joy for walkers
But then few now walk
Or really care for seasons

In spring, the romantic
Is at last renewed
Yet who will admit
To being a romantic
For the practical man
Whose only rule is use
One damn day is good
As good as any other

In spring is pain
But pain of chance
And death has possibilities
Beyond the pain of birth

Poetry out of poets
Will be born again
To sing again of spring
The fresh wonder of all
The mate-seeking flesh
The soul-filling urge
That was in first creation.

THE THEME IS YOUTH

The theme is youth
Pushed by the wind
So leaps this love
That finds so little
To feed its hunger
With such a wind
And yet goes out
Too quick too eager
Or finds at last
An old dead stump
And feeds on it
Until all fire dies.
There is sadness in it
And yet gladness too
In the cruel gentleness
On the barren fields
Set up for barren burning
Despite all carefulness
A young fire will start
And leap the walls
Hungry for the world
Pushed on by the wind
The ever pushing wind
And other flames
Will leap after it
Half a world will blaze
To come at last
Back to the barren place
And in bitterness burn
Burn itself to ashes
What field is this
That sets us into life
Filled with hungry fire
That calls us back
When the whole world
Is within our grasp
And gently puts us out
As a child to bed
Is laid at darkness
There is no darkness
When we light the world
With our hungry flames
Oh little world come here
Let us burn together
Convolving on mutual axes

While we stroke your cheek
Your tired old cheek
With our young green flame
That encircling wall
Is not so tall old mother
Let us warm together
And heed the pushing wind
Sweet mother bless us all
Feed our young hungry fire
For surely it is time
Your lips are fire
That light my soul
And my heart, my love
Burns as bright as yours
Sweet wind move me
Let my burning light up
The empty-clouded sky
For we come burning
In fire and in love
A green-flamed lover
Seeking the oldest love
Who will feed our hunger
Before the wind takes us
Who will hold us close
In those old firm arms
And teach us how to love
The wind is pushing
Pushing on our flame
Up and over the wall
And there the mother
The mother-lover waiting
To teach the latest fire
Of father-adam's loins
How to dance the world
To set us free once more
In green-dancing fire
To slip in many hearts
And light once more
On love's ashy altars
Some small green flame
To set aglow once more
The empty turning sky
Our arms reach out
Hungry to embrace
Our heaven sent eve
She eludes even still
Until the pushing wind
Lifts her to our arms

And we burn together
Making a spreading green
On the horizon of the west
The old glory of day
Burns in a new dawn
Your lips, sweet sun are fire
That light at last my soul.

HOLLOW HEARTED SHIPS

These rib-bones
Jut up from the sand
Fingering waves
Play on them
And they laugh
Without knowing how

I might have sailed
In such a ship
Were this my day
To lands unseen
Stood like a Greek
First sighting Troy

My hand guiding her
As she breaks each wave

Or through floating ice
My long Norse beard
Caked with sea and salt
Seeking new worlds
Or some new face

In the islands, girls!
Who smile and beckon
Waving over me
A palm branch
To relieve the heat

Around the Horn!
I can't count the times
Only my iron will
Keeping her afloat
And the men nod
Respect in their eyes

The tide is nearly full
And the ship ribs sink back
Within the breast of the sea
How many times has it sunk?
I have stood much too long
I must be careful of the sun
You see I freckle so easily

PEPPI: DIES

The weeping is past
And the old women
Are going away
Folding their shawls
Laughing in the dawn
Each with a coin for their work

These women that wept
Peppi must have slept
With some of them
He's paid his last
But in those days
He never had to pay
That came much later
After the bulls failed
And the blood stopped
Of being old

The weeping is past
And Peppi is stretched
The long length of death
The weeping women
Can still be seen
Making their ways
Into the coming dawn

And some such as I
Cry not paid to cry
Mourning for ourselves
Seeing one who was great
Should so poorly die

I kiss his forehead
Searching the faces
That hold his eyes
For some last word

Sweet mother pray for me
That there is some dawn
I cannot stay to watch
I will kill a bull for him
When the sun is low
Pray sweet mother pray
That dawn won't be long

T.W. YES

It seems you're always leaving
Or yearning to return
When the days dog you to death
By coming and coming again

It's time to find new faces
Or seek those old ones
Which gave to you some comfort

You have no place to go
Neither back nor out
That simple strength
You had for leaving
Now has left you
In a foreign place
Which gives no joy
Nor is fit for dying in

You will never leave
Though you walk forever
And you will never go back
Though those arms open
Folding you to milkless breasts

You will return a stranger
And only mutual memories
Meet and caress for a time

But you and those old arms
Know you hold nothing
But lovely, empty dreams

The land is strange
Dreams fall fast apart
And you are left standing
Staring into strange eyes

Though you do not speak
Each of you will know
And turn away to hide
The dying of your hopes
In a flood of empty words

And once again you'll go.

LET ME MAKE MYSELF CLEAR

Let me make myself clear
That we may see through
To some meaning that abides
In both you and me
Let us say some things
Our eyes have said already
I wish you no harm
But offer you my arm
That we may walk up
In the moon's soft light
To some unseen place
Not to hide ourselves
From any common view
I will not speak of love
Till other things are said
Prospects of old import
Set up before this life
Before this moon went out
Do not look so wild about
Before our flesh is wed
We must come to life
I did not bring you here
To sit and weep for home
See the earth cries too
Its tears rise and fall
You turn at last to me
But I am colder than the moon
My arms will not warm you
Come there is yet light
I will walk you home
No I will not come again
The moon was not big enough
And all the rest
Is smaller still
I see me in your eyes
And am afraid of you
The mistake was mine
Let us not repeat it
But pass each his way
Ere the moon rise again
To tempt us upward
Take this ring quickly
We'll make our vows
Tomorrow in the daylight
A kiss to seal our fear
Until moonlight do us part,

IN THE MINOR MEANS

In the minor means
Of the minor rhymer
Let us all raise
A cry of high praise
The great bug-a-boo
Has turned tail down
And head-long runs
For the tall bushes
Let us make our peace
And chant him out
Here birdy birdee
Come sing for us
See there his eyes
His sweet wild eyes
Hide your sticks
Behind your backs
Here birdy birdee
There now come out
Who threw that stone!
Let us show discretion
What a nice birdee
How well you can chirp
Such pretty feathers
There now! Get him!
Now see he got away
Where is he now
Did he not fly up
Birdee where are you
Birdee won't you sing
There! up in the tree
Now birdee do come down
Don't pout like that
We never meant a thing
Not one feather
Would we ever touch
Let us hear one song
Will you be quiet!
He didn't mean it
Birdy we all love thee
See now he heeds me
He moves to come down
He--Birdy stop that!
Did he get you sir?
What fowls are these
That leave the land

To nestle in the trees
We can wait here
Until he dies and falls
Then beat him hard
And pretend he cries.

IN THE LONG WINTER

In the long winter
That precedes us
Into the spring of sorrow
Will you not walk
Here by my side
There is room enough
To walk together
Think together
Of the warm winds
That wait in the wing's shadows
To cheer our unknowing
Have we not said
In soft tones of yearning
How long is this cold floor
There could be no colder
Not behind us or before
In time of no season
And yearning screams
Echoing silently
Down dark shades of light
Broken now and then
By some half-open door
Whose strange promise
Makes fear into a joy
Breaking our shaft of light
Until we are safely past
This is a time of night
When dawn glimmers dimly
An unsought improbability
Why do you stop and stare
That door is like the rest
Come back into the light
There is but darkness
And no dawn will come
Must I move on alone
Even now the wind rises
And chills me unto death
It is warm this wind!
My love the wind blows warm!
But that door is closed
And I uncertainly stand
The light grows bright
And the wind blows warm
My yearning is torn in two
My cold spirit melting

Runs down to the floor
Looks once at the dawn
And slips under the door
Seeking after my heart
Our yearning stops and turns
Back to the rising flame
From whence it came.

IMPORTANT!

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