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WILL MADE WORD AND OTHER CONCEPTIONS

THESIS

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By

Margaret G. Small

Denton, Texas

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This thesis consists of a series of nine poems which deal with the theme of finding a balance between energy and form in life and in poetry. Fourteen miscellaneous poems are also included. In addition, an introduction by the author explains the purpose of the thesis as a whole and explicates the poems in terms of this purpose. The introduction discusses the meaning of each poem and the techniques used to convey its message. Each poem in the series of nine poems is also related to the overall theme of the series.

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## INTRODUCTION

Will Made Word and Other Conceptions is a study in poetic form. It is an attempt to understand how an initial thought, feeling, inspiration, impulse, or whatever it is that must be said, is given its most truthful shape in words. The collection includes poems in free verse and in conventional forms. Although the method used to achieve the end product, the poem, differs in each of these two modes, the goal is the same.

Before discussing techniques used to arrive at this goal, it is necessary for the poet to understand what exactly the goal is. A poem should be, according to Robert Frost, a balance of form and function, or, in Coleridge's terms, of the particular and the universal. Two other definitions, more applicable to this study, meld the essentials of a poem even more. Donald Hall defines poetry, and art in general, as "an embodiment of the two parts become one--the insight combined with the organization."<sup>1</sup> Hopkins calls creation of a poem "inscaping," the process of merging to a perfect whole the thought and feeling of the poet with rhythm and sound.<sup>2</sup> He believes the energy, the poet's thought and feeling, makes the form, or, in his unique terminology, the "instress" determines the "individually distinctive inscape." Inscaping is the real result of the instress, which holds the

inscape "in being."<sup>3</sup> Thus the poem is the materialization of directed impulse, an impulse turned into form and held at its most dynamic pitch by the energy of the crafted words. If impulse is blocked by inappropriate form, by insufficient craft, energy is lost; the poem never reaches its peak.

What poets have always been concerned with is how to achieve this peak level in a poem. It can be done using a prescribed form as a basis, as is illustrated by Hopkins. It can also be done in free verse. In both cases, composing a poem should be an attempt to discover the form which conveys the poet's impulse most truthfully. A poet writing in a structured, regular rhymed and metered form can be innovative within set limits. He can use the form and vary it to suit his purpose, to discover the best "carrier" of his insight. In free verse, the poet is not limited by a prescribed structure but must determine all of his own limits. In both cases, to achieve its most dynamic level, the poem should be "as inextricably taut as a spider's web--touch one part and the whole of it trembles."<sup>4</sup> This tension is lost if a word or image which is not needed, or is inappropriate in a particular instance, is included. This is what Wallace Stevens means when he speaks of the writing process in "Of Modern Poetry": "The poem of the mind in the act of finding/ What will suffice."<sup>5</sup> In composing poetry, the poet is guided by "what will suffice." That is, the poet must use the exact word, image, phrase to relay his message

sufficiently. Any extra detail or inappropriate use of a device will slacken the tension.<sup>6</sup> Robert Creeley expresses the same idea: "You say what you have to say and then shut up. Whenever it rides over it begins to diminish in terms of energy and possible interest to others and to myself."<sup>7</sup> The exact form must be used to relate the truth of the poet's impulse. Anything extra will merely disguise it.

A poet writing in structured forms runs a considerable risk; the impulse is often forced to fit the prescribed structure. This may cause the direction of the form to be at odds with that of the impulse. On the other hand, the free verse writer has no prescribed form to direct him; therefore, finding "what will suffice" is just as difficult. He must rely solely on judgment and intuition.

This last case is the dilemma of writers and critics of "unstructured" modern poetry. How does one judge a seemingly formless poem, or how does the poet determine the best form his poem should take? Marvin Bell poses the same question when he asks "how minimal one's artfulness must be, or can be, if one hopes for a poem to be, not only authentic and widely accessible, but special and inexhaustible."<sup>8</sup> Bell, like William Carlos Williams, contends that free verse is not unstructured, even though it often has the appearance of artlessness because of its use of everyday speech and ordinary situations, its apparent lack of formality in line lengths and rhythms, and, as some claim, its general

indistinguishability from prose. A good poem cannot merely tell an emotion. The poet must be aware of meter, line, image, sound, syntax, parallelisms, diction and use these interrelatedly, to form a pattern with these, to relay his feeling sufficiently. One way to judge a free-verse poem, Bell says, is to see whether a line can be broken up or placed in other lines, or if an image or word can be replaced by another. If it can, the poem does not have sufficient structure. It won't work.<sup>9</sup> As Bell explains, "An object in a poem, or an image, or a comparison makes a difference when it is used--not just in one line or one stanza, but over the whole of the poem...it will be part and parcel of the fullest meaning (and often the very conclusion) of the poem. Otherwise, we are being given that light form of diversion known as description."<sup>10</sup>

To determine the form an impulse should take still remains the decision of the poet. It is his duty, and should be his desire, to make the most communicable form of his message, whether free verse or structured. In order to make the most accurate decision, to know "what will suffice," in order to judge, or intuitively know, when a word, image, or phrase is right, the poet must develop a sensibility to poetry by continuously experimenting with poetic form.

\* \* \* \* \*

Each poem in this collection is an exercise in structure. Will Made Word and Other Conceptions is a series of nine

poems with a related theme, followed by fourteen miscellaneous poems. The series, which concerns a character named Will, deals specifically with the theme of finding the balance between energy and form. The remainder of the poems are unrelated in theme and have been grouped according to common techniques used.

The theme of the Will poems concerns attempts at discovering form on two levels. It deals with finding the right structure for the impulse in the person and in the poem. Will represents the universal force, the soul, the energy, in every man. He is also the real man, capable of using his free will, his consciousness, to align himself with the impulse. Will is bothered by his awareness of the discrepancy between "will the impulse" and "Will the man" (or the form), between what he could be, and what he actually is. Will's problem is that he does not know how to deal with his individuality, his special form. He does not know how to overcome his body's limits by honest communication. In the same sense, Will is an insufficiently structured (either too formal or not formal enough), senseless poem. Thus, the theme of his inability to communicate runs throughout the series.

The series is a sequential account of Will's journey which leads to insight and discovery of his potential power. He goes from one extreme, a too-structured, limited, delusive world, to the other, one without any type of structure or



meaning. Will finally comes to terms with his body and begins to move in a truthful direction, although the ending of the series is in no way intended to imply that he has reached his goal.

The first poem in the series, "Will's Dilemma," shows Will's selfconsciousness of his individual form. He does not know how to cope with it. As speaker, Will begins as the impulse in a structured poem, a variant of the Petrarchan sonnet, and ends as the spirit within the human body. The poem draws the parallel between poetry and life which, although not shown explicitly in each of the following poems, can be applied throughout the series. "Will's Dilemma" has a regular trochaic rhythm in the first stanza with no punctuation between sentences to stress the nauseating monotony of the body's constant rhythm. After Will finds an apparent solution to his problem, the rhythm is no longer bothersome to him and is therefore discontinued.

Will's solution to his dilemma works only for a short time, however. He chooses to "revel" in his form, to be wholly egocentric, like a child. "Will's Lost" describes his delusion. It can be compared to any number of delusions or false structures built to perpetuate a "comfortable" lie. The poem, a Shakspearean sonnet, shows Will completely absorbed in the structure of his body. The regular rhyme and meter in the first ten lines is intended to suggest the regular form of the body. Like other false structures, his

delusion cannot last. Will breaks down, as does the form (the rhyme and meter) of the poem, in the last two lines.

After Will's delusive image of himself has been shattered, his first impulse is to escape the physical, the individual form. The state of Will, at this point, is described in "Will Escapes," which takes place in a hospital. Will completely dissociates himself from his body, as well as any other particular form, and attempts to transcend life forever by continually chanting Om. However, as the poem continues, Will discovers he is afraid to die, to lose his form completely, and admits the only way to achieve his potential, to experience "Oneness," is through the body by honest communication with life's varieties. In the end, he "heads out sputtering," not the universal word, Om, but various words. Following the conventional structure of the first two poems, the free verse in this poem, by contrast, is intended to emphasize Will's unstructured state.

Will's first attempt at honest communication is described in "Will's gone or some poems just won't eat." Although Will knows the direction in which he must go, he cannot get his body to work for him. The narrator in the poem is a woman friend, a potential lover, who appears in later poems. He makes no sense to her. His mind is disoriented, his body is disjointed. The will, the center force holding his parts together, is lost somewhere inside him. Consequently, he is lost, he cannot relate. His words and

movements are meaningless to the woman. Her attempts to communicate with him are hopeless. Again, as the title indicates, Will, in this poem, is the personification of a poem that has no impact on its reader because of its lack of structure.

The poem is written in free verse, although occasionally iambic meter is used in certain lines to give the impression that an attempt is being made to find meaning in Will. The iambic line is used especially in cases where the woman is trying to interpret him or to elicit some meaningful response from him: "i cannot see what holds," "i shelve it with his other surds and wait," "i smear his skin with food/ and knead his gut each limb." Most of the words are one-syllable words to give the feeling of disjointedness. Clusters of stressed words ("each odd part wills out," "bang both walls") are used, as well as a variation of metrical feet in a line ("a leg here a hip an elbow here there a head") to emphasize Will's disjointed state.

This objective view of Will is followed by a poem which reveals the secret thoughts of Will. "Will's Love Song" shows him thinking what he would like to tell his lover. He is saying that he actually has a feeling for her, but he cannot express it. He cannot get his body to work for him. He is still too aware of himself, afraid of his inadequacies, and, consequently, cannot trust his body to follow the feeling.

Besides not being able to communicate, Will is also impotent. The parallel between honest communication in life and poetry and sexual potency is drawn throughout the series. Both produce results. Both are ways of overcoming the limits of the individual. At this point, Will cannot produce an honest word or another living creature. He is ineffectual.

Use of the sonnet form with variations in rhythm and rhyme, in this and the following poem, "Will, Dancing in the Dark," is an indication that Will is beginning to see his direction more clearly, although he may not realize it.

"Will, Dancing in the Dark" is another objective view of Will seen from the point of view of the woman. She hears Will dancing by himself in the dark in another room. When alone, he can forget himself. However, in the presence of another, he becomes aware of his separateness and cannot function. Although he is dancing now, he is dancing alone and still remains unproductive.

From this point on, Will gradually begins to communicate. In the next poem, "Will Sings," he is finally moved, touched by another creature. The nightbird's song, a form of pure impulse, fills him; he understands its message. His direction becomes clear. He can now "tell the word/ that plays me new/ again." The poem indicates that the expressed song forms the creature; the will forms the body; the impulse forms the structure of the poem. This is the key to Will's

dilemma. He now knows that if he lets the impulse flow through him freely, his body will follow naturally.

The poem is written in free verse to complement the theme. Use of internal rhyme and assonance are intended to unify the poem. The one-syllable words, clear action verbs beginning the lines of the second stanza, and short lines are used to relay the sharpness, the blinding clarity, the forcefulness of the bird's song.

Again, evidence of Will's realized potential is his ability to reproduce. "Will, To His Woman's Hip" emphasizes the parallel between sexual potency and expression of impulse. Will speaks to the hip of his lover as it functions through three stages of creation--conception, gestation, and birth. Words used with "will" as a base have to do with creating life. In the first stanza "willing arcs" refers to the hip in the act of creating, in intercourse. In the last stanza, "will ful" describes the fetus which is full of life. The poem is in free verse. One- and two-syllable words and short action verbs arranged in short lines are again used to suggest the forcefulness of the creating process and the simple clarity and vitality of the new form. Internal rhyme, near rhyme, and assonance are used for unity and to imply a dynamic flow throughout the poem.

Will's realized potential is exemplified in another way in the last poem in the series, "Uncle." He has begun to align his body and mind with his truthful impulse, and the

result is a purer movement and expression. Each section is his description of the pure potential movement of each particular body part. The whole poem is Will's direction of his body towards what he knows his potential to be. The more he allows his potential to express itself, the more he becomes the "real" Will. He now realizes his power to impress, to make his surroundings complement his movements, and vice versa, to produce, to create physically and mentally. The last image, the motion of the hand waving good-by, indicates his intention of surrendering to the will. He has found the answer to his dilemma and knows the direction he must take to approach it. Short one-syllable words, action verbs, verbs as nouns, and short lines, have again been employed in this poem to give the impression of pure, forceful expression.

\* \* \* \* \*

The rest of the poems in this collection are also attempts at finding sufficient form. Because discovering the right structure is the main concern of this work, each poem will be analyzed to see how form is used to convey the intended message. The discussion will group poems according to similarities in structure and similar purposes for using common structural elements.

The first two poems, "Child Watches Rain Melt Snow" and "Tenants Reflecting," are intended to give an impression of time--past, present, and future--merged in an instant.

Similar methods are used in both poems to relay this notion. In each poem the real action is minimal yet essential because it initiates the psychological action. The actual incident, which takes place in an instant, sparks an increased awareness in each character so that in this moment each woman sees her past and future at once.

In "Child Watches Rain Melt Snow," the child's sudden insight is prompted by her viewing of a natural occurrence. The real action of the child watching rain melt snow is stated in the title. The rest of the poem relates the psychological impression this scene makes upon the child. Words are used in a particular way to merge the present real action with the psychological action, in which present becomes past in an imaginary future state. The only action verb used in the body of the poem is "disturbs," the word around which the whole poem turns. This word describes the one action, real and psychological, taking place in the poem. In this word the real becomes the psychological. The rain disturbs, causes change in the dead earth, stirs it to life. This same action "disturbs," activates, a new sense in the child--that of passing time. She now realizes that change is inevitable. She sees the future, the present as past, in this one instant. Other words used in the poem are nouns, conjunctions, articles, prepositions, adjectives, all describing this moment of disturbance. The only other verb forms used are participles which are intended to give the

impression of a held moment of action, as in a painting or photo. Likewise, the title, which gives an objective description of the scene, allows the reader to see not only what the child sees, the real occurrence, but also what the child imagines. The reader sees the instant "like an old photo." The title is like the title of a moment of action captured in a photograph.

In "Tenants Reflecting" similar techniques have been used to catch the passage of time in an instant. Again, the real action of the scene is interwoven with and sparks the psychological action. During a momentary meeting, the two women, tenants of the same building, become aware of their similarity to each other. This awareness is conveyed by the focus of each character. What one character sees in the other should tell the reader what she recognizes in herself, what she has or will become. Their thought processes, which evoke a past and future time, are conveyed while an actual conversation is taking place. Again, the window is used as a device to make time transparent. What each character sees in the glass is not her own reflection but another person. However, as the title suggests, each woman imagines the other to be her own reflection. Because one woman is older than the other, one sees her future, the other her past. In the last stanza, as the other woman reclines, the old woman sees her whole life, and the other's life, before her; her past becomes her future.



Another technique in the poem involves the use of participles to give the impression of continuing points of view while the focus changes from one character to another. This overlapping of past and future views at the moment of a real situation serves to merge time for the short duration of the conversation. Another device used to meld the two views is the use of pronouns with ambiguous antecedents in each stanza so that, initially, it is unclear whether the woman speaking in the stanza is thinking about her own reflection or about the other woman.

Two other poems have been grouped together because, in each, similar methods are employed to convey a powerful emotion. Movement is used in each poem to relate the forcefulness of the emotion and to unify the poem. "Iris" and "The Wedding Guest" are first person descriptions of the emotional reaction of an individual to another person or thing which has a powerful hold on the speaker. Movement is carried in each poem by this intensifying response. The building of emotional force is conveyed by manipulation of image which becomes more distorted as the speaker's emotional state heightens.

In "Iris," the speaker initially gives a fairly realistic picture of the scene. However, the use of "provocative" to describe "yellow" hints at her aroused state. As the poem continues, the emotion intensifies. The flower becomes a "vain tyrant," who controls the speaker. The emotion

described is one of nervous frustration. The wholly separate beauty of the iris bothers her. She cannot become one with that beauty. Again, the point is similar to that made in the Will poems. It exemplifies the frustrating limits of the individual in an attempt to totally know something separate.

Other techniques of movement in the poem are intended to magnify this feeling. Like the "skittish" eye of the speaker, which cannot wander from the iris, the reader's eye is pulled back quickly to the short one- or two-syllable lines of the poem, which are stacked like the flower's long stem. The long o sound of yellow, the long i sound of iris, as well as the long a sound of shape, are constantly repeated in various words throughout the poem to make it concentrated with the subject, as is the speaker's mind.

"The Wedding Guest" is a portrayal of another powerful emotion--fear. Again, greater distortion of the initial image indicates the speaker's intensifying emotion. The look, described as that of one man in the first stanza, becomes, in the second, "warped faces at all angles," which represents the unbearable building of fear in the speaker. Line lengths are also intended to relay this emotion. The lines are long to imply the speaker's long unending inward "draw" with the intense "laser look" of the other. Short one- and two-syllable words, often ending in curt p, t, or pt sounds, are used to imply the forcefulness of the look.

The meter is irregular, although, at the point of greatest intensity, the stresses fall closer together: "laser looks ate straight past." As in "Iris," assonance and occasional internal rhyme are used to concentrate the look and to carry the flow of emotion.

In structured conventional forms, regular rhythms provide this unifying movement. Sometimes steady meter is hardly noticeable, as, for example, when it is used to structure the flow of natural conversation. At other times it can be used to emphasize constant motion. Regular meter in conventional forms is also often altered to accommodate various types of movement. Included in the series are several structured poems which use regular rhythms in these ways.

"The Track" varies the iambic rhythm of the sonnet form to suit the description of different motions. The poem describes an oval running track filled with odd-sized people, making odd and awkward movements. It begins in regular iambic pentameter to describe the setting but gradually loses this regularity as the varied rhythms and forms are presented. In each character description, appropriate meter is used to suit that character's type of movement. A string of one-syllable stressed words describes the quick pace of the short-legged man. By contrast, the tall man's long stride is emphasized by the use of participial and adverbial phrases which extend the sentence base. They also contain

several unstressed syllables which serve to lengthen the beat and ease the pace. The description of the older women is for the most part in trochaic meter, indicating their short but easy stride and regular swaying movements. In the rest of the poem, lines of regular iambic rhythm alternate with irregular beats, perhaps to stress an inability of the tiring runners to keep up with life's constant rhythm which continues oblivious to the individual. Although not done intentionally, the rhyme becomes less exact toward the end of the poem. This could also be interpreted as an indication of the weakening condition of the runners.

"Strangers at Day Break" has a regular beat and rhyme to indicate the constant rhythm of the body. Although the meter is not regular, each line has four stressed syllables to it and any number of unstressed syllables. The four-beat rhymed couplet lines relate the regular rhythm of the body's autonomic systems. Any voluntary movement breaks this rhythm, as exemplified in the second and fourth stanzas. The purpose of doing this is to contrast the physical and mental state of the characters. There is a basic link between the two persons which is obvious when the mind is not at work. However, the conscious mind often breaks this link.

In "Dinner With Auntie," regular meter carries the flow of natural conversation. The poem, a dramatic monologue of an eccentric old woman, has a base meter of trochaic pentameter. This technique allows the speech to flow easier,

at a regular pace. The use of stresses at short, regular intervals gives the speech a concentrated vitality which sets it off from ordinary prose speech.

Although movement is inherent in poetry, and in prose for that matter, the above poems have been discussed in terms of movement because it is one of their primary concerns. Similar techniques of movement are used in the remaining poems, although their unity and structure depend more on other methods.

In another group, a central image is used in each poem to unify it. The image, often presented in the title, is either a symbol for a person or a concept, or is itself the focus of the poem.

The central unifying image in "O" is the title, a visual image. It symbolizes futility, a false hope, nothingness, as it comes to represent a traitorous moon as well as the unfertilized egg, the "dead hope." The egg, in turn, is a metaphor for the woman and is used to describe her despondent condition. Because the female menstrual cycle parallels the phasing of the moon, a direct relation is made between the woman "egg" and the moon. The moon causes the woman's hopeless cycle in the poem. The woman realizes that the moon's promise of a completeness in life is false as it continually shatters her hopes and drags her to a state of despair, symbolized by the "blood knot," the infertile egg. The last line describes the real nature of the moon and the

woman. It also explains the meaning of the central image, the title. The repeated use of words with the letter o could be considered another unifying technique. These words continuously draw attention, visually and audibly, to the main image.

Again, in "Door" a single image is used to give the poem coherence. This image, the door, represents the man being described. In his unwillingness to communicate, to be touched emotionally, he is like a closed door. In the third stanza, words descriptive of closed doors are used to define his locked senses, the faculties he could use to know the woman as well as the gates to his own emotional core. These words ("the shut," "their lock," "the close") are usually verbs but are used as nouns in this case to intensify the tightness of the man. Because his senses remain closed, he fails to appreciate the uniqueness of the woman. Consequently, his potential remains untapped. There is no emotional growth. The image of the open door in the last two lines takes the reader back to the beginning of the poem. These lines illustrate what is told about the door in the first four lines.

In "Gaze," the whole poem is a description of the central image, a man's gaze. This image becomes a reflection of his emotional condition. Although his gaze descends slightly from its distant "realm," it still "clings to its sterile brow." The man still remains distant from life and

uninvolved. As the look moves down, the lines in the second stanza become shorter to give the impression of sudden movement. As the look comes to a stop, the lines lengthen.

The title is again the unifying image in "Offspring." The rest of the poem describes the making of this image. The life rhythms of the male and female merge, become one, in the offspring. The child speaker is the embodiment of this "contrapuntal" rhythm; she is the unified form of the dual impulse. Every movement she makes is sparked by this merging. The last line carries the reader back to the title and explains the nature of the central image. It also clarifies the meaning of the word. The poem is a definition. It narrows down to the origin of the word, the image.

Again, in "Hummingbird Arc," a main image holds the poem together. The entire poem is a contemplation of the arced pattern a particular hummingbird makes in flight. The poem reveals the speaker's thoughts concerning the arc as he examines it. The arc becomes for him a symbol of mortality, incompleteness. By its symbolic nature, the arc reflects this half life, and in doing so, "completes it," orders it, provides "a stay against confusion." The speaker interprets the arced flight as a work of art. He toys with the possibility that the bird, too, must be aware of his condition if he creates art. In the final line, the speaker admits the ridiculousness of his assumption and reduces the image to "mindless play." The image holds the speaker's attention

throughout and is intended to stay in the mind of the reader as well.

The central image in the next poem, "House," makes a statement about human nature. As the title suggests, the image is an old, fallen-down house. By telling what the house no longer is, the speaker explains what it used to be, what its purpose was--to keep privacy, to protect intimate lives. The house is evidence of the need for human intimacy. The old house no longer performs this function and is, therefore, deserted. The comparison of the open and closed house is inversely related to the open and closed nature of its inhabitants. In a closed setting, the characters can be open, can communicate honestly. In an open setting, the intimacy is not there. Also, space and place work upon each other in a similar way. Place breaks down as space invades. These inverse relations are used to tighten the poem. In addition, sound plays an important part in the poem's coherence. The long o sound, as in close and open, is repeated throughout the poem to emphasize the dual nature of the central image.

The final poem, "Grandma's Jewels," cannot be placed in any of the above groups. Its unique feature is its storybook quality. The long prosy lines are intended to enhance the storybook impression. The poem is a narrative account of a girl's initiation into womanhood and her sudden realization of her creative abilities. To emphasize the girl's



creative power, the potential of the imagination is paralleled to that of the female body. The grandmother was the embodiment of pure imagination when she was alive, and her jewels are symbolic of her nature. Whether the jewels actually retain the grandmother's spirit, or whether the girl allows herself to be carried away by her own imagination, remains ambiguous. By the end of the dance, which has the intensity of a sexual experience, the girl is in awe of her female body. Her female potential is fully realized. She has entered womanhood.

Of course some of the techniques discussed in this collection were not used consciously at the time of writing. To a large extent it seems the poet must rely on an innate sense of his subject. He must know and understand completely the unique feeling, object, or person he wishes to convey in order to inject his poem with the same particularity. He must allow this feeling to express itself on the page. That is, rhyme, rhythm, and other techniques are at times used unconsciously to materialize the unique impulse of the subject the poet feels.

This is not to say that judgment does not play a major role in determining the form of a poem or that writing should be easy. As was stated above, the writer must develop a sensibility to poetry. This developed sensibility, or increased awareness about the function of a poem, plays a partly conscious, partly unconscious role in writing. It acts

as conscious judgment and also as intuition. The more the poet writes and reads poetry, the more this sensibility is sharpened and the clearer his direction becomes. This study in poetic structure has greatly broadened my understanding of poetry and, like Will, I am more aware of the direction I must take to make sufficient form.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Donald Hall, "Knock Knock: A Column," American Poetry Review, 5, No. 5 (1976), 32.

<sup>2</sup>W. H. Gardner, ed., Gerard Manley Hopkins: Poems and Prose (London: Penguin Books, 1974), p. xxii.

<sup>3</sup>Gardner, p. xx.

<sup>4</sup>Marvin Bell, "Homage To The Runner: A Column," American Poetry Review, 5, No. 6 (1976), 10.

<sup>5</sup>Wallace Stevens, "Of Modern Poetry," The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens (New York: Borzoi Books, 1955), p. 239, ll. 1-2.

<sup>6</sup>Bell, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup>Robert Creeley, "How He Knows When To Stop: Creeley On Closure," American Poetry Review, 5, No. 6 (1976), 6.

<sup>8</sup>Marvin Bell, "Homage To The Runner: A Column," American Poetry Review, 5, No. 2 (1976), 31.

<sup>9</sup>Bell, p. 32.

<sup>10</sup>Bell, p. 32.

WILL MADE WORD AND OTHER CONCEPTIONS

## Will's Dilemma

I must find a way to puncture this tight  
form this constant beat and nauseating  
rhyme again I claw these palpitating  
lines these pulsing feet with hope that I might  
find a leak to flee this humping day-night  
stress-unstress compulsive syllabating  
but hope recoils with ricocheting  
rhyme. Must I yield to my pressurized plight?

I will revel in this even frame. Snap  
coy winks at double lengths and curves--aware  
of my juicy rhythm and smug rhymed pairs.  
I'll kiss bald knees tucked side by side to nap  
like twin eyes snug beneath lids' warm skin flaps;  
savour dual pits' sweet stink, each scooped and haired.

## Will's Lost

There isn't any universe like mine--  
so regular in functioning--each beat  
and chew and churn and move in perfect time.  
For it to play its symphony I eat  
all day and take in all my body sights  
and sounds. Right now it plays a minuet.  
I tap a foot, with well-formed arch, both right  
and left, its round-knob toes a handsome set,  
and clap these knuckled double claws--each joint  
a circle pool rippling--to body's tune.

The beat grows loud. Knees knock. Eyes blink. Loins  
slap. Teeth click. Feet stomp. Hands rap--feel like a goon  
but can't stop--where am--stop--where--this raging--  
scream! dry heave scream! Head Arms Legs  
pop off

## Will Escapes

Will's parts are piled and cloaked with sheet.  
A hairless head tombstones the heap,  
Forever chanting Om.

Today through Om's ether  
He hears a clatter  
Nearing from antiseptic halls.

Emergent faces flutter his calm--  
A lady in white  
Leads with fire.

"They're coming to light my pyre."  
Will feels a hint of pulse,  
Odd parts jump, but Om won't stop.

Beaming faces  
Wild in light  
Upon him now  
Near the fire  
To his breath--

"No!" he shouts.  
The fire's out!  
They laugh, clap, whistle,  
Scream, "Happy Birthday, Will!"

Om's calm's gone.

His head streams wet.

Warmth awakes numb parts.

He bawls.

"Don't cry Will, you're only 25."

In the lady's mirror eye

He sees a rotting heap,

A marble face with stone O mouth,

And beyond--

A window frames color moving

Outside: tan girls sprung,

Blond strands caught

In air, orange balls flung

Toward lined shacks,

Brown roofs

Spade blue sky.

It tugs, it pulls him toward her eye.

She plucks a kiss from his approaching cheek.

Another surge of warmth fills Will.

He knows he needs the feel.



At midnight,  
Will gathers himself,  
Spills out the window,  
And heads off  
  
Sputtering words.

will's gone or some poems just won't eat

his body is a pack of orphans

each odd part wills out

i cannot see what holds--

just a spread

of wild nerves

his talk is ugh eck mu

sometimes bat

or any word--

an absurd bird freed

aimless in its freedom--

it falls on me

i listen for a tune

but hear none

a blind mute bird

a senseless word

i shelve it with his other surds and wait

i feel no rhythm to his gait

foot and foot he plods

knocking through the hall

a leg here a hip an elbow here there a head

bang both walls

he falls against my kitchen door

a sprawl of bones like sticks

i pick up

i try to feed him

not sure how or if he eats

i spoon food in

his dead-end mouth eyes

or any odd receptacle

i smear his skin with food

and knead his gut each limb

tenderly

so that a pore might suck it in

i cannot feed him

food streaming from disparate parts

he picks up to try again

i hear him knocking through the hall

off the walls

back door slams

an odd buttocked waddle dims

## Will's Love Song

If I could work this tongue, form these lips to  
word the sound, I'd tell you Will's inside  
somewhere. If these wild parts would just comply,  
I'd play a tune, shape a dance for you.  
I'd wring my soul to sing a sultry blues,  
enchant you with these limbs--their rhythmic ride.  
If this flesh, cracked holed haired and boned, would jive  
with Will, you'd know me by the warmth I'd give you.

But when I try to sing I fart, to dance I  
clap, to come I burp. Whose line is this? Whose  
transplant heart? Whose gnarled skull? Whose ten eyes  
ogle me from stranger's feet? Could I choose  
to give just one odd part to you I'd try.  
But with no trust of word, kiss, gland--what to use?

## Will, Dancing In the Dark

I'm jarred awake, the wall vibrates, muffled  
music scratches rhythm in my brain--the  
clock's at five, I hear some talk and shuffling  
feet in time with knocking bones--It can't be  
him again!--It's Will dancing in the dark;  
stretching out his knotted limbs, rushing out  
with wetness in his skin, saying unsaid marks  
written back of eye, untold words--spouting  
from his watered lips. . . It's dawn. He's  
lost again. . . Will, fly-by-night,  
Why fold to morning now? What keeps your easy  
swing, sweet singing, your light step from sight?  
"I'll down day with three swallows of sleep," you  
say? Let's play, Will. . . Come to!

## Will Sings

Nightbird's note picks my skull

stings like

acid to my musty brain

eats my mind clean

spills down spine and

fills a vacant core

washes hollow's dust blind

holds me one

and willful.

It forms the bird to sing.

I hurt

to tell the word

that plays me new

again.

Will, To His Woman's Hip

hip

den of tiny promises spread  
 silent on bone like window dust  
 cup and curl in  
 to wanting  
 fill a promise with willing arcs

hip

love's coop  
 cup our ever-earth root  
 birth dirt stirred

hip

life boat  
 spoonful  
 harbor cargo will ful  
 in your bone hull  
 rock it safe in wet curve  
 ease it from you  
 whole

## "Uncle"

## I Foot

earth press  
 you print its moist dirt  
 it inks you black;  
 filthy lover  
 mud nudger  
 bend ground to your sweep

## II Leg

vertical wing  
 wind string  
 swing a tune from air  
  
 cocked shoot  
 clip space to your fold  
 spring it free

## III Torso

centerhold  
 socket your satellites  
 easy  
  
 bone valet  
 hold flesh light  
 and firm like  
 a shirt bright  
 washed fresh and ironed



## Torso

house of vital operations

what engine's held

safe in your bone box

what steams secret

under chest swells

lungs

fill with hot breath of summer

tree and respiring creatures

contract with hollow draw of night wind;

heart

dynamo

pump juice to the limits of sense

flush me bright as blood;

organs

that churn, cleanse, secrete oils

and acids--

simplify variety

purify to one

hip

juice cup

fold a lover in

to bend of spine

out to stretch of

lung and gut

undulating to the drive of generator will

## IV Head

wise hip

what seeds lay dormant

in your grey bed?

Surrender thought and sense

to summer light's rinse

that wakes you

to lift of child's breath

to the seep of flesh's radiance.

Surrender to the soak

that wills seed open

on page, ever-growing--

like a plant in print.

## V Hand

the palm pulls nervous  
rivers each into other  
like sea draws waters  
down: the quiet bend of hand  
into itself--Bye Bye Tootsie.

Child Watches Rain Melt Snow

The pane is no wall  
to the child and rain

a rain that disturbs

a sense of reflection fading  
eying her like an old photo:

a child's faint line  
in a fogged window.

## Tenants Reflecting

Through the pane their  
eyes catch. Turning in  
midstep, the gray woman  
bares her lined face  
to the woman lying  
beyond the glass, raising  
the shade, mouthing, "Is  
there something wrong?"

The old one, knowing  
the look, the tired  
eye, knowing she  
knows, eases her dried  
core's barren clench  
and words, "I blew  
a fuse." The

younger, eying the  
wet web between  
her new teeth, foam  
corner her tight lip,  
nods "Oh."

Turning away, the  
old woman glimpses  
the other reclining,  
the gray veil  
falling.

## Iris

The iris  
unfolds  
provocative  
yellow  
at my  
window: the yellow

hurts  
my skin  
forever  
pulls my  
skittish  
eye back  
to it like  
some vain  
tyrant.

Its light  
breath hangs  
weightless  
on me--  
the yellow  
plays  
beyond

my touch;  
it makes  
me wild--  
I ache  
to shape  
myself  
iris--  
that yellow;  
curl round  
curves, folds  
of that gold--  
to grow  
yellow  
till I  
die.



## The Wedding Guest

From some outer tilt he clipt me,  
head tipped, eye bleeding back at me  
wild from its corner--straight on  
--bull's eye.

At all angles warped faces burned in  
on me; from sides of eyes laser looks  
ate straight past somewhere between  
the cleave of mind.

that point touched into which I cave:  
the density that is me  
falls into itself,  
disappears

but is felt like the draw of a million tons of river.

## The Track

They come from out of brush and tree to tread  
the dust red O, a circus of hue  
and form, bounding wild, flesh juggling, each head  
bobbing with foot spring. Short man's blue  
pant squat leg kicks up swings down each limb round  
and round. Passing with a long stride, tan thin  
man glides by easy as a lithe wolfhound.  
Older women, plump and white as muffins,  
giggle and sway after in his soft air.  
The circus ring rotates these mottled beasts,  
now streaming wet, panting wild with nostrils flared--  
all frantic for the endless turn to cease.  
  
The beat grows loud, the head falls, the torso  
sags. Quick steps behind pick up the dying tempo.

## Strangers at Day Break

In sleep two covered guts, round  
and snug, swell and fall to the sound  
of breathing. Breath rushes in waves  
out and back into the source which enslaves  
its ever-rebounding wave. Each heart  
blood-beating its constant part  
to the never-ceasing, proceeding-retreating  
rhythm of breathing, disperses its beating  
through narrow inlets to outer bounds.  
To the breath sound each skull pounds,  
fingers tick, toes pulsate,  
from head to foot veins vibrate.

Suddenly, his leg shoots up then  
falls down across her bare flank.  
A more heated beat begins--

In a rhythmic dance they start  
they stall. Each one heart  
pump echoes twice a thump.  
His leg pulsates to the throb of her rump.  
She is moon to his ebb and he  
to her flow drawing breath sea  
billows one from the other. They lie

enveloped in cosmic harmony.

They awake. Guts jump, skulls ache, veins gyrate.

"What to say?" they think.

Over her shoulder she flashes a blank stare.

He grins. "You've got a wart on your chin."

## Dinner With Auntie

Ah Ha! Caught you in the dark, my darlings nibbling at my morning crust. So famished you must be. I haven't eaten since noon yesterday. For dinner. . . try these chocolate crumbs. I made the cake especially for your little ones to sort of ween them. Don't run in fear. That's a finger, tiny thing--crawl up it and explore this fleshy form. Go on. . . up my arm. Oh--your infant feet do tickle. . . on up to prickle neck and face and I'll pretend each pin touch is a kiss. Yes. . . across this cheek. Don't stick your nose in pock mark--you black cock! Go on across my moist eyelids to ease the ache. Go on. Back and forth back and forth. . . must I urge you every step? Ah. . . that's it. My sure friend, you do soothe this tired face. . . Enough Enough. Finish your lunch. There--join the rest. Where are those pissing rats? Forever starved! Venez ici,  
mes gris amis. Venez ici!

O

Moon pulls another knot from my womb  
a red clot no form contains  
a dead hope.

I am that hope reborn stillborn  
each new moon.

I'm heavy  
drawn through  
by a stone manipulator  
I can't know  
or rest in its curve.

Moon tricks  
lures with its full O;  
  
it drags me to a blood knot.

Moonscag!  
my womb aches in its curl  
I bend more to your cupped hand beckon  
the fetal circle completes:  
  
stillborn clot.

## Door

It's not what goes through or stops  
hesitant at its open, or  
even what is led to:

it's what's made in the meeting.

I searched the doors of your face;  
waited at their lock, lids tight  
like the shut of a double garage;  
waited at the close of taste, the edge  
of smell and ear; waited for you  
to take me in like a breath, to rinse  
your senses clean with me--

for you to tell  
my approach by  
the swing of my frame  
know my name by the salt  
of my skin, the tone  
of my thigh.

I should've used dynamite,  
scattered your eyes like seeds to open  
like doors take in to feed promise.

## Gaze

He has the eye of a saint--  
full of wet pain, faint  
blue, dazed up, reflecting  
a hallowed glow, and  
undisturbed by  
genuflecting lids.

Decending  
its realm  
to fix  
lightly  
on matter  
and form--  
his liquid gaze  
swells. Still  
  
it clings to its  
sterile brow  
like a writhing  
drop latched  
above to its  
awesome source.



## Offspring

In sleep their covered  
forms, although still,  
betray a rhythm, a vital  
friction--

a contrapuntal interplay  
of breath against breath: this,

the beat I have always  
played to, gestured with--

from within

the dance forever springs.

## Hummingbird Arc

What stopped your flight at half circle,  
arced up waiting like a beggar's  
hand, waiting curved like  
a wanting hip?

You, who come from circle shell,  
know no circles here? You too  
know wanting, hunger  
in your feathered cave  
pulsing?

Your artful flight reflects  
this half, completes it.

You, bird, taunt me with your mindless play.

## House

The house is no harbor  
now a jagged space  
of boards, half doors,  
and weeds--an open place  
once sacred in its close;  
no part unseen, no  
private cubicle to hold  
the force of lovers more  
loving in containment.

The walls keep no secret now--  
no voice that stirs  
another mind to speak,  
a voice to close  
the space between,  
no feeling told  
to charge the place, excite  
the calm of quiet wild  
invading.

## Grandma's Jewels

Picture her gaping into that brown crushed bag  
she found next to Grandma's ashes.

There on the shelf  
through thin paper skin  
she had spotted a glint,  
a crystal star, blue like a squint  
eye laughing, jeweled bait  
to draw young girls in.--They say

until ashes are freed over water to mix  
with the wind and sea, the lone soul still stays.--

Inside jewels blazed wells of color  
She pressed them against her bare breast and arms,  
the colors burning her face, and danced  
wild with fever like Grandma (she the Empress of Persia,  
the Queen of Spain.)

Grandma was brilliantly mad. She thought her eyes  
sapphires, breasts huge milky pearls nipples in ruby  
and jutting hip an ivory shell cupping a rare diamond.)

She wailed  
arms legs flapped  
in a frenzied rite--  
the step quickened  
the pitch rose  
with the heat--  
higher  
hotter--  
she quaked to a stop.

Proud wonder slowly filled her face and form.

In afterglow  
she packed her secret  
back in its nest  
and showed for dinner. . . .  
real calm like a lady.

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