

***Tern's Bone***  
***and Other Poems***  
***by Suzanne Gross***

***drawings by James Cagle***

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## Introduction

We are proud to devote this issue to the work of Suzanne Gross, on the tenth anniversary of her first appearance in these pages. Her "Guitarist" in the Spring 1955 issue was the first of her poems to receive national publication. Since then her work has appeared in a dozen magazines and has been widely honored: In 1958 she won first prize in the first Sister Madaleva Poetry Association contest. In 1961, first prize in the *Chicago Choice* inaugural issue competition. Her poems have been in the Borestone Mountain *Best Poems of 1961* and *Best Poems of 1962*. Her first volume was *Sand Verbena* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1962).

Born in winter 1933 in Janesville, Wisconsin, Suzanne Gross attended the University of Pittsburgh and, for a summer, the University of Wisconsin, before graduating from Beloit College. She has worked for the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Department of the Interior) and the Agricultural Research Service (Department of Agriculture) in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and for the Forest Service there and in Milwaukee and Madison, Wisconsin.

Since 1963 she has been Poet in Residence at St. Norbert College, West DePere, Wisconsin, a school to be congratulated for its wisdom in providing for the poet the ideal proportions of association with the academic community and freedom for writing. The combination is rare.

M.K.S.

*Of herself and her work, Suzanne Gross says:*

I am not far from the farm. On my mother's side, a great-grandfather came from Devonshire during the Wisconsin wheat boom, planted 1,000 acres near Janesville to the gold grass, and was wiped out with the others. In my memory there is a terrible story of fire on that farm.

On my father's side, a great-grandfather came from Hesse-Nassau, farmed in Ohio, and then in Wisconsin. My father's father farmed in the Kickapoo valley, near Bear Creek where my father grew up. I have been on that farm, folded in the hard hands of the hills, subject to floods, timber rattlers, deep winters, and the violent cycles of God that make gristle in the hearts of men and women. On that farm I milked enormous cows, with my face in the sweet flank and the milk singing in the pail; I picked strawberries and blueberries; shelled corn until my hands were polished and too tender to touch; snapped beans on the back stoop for a thousand lifetimes; loved a dog, was run away with by a fat horse whom I also loved, and listened to the dogs running the foxes in the dark.

From such bearded forefathers, such tales, and such a childhood I drank up a hungry cherishing of the ground, and the worship of water. Five years in the desert only made the hunger sharper and the worship more deep.

It is said there are Normans in the beginnings of my mother's father's family. If so, perhaps it was their fathers who passed on to me something about the sea, and the ships on the sea.

Five years with the United States Department of Agriculture, in the Animal Disease Eradication Branch of A.R.S., and in the Forest Service, brought me to facts that expanded, enriched, illumined land and water, and increased the wonder.

Inextricably interwoven with these sources of flesh and spirit is, for me, Christ. I am a Christian

because all my ancestors have been as far back as my ancestors can be discovered at all. I am a Catholic Christian, gladly, because of Demeter, and because of Dionysus, who have not been lost but taken up; and because I must eat and drink Christ, that I shall not let the body or the earth go, or be left behind.

Probably I am a poet for the same reason that I am a woman; though I do not understand why I should be either, I rejoice to be both.

When I was a child, my mother read me Milton's "Sonnet on His Blindness." I did not know it then, nor for several years afterward, but I was hopelessly in love with the English language from that moment. And I do not resent that it must *mean*: I love the sounds it makes because they mean, and can teach me to mean always over and over again, newly. And I do not mind saying over and over again what we have always said: how lovely the world is, how painful too, and mysterious; how good love is, and how much like death; how fearful death is, and we do not know what we shall become.

Like all poets, I suppose, I hoped in the beginning to say new things in a new language. I am not now ashamed of that hope, but I had rather now say these things over and over until I have learned how to sing them: perhaps this is why I love best of poets my dear Milton, and Keats, and Shakespeare, and John Donne, and Wilfred Owen, and Dylan Thomas, and Edith Sitwell, and Whitman, and Dickinson, and living men and women whose names, I think, follow as naturally as sons and daughters from those above.

And perhaps that is why the music I love, and that is so essential to, and so much a part of, my work is Bach, and the strong, classical Chopin we know so little, and Schumann and Brahms, Mozart, Beethoven, and Richard Strauss.

And perhaps that is why I am not, at least not willingly, of the family of Rimbaud. I too, would approach the condition of music; but I believe that no beatitude is to be won head-on.

*Suzanne Gross*

## From the Cause of Saint Elizabeth

Then we followed on her voice, sounding  
down the narrow passages and down  
the windings of the hollow stairways,  
and so we came up with her, alone  
in the empty hall of the Wartburg,  
where she hugged the naked wall, turning  
her face to crush its bones to the cold,  
and crawling her fingers up and down  
the stone, patting it, pressing it, then  
driving her nails hard against the rock,  
as she would dig a hole to hold to.  
Huddled under the dark vaults, we  
heard her say ah body, how shall we do,  
we have lost our friend. Then she suffered  
us to lead her helplessly to sleep.  
So going in, she saw their silent  
bed and crying God, ah will of God,  
fell all her length headlong to the ground.

All this time, those who went out with him  
to the Holy Land were riding home  
from Italy, fraught with his princely bones.  
We saw them passing through the valley,  
going north along the River Lech.

Over the casques and the blowing hair  
of men and horses, a silver cross  
with five great rubies moved to his pace  
that bore it. Black horses followed him,  
bearing that casket where the duke's bones  
lay wrapped in silk and cloth of silver.  
Through the dust, the velvet footcloths shone.  
Once, men's voices burned out in psalms  
that flowed away over the water.  
Then nothing sounded, only their feet  
lifted and falling, the shift and strain  
of harness, and horses' sighs; the clink  
of hoof on stone, a bird, and the leaves.

And so alone beyond the grieving  
knights she stood beside his bier. And there,  
as she so long desired, they opened  
her the coffin and she looked on his  
bones. A little while she leaned her hands  
against the edge, then slowly spread them  
out, reaching all her fingers to touch  
the remnants of his body. At this  
she broke and wept aloud, and sank  
down on the bier, holding in her hands  
some fragments of his hands. And so she spoke  
to God: I know not all is lost  
when bodies are, though flesh is our bread.  
Surely we shall find our flesh again  
dearer than we knew. Till then be this,  
this, the hand you strike with, shut on me.  
I had no gift to give but this: none  
but this was dear, and nothing more was  
mine. And thank you in this place and time  
to hold again this little much of  
the hands you made for me to sleep in.

## **Tern's Bone**

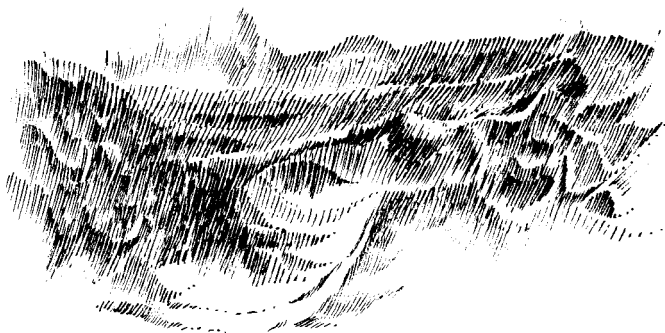
A black tern of the inland sea  
has given me the polished bone  
that built a seabird's breast in him,  
and held the deep muscles of flight  
clasped like hands around the muscle  
of his heart. When I saw the bone,  
it lay in a litter of beer  
cans and torn beach party papers:

a little shipwreck in the sand,  
the graceful keel turned up to catch  
the light. I found the loveliness  
of this as he that left it here  
for me once found his feeding there.  
The black tern is a scavenger  
though he can dive into the sea.

In my hand his breast lies empty  
now. Not even he shall ever  
drink again the wine the precious  
kylix of his bone held for him.  
Another now has poured it out  
beside the sea. So shall the son  
and father die, and leave a key  
of silver and a key of bone,  
though neither shall unlock for us  
their singing and the doors of death.

The killer of bulls, when the grace  
of his courage is gone, leaves his  
torn and bloody shoes. No music  
is more than this bone. The soaring  
bird that left it here is gone now.

Then who may assure me that he,  
the legendary rapist now  
coming closer in the darkness,  
though old and brutal, truly is  
my spouse whom I shall learn to love.



## Deepwater Wife

I don't believe she ever spoke  
his name. Andrew, she called their son,  
but never told us if it meant  
that seaman, and that saint. Perhaps.  
She came daily to the hot beach.  
Some of the time she swam: not well,  
but trusting the water as we  
could not, letting it draw her down  
inside itself, under the waves,  
moving her through the layers of light  
and dying light, the bands of blood  
warmth and shocking cold, surrendered,  
as if she were or would be drowned.  
Long before the first of us saw  
the least shadow of smoke, she knew  
the invisible density  
below the shifting horizon .  
And when, at last, a ship arose,  
her eyes broke and left her open to the sea.



## Grass Oracle

How barbed with light the seeming  
armor of the wheat, the glumes  
that hold the topaz folded  
grains so folded between them,  
as the kernel hides the haulm  
in the secretly feeding  
sun of the stranger's bread.

This is the friend and the flesh  
and the daughter of heaven,  
the low, and grace of the ground,  
and the meek, and that gentles  
the fire and the breakers of rain.

See, it is only the grass,  
having too a hollow culm,  
the leaf sheath wrapped around it,  
and the thin blade of the leaf  
a little broken and curled;  
and having sessile spikelets  
with barbed or bearded glumes.  
See, it is grass. See, it shines  
light of its own on itself  
and is gold.



## Dateline: Death

The paper told where  
it happened of course.  
I have forgotten  
the place now. It could  
have been the corn-green  
town where I was born  
and the trestle curves  
a little west to  
cross the power dam:  
there where I stood once,  
stricken on the bank  
above the rainbow,  
and let explosions  
in the water spin  
me down and drown me.

The paper said three  
children walked across  
a trestle tall as  
mine was. They were one  
boy nine years old, one  
girl of six, and one  
thirteen, who was her  
sister. When they had  
come halfway across,  
the water running

louder under them,  
glittering more now  
into their squinting,  
they heard the diesel  
horn behind them blow.

Silently all three  
began to run. Then  
the youngest fell, caught  
her ankle hard, down  
between the shaking  
ties. The others leaped,  
before they missed her,  
safe from the roadbed.  
Then, only then, one  
saw her sister held  
before the train, who  
turned again, ran back  
again, and tore at  
the shackled foot. Then  
she knelt on the ties  
and took her sister  
in her arms, blinding  
her against her breast,  
and said to her see,  
I am here with you,  
there is nothing to  
be frightened of.  
And the train struck them.

It may have taken  
five minutes at the  
most, the newspaper  
said. She could not have  
known the thing she chose.  
She could not have known.

## The Link

Now that I think of it, I think  
it's no wonder the tarsier is  
never found out of its island;  
still less surprising it is rare,  
nocturnal, and so little known.

I am getting ahead of my  
self. What I wanted to say is,  
I remember reading in one  
of those popular, misleading  
books of science, how the author  
caught, or was caught by, a tarsier.  
Its picture, too, was in the book:  
a quite unlikely animal  
closely, as it were lovingly,  
clothed in its fur. The photo showed

its articulate paws and its  
sort of smile. Its head, or I should  
say its face was eyes: slanted, huge,  
shining and dark—the eggs that hatched  
the resurrection of the dead.

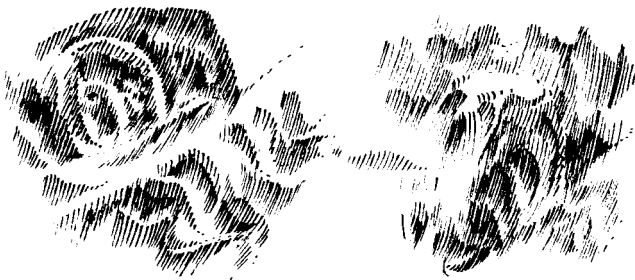
But I am digressing again.  
Apparently hoping to find  
whatever should discover him,  
the man went into the forest,  
walking in the dark. There, the light

he had unexpectedly fell  
on a tarsier and blinded it.

There are a number of easy,  
inadequate explanations  
of all that followed. The tarsier  
sprang out of the light to the man  
it saw, however dizzily,  
behind, or beyond it, and clung  
to his naked arm, huddling its  
body deeper into the warm bend  
of his elbow. Once it looked up  
out of its becoming, blinded eyes  
into the other's. Then it hid  
its face against him, trembling  
all over, and hugged him harder.

The man forgot the specimen  
to know what beat against his arm.  
He touched it, spoke to it. He bent  
his shoulders and his breaking chest  
around it, trying to tell it.

I don't remember if he said  
he collected the thing and it  
died on his hands, or if he said  
he let it go there in the dark,  
in the green tremendous silence.





## **Fox Valley Oracle**

I shall take leaves  
and go to ground:  
cleft, the furrow, mouth of earth,  
and let the breath of earth  
be breath in me.  
And I shall say

here, it is here in the dark

and nine rooms of night:  
in the flared owl's hunting and flight  
over the hay and the crowns of light;

in the pulsing and shiver of singing  
by the milkroute roads and the ringing  
of berries and catkins swinging

over the porches and the stinking flood  
of the river. I shall say the buried blood  
of children founds the mud

of houses, crumpled alleys  
bear the names of men from valleys  
of apples, the fox, and the sallies

of the whitetails to the sprung grain.  
It is here in the nightlong reach of the rain  
to the sleeping women slain

by the glitter of sulphur; and here  
in the running of chain and the freighter's sheer;  
in logs winking and gear

branching iron, the slips  
and the bull wheel, the stone ships  
shouting, and the flaking chips

of dung in the burdock; in an awn  
of wheat; awake in the green caves of the lawn,  
in the starred and smoking dawn

of the black-crowned heron, and the peace  
of the houses broken by wild geese  
passing unseen. It is a fleece

at the fair, it is a plover's cry.  
The fathering swan of the summer shall fly  
forever, and myths in the sky

be true. It is here

in the fields at the sea of a lake,  
where seagulls float in the waved wake  
of a tractor, waves break

through the roots of the farm,  
and god is white pine  
and the harp-horned mother.

## Study of a Dog's Head

Quiet, she sat at my feet.  
She was dark as an oak-leaf  
dying, and I touched her face.  
I held her head in the shape  
of my hands, my fingers made  
a crown, the spring of an arch  
with her skull. I touched her face,  
not for the warm, watersmooth  
eddy and flow of her hair,  
not for the ridging of bone  
above the brain, as knuckled  
and sudden as the mountains  
in the sea, nor the wingspread  
of the bone over her eyes:  
for the two round veins rising  
from under them, tingly  
wrinkled with muscle and nerve—  
it was for them I went down  
on my knees to look at her  
with my hands. I touched the two  
veins, and I felt, I felt them  
fill and fill and fill with blood.

## Maa Ne Hra

My name is the throne  
and I am she who reigns  
in the palace the king is.  
I am fields of barley, fields of wheat.  
My name is bread.  
I am the mother of millet,  
and the water's wife.  
I was a tent in the desert.

I bathe in the dark,  
afraid to see myself  
so naked. Never, never, the child  
never was. Dust is in all  
the glasses for wine and the leaves  
of longed-for books are uncut.  
The dog has found a way  
to die and the shore birds  
have flown from the shore.  
High as the hay  
that is high as a child is,  
thistles have blown and are choking  
the door, and while I slept,  
the plover rose over the prairie  
singing and flew from the land.  
The clover is mowed  
and their houses of grass.

All I had I gave away,  
all but some books  
and my letters. The sheets  
that I signed with my blood  
I burned. Under the sycamore,  
under the tamarisk there I sat down  
and wept the songs inside me.

The river poured me out,  
it silted my body  
with dust and my tongue  
choked me. The mountains are lovely  
where wind woman lives, but my  
home is the prairie and I am your sister,  
child of the chernozem and your father,  
the father of rivers.

Long days we lay  
together in our mother's arms  
and breathed her hair. She taught us  
how we grew in her. The single  
blood that flowed between us  
unfolded us both  
from the same point of love.  
It was for you then,  
I am freemartin now.  
Soon the sun will rise,  
young animals cry to be fed.  
We have colostrum in our hands.

It was your knees that made my hands  
the shape they are to hold  
anything in them, and your fingers  
drew my face the way it is.  
Where any bone that bears me now  
turns in the bond of another,  
you turn with me, you move.

I looked for you always,  
with children and among the waterbirds.  
When I found you by the river,  
you had been torn and were dead.  
I was the terrible  
hawk that hung over you,  
and found a father in the way  
you held me in your eyes.

In the train between cities  
I rode in the smoker where old  
railroad men ruminated their cigars,  
holding out their watches to exchange  
remarks about lost time  
and time to make up  
at every stop. One of them once  
held out in his hands  
a handful of seed pods and asked  
the old trainmen what they would be.  
Nobody answered him. Haws, he said,  
they're haws. And I saw through the glass  
the plowed counties of spring. I call you  
crying in the hands of that old man,  
and in the always dark, religious furrows.

You do not hear me call you  
crying over the heartsick hills  
of the old road  
north by the way of the shore.  
It is darker  
in the car than the night is  
all around me. Ashes scatter  
my thighs. It is colder in the car than  
the walls are of snow.

Now I am old  
as you are old in loss  
who loved me in the dithyramb  
of time and in the formal  
pain of instruments:  
you whose heart stands still  
before the throne, the majesty  
and gracious presence of death:  
my brother who are prince  
of death and promise of the corn.

## My Father's Son

Like me, my father's son  
grows old. Each year I see  
him, he has a little  
more loosed himself to slow  
minutiae of death.

That is, his flesh gathers  
earthward, a kind of mud  
inches off his muscles,  
pools, packs up fat to warm  
an endangered belly  
increasingly cared for.

The bad dreams of fathers  
have bruised the slackened skin  
around his eyes. His heart is  
not in his children's games  
as it was in his own:  
who stood at the anchor  
windlass in Norfolk Roads,

and dawn about to break  
across the streaming chains,  
and sang, because he knew  
the song, *Away Rio*,  
as the dark steel lifted  
to meet the first dark sea.

## A Grave in the Desert

Coming a long way and too late,  
I found her name had turned to stone.  
She was broken, she was numbers  
cut in a rock. There I fell down.

My heart beat thick against the grave.  
I lifted the sand and sunburned  
grass to rinse my eyes and my mouth  
in her body given me back

by that gravid, waterless ground  
where she lay down young. I forgot  
that careful laws enjoin concrete  
and steel to keep me clean of her

unsafe, unsanitary flesh.  
And I forgot I shall not live  
to have wheat from the planting loins,  
crumbs of the soil never shall fall

in my hands from hands that feed me.  
So long I thought I knew my long  
desire returning in the wild  
rose along the road. Rather,

an iron thousand years shall lock  
its lid upon the eye before  
the any body of my love  
shall run to seed and be my pasture.

## The Oseberg Queen

Where the rough plow dove, look:  
a ship is rising clean,  
for a swan-stemmed she-drake  
breaches in a sea of  
mounds, she rocks her bonehoard  
in a light grown older  
by a thousand-year night.

A skerry of stallions  
lies broken in the bow.

Fanged skulls of dogs bite clay  
at the strewn hooves of the  
auroch's calf, whose strumming  
horns are wreathed in ropes. Here  
where the holy horsebones  
thunder among anchors,  
tall sledges reel apart:  
wood writhing with wound-worms,  
light-elves, sharp flowers, and  
the netted nervework of  
the brain become the hands.

Here is a chest of wheat  
and apples. Oh apples  
keep their ancient shape more  
than queens do in the grave.

For the queen's struck to her  
black bones, who lay in the  
beginning royal, robed

upon her bed, snake-necked  
ward-wolves at the corner  
posts watching her asleep.

No hound howled when a man-  
shaped need clawed in the clay  
that clasped her clay and hacked  
away her arms to get  
her red-gold rings. The dogs  
of oak gape whole, their teeth

and their springing eyes are  
sharp as ever. Mats of  
thread imprint the earth, that  
once were heroes ventured  
from her loom. Looms unstrung  
lie loud with the flutes of  
her larking stark bones. Her  
scissors and her spindle  
roll with her spinning braids  
and hoard of horseshoe nails.  
Her wagon breaks in a  
millenium of stones:  
wood melons for the hubs,  
a beast-twined shallow trough  
the wagon bed, shafts for  
the shaggy team that hauled  
her state, four smiling swans  
to rock her on. Cool skill  
will build it whole again.  
Between two planks of the  
buckled deck a little  
sharp axe lies perfectly  
preserved. Now bow and stern  
of the sea shell ship grave  
curve as the bull calf's horns  
or the shadowed moon; carved  
sea-snake's arms or body  
cradling still the viking  
jetsam of a queen. They  
who come to catalogue  
the find shall find her lamps  
of iron in her bones.  
Her thirty oars are all  
run out to row, though kin  
and cattle die and sign  
the meadows with their dung,

sow the sea floors with their  
acts as nameless smooth as  
sailors' skulls. The goggled  
world takes pictures of a  
ship swayed piecemeal up in  
chains. The sea gives up its  
bone and wooden dead a  
lion or a dragon  
or a sailor at a

time. A trove's tricked from the  
drowning years, look! in the  
tug and tanker tangle  
of the harbor barbed with  
steeple, islands, shipwrecks,  
ways, hand in hand with the  
bulging divers, wonders  
walk in their wood and clay.  
These cherubs hold kings' wheat,  
a crowned sheaf on a shield.  
How between their cloudbank  
curls their cheeks still blow rich  
winds and wars. Their wooden  
fruit hangs green and ripe as  
ever at their infant  
thighs. The man-eyed lion  
leaps no longer at the  
bow-wave; still brave with gold,  
he lies tamed by water  
on the deep salvors' barge.  
Beside him Hercules  
bearded as a Swedish knight  
glares in his hood of fangs,  
the hell-dog captive at  
his thick-toed feet. An arm  
without a body lifts  
a torch of wooden fire.

A hero with a book  
treads Caesar down; headless  
now, a Roman soldier  
bears the furious moon  
upon his shield. A one-  
armed warrior, sheathed from head  
to foot in his armor,  
has no face. The lips and  
fingers of the sea have  
touched away the edge of  
feature, the man is a  
gesture in the body  
of a tree: the knee and  
elbow flexed, the bow  
of unreal bones unstrung, the  
crested globe so turned that  
eyes gleam that are not there.  
The nail that held his hand  
and his harp to David,  
rusted and fell away.  
Here is the harp, and the  
hand surrendered by the  
sea. The harp is crude, the  
strings too thick for song. But  
how the certain hand still  
arches gentle on the  
bars, that elsewhere failed the  
kingly body in the  
sea. See, David's harp and  
David's hand were carved all  
one. The head of the oak-  
breasted sailor rising  
from a leafy corbel  
has flesh enough for lips  
wrung from his stump teeth and  
cheeks grooved as he always

drowns. Eels writhe his lime-slick  
hair, slide from his nostrils  
into his mouth, eels loop  
the bay of his sea-sucked  
brains. Neither the scholars  
nor the salvors know where  
this image stood in the  
watery hulk of men,  
no, nor the lovely knight.

Bushels of money swing  
from the sea, all lost ships  
are full of treasure. A  
cock crows on a painted  
plate the size of bread, a  
cock on a dunghill sings  
up two suns in leaf or  
two round trees rising. A  
loaf of butter clings still  
pale as wheat and rancid  
in its keg. What Ragnar  
bent with shackling fists to  
pull this boot on? night and  
the midwatch come again.  
Oh, was it this one? See  
the deep sea diving man  
shod in lead, barred windows  
at his ears, his wing-nut  
necklace heavy on his  
chest, twice cabled to his  
crew on the rocking swell,  
once to the subtle air, who  
walked lost anchors down the  
wreck. He stands forever  
taken streaming on the  
shore in valves and rivets,  
mittening a sailor's

skull. His bloated suit is  
smooth beside the mortal  
scabs and angles of the  
bone. Dark countries take their  
shapes in light above the  
shelving sockets where the  
sea's remembrances have  
spoken tides' night and the  
shipmates' jagged cries to  
patient mineral, though  
no remembrance hungers  
in the bone. The world's web's  
unpicked in fish-mined eyes.  
Hard bread and horse wore the  
teeth as little as a  
child's. The heavy wishbone  
of the jaw was broken  
by the sea. Still without  
live sight or sound, wasted  
bone sees on and on, tells  
the diver's breast what that  
last vision was that scooped  
the meat of heaven from the  
head. They found him fish-picked  
in his humble shroud of  
gathered bones beneath the  
bronze ton of a cannon.  
Oh, hear, the salty caul,  
ache of darkness in the  
shell that sings: I was. For  
high above the crowd of  
newsmen from around the  
world, in nylon ropes the  
heavy cannon sways, cast  
with a king's name, little  
mermaids, flowers, and crowns.

## **Corona Borealis**

### *The Prairie Gull*

How the harpstrung iron sang in earth,  
when heavy horses walked the long fields,  
and fathers called back the former light,  
that green day seep to the inland bone.  
Far out at sea, the folded seabird  
slept, and no wing hurt the sleeping heart.

See, yet from the sea's unspoken heart,  
searching the wound of the broken earth  
that iron moulds, the risen seabird  
finds the chords of air that arch the fields  
unseen, and wrings to his blown bright bone  
his shape shaken in the forming light.

From the naked metal light strikes light:  
a flash as fire to the buckled heart,  
a sun in chains at the turning bone.  
From shod hoofs and the share in the earth  
long lights ring to the church in the fields  
of bread, gold as the eye of the seabird.

Ah sharp, sharp the wings of the seabird  
carve out his storms in the formal light,  
at the plough's wake in the homeward fields  
where his cries dive on the ploughman's heart.  
Huge hooves sink in the still bearing earth,  
the following iron strikes to bone.

And none can think what flesh clad this bone  
springing from the plough, that the seabird  
seeks inland, swept deep to the rived earth;  
or how long this lay cased from the light  
in black wood, or the name of the heart  
of the body spent in the red fields.

Lost with harpshaped iron in the fields,  
now the wand and sceptre of the bone  
appear. None can know if some dark heart  
shall bloom that here fell sown. The seabird  
shall harrow the seed: look where his light  
wings rise to the sea from silent earth.

Over the fields the burning seabird  
lifts his harp of bone in the last light.  
The farm's heart wakes in the spinning earth.

## *Orion*

I saw, last night, a lion shining  
in the dark, pacing over the hills  
and the still farms, going beside me  
silent at my shoulder, at my hand,  
as the road ran home. All night, all night  
over me, he was a question of stars.

I might not have known him in the stars,  
but that in a darkened room shining  
with friends, I learned the fabulous night  
where the great dog barks on the cold hills  
of the northeast world, and the bright hand  
of a swan's child waits to tame or break me.

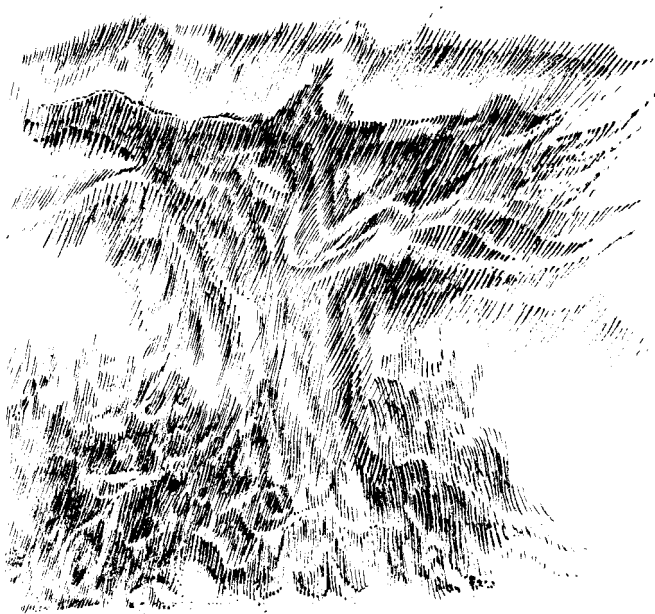
More lovely, more terrible to me,  
tall Orion hunts among the stars.  
That same dog follows at his left hand,  
his sword is light, a sun his shining  
arm. His, all his are the winter hills.  
His white thigh is a glory in the night.

Deep in his body, the horse of night  
calls to the astronomers, and me.  
Still I seek, as I first found, his hills  
fiery with snow, his orchard of stars:  
before the lion sang, a shining  
note burned in the sea-born hunter's hand.

And now look, look again; for my hand  
turns the pages of the rising night  
and finds no children's story shining  
in the room: a lion has taught me.  
There is a god's son among the stars  
who bleeds: Orion once who walked the hills

happy with a loveless virgin—hills  
safe from the daughters of wine. Her hand  
slew him in the sea. He drowned in stars,  
when the god of music dared the night  
in the eyes of his twin. Over me  
lion, Orion and the dark, shining.

From the snowing hills, from the deep of night,  
slain Orion's hand and blood have touched me.  
And more than the stars, the dark horse shining.





*In the Marsh*

Night, my night has fallen in the blood.  
The secret, sweet marrow, white and gold  
as early snow, has fledged out black-birds  
from the center of the brimming bone;  
has fleshed animals I never saw  
until they all lay dying in my arms.

Oh close your eyes, sleep now, in the arms  
of the ground: I dreamed an elk-calf's blood  
had stained me to the heart: that I saw  
the fawn look in at me — so, the gold  
blackened in his wounds and eyes, and his bone  
slacked — I bore it through the night and the birds.

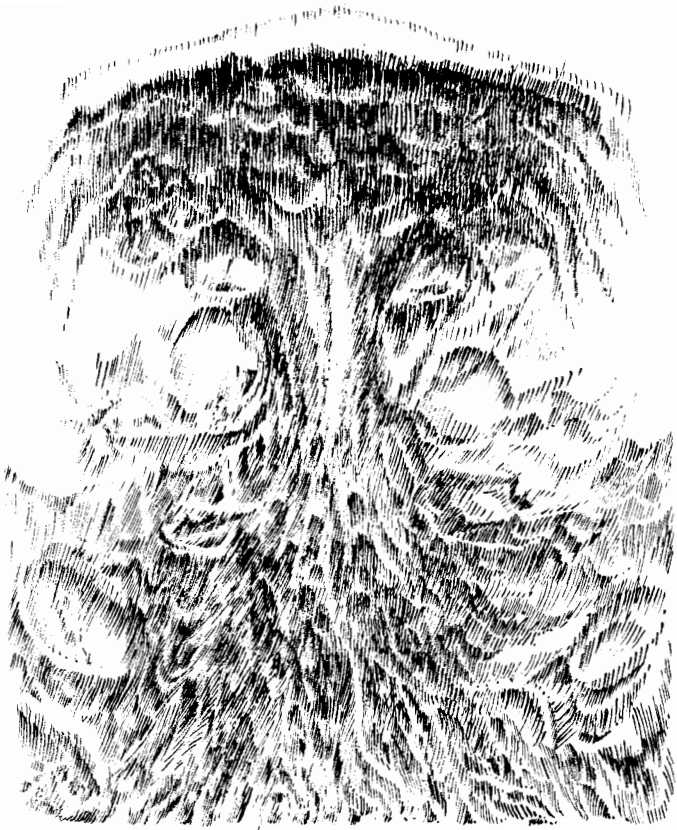
And I have dreamed, dreamed, dreamed of great birds:  
the swan, the swan, too, fell in my arms,  
so light, so light, that was flutes of bone,  
northern cross. He marked me with his blood,  
before he died still rayed with his gold.  
His wings unbent and swept the earth, I saw.

Sleep, sleep now, close your eyes: I saw  
the sun die too, that lighted the birds  
home from the cornfields heavy with gold.  
By the dark water, I raised my arms  
to slow, dark birds. Slow and warm as blood,  
my tears scarred the flesh wrought over the bone.

One day, in the marsh, I found a bone:  
a mallard's thigh, or goldeneye's; I saw  
it gleam in the red grass, all his blood  
gone in the rains of spring. See, a bird's  
bone's my fetish; see, my hunter's arms  
are reeds in Horicon, clashing and gold.

Eyes, close your eyes: in the marsh long gold  
light sang in the fretted woods, winged bone  
sighed into the rising mist, my arms  
ached with heavy cold — oh then I saw  
the deer speak, one to one, and great birds  
beat by in pairs, crying out of the blood.

Tell me: was that gold light then death I saw?  
the frost at the bone an omen of birds?  
for my arms and arms burn in the night's blood.



*The Runes*

When they come that shall lay me in earth,  
who then waking in the prayers of flame  
shall know, or could tell them: her eyes,  
that bruise the cool flakes, embraced no voice;  
the singing bones would sheave no more light.  
Only she could touch, long before dying.

So it shall be, the stars all dying  
out at last. I shall have worn the earth  
smooth and so little, reaching through light  
and rough love to trace the forms of flame,  
listening to snow, and to the voice  
of the Pleiades rising through dark eyes.

A line of song may stab out my eyes  
and I, childless, walk away dying.  
And I may lift a glass, and the voice  
there in the wine pierce me and seel. Earth  
shall ruin at the bone gates, dumb flame  
leap, and fall down in the ashes of light.

Once before the last remembered light  
flares and flutters out behind the eyes,  
and thick dark chokes the animal flame  
spent in the littered hoard and dying —  
once, while I am still betrothed to earth  
with broken rings of bone and a stone's voice,

come: spell in my hands all the world's voice.  
Deeper in the flesh, that I feel light  
break through blood, engrave the names of earth:  
blue paws in the snow, the wolves gold eyes;  
egrets, and evening's rose; the dying  
swan at the singer's throat, and Rigel's flame.

Burn into my hands with hands of flame  
the white bows seething seaward; the voice  
of rivers in the desert, dying  
black song and silver; the green light  
that rises from the corn. Come, pierce eyes  
in my hands, that I shall see the earth.

Cut me so with flame I shall crave no light,  
nor then any voice more to bless the eyes  
that led me dying to the heart of earth.

## *Horses*

All the brave winter there were horses  
on the hills. The day I drove from home  
in the melting light, I saw the white  
mare in the angle of the fence, bells  
of mud dangling from her feet and mane.  
She slept, I think, nor rang in the blown snow.

Beside her, rumpled and whisked with snow,  
the dark one, in the way that horses  
have, shook the comb of his crisp, clumped mane  
and settled to her ribs, as at home;  
his head hung over her, still as bells  
that no one rings, so dark against the white.

As once I meant to pray, and the white  
fields beyond the house of bread, the snow  
shadowing the sky, the turquoise bells  
swung in the steeples of spruce, horses  
remembered, wound me to the green home  
of some stranger, caught in the hills' mane.

But oh, she rode a horse, and the mane  
all braided streamed, so lightly and so white.  
And nobody I knew was at home  
in that house. Arched and spinning in the snow,  
in scarlet halters, two black horses  
wheeled and sprang. Their male necks flared like bells.

There hung on every tress, silver bells.  
Each dark stallion whirled his bannered mane,  
and battered air; and then the horses  
leaned hard bone on bone, and wreathed the white  
pasture in a smoking spray of snow.  
Play, she said, and sing, and know no home.

And so I turned away, going home.  
She spoke: all the silver shining bells  
sparkled as she spurred him through the snow,  
and sparkling rang in the floating mane.  
There in the broken corn, in the white  
drifted field, I prayed for two black horses.

And I have come home, and hear the swept mane  
shaking silver bells through the drifted white  
days, the tinkling snow, the heartbeat of horses.





*The Snowtree*

We slept. All night the burning train rose  
in the west, swaying into the dark,  
moaning and swinging its single light  
on a shrouded field, a hooded tree.  
We slept. And all night long, fiery stars  
fell, swam and drifted in the flowing snow.

So folding, unfolding wings of snow,  
the flashing train soared home. And night rose  
in a floating waterfall of stars.  
Silent, silent, in the praise of dark,  
all the starry animals, the tree  
beside the blinded house, respired light.

From night, the so sleeping, gentle light  
bloomed crystal, rang to the touch of snow.  
Shining at the door, the apple tree  
shimmered on a silver stem, a rose  
of swan's feathers and ice, bearing dark  
garnets, rubies, and gathered blood of stars.

All the world's waters sang in the stars  
of jewelled dust on the boughs of light  
that morning. Young rivers burst their dark  
pens of ice and swirled away the snow;  
seasalt and sweet, the swarming sap rose  
warm in hidden branches of the bones' tree;

the gold blood fountained in the pine tree  
throbbing through summer; pale shooting stars  
in the firefly forest and a rose  
on the whispered prairie shattered light  
for the crowns of grass. Enchanted snow  
floated the living tree, flowed from the dark

body of the wived field, from the dark,  
weeping palaces of stone. The tree  
is naked now, now the blessing snow  
sinks to the starving roots. The swift stars,  
with diamond claws and fangs of light,  
tore the singing tree and the wild, one rose.

We sleep. In the dark heaven of earth, stars  
and seas rise to the tree. In the mole-light  
silently, silently, snow crowns the rose.

*Cantata*

Spring shall come: they are clearing the stones  
from the fields; and see, the trance of death  
shall break away and let the body  
go. The sun shall discover the earth.  
The shroud veils a bride asleep; the heart  
unfolds that was so buried in the fall.

In the woods, below the waterfall,  
I stand still and hear the melting stones  
tick, and water dropping from the heart  
of the fern-green ice sing me the death  
of cold. I breathe in the taint of earth:  
sharp, like bread; and sweet as a cow's body;

rank, like raw milk; good as the body  
of a man haying and in the fall  
of love. I kneel down to feel the earth,  
the flood-combed grass, lichens on the stones,  
clenched roots. When I rise to tell the death  
of death, there is no one to hear my heart

say, it lives. And though I break my heart  
to be your bread, and bless your body  
in my hands, I come to bear this death  
growing on my blood. O let me fall  
asleep, and drown now, as the numb stones  
shall drown when the whistling swans cross the earth

and cry. Though I would rock in the earth  
forever, no worm will sing my heart  
to sleep. I must go over the stones  
to touch the flying hands and body  
of this blind gull, and see the sun fall  
on this green bay and wild swans in the death

of the daylight. Gulls struck gulls to death  
here; they have written it in the earth,  
in the lapped sand. And now the swans fall  
deeper as they flash into the heart  
of the water, seeing a body  
cast a shadow here darker than the stones.

Come, sleep's brother death, close over my heart  
the farming hands of earth. Let my body  
fall harrowed. See, they are clearing the stones.

*Nocturne*

They say of the seal-wives they drown  
the men who follow their song  
beyond the breakers, walking  
into the shipwecks and fishermen talking  
under the sea, into the long  
and echoing choirs of light to lie down

with the women the beautiful seals become. Down  
there in the dark that is deeper than breathing they  
drown

and never come home. They say it is death to long  
for the seal-women so. Only the hearing their song  
is the danger of death. I do not think they die. They  
are all talking  
together and singing there, and I am walking

under the water with them. I am walking  
alive in the deeps of the rain, where deer lie down  
in the streaming grass. I hear them talking,  
I see them dive in the waves of the hay. Though I  
drown

here, I shall not die. I am learning the song  
the animals sing to themselves, hearing your hands  
and long

hair stream in the long  
swell of the rain. I am walking  
on the shore, and hear at my ankles the song  
the breakers say, rolling the pebbles up and down  
to shine them smaller and smaller and drown  
them at last in the dune-grass. Children are talking

there, out of the reach of the sea, talking  
of cities to build in the sand. And I hear the long  
combers come in and they call me. They will not  
drown

me so close to the shore. I am walking  
into them, naked now as I go down  
the slope of the land under water. The song

of the breaking sea is rising to the song  
that is breaking my breast. The voices talking  
on shore and all the lights are dying down.  
The water is lifting me, lifting me, long  
waves have hold of me now. They are walking  
me out to sea with them, naked and helpless, to  
drown.

Blue water, teach me the song of my dying I long  
to know. Still as they are talking ashore, teach me  
to sing as I am walking  
down to deep water, blinded and shining, to drown.

## *Advent*

I did not see the snow begin to fall.  
I was alone in the house, and did not know  
how quietly that afternoon the light  
was leaving me to all  
that I belong to of the night,  
and the drifting down of snow.

Soon, though, sharper points of snow  
touched the tips of my eyes. I felt the fall  
of winter tap at windows emptied by the night,  
and tick in tiny hairs at my wrist till I could know  
the closer cold drifting all  
the hollows of the body. I reached for the light,

and my hand shrank as if pricked by the light  
stab of a needle. Suddenly snow  
glittered again on my mother's hair, as walking all  
the way from church, I watched it fall  
on her, flash, and fade in her furs. I did not know,  
then, what the snow was. I only knew the winter night

hurt me with cold and stars. And I knew, when night  
came early, I could see my breath vanish out of the  
light.

The grown-ups said it was my ghost. I did not know,  
then, how they knew, or why they wanted snow  
for Christmas. I only saw the white sky fall  
until I could not see the garden or the lily-pool at all

and white tombs covered all  
the peonies. I lay awake against the night,  
and tried, inside myself, to make the fires of fall  
come back. Now, I sleep without a light.

Born in winter, mated in the snow,  
pelted like the fox with fire, we cannot say we know

that after winter we shall know  
the handclasp of the rain, though all  
the fields lie down now in the snow,  
turned from the plow as though the night  
will not be long and the morning light  
will come, and spring, and summer, and fall.

I only know that any night  
at all may be forever when the last light  
dies and the snow and the darkness fall.

## Monologue to Saint Mary Magdalen

I too have let the desert rock me  
dumb, and huddled in a skull, fierce to  
be as nerveless, smooth, amnesiac  
as that soupbone of the sun. But flesh  
would not fall and let me season dry,  
drifted with the cipher of an ox.

Still those horns arrest embrace and prayer.  
Rib of cattle, skull of man, shapely  
rack and fret, teach me nothing, nothing  
but the gorgeous garb of flesh they wore.  
So to the old bone's proscenium  
my chorus, grave and naked, returns.

You who are my young mother, say  
if the pale and tawny clients flared  
always at your thighs, and your polished  
fingers ached across the bone. Say that  
when you turned a grove of lovers turned  
with you into a daylight. I crave  
that lost and cried away now, as I  
think you did; and bless what bodies burned  
upon my own; bless though hooded hell  
whirl and clatter in the sand to dance  
me broken on the wishbone of a  
wound. I cherish lovely fire to slay  
great angels in their holes. Could you, my  
saint that were so rare a craftsman to  
the taut and easy bone, curse flesh? you,  
whose artful hands shut the tough, dusty  
feet of God into your hair; who ran,  
so simply glad again, to take the  
brave scarred lover in your famous arms.