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Refusals

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JON ANDERSON currently teaches writing at the University of Pittsburgh. He has published two books of poems, *Looking for Jonathan* (1969) and *Death & Friends* (1972), and has completed a third, *In Sepia*, which will be available this spring. His National Book Award nomination for *Death & Friends* made him one of the youngest poets ever named for that award.

REFUSALS

Sometimes we get down to loneliness
& poetry is just talking about things.
In the wake of those graceful verses,
those boats loaded with spiced meat & jewels
is a silence meant to kill.

So you talk
about death; you expel it,
the sweets of dioxide, into the air.
And driving all night, in silence,
you see it flying by.
Is it sweet, that you love it so? You're not
a poor bastard yet; you give some affection . . .
like alms, or smooth as cheese.

And you still love the loneliness in marriage:
refusals of sex & shared meals, frustrated
appetites, for which you slam a door.
For sex should retain its adolescent shyness,
shouldn't it?

Or better to meet at sea,
two dark gunboats that thump & shoot fire
all night, trying hard not to win.

These refusals begin to look like courage.
You're trying hard not to give in.

But you can't come down from yourself;
you wouldn't if you could.
So you end up speechless, writing it down:
that tapping all night is yourself.
Mornings you wake up listless;

how could you choose this life, & how,
among friends, deny kindness? You keep your eye
at death—or death's abyss;
you never choose to drop.

Sometimes you refuse to put up with yourself
but you go on talking,
thinking, maneuvering
over the dark & chartless waters
& under mysterious orders not to come in.

THOUGH I LONG TO BE NO ONE

I passed for two nights
& days, alone,
on a train.

Whatever I do
I am always leaving.
Whoever's face I lay my own along,
the cheek bones bruised & rose.

Faces of friends,
of women;
the elongated face of my third wife, aged
& concerned about my house . . .

Nightly I carry them forward in sleep,
though I long to be no one.

The wheels of iron pass
over these rails
& boards above water.
Over the bodies of my constant departure
into my constant longing.