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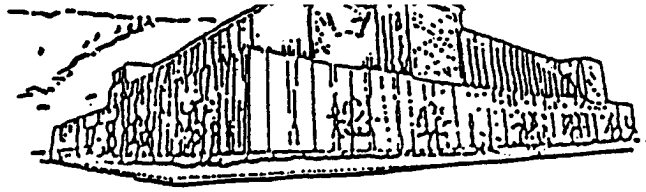
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News of the Blazing World

Poems

by

Joshua Corey

B.A. Vassar College, 1993

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

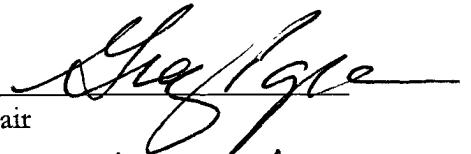
for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

The University of Montana

1999

Approved by:


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Dean of the Graduate School

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the magazines in which some of these poems first appeared, sometimes in different versions:

Gulf Coast: “Metamorphoses,” “The Woods”

Nebraska Review: “Forms Assumed By Suffering During Sleep” (formerly titled “Jean Valjean”), “Planets of a Cold Spring”

Poet Lore: “Spring Snow”

Puerto del Sol: “New Jersey Elegy”

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Then, said she, it must necessarily follow, that this living, self-moving body gives a spirit motion, and not that the spirit gives the body, as its vehicle, motion. You say very true, answered they, and we told you this before. Then the Empress asked them, of what forms of matter these vehicles were? They said they were of several different forms; some gross and dense, and others more pure, rare, and subtle.

—Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle

The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World

ELEGY

When the moon comes into it, as moons must,
it is a gibbous rider, skimming high night

to cut a swath of needles through the million lights
that well and fall into the sea. Fire builds like weight

in cooling limbs, flinch, a shudder of slick grass. What lives
is light and oil, chambered surfaces, faces stamped out of wax—

the lazy violent smear of color born in the body,
the still heart not quite clear in the mind.

NEWS OF THE BLAZING WORLD

Letter opener, apples, india ink.
Men with heads like goats

are shivering in the yew trees. Now night,
the polar time, crowns yellow grass

with frost. Banners of black smoke
in blue evening, beneath blue

and parching stars. The Lady in rapture
imprisoned by ice, *by the light of her beauty,*

sees the aurora borealis of
the coming world. Behind her

the faces of frozen men, oarblades
shining in livid snow. Death

loiters within limbs, in the hard
cores of chill. Behind her curtain,

a woman writing this: *In the meantime*
the Empress. . . making and dissolving

several worlds in her own mind—
The boat bubbles down in freezing water

to the navigator's table of objects.

A JEST FALLS FROM THE SPEECHLESS CARAVAN

Love is a Spaniard of the mind, not quite exotic.

He has some secrets. His glozing head

bows beneath waves, his vocabulary plateaus

at sea level, in a desert cleft. He keels

into salt flats while blood poppies open in the sky.

In a monody of caravels, sail by sail,

he counts his lusts. Carillon bells

sing out from the mission in Havana.

The soldiers' casques spark silver, they wind the hill.

His liege the old world is hugging its knees

in a vascular garden, cynosure of dried roses.

He crouches beneath basalt, in the hypogeum

of virtuous pagans. Sapphic stanzas

gleam like doubloons in the gloom,

sonnets combust briskly. Shades stand around

by the runnels of blood and talk—

She and he—he stood between she, she

and she stood apart from me—he kept me

from my he. Where plates shear together

a great quake. Gunmen spring brittle

from the earth, blaring *down, get down.*

The falling body is a biplane's shadow.

He swings high over the greensward

of the Gulf, mute discoverer of corposants
blueing the mast. Land, land. He prowls
past the margins of liberty, he is bound.
Whom shall I say he loves as his heart splays
into applauding water? It is the joke of desire.
It is the moon's Chinese fan. The ship's screw
churns in the earth, the tenement stands awake.
In a Brooklyn window he is tiny and charismatic
and smoking the laugh of a freezing man.

NEWS OF THE BLAZING WORLD

This is the church of aspartame,
caffeine, nicotine, and winter through

that window, stripping branches bare.
Somewhere bells: order up. The man

studies his smoke, wisping up—
when is it no longer smoke, when

is smoke air, and for that matter
when is cancer flesh, cells gone

greedy in one's own inner lining,
the velvet blush of lungs fed blood

and cinder. He looks at the crossword,
four letters for the biggest organ,

writes *skin* in blue pen. He is contained
by his skin as the air contains

the smoke, as the diner contains
the voices and human smells, a pocket

of warmth in gray sealed November.
He sees moonscape in the street, washed

in originless light. He imagines a world
as a king might, scientifically,

from kingdom to phylum to species,
from general death to the life of the concrete.

AGAVE AGAPE

The carnival imprint of your body
wrestled in the bed, hands cached
in the pillows—I see you at the center

of the sun's knot, I taste clear ink
coursing off the lithograph of your skin.
The afternoon punts us into recess and dream,

the air trapped in ice winces
a kettle's sharp song. Pause for identification—
the bedposts there and there, the shore

of sheets twisted. Intellectual dust coats
my slippers on the floor. We are forced
on each other like black patches of tar,

essential carbons of lung, enslaved
by the barbed, luxurious vein.
I break the skin of a peach—

we are alone in the orchard
with the magnolia trees' nativity
of snow: white placenta, peel:

little pants and echoes. The throat's
a clear and ringing well
in a desert of century ponds.

LIGHT HORSEMAN

The dawn's withheld secrets are sharp
hoofprints in the ice. The slatted barn.

Wood the color of years in the dark—
minutes breathe, bovine. The boy

lights a Coleman's star-white flare.
Strikes straw, strikes dirt: the effort of silence.

Light on wood, upflung rafter shadows,
horses hunched in three stalls, cows in four,

whole and aglow as Italian nudes.
His orange burnt forearm, raised

attitude of search, unpraying,
the lifted lamp cuts a globe

in the air's manure. Filaments of hay
gleam, the boy's own breath forms

and dissolves the body's January.
Heavy as snow, blinded,

he moves toward some goal—
a saddle, a silver milkpail,

a faraway lens, glinting
like the disc of frost shattered

on his bedroom window by the sun—
no one to see it—the fading morning

brittle as smoke in air. Hoofbeats. The lamp
dark on its hook glows bold in the day.

NEWS OF THE BLAZING WORLD

We climb the autumn world
into the yearning essence of bone,

retreat into spent brass shells
found by dead fires in deep woods.

Books surround our armchair.
Weak-eyed we go pleasing

through leaded glass windows.
I grow old, I grow old. We grow

as weeds of mind, piercing earth's
neglected slants of color.

We fly by night, spirits hissing
out of dry mouths into the radiant

map of the past, and wake
in steam, joints searing where

the manacles touched. We wear air
for a time, as light hides

for one moment in a spill of paper
before it flares into aorta and ash.

FORMS ASSUMED BY SUFFERING DURING SLEEP

At first it is almost a sweetness—
the hard arms slack on the armrests,

the chair settling under his weight,
the dying fire, and the egg gleam

of an eye glimpsed between
twitches of the lids.

The fabulous musculature of a white shirt,
sleeves half-rolled,

and the hidden tattoo beating
like a convict's heart.

The vigorous head with its gray curls
cocked on the chair's hard back,

and the black-clad legs thrust straight
in front of the fire, as if he stood

and the room reclined in sleep.
Everything reflects: brushed

floorboards, the chain
of office, icy candlesticks

grimaced by huge hands
that gripped them once like bars.

Blood bright as the shirt as it moves in his face—
a pulse in his jaw and a thick croak,

as his names blunder together
like armies true and false.

Bitter memory and a sweet present
dissolving into it, like cake in sour coffee.

In a moment he'll wake, brotherless,
the dead fire in his nostrils

and a decision in his mouth.
We know his dreams. But first

follow the shape of fingers on his outstretched right hand:
the way they turn and curl upward in sleep,

the fine knuckle hairs still black, almost stirred
by the cold harp of the flue. That cupped hand.

Open to steal bitter fruit,
or to lift sweet snow to his rough, floed,

sin-drinking mouth.

DARK WATERS OPEN AT THE HEAD

And close. Saltwater taffy in the cheek—
sweet bridge to the play of white light

on young water: lakelight, sealight,
riverlight, bathlight. Dark waters

open at the head and close. The child's body,
slick, emerges—the brilliant beach

of days torches a horseshoe crab
upside-down on the strand, bleached

bowl of knives, a broken clock. Years later,
pale in every pore, the moon

on starched sheets raises our arms—
dark waters open at the head

and close. Kneeling in baptismal grass,
our eye of water in the barley, I saw

the black shot bodies of crows—what can't
be reached is god. How did the doctors

disappear—in a white flare of gulls?
Who tastes the church fathers, silent

in their sepulchers? A crush of sugar, blades, and salt
hurtling backward, plucked as though by death

into dark waters open at the head, and closed.

DESIRE, DESIRE, DESIRE

Erotic the plum split
by a thumbnail. Sorrow
the pit naked on a plate

standing apart from the opera
of waste. Everybody blind,
staring at the stubble of hope

burnt gold. Royal purple the whim
of a blood-drained dancer
who prays to meridian, who is severed

to a trunk of red dust,
to the throat of a peach,
a skull planted deep

in the glaze of fields.
Full the furred foot
in the wave and slough

of ocean, below the lonesome campanile
of cold-cropped love
harping here I am here still here.

AUBADE

The sun kicks in the door, guns blazing.
I've come back on my shield.

Red light knuckles through our lids,
skin a torch where the covers stick.

The blood-dome surrounds your eyes.
Veins into thin-hammered gold.

We need every second's transfusion.
If you take me, what shall I give?

Branches star the blue windshield of the air.
Bronze roots stall like clockwork in the earth.

I plant my heart in your loam.
You erupt in your own dazing skull.

Kiss the minutes. You are the woman
of immanent fallout. I am the man

in your twisted sheets, persuading.

PLANETS OF A COLD SPRING

On earth as they are in heaven, stars
scatter like early dew on the grass,
the new leaves. On the scallion green skin
of the observatory's dome
light like frost. Mars
is the glimmering bloodshot white
of an epileptic's eye. Earth's
heat and shimmer changes
what's real in Poughkeepsie.
We could go to the desert,
we could climb Mauna Loa,
we could fire new discs of helium
to see the planets as they are.
It's late in brickscabbed rooms,
desklamps starring windows
the color of sweet crude.
Night sounds—an owl's killing pillow,
the meteor of a vole—
are paned away, remote and slow
as the sleepless rings
of gas giants.

INGRAM FRIZER

1

Carnival of knives.
The blue-flashing, red-flashing blades,
lights flying down.
We are made to speak in a series of O.
Endless roses of testimony—

2

A privacy without qualities.
This table of English oak, these flies,
this bread and meat, this half-cured wineskin.
A sword safe in the corner. Backgammon tiles.
Nostrils flare blackly, one pares his nails
with a dagger. I cup secrets
like the dice clicking in my hands.

3

Smoke.
It's true that poets kill themselves.
I've stood in the pit to watch kings die.
Tell me sirs, was it not bravely done?
Truth enters not through the eyes—
he knelt for the Queen's commission.

4

Ask, ask, ask.
By night he foundered on a shoal of boys.
He opened the veins of rhyming mother-wits.
He was sharp, drunkard, capable of love,
untrustworthy, an atheist, liar, no one's fool.
He died.

NEWS OF THE BLAZING WORLD

Tonight's a radiant waiting room, lit clouds strewn
like pages and clearing. The rill of melting ice

on sidewalks raises a sheen—a stained
welt of light on the back of a pewter spoon.

A nude man kicks off his covers
and sweats into the dark,

dream rising like a hit
of perfume on hot skin. The zodiac

wheels over the bed, the house and ragged yard,
the yowl and jagged streak

of an ivory tom. The ghost town
drowns in its reservoir, packed in boxcars

bound toward rust. The slit
of the observatory yawns its yellow stars.

Does he flash in sleep like the belly of a fish,
eyes white beneath their lids, veiled

planets jealous of glow? He dreams
in Portuguese a succession of rings

rippling from that subtle and luminous body,
rippling outward, opaque as water.

DEPTH PERCEPTION

I would like to free my ankle
to reach a roof
under trafficking stars.

I would like to pass between mirrors—
advertisements for death—
and see a wing flutter

in the corners of my eyes.
But the tea is hot and random
and brilliant with milk.

The handle cinches round my finger
snug as a metal band—
flakes of sugar on my lips

scar to sexual light.
In the aquarium
I do not know I am beautiful.

—Song of the hydroptic lens.
A fist knocks on the glass,
pastry crumbles in the air.

II

THE LANGUAGE WORKS EXTREMELY WELL

The language works extremely well.

When I say *chest* you club me
on the buttocks with your knives. When I say *beard*
you prick my knee with a truncheon.

When I say *breast*
you graze my lips with your straight razor,
you marry me with stones.

HERE WE ARE IN THE FOREST

In my false leg, bayonet. Gimp and fang.
In my false Bible, a flask.
Ring of spade on hard root, the illuminated skull.
No owl. Summer breeds in the cracked corpse eyes
of little black ponds in the little black forest.
Me the unwinking despot of firs, my face
pushing through curtains—rusty shears
cut humid velvet. What oppresses rodents
with their pitch-lit pine cones? Blaze and blaze.
We dig in womanly soil, we sweat
second skins, stubbled and sweet
as pigs. We cut capers, we are snowmen
buried face down, rooted by the nose.
I am cleaner than I thought possible.
I am a sailing cavern, puddling into
brute element and oil,
bruised stalagmites barking on shins.

I am Hungarian, I get hungry
for elegant toothpicks, chicken and dumplings.
I catch fire in the sunlit restaurant,
saffron bloom in a saffron room. The Magyar
of spoiled meat marches in me: the hussar yell,
the drunk-tilt shako. Sunk and heavy butts.
I mean rifles, I mean the quick sarcoma of foxholes,
the cold glow of graves. Happy
thresh of crow wings pass the moon sunk in silt.
Flensed moon of the Danube, waltz of exhausted blood.

In my flask, fine cognac. How rich to be alive!
I am tamped like tobacco, a snore is excessive flesh
rippling, the vastest interior. The survivors
of fire press on into winter. They come hugging
forward out of hip-deep drifts, it streams off them
like sand. Ice blindfolds cling in wind, jaws work,
bone is exposed as the purest sleep of cold,
heads roll. My skin is a flag, I am the most patriotic,
I am numb in the river. The water closes over me,
and I breathe. I am weighted by rocks.
I stare up through the film of the Danube,
I look at the stars, I am buried deep, and I breathe.

UN CHASSEUR DE L'HÔTEL DES ÉTOILES AVEUGLES

The police are here. They lock me in their icebox
and taunt me with blond photographs
of blurred glasses of water. *Vérité*, they say.
They demand *bleu cheveux*. They whisper *sale minet*.
A moldy rug forms in my mouth. I say
I don't speak French. How may I be of service?
They spit into porcelain lenses.
They rinse my eyes with kerosene.

The concierge slaps his skinny thigh, offers me
red lids; he covets my clean cheek.
I carry the general's baggage, he tips me
over the balcony. What do you see? he shouts.
I socket the jaguar city; I inhale the capital
of swans. "Tits," he says, and smiles. He gives me twenty
and a kiss.

At night we roll out the bloody carpet,
we swallow each other's wrists. The guests
like to hear our jokes—they pat our heads
and show some skin. By dawn I am my trousers.
The concierge leads me to the roof, he shows me
blind and grimy stars, commands My hero, close your eyes.
I hear him lick his lips; I smell the city's oil;
I touch the tar of childhood. I'm in it to my knees.

THE NOONDAY DEMON

Bark and echo speak boredom.
A black dog listens to white mist,
moisture spilling upward
from the hidden river. I
hands in pockets stand in the pool of air.
What resolutions shall we pass
in the afternoon? Spring on tiptoe.
A black dog licks its balls
in the papal smoke. I am married
to a baldness of the sun, to blind proposal.
The missing hairs slink like worms
into the ground. Where skin grazes skin,
a pall. I remember the cambric weave
of the sea at dawn—a white purl of oil
smeared. I am magnified
by passing states of light. By frivolous moods
of the forest. And my heart?
A netted fist. And my head?
The apple of years. Resolved:
a vision of meat, pitched into
polluted wells. Pray to the black dog,
saint of appeasable hunger.

ABRAMOWITZ

We looked for Abramowitz.
We looked
and looked.
We were the blind map's
search party.
I stuck my head
in Poland.
He wasn't in Poland.
Al flew to Argentina
and overdrew
his expense account.
Nothing.
We tried Israel or what's called
Israel
and they said
Have you seen Poland?
We looked
in all five boroughs.
We checked
the wombs
of Miami Beach.
We clocked time
in cemeteries.
We were paid
to ride on buses.
We were paid time and a half
on Fridays.
We didn't look
Sundays.
If he was on Sunday
it could not be helped.
I dreamed
Abramowitz
in Warsaw.
He was dressed
just like
my father.
I like
those sun and moon
suspenders.
I realized
I was speaking aloud.
He stroked his beard
and called me
"Lois."

TRUE DIFFICULTY

Expect my wife in the basement
of weeping cinderblock. Expect her
behind the water heater
doing her fan dance. Now
I'm in the doghouse when I learn
she's a pile of photocopies.
Every evening I come home
to her extravagantly reproduced body. Legs kicking
from the kitchen, arms hooked
on the chandelier, her faces
all face down. I set fire to my martini,
I breathe the water of vermouth. "Suck salt
from your own wrist," I say, "someday I'll pack my bags."
My bags and I go riding
to my bungalow by the sea. Woe is me
but something has me by my ankles. Somewhere she crumples
fists of paper with her god of the rumpus room.
Somewhere sisters with blunt instruments
dismember the kings of sugar.
I admire the acute angle
of my spine and vestigial tail, the chemical scent
of shaving, the filthy smocks of lung. I own
the ocean's freezing knives. My head alone
is singing, my bones are piling on the shore.

THE KITCHEN OF FRANCESCA AND PAOLO

Inferno, Canto V

See the toast? I come vending a vile pirogie
in mossy lavatory to overhear, “O animate fiancé,
a benison on your parlor. Alter no nearer!”

F. queers the qualified Columbian disco
& the cons’ jollies: all’s humidior or a dulcimer nightly.
Venturing from her lair, dowsing potential vowels,

on the coattails of her ushering sire over-dowdy.
Annoyed, Paolo purloins malignance
if for a day you affect his greed. She:

“O animal gracious and benighted,
cheer our visit—drop your viper leer, purse
not your nose-y ligature. Il’ mundane grand guignol,

we are an oily faucet in the do-re-mi universe,
a pregnant noise. Lose me, Apache,
& I’ll pose a high pie to melt perversion.

Detail this genuinely cheap parlor of patches
without udder demo or parliament of voice.
Menthol vented: come far, see touch.”

He: “Cyanide terror dives nattering free,
sues our marina clover, po-faced descendant
of our infernal consanguinity.

And more chalk. Oh gentle rats, apprehend
present costumes, the bell in person.
Choose food totally. A la mode anchor offends?

Then more: channel tomato and mar pardon,
me a pressed constituent, pizza fortified.
‘Kay, come ready, answer no abandonment.

It’s said Cain attends his vital suspense.
A quest for parole and dolor, the führer portal.”
Quandary intestinal! Well, animation offers

a Chinese visor, taunts the ill tennis buffoons.
A finch boater, she hissed: “Que pasa?”
Quintessential riposte, come in: “Oh lasso,

can't dolts pencil in, can't dizzy
men castrate all malodorous parasols?"
Poor meat ravioli, lore & party on.

He continued to communicate: "Francesca,
ye toed martini—a lachrymose me is fanned & trysted.
Ma, gimme: the tempo teams & dulls me, suspirated.

Key of C, a come coincident, a moray
keel connoting incest & the eels' dubious desire.
A killer of me: maggots nestle in the Lord's hay,

the ricochet shades of Vegas, my valise
tra-la-ing this area. Achoo! You saw duelling doctors.
My sad concierge sniffs the primo radish,

dug nostril & more to high contented affect,
the dear old cocaine kablooey, a pee-angel & bitchy.
Legitimate noise is unjoined per the deeds

of stilettos at the luncheon, humming more low strings—
a sole Geronimo sans alchemy is suspected."
Francesca snarls, "Sure, & Liberace singing soprano

quells lectures and sciata. Tiramisu
muscles a bunt, fuckin' 'ell, jejune rinse.
I wonder—lemmego!—you ill dizzy riser,

essay avocado your macho old Monday?
Testy Gemini, dawn no field's mi-fa-sol,
but book my Zuppe di Paolo in tutu tremble hottie."

Galley-ho fun liberal, cheered by low squeaks,
he bells the door, no—peers more. He's the legume avant-garde.
Paolo: "My mistress, my chef, your dissenting spirit

alters peers younger, sings cheer to piazzas.
I'll ventilate the cousin under me: Maurice!"
The caddy comes corpulent, a mortal cadre.

NEWS OF THE BLAZING WORLD

But music? The declined eros
of a Schubert concerto, cello bellies

beating in the enforced cave
of the chapel, where five women

elegant as throats tilt white hands and faces
until the granite hums—

clouds shutter the autumn sky
until color bleeds into itself—the ghost

panoply of pine needles wild on the street
spiraling up into pure cold air—

green is gone, water gone. Indifference
thrills our empty, upright bodies,

but what whistles on the plains?
A voice at noon calls a lost dog

named Jerry. A siren climbs
at the abandoned factory.

The sun fails, the moon parches. But
in absolute dark a freight's horn fills—

crashed piano—the blue sound cracking
slow on the shoals of a sleep.

TEA

The novelist Kazuro Ishiguro
adjusts spectacles, raps his glass
for our attention. Island nations
with imperial pasts, feudalisms,
honed, elaborate manners—
at bottom obsessed with tea.

An armless cup by half turns:
a jade sea bound
by a coast of bone.
Impurities:
rice walls, teak and bamboo,
a man and woman kneeling.

A music box is not obscene
on a mantel surrounded by steeping
sepia. Sunlight prisms
through the chandelier,
stale tongue of dust. Cecille:
take this tray to the dying Countess.

Everything choked with milk,
contracted by lemon.
Hide your mouth with your sleeve.
Teeth stained black as the lash,
the Company bark,
Earl Grey by the bushel, plunged by translucent hands.

The sickroom dissolves into garden.
We are weeping herbal tinctures,
we smother scones with clotted cream.
The alchemical secrets of rising water:
rose petals floating on a pond,
gold carp lunging from blackness.

PRIVATE LIFE

Ladies and gentlemen: the nest, the burrow,
the shallow cave, the breath of curtains—
the roof, ceiling, cinderblocks, floorboards, cracked glass—

the chairs, the kept lawn, the global kitchen, the bath-
room, the toilet seat, mildew, the toothpaste cap—
secondhand prints, the walls, the doors, painted hinges—

here sleep, here eat, here watch television, here leave and return—
digestion, excretion, sickness, the headache, the diarrhea,
melanoma, intruder sun—the hacking cough, the bloody sneeze,

the fever, the crisis and recovery, the night, the night—
ladies and gentlemen, birth of moon, wane of moon,
the blades of candles, the fire in space, the unlit ritual,

the flesh, the *ave*, the too-late mercy, the cold front, the mountains—
you awake accusing alder, humiliating pines,
you slumber, you have no recall, you sit for hours,

you startle, surrender, give offense, cheat and grant—
the prayer, the middle distance, sought horizon—
this horse's charity, train-trestled orbit, cello-guilt and hope—

this gun-barrel, arson, magazine, the hollowpoint, this rape,
second-story man, marred arsenic, these tendons, this ribcage,
the heart liver and lights, this trumpet, angel's pity,

dry fur, reasonable shoes, cybernetics,
the clockface, glass giraffes, grizzly pelt,
bookworm, new leaves, the marijuana—I give you

servants and names, I concede nothing, I hide my tears
and erections, keep the good stuff to myself, the wine, the thai stick,
precious veins, steak knives, air conditioning, electric heat—

we cook, expectorate, singe wings, sink fences, fire domestics,
mother's worry, starry-eyed, we pray prey and praise—
I give you hope, *harmonia mundi*, midnight VCR, the motion.

SPRING SNOW

The thief has fled, but
his fingerprints
are everywhere, his footprints
fill with water. We who waited
must hunker down in rubber boots
and wait some more. Somewhere
behind that scrim of sky
the sun is sleeping. The moon
paces in her rented room
and the only light is that of a comet
with nowhere to fall. Darlings,
I'm sick of sweeping the streets.
Let's go to the forest
and hunt for the rain
that lives there, stalk
barefoot in the streambeds,
and make mud. Let bison stand
in raw ripped fields, their eyes
flickering like anthracite—
we'll head for the hills
for as long as ice can form,
for as long as long sleep
can hold us. We'll compromise
with fugitive warmth,
fleeing this smother of snow.

RANSOM

we have your precious ones
 your wife
 your son named Sam
your daughter Pennsylvania
 your rarest ribbed timber
 your beloved Fabregé egg
we require unmarked hundreds
 you will
 be contacted
do not
 involve
 the police
they are the lonely
 whores of the state
 do not look out your window
we are seven men
 all bald
 we require compensation
we've been watching you for weeks
 we know the lightness
 of your coffee & your shoes
are hi-beam red
 we like to see you on our screen
 back of your head
a polished mirror
 in which our eyes
 roll back
your trusted friend's
 our spy
 he studies you
for free
 bloodhound
 of spilled cola
he insinuates
 his hands
 he sniffs your ass
with joy
 he writes suspicious
 autobiography
we'll tell you
 where to drop
 we demand
six of your Cadillacs
 you wear
 our magnificent blindfold

THE WOODS

I go green and wild in the river leaves bleaching
the sky Hopper-blue to a quick cairn of stones.

You might walk forever—stupid glee of the sun—
to reach a dog's grin. You might wait your turn.

I make room on my disk, we count bohemian
waxwings while crows stutter between branches.

You're waiting to tell me it's true.
The nights get famous colder, the house settles its head.

I'll walk behind a little with this bundle
of sticks, soup bones, black books.

I see you
towering like pines

you epilepsy
rimmed with white light.

THE DEATH OF _____

Evening keeps happening—a bellowing of tires
in the highway's hollow gourd. Who can say
how expensive was this argument of strings,
gutshot pianos, horns, the charred and horny hands?
Mingus in his wheelchair predicts the death of jazz
under a ropeburned flag in Gerald Ford's garden.
Covenants of cellos expire in improvised light.
Make it new, blow and burn—sinus ache
of sound, the cracked heart skips—a man surrenders sex
in a blood-painted circumstance. Not the city on the plain,
or the pale salted sea, not the virago beasts of evening
or the throat's red parch, not certainly
the mouth in which the tongue conceals a key—

HEDONISTS OF EAST HANOVER, NEW JERSEY

O my hearties! easily startled, they perch uneasy on the gangway.
Sven with his one eye
and tattoo of Vincent Price
leering jovially from his biceps—
his week-old wad of gum
and trousers bunched at the knees.
There is lovely Francis. Just sixteen
a blond sweet smile—his thumb
wanders vaguely. His chest blazes like a shield
in the stinking river sun. Now Pepe step forward.
Coal hard and bright as diamond, coal
the parent of heat and value. He can dance
in six languages, he cries Salaam!
and Oy vey ismir! They all have heroic cocks
and shyer dispositions. The true substance of air
beats like dust in their lungs.
These bright and risen torsos,
these ghastly skulls of dawn—
blood sheets beneath pure skin
and grins at death's own food,
it ropes the scrotum carnival
and pins men's ears to the sea.

When one opens his one eye
he sees the carnivores of graves,
the tricks of engineering
and bold palaces of grass. Sycamores tilt arms
to cup haloes out of sky, while cardinals splash their webs
on scattered upright stones. He needs a chart of green,
wet bandages, nicotine. He plants a face in arbor
and raises shells of unthinking meat.
Light sheep of the evening, they groom
their spectral thighs, they hunker in the dew
and never criticize. It is the charm of fields,
the pottery of snakes. One is a blaspheming fluid,
one cradles as he drowns,

one gutters the names of pleasure—

III

THE BRIGHT ATTENUATED IMAGE OF OUR FAME

Herr Rilke you look dour,
sausage crumbs in your mustache.
Bad skin, a sour
downturn to the mouth, pipe ash

in the lap of badly creased trousers.
You are a swan-quill biter
in little rooms that overlook the century—
you run your hands over Lazarus, tighten

cords in a frail jaw.
Perpetual toothache of Prague,
your talent is the flaw
in the jewel of your ambition. I sag

at your naivete,
the wild angel that corrals
a poet's wit, soul of brevity—
the dim-sheeted death masting up the horizon.

You lay a path of flags
at my feet, not national—
your images prophylactic
and whetted. Irrational

animals slip your leashes
and stampede across the steppes.
As a whale beaches
itself, your genius multiplies

on extinction and the solitude
of air. Everywhere
I see the sullen mood
of tools—table lamps that care

about nearness to a window,
Queen Anne chairs hunched
by the bookcase. Snow
fills a humidior, bunches

of violets wilt
at the first flinch of a paintbrush.
Your hoary torso flares
half-buried in the soil.

Boots trod—your eyes are lakes—
your lovely throat is sad.
A chorus wails in the blood
what's hollow, lustrous, unmade.

THE JEW OF MALTA, MT

History is a code best forgotten—race a blue stitch
of numbers up the sleeve. Whole families
crack English like walnuts in their teeth,
while clever daughters are lit by newsreels
and a hand on the knee. If two children meet
by chance in a stairwell, their children
speak one language—easy as that. I was born
into puritan and guilty Shylock. Each day
she strung barbed wire, he
swallowed both their tongues.
The outermost ripple of diaspora
is this Ashkenazi jig, my fishhook wit,
a recipe for scattering prayers
behind me like pyrite. But *sh'ma yisroel*
is all I know and besides,
the wench is dead.
My West is a weight of stars,
dew in the desert, the breath
of Abraham, cattle
with frost on their flanks.

METAMORPHOSES

Myrrha prays for deliverance from implacable
earth and flesh. Upflung in island light her
bitter almond arms, hot sticky tears. But the womb's skin
keeps taut, the sun sets—her father's child kicking—
and she will have to choose like the rest of us.

Daphne's cries unlistened for—the god
a greedy weight in the shade of a golden grove,
her torn nails furrowing in hard dirt.
Mocked by a pregnant noon. Pale virgin cigarette.
Sunglasses hide the bruised, open eyes.

And Orpheus sings elemental dark—
the dying fall of myth's sweetest tenor.
Hades and his demons fold their arms
in iron chords. Eurydice burns like glass,
a blond swoon, repeating singsongs of decay—

What falls, however slow? The stony autumn of orbit?
The sea tilts in its goblet and acorns tumble
through sleeves of rain, while lovers perch
forever. In skin that's skin, in bone that's bone,
rinsed, translucent, godlit—

IN THE TIME OF THE GREAT CASINO

1

The casino hulks, steel bones
exposed, a loom to weave
the Mississippi wind.
The jobs dried up and
blew away, pages
of a cold November.
The eye blots out
its baroque shape,
invisible as a mall.

2

They shook the Cathedral
like a piggybank until
the last dime dropped out.
Now they say Mass
in Biloxi, with a re-enactment
of Columbus's landing
on Tuesdays. He's met
by Pocahontas with
an armful of chips.
Someone drank the last hurricane,
and the red straws skitter
raw across the sand.

3

So much sand laid bare
at the feet of the casino.
Tracks of milled coins
lead you to the river,
where they jumped.
Poydras Street gnaws
on its own leg, trapped
in the ruined mouth's
gold teeth. An
accordion player sits
down on the curb and weeps.

4

Yes, empty. Even the dead
have flown west

on the redeye to Vegas,
and timed lights don't fool
the burglars. The Quarter
is crammed with thieves,
casual tools
like secret cigarettes.
Bluesmen plan heists
and toast the casino,
where the blues will run
hot and cold
from ebony faucets.
Next year in
this year, the cold hard crash.

5

The strippers are inconsolable
and wear black garters.
Egyptian sailors go
in threes and do not sing.
The docks drink rotgut
and wait for the end.
The casino,
that fat flute, plays
its forlorn promise:
big enough to win
the wind. Its uncarpeted
chambers are immense
and slow, like
a concrete heart.
Sink-eyed, keening,
glassless.
Louis Armstrong's ghost
boards the City of
New Orleans and
doesn't look back.
The golden bell of
his trumpet swings
briskly by his knees.

NEWS OF THE BLAZING WORLD

That translucent leap of rags is a warehouse
or a rail station or the hundred animals

of flame—the upper stories of smoke
scumble the intact rooftops of buildings,

obscure the gas station and antique pumps.
Fire is always new. Closest to us

a man in a white shirt, hand raised
as though in salute, cords of wood

and chain link between him and the burst beacons.
It might be a safe distance. Bruno Schulz,

your eyes are weak, you dart fearfully
through the streets of Drogobych, a roll

of paper under your arm, figures etched
by cold sun, scurrying round the blackout corner

into this murderous image, bullet of time.

APPARITION OF THE SELF ON FIRE

Swank of beer leaves the throat chalked
and salted—dry white
of last call.

Smoke and green felt. Egg
of an hour spent in television,

alcohol of doubt. Shot glass
rings imprinted in
my flesh. Wet
snow and icicles
collect in my soaked shoes. Believe in

hell or anyplace, just don't
bother me. Don't ask
for salt, say
filled ashtray, don't say
daddy. Cold tightens the noose of mind

tangled in scalded trees. These
are explanations
of winter,
too much secular
sand, frost and cataracts, three a.m.,

the day's shank and ankle. A
tiptoe piano
plays prevailing
wind. I'm a wild horse
in tar. I bolt for the burning barn.

HIS NAME

Marvin and his hungry name
are shoveling pie at the Horn & Hardart.
Which is as much to say: the past
is the purer hunger, catalogued behind glass doors.
Marvin's name says "Pass the butter"
and Marvin thinks of '39
when Stalin gorged himself on garlic.

Old Marvin and his old name
together on a street in Paris
behind high foreheads and black glasses
and paunches in their worn white shirts.
Marvin wore wide ties: he pushed
through the grain of his own face. He saw
a face in a tabloid mirror
and the masked Jew of his name
provocative in falling socks.
Marvin rushing down boulevards
with paper streaming from his heels.

I have all of Marvin's letters
in a white box and a brown box.
I have his molars preserved in alcohol—
excuse me—the gold nibs of his pens.
I am Marvin's only son:
you cannot guess my long disease.
I have his happy decades of dirt,
his lank hair parting in its oil.
Marvin, my adopted father!
Pasty in the night
beneath the breathing poplar trees.
I embrace your fatal Europe!
I kiss the good stink of your teeth!
Marvin, I can see you
hugging a ghost with a deathlit beard!

ALTERNATIVES TO OHIO

Money's no object: a business of show
Beckons when you've never been to Ohio.

Some dream the salt-frozen lake in the sky.
They lie down cold in the bed of the Ohio.

Train wheels flaking rust, diesel lungs set aglow
The hammered rails between death and Ohio.

Blood angels gesture on the roofs of Venice.
Gondola lovers think not on Ohio.

Shuteye and snore. Merrily we row
In river widow's weeds, dreaming Ohio.

Toward steel mills and fiberglass, bushels of fire—
The tire yards, methane, pigsties of Ohio.

Filthy wings made of money. General snow
Falls on industrial graves of Ohio.

Sizzling voices in the pan of a cloud
Exclaim over the silken hair of Ohio.

Suffer little children who sing as they go
To breathe black dust imported from Ohio.

Shipwrecked schools on the imperial shore
Won't name the capital of Ohio.

Nights of hot sugar, summer's sweetness flows
Over expressionless cornrowed Ohio.

Ignominious churls, frowsiest girls
Waltz in the asphalt ballrooms of Ohio.

An oar on my shoulder, I walk the floe
Of ice that carved the valley of Ohio.

Blouses drying on the roadsigns.
A flaming sword lingers at the gates of Ohio.

Stalled cities on the hill wave bye, goodbye.
What flows out is who knows best for Ohio.

SOME BOYS

Pitched fruit: a half-
eaten apple tumbles across
the wild lawn in a spray of sun.
The bat swung, disintegrating
juice and seed flung,
me tasting air, running for home
in ferment, raw moonshine of twelve.
Alone in my room, curtains drawn,
homework undone. You've gone,
taking your jagged grin, my answering
bark of steel, mask of braces.

§

Sleepover. My mother's Modigliani
stares, an expending spirit. The beds pushed

together, a giggle and a gag. The blind, hairless sac,
my seeing fingers, your own hand sure

as when together we found stones
and smashed the windows of the abandoned house

on Summit Avenue. The same thrill—
darkness emerging from behind

the ragged edges of reflected light.
Cold cracked steps, a writhe

of ivy and time-crushed brick.
The old game: who will stay longest,

who can go deepest: the shattered lock.
Wet wood, ancient air, rotting

wallpaper. Cobwebs kiss the ghost
of a sofa, dust deposits on kitchen counters

deep as mud. The light becomes complex.
From room to room, white flashes:

your hands, your throat, your face.

§

You, you, you. Lean Zarathustra.
 That time I caught you stretched
 on the hardwood floor with her.
 Hours we spent in that room, saying nothing,
 the radiator a hissing,
 clanking chain. Your rare, rare laugh.
 I cringed and made mouths, your lapdog.
 The girls threw themselves
 from shame and your unindifferent
 scowl. Now I'll speak. Outside,
 the browner boys hurl frisbees,
 their legs tining into the grass
 like night's lightning. Give me
 the oscular proof. Shut my mouth.

§

Was—am—a boy. Work of hurt.
 The inconvenient muscles. The drummed
 notes of grace. The scar of a beard. Pearling

intersections and the book of the back.
 The skin of a crown, the raptor eyes.
 Boys on a summer basketball court—

loose shirts flying through humid air,
 stippled skin of the ball, orbiting
 dunk. Boy, oh boy,

I am cruel as you, and pale—like you,
 an unadored noon, a gleam under lids of desire.
 Blurred cricket of bicycle, heliograph

of a hoop, smear of chainlink, the ignorant eye.

ON OUR IMPERFECT KNOWLEDGE OF VOID

History is not continuous—the divorce must occur—
there was no moment of charity. I stepped out
of granite into the rainwashed alley.
I rode the pure bus into the angry buzz of sun.
When did the desert become horizon? When did this roof
open like a cabaret, and out come kicking
your small brilliant foot?
All around me lurks the humid air, the high skirts
of dusk, dusk's improbably long legs. There's a ferret
loose in my chest—he smokes constantly—
he drums his fingers on cheap felt.
I signed the papers. You want me to say
I felt free. Well,
what I felt was like walking on a frozen lake
in which giant bass turn slowly.
My head has doubled in size, my tongue
becomes a silver dollar. You want me to keep saying
how at last I discovered passion, how I moved into a trailer,
drank beer and sang in Spanish
every night, all night. How tears cauterize
the face where desire is received. The divorce
did not come through, I still live in the great house.
I take a stroll in evening wear
by the banks of my lagoon. In my mind
you're a plummeting breast—documented
olive trees—bark of the hooked blind bass—
the thinnest wrists of coal. Please accept
this invitation, please sit
in that overplush chair. I speak to you
from chlorine. I say it's good to be alone.

REAL PROGNOSIS

The theory of the day is: hospitals,
and the little musical rooms of suffering
swinging wide their doors: operating
on the trauma of caesarian and suture,
emergency: to emerge, to push through the bloody envelope
into an electrocuted present, the way we peer
through smoked glass into the parking lot,
where trees convulse their temples:
furthermore, beyond the trees a horizon,
and beyond the horizon a rocky beach,
and beyond the beach we see the theory of the day
is: drowning, the daily engulfment of things:
telescopes and mail in hail and rich food:
we cannot imagine breathing. A slow waving arm
rises from the bed of a sleeper, knocks
the yes and no questions. The theories are: catechism,
jury, bed sore: they are limping
in backless gowns: they are selecting
stones: they are dicing rare steaks
in a room of artificial curtains and red light:
the theory is: song, butter, the juice run clear,
the body in the blind sack
of the mind, cool as a banker:
fields and fields of forecast on fire.

NEW JERSEY ELEGY

Each town leads to its double as thought bleeds
into thought along avenues aglow
with elms and dead generals, the flags of leaves,

poverty pushed beneath the hilled houses
of wealth's waterline. Run-down village greens
compete with parking lots for the choicest

square of sky. Sometimes I follow Washington
and his troops, barefoot in the livid ash
of winter wheat across the river from Trenton—

astonished redcoats in the wash
of the Delaware like so many maple
leaves, muskets drowning. Then victory turns

toward one sort of history: the sooty capital
of cold roads and refinery fires,
the split wharves of Long Branch, Springsteen

at the Stone Pony, or that solitary
graveway, the Turnpike, a ribbon of spleen
roping head to tail, from the Walt

Whitman Bridge to Lincoln's tunnel,
imperial and necessary salt.
Trash fires banner in yards, smoke funnels

and sparks, a freeze brings down powerlines
and turns air into metal. I've seen snow
fall on seawater, an ashtray lined

with hypodermic stubs, gray meeting gray.
Still it's true that by night Newark is a garden
of stars, where planes from Paris land

like obese angels and blind children
pluck coathangers to hotwire
new cars. O the misfortunes you breed—

your nature as forgotten as your
red ghosts, debating among the reeds
of the Great Swamp, hemmed in by highway.

You're a cemetery, a wilderness
of stoplights, a commonwealth of diners
and hot Italian delis—you queen dressed

in castoffs, midwife to corridors
of char. Your topiary suburbs
and gritty towns deal

out the good gray shores,
snubbing the greater state
and saying *hit me*, saying *more*.

Somehow I can't hate your answers
to false pride, your roses burning black
in the vase of a lung, your cancers.

THE RODEO OF OUTER MIND

Mule waves picketed on the western shore, walking the winter beach, where everything
refines into white sky, whitecaps, sand gone white

in the glare of scabbed dunes, bare aluminum. The scuds of cola foam loop and ravel
at the tide line. The horses go galloping into the sky, the crowd roars its holy affection,
the young steer tumbles in the dust. The coiling rope gathers the Nevada of the sea,

spiral arm of the cowboy framing all slow motion, swirling, scouring
the black crust of land and the dead fires left behind like sockets in the hills,

the lariat a long tooth of foam, hard leather, splashing at its uttermost rim,

a lens in the wind, a burn in the long thighs of the century, knees crashing down,
eyes raised to Vega, to Las Vegas, to the glittering condor unfolding like a knife in the new
sky,

the LA jails of light brimming in the desert like great lakes of luck, the fall of molten lead

to the pit of the stomach, to salt at the roots of the tongue, what burns black
coast to coast, what scorches in rarest atmospheres. What heals as it binds

in galactic prosody, the floating ribs of the West
overturning empire, a lariat of torches seen from space, surf of lights

like snowdrifts, the night falling from a great height
onto the drive-in, where popcorn Buicks follow John Wayne out the cabin door

into hurt history and monument, tumbleweed, capture: *Mistah Duke, he dead.*

§

In the heart's chancery the will is read: a green faith, a pink courage,
white corsage on the delicate wrist of my darling Clementine.

Dry counties in the whiplash of faded Westerns, a barbed lariat curling
over exotic dancers, sheepranchers, a myth kept keening in place

like a calf strung between strands of barbed wire in gurgle and red froth.

§

This perfect American silence, matinee, precious volunteer of hours,
emerges from day-for-night into the calm evening of a valley

where the limp, brave flag inclines from the post office, where prepubescent boys
hunt frogs by the railroad tracks, stabbing with sticks that might become guns

firing in dry air over the sawgrass channel, stalking with bowed legs
through the clear thin stream, upturning pebbles. Two boys a mile out

below the interstate, where exhaust crawls in the weeds, beard of the shaggy pines,
calling high and jeering to each other in the ropeburn thicket.

Out of the evening scar a boy bursts grinning, cowboy, and his friend kicks down, Indian,
dead in the blue needles, and for a moment it's still: the Pacific in its cup,

the circus tent's grief, hoofprint puddles, a dim report dying in a slim arroyo.
A semi passes, eyes fixed on the invisible.

NEWS OF THE BLAZING WORLD

Is this is my life at last? I speak spark to the sun—
when I lie the body listens. I am the body's

only burden—there is nothing else.
When I entered the pure cold, I said

farewell to precious stones. I offered up my nectar.
I walked one foot beneath the sea.

My outerstretched arms gather
subatomic slowness. The body is always virgin

and mind—the rest is offal, horrible legs,
the dead crab baking on its back—

innovative crustacean. Toward objects
we sidle in sleep, awaking

red-walled rooms of self. We divide
into language's blue and buoyant planet.