

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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THE DECK STOOD ON THE BURNING BOY

The deck stood on the burning boy,
The water slapped from under,
And all around
Ship topside down
Felt boy be rent asunder.

Through all the day and all the night
'Twas fire upon the water,
Till with a sigh
The lad heaved high
And down, with ship hard after.

Thus in the water sprouts the flames
By boy and barque once planted,
And everywhere
Through earth and air
Is sea by fire haunted.

And fathoms down the deck still stands
With leaves of light and yellow,
Where just beneath
With fiery wreath
Still burns the beastly fellow.

Donald Finkel

2

SONG

The morning stirs in my wings
The flapping of young desire
My song is silent at nightfall
When the sun and my wings expire

My knowledge of myself
Should I fly or sing or be
Is in the leaves I touch
In the grass I taste and see

At noon when the sun is suspended
Over the eggs I laid
I bathe in the warmth of the sunlight
These young eggs sleep in my shade

By knowledge of other birds
The song each loud bird sings
Is not the knowledge of birds
But the knowledge of my own wings

At night when the world is shadows
And my wings feel far away
I can feel the wind in the trees
The wind of day after day

The knowledge that sleeps in my wings
The knowledge I cannot see
Is bird after bird after bird
The knowledge of me after me

Sanford Edelstein

DECORUM LIKE A SHAWL

Move over brothers
share your warmth
with one more maniac—
let us club our brains.
The wind tunnels of today
hold me suspended,
streamline my memory
into a smooth, unfamiliar shape.

Alarms of anxiety go off
long before the appointed hour—
apprehensively I leap
from crisis to crisis,
clad only in a pale pink gown.

Lobotomy, that brain rape,
looms large on my morning horizon
I must learn myself again
before slaughter on a legal knife
nips the brain's buds.

My garden walks
are smiling blameless jaunts—
while observed I wear decorum
like a shawl.
Soon they will signature release
and all the bottled-up screams will rise
beyond the iron edged windows
beyond this mad man's world.

Dorothy Dalton

4

TO HIS COY MISTRESS

Well since we are not built for despair,
Our parts being so obsoletely
Elastic, and since there's a fair
Chance that we'll never grow completely

Accustomed to the notion that dying
Might really be dying, and that hell
Might really be hell; and since in trying
As hard as we know how to tell

Ourselves that there is nothing wrong
With us a little love won't cure,
We have a way to make the long
Postponement easier to endure;

And since your eyes are very blue
As eyes go, and your lips as lips
Go, of a warmth and redness to
My taste; since furthermore your hips

And thighs are neither too large nor lean
And rather shapely as it were,
Whereas your breasts—or what I've seen
Of them—are even shapelier;

It seems a reasonable thing,
My sweet, for me to kiss your eyes
And then your lips, then lingering
Before your breasts and hips and thighs

Just long enough to make quite sure
No thoughts of despair or dying or hell
Will interfere, proceed to cure
My ills, and some of yours as well.

Martin Halpern

AUBADE

How fear it is to bindly blink
Amidst the boos and spooks of dark
(The bump and ouch of grope and guess),
To bark the knuckles, crack the shins
Of sentience on the horrid edge
Of nothingness; how scare to hear
The windless whisperings of naught,
The silky soundless sigh of night;
How prickly-chill to sense the shrouds
Of muffled mental furniture;
But when at last the warbling light
Annunciates the death of dark,
Flooding the mind with gold and bright,
And form restored by reason stands,
Clear as the morning clear comes on—
How sweet the sun! how ah! the dawn!

James L. Rosenberg

6

THURSDAY

I

After the living the attic. Then the rain,
and children prowling indoors turned into the attic
to treasure hunt the remains.

So Thursday when the wind turned.
Whistles blew: **No school, No school.**
Northeast from the Atlantic.

Rummage day under the eaves. The dressmaker's dummy
that was Aunt Clara welcomed us. The rain
scratched like a kitten. **Let's play store.**

Not much imagination but let them be.
Sea-blown kittens over aunty's ghost
change no habits. They **like** to play store.

Then Jenny brings me the box she bought for two papers.
"Look! Look at the man in the funny hat!"
— Hello, Father.

Is heaven the cave above us, under the rafters
aged the color of leather? The dead are dusty
everywhere we touch them. Jenny brings me

Paul at three in his grandmother's lap:
the gray leather smile at the suede child I think

means nothing. Age is no skill but a nuisance.

Store it away.

The rain is its own arrival. It needs nothing.
If accident follow the act is that an action?

Yes, Jenny, it must go back.

The faces need their time as time needs faces.
Someday even Jenny will need to be sad

as great grandmother's talons on the child,
as Aunt Clara's dummy, as father's easy thirties
in a funny hat.

But oh, Mother, what eyes my father had!

II

Order? The son of the man beside his children
has no other. Why should I teach them the rain
who know already they can play in it?

Now they are dressing the dummy in old curtains.
Well, what if Aunt Clara's heaped in one more dust rag?
father's a laugh in a derby? —let them be.

Time's for a time. I'm here to beg not preach.

III

Fingers drum on the roof. Ratapan, ratapan, ratapan.
Snakes writhe on the sea.

And the big wind.

Ratapan. For the dilatory man.

8

For the literary, tutelary

capillary man.

I know no artery to the dead nor vein dark
as the Cretan's river:

a smallest mesh

webs Uncle Cesar to his handlebars
(very gay nineties)

and the great stance

seeming to say: "Throw me a live bull; I'm hungry!"
No more. It's after dinner.

And Father again

with Mother a beauty beside him; this man's woman
in the flower time of starting:

veils, smiles,

initiation rituals—the solid seeming
places of the tribe.

And Father's father

photographer-and Sunday-scrubbed and scarved,
Sorrento painted behind him

Con affetto

al mio figlio lontano. And over his ear
a rip in the photographer's Sorrento.

Canvas too

turns to a leathery dust. A dusty sea
sneezes in the wind.

Clara, Cesar, Lorenzo.

Licked by the flaming children. Felice, Cristina.

10

at 5.8 fatalities per
100,000,000 vehicle miles,
as compared to a national average
of 7.6.'" As compared—
to what?

At an average rate
of 11 miles per hour the Tiber flows
96,426,000 miles per millenium,
with a record to date of
one civilization.

Over the Tiber,
looking down from the Ponte del Risorgimento,
I saw a hawk float by.
Not a reflection in the sky.
The bird itself in its own death,
wings outspread on the water,
clouded by flies in its going.
A nebula.

The stars are no further
over Sioux Falls than over the Coliseum.
In Jersey City
I saw the day-moon over the wood
of the video aerials. When I entered the Turnpike
the fog came. By Entrance Eleven
the wreck waited. The corpse grinned out of metal.

VI

And the rain. The rain.
Pattering the car top.
Coming too fast for the wiper.

My daughter slept at my back
 in a portable bed.
 The ambulance came
 for tidiness only.
 There was nothing left to save.

The dead man lay
 openly in the rain.
 Morbid, I waited,
 pleased by my own revulsion.
 The man is dead
 when the rain falls openly.
 There are roofs on the living:

His rain is another sound.
 For him the box is ripped.
 The kittens have scratched it.
 The flies await their constellations vainly.
 The river is stone to the crematorium;
 the emblamed vein, a solid.
 There is nothing the stars
 may gnaw in their swarms
 but dark.

VII

Muddle, muddle, muddle, says the rain
 on the roof. The sea's hissing.
 The fog's stuck to the world.
 Somewhere a bank gulps gone.

So Thursday among the children who do not see

12

days but games, places but games.
A singleness of the blood at its round flowing.
Why play at less than life?

Muddle, muddle, muddle, says the rain.
Roundness is all. The round game like a music:
the first sound calling the second into being.
Lightly, lightly, **graziosamente**. Follow the music
into itself. A road like any other.
Past children in the rain, past the stone news,
beyond the rip in the old man's Sorrento.
Ratapan. For the cinerary man.

But oh, children, what eyes our father had!

John Ciardi

A VARIATION ON SOME LINES

Muddle, muddle, muddle, says the rain.
I hear the river hissing.
The fog's stuck to the window.
Somewhere a bank gulps gone.

A time of no shape. I feel the mountains
hurry. Trees go loose in the air.
The sound of the clock comes out of the hallway
and holds: **bat, bat, bat, bat**.

I meant a praise. A form. In a calm unease
I dread for all things made.

Muddle, muddle, muddle, says the rain
The fog's stuck to the world.

And a rain stain on the ceiling blooms
two perfect suggestions: rose and fish.
What's art when wet plaster's
subtler than Yves Tanguy?

I'll make a praise:
is chance or the eye the shape?
do the bones of the carp know
how prayerfully China has drawn them?

What's seen is saved.
What's heard is answered.
Beat, beat, beat, says the blood.
Light, says the eye, **Pray me**.

John Ciardi

SCENE

I made the sea that morning,
and I set three petrel soaring
over shores grain-golden as the sea sunlit
where a fiddler fiddled for the love of it
and for the dragonfly cotillion.

Petrel, crusty fiddler, dragonfly and boy
slipped the golden sands, and now my joy
is, I remember all of it.

David Melvin Paul

14

WINTER SOLSTICE

For Ruth G.

Light goes. Dark and darker. What can a girl
Do when she is me? Can her mirror say
She's woman, rather than stare at the swirl
Of snow over her shoulder, at the way
A storm dumps peace over slums? If the day
Can slip in crystal shreds, just as he,
Night's nude handsome negro, for his lewd play,
Dropped his natty linen suit, why mock me?
You show what I am, too: I can see, I can see!

You, mirror, make out boy enough: breastless Ruth:
Bones, no flanks: boy enough for John. A cage,
This body, for a mad starved wish whose tooth
Gnaws an old scrap of love. John, outrage
Is so empty, when you loved me, an age
Ago, in your way. I painted piecework ties
To keep you with me in this room, my cage:
So many Rousseaus, silk jungles where eyes
Glared with lusts, red-rimmed from green fronds. Even
your lies

Fed me: I thought we were safe here in bed,
My forests of metaphor outside there
In the world. But the world's wheeled, John; you said
Our visions walk in circles, whirl in air,
Strike down the lonely heart—as your gold hair
Struck me. John, I drove you out with no fears.
I loved you; now I came home to this lair
To find you crouched under that black who leers
At me still from darkness. My glass paints me in tears.

Jascha Kessler

THE SHAWLS

We ignore the ravages of life,
 As much as the wind rattling a window
 Ceases to occupy, once its strife
 Is muffled in the shawls of a widow.
 First she sets this one high behind her neck,
 And then the mauve draped over the arms, so.
 I remember watching that one grow
 Under her fingers before she got arthritic;
 Stiffened the joints (you know) until she sits
 Dowager erect, looking as though she never sinned,
 And arranging her shawls until each fold fits
 The quatrocento portrait, as yet undimmed.
 But there's the wind through the pane,
 And tired hands composed within her lap
 Must clutch at ends that have begun to flap
 Like young hands waving farewell again.

David Landman

NEVADA DESERT

Mirage is a mode of air that holds more light
 Than eyes can use, too much to transmit color
 Even if there were color to transmit
 In plain brown rocks and foliage gray green:
 So sagebrush lives on the memory of water,
 And men rely on illusions of the East Coast.

Across this scene an eastbound train transports
 Miss Lovelyheart, young local colorist
 Of old-time Kansas rides her easy chair
 To read a dream. Her car shifts rhythmically
 From rail to rail its streamlined need for grace,
 Going against the air-conditioning sun.

Edwin Fussell

16

STILL LIFE

Under the shadow of the sun,
at noon, when shadows on the earth
are small, and rubber-tough, below
the windows—open—and the trees—
Linden, of course: that pre-war smell—
children and dogs play baseball in the street.

Windless in sun, the half-urban road
holds and composes without shade
the stopped-down motion of the game:
the catcher waiting, two men on,
and the dogs: watching, for a hit
that they can tumble after with the field.

See how the thing composes, so:
buzz of noon heat, three clouds, a game,
flies riding in the upward-eddy air;
through shade of windows from the houses
claiming and claimed by this game's children,
the subtle harmonies of noon-time life.

These images are permanent;
and change: not only other boys,
and games and dogs, or even streets:
but when the sun moves, skidding from noon,
the landscape fades and splinters: always
the speeding car, the running boy, meet at the ball.

Once only: if it happen once,
yet permanent that cry and thud,
screech, and the yelp of dogs, mothers
running, with hands in towels, through lawns.

And the boys, dropping their gloves, walk
slowly, seeing the busted body beneath wheels.

That driver is death to them: his eyes,
staring at all as he steps down,
never will dim through dreams of hate and fear.
Police, and hearse, and sobbing mother,
even the funeral will come and pass;
but now, at sculptured noon, the team stare dumbly back.
And this does not change; it still composes: So.

Bruce Finson

ON THE DEATH OF DYLAN THOMAS

This night, when an old November moon
Helmed its steaving prows down the carbon sky
Toward an island coast of trees,
Reefed against sky tides and awash in clouds,
A flash of blood and bronze
Stained my eyes in the hill horizon crash,
Foundering the moon like a burning ship.

Tonight, before antipodes of sky-curtained sea,
Was told the loss of a nobler vessel,
Now adrift among vast deep moss
On the ocean floors of a green eternity,
While these late and naked feet,
Numb in the sands of a lonely beach,
Await the tides of our common moon.

Wright Booth

18

LATE AFTERNOON LANDSCAPE IN JANUARY

Now the slant of light in the afternoon
Refutes the atheist. For the eye of God
Is at tender angle under the breasts of snow
And His holy hands are soft on the white rumps;
Purely now the libidinous innocence
Of holy, rosy fingers finds delight;
And, passim, over the acquiescent land,
For His lovely lust in the violet afternoon
The montes veneris rise, with tracery
Of shadowy twigs on the flushed, inviolate snow.

Viola Wendt

ON READING MARIANNE MOORE

We had never guessed what lay behind
The coruscating iron gate
Or the rose hedge of Dresden blossoms
And inedible haws
With the fruited promise of pomegranates but having
a wholly other
Texture and function in the mouth;
Or beyond the eaten rock wall

That gave no evidence of its embrace:
 The tiny garden spot with the white wicker and the
 poodle
 Or mushrooms exuding the spotted smell that
 seduces leprechauns to alien heaths
 Or a stark, magnificent drop to a sea that groans
 In a timeless suck and spew
 With a décor of porpoises and the arcs of dis-
 continuous monsters;
 Or where there was no barrier at all
 But a place that rose soundlessly
 While we turned our backs inadvertently
 To contemplate a word hanging
 Suspended from the color of intellect by a slim silk
 Spun out of its crystal entrails.

But once there, we found the countryside familiar:
 We had spent our forgotten childhoods there;
 Or a little Platonic door awoke in the seamless wall
 And we recollected the ecstasy of knowledge.
 In a joyous nostalgia we clapped our hands
 As the invisible abstractions and interrelations became
 square or pink
 Or barked like seals or small dogs
 Or made the noises or silences of innumerable odd or
 ordinary fauna,
 Or opened mouths in which we counted
 The exact number of teeth that we had always known
 Were there but that no Pliny
 Had ever told us about.

Viola Wendt

20

GOLDEN BOY

The warped wind slid down the littered alleyway
And rattled ash-can covers and dug in trash heaps,
While Herman huddled in his crypt-cold bed,
Divining why she hid his crutch and his clothes.

A board complained where she stood on the stair.
"She devil" he mumbled, "She stole my Golden Boy."
An insolent siren moaned ahead of the hearse
And he knew again that Gus would never come.

Above the juke-mouthed bar came furtive footsteps.
"Dad, don't drink that milk" a choked tongue screamed,
Then sounds of scuffling, a thud and her sniffing;
Greedily old Herman drank his milk.

Maude Totten

HUNT

All day it had been raining; now, the leaves
Were crisp and wet with light. It was not late
Yet; bright, the clouds were bright; but it was cold,
And in your small shivering you let me hold
Your head against my chest, and in that great
Alone it was only the light of the leaves
That was watching us. Our breath was clouds, a stump
Steamed quietly, a goldfinch landed on a clump
Of thistle, and started to sing; and it was good
To be warm with you in that untrammled wood.
But time broke around us like glass, our friendly park
Grew bristling, we stood apart. From the dark
Trees came a red fox, running. Then
The dogs closed in, and finally, the men.

Melvin Walker La Follette

A GROUP OF POEMS
AND AN EXCHANGE OF LETTERS

THE HOOP SNAKE AND THE BASILISK

The Hoop Snake rolls himself along while munching on
his tail.

He loops the glades and gullies and hoops the forest trail.
In reptile spite he strikes the trees and little recks the risk
Till rolling, rolling, rolling, he meets a Basilisk.

The Basilisk is gliding, his kingly crown askew.
To kill the herbs or varmints he exhales his deadly dew.
Intent on royal duties, he is ramping from a brake,
When rolling, rolling, rolling, up turns the looping Snake.

"Aha," he thinks, "my Avatar—or else a new descend-
ant."

Despite the jaunty jewelled crown, the Snake is inde-
pendent.

They sieze each other by the tail, and mutual ingestion
Leaves not a smudge of either one—not even a sug-
gestion.

Richard Ashman

22

BY LIGHTNING FLASH

By lightning flash I saw my brother stand
A dagger in his hand, a body prone,
Dark-limned against the silver of a lake
The field then was below that midnight cloud.

Years later this mad picture of the night
Plunged past all boundaries of words I knew.
"If he—," I lay awake. "If he, if he—"
I'd seen it, but I knew it was not true.

But hatred comes at last—its own defense.
The human worm demands its lump of dung;
And who denies me this (I drop pretense)
I'll perjure to the rope by which he's hung.

I know an inland sea where Jesus Christ
Spoke in a tongue I could not understand.
I roared across the sky and there unleashed
My righteous hatred and destroyed a land.

Richard Ashman

THE PIPES OF PAN

Across the rocky road that slanted up
Toward the westward gap wild carrots bloomed,
A sheet of white upon the narrow field
That teetered on the sloping forest edge.
The one-room cabin, paintless, dignified
By many winters, sagged beneath the oaks,
Wind-showered by the fruit of mistletoe.

Beyond the trodden mud before the door
Pale chestnut shoots around a dying bole
Struck up for light; and hazel and dogwood
Spread out to find a patch or two of sun.
Fitzgerald was home. He leaned against the door
To stretch his legs, cramped from a life of ease.
The small boy from beyond the road approached
And said: "Hello." "Come in," Fitzgerald said.
His spouse, hair in a scraggly knot behind,
Sat barefoot in a mother hubbard dress.
The table, propped on three lame legs, still held
The unwashed dinner dishes, ready for
The evening meal. "Where's Tom?" small Ben inquired.
"He's up thar in the woods with Peg and Sal."
And Ben walked out and heard, deep in the brush,
The music of a whistle, played with love,
And Tom appeared, preadolescent Pan.
His sisters, laughing nymphs, skipped in the glade.
"You like a whistle, Ben?" Fitzgerald asked.
"Where can you get one?" "Watch," Fitzgerald said.
He walked ten paces to the chestnut shoots,
Selected one with care, and cutting it
With ready knife, expertly pushed the wood
Out from the bark and, presto! "Ben, here's yourn."

And now the pipes of Pan
Are tooting in the hollow by the stream,
And ragged nymphs, dull progeny of Dan,
Complete the simple post-Hellenic team.
Ben marvels at a life so full and free
And wishes for a shack beneath a tree.

Richard Ashman

Dear Sirs:

This is being written because I am a person who writes letters when puzzled or annoyed. I do, therefore, begin with an apology. I am baffled by some modern poetry. A number of issues of **Accent** heightens this bafflement. Right or wrong, I give my reaction.

Scientists have been adversely criticised because most scientific papers are unintelligible to the layman. Those who advance such complaints should pause to consider that science is largely explication, whether as theoretical development or intended for proximate or immediate application. It is not written for laymen. I do not myself understand most mathematics, but I am quite aware that to put the abstruse logic of mathematics in words is impossible. In my own field, chemistry may be heaped on physics, then applied to biology and further extended. Conclusions may, or may not, be expressed simply.

Until recently I had not even been aware that among academic intellectuals (seemingly in a most unscalable ivory tower) a vast, almost living, organism has flourished. It is a peculiar monster, private, whose growth is seemingly dependent on incest. I visualize it as an intellectual octopus, whose tentacles interpenetrate the crannies of the non-academic reef, but which draws most of its sustenance from itself. It is, in a certain sense, miraculous, violating the laws of conservation of matter and energy. It is a creature whose every nerve impulse is transmitted by private code, devised of a language seemingly English, but whose connotations are clearly Martian.

Of course, this is only my own "poetical" extravagance. Yet I have read, reread, thrice read certain poems in **Accent** (fewer in the **Beloit Journal**) which are almost wholly without meaning to me. I have found more comprehension in reading fiction in a language I did not understand. Not, of course, that I am complaining, condemning, or fault finding. Rather, I am confronted by a revelation.

Yet poets (cf Oscar Williams) have complained that nobody reads poetry. It is not that most persons are morons, but rather that the newer poetry is so utterly unrewarding unless one belongs to the incestuous family. Oscar Williams poetry, especially **The Man Coming Toward You**, is an egregious example. Its beginning is almost on a readable level, but its hind-quarters are a violent succession of disconnected ideas or images, strung together like the segments of a tapeworm—and just as attractive. T. S. Eliot has said that the reader must bring to poetry an intelligence somewhat comparable to that of the poet. Of course, no one can be quite as intelligent as Mr. Eliot, yet his remark was balm to my own ego, since I rather like his verse. If poets want readers, they must write what readers can understand—not fully, but enough for enjoyment. The academics (for want of a better term) rising superior even to Mr. Eliot, have no wish to be understood—or no hope. Intelligibility would be a confession of failure, I gather.

Science is a continuous development, the new being erected on the foundation of the old. Poetry, together with the other arts, is quite different, but it should be adapted to its milieu. In this sense, science is relatively timeless. Poetry breaks with tradition only as life changes. But it is very doubtful whether there is ever a one to one correspondence between an art and its time. Funda-

mental human urges do not change, but the artist feels he must break with an outworn and unrewarding tradition. He strives for newness against a background of constant human nature. This leads, inevitably, to schools, each making exaggerated claims of harmony with the present or the emerging future. Yet the public of that present are by no means gratified. They understand better than the artist that his art is expressive of nothing fundamental in his nature, and that it corresponds to its environment only in certain of its words and figures. Of course, Freud has been acclaimed. The scientist, knowing quite well that psychology is in its swaddling clothes, understands that Freud could only have made a beginning, largely by hunch, much of it necessarily false or distorted. To some poets, however, Freud, like Marx, is the terminus of revealed truth.

I must return to my primary contention. The intelligent public is repelled by much contemporary poetry. In part the repulsion is at fault and passing. Every poet of the past who broke new ground was condemned by many contemporaries. T. S. Eliot was not welcomed even by certain poets. But Eliot (unlike the tribe I have in mind) is not too obscure to the superficial understanding. What I will insist cannot endure is the poetry which seems largely meaningless even on rereading. It is a poetry which apparently depends on a private pig-Latin, comparable to that used by the boys of certain African tribes to confuse their elders. It appears that the intention of much modern poetry is obfuscation of the uninitiate, and poets cannot complain if busy people refuse to decipher their pig-Latin. If I want a real puzzle, I turn to crosswords or cryptograms.

Very sincerely yours,
Richard Ashman

Dear Sirs:

No answer to the above is possible except samples of the work under question. Here are two poems from the book under fire. Let the reader judge for himself.

But may I add, sotto voce, that fisticuffs among the doctors cannot save the patient. Your critic's "revelation" amounts to nothing more extraordinary than an internecine gripe, and like all gripes, it evades the true issue at hand. It seems to me more reasonable to attack the evils of society than the shortcomings of other poets.

Sincerely,
Oscar Williams

DWARF OF DISINTEGRATION

I

Who is it runs through the many-storied mansion of myth
With the exaggerated child's-head among pillars and
palings,
Holding in his grip the balloons of innumerable windows
And chased by the flowing malevolent army of the
ceilings?

It is the dwarf, the yellow dwarf, with the minted cheeks,
With the roots of the fingers, with the wafer-thin cry,
In a maze of walls, lost in the nurseries of definition—
Shadows dance on shins of trumpets in a waning sky.

Voices are wired in the walls, rats are gnawing rumors,
The throat of music is bursting with the leadpipes of lust,
And the giant's face on the dwarf's shoulders is frightened

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As the battle sounds strike the panes from the near-by
past.

The pillars in the palace are reclining about like pistons:
The horses of parenthesis have run away into the woods:
The king is caught on the vast flypaper of the people:
There are holes as big as hovels in the wall of platitude.

The queen is ill from planting the garden with progeny
And her eyes are crossed off by vicious marks from her
face:

She telephones the dwarf who puts his head in the instru-
ment

To find his features come out in glacial coal-bins of space.

The orgasms of distant guns attack at the lustful curtains
And soldiers are standing about in historical knots of lies
Warming frozen tag-ends of lives around the spontaneous
Combustion of bosses who are stoking hollows of hired
eyes.

The swine bulge in the snake bellies of the telegraph wires
And bellow under flat clouds of ceilings in the interior;
Communication swallows the quicksilver swords of dis-
tance;

Headlines perform, in squadrons of plumes, on the war-
riors.

But the draughty palace of fable is full of feeble splendor:
The yellow dwarf now in possession of knowing documents
Runs after the newspapers cackling on the edge of free-
dom—

The golden cupboards tremble for the aging sentiments.
 The music of battlefields exhilarates the hidden overhead
 And injects into the air a breakdown sense of release,
 And the numerals wriggle off the lock boxes of the world
 Unloosing a swarm of the venomous vultures of the peace.
 But the dwarf, the yellow dwarf, with sunspots for eyes
 Is hunting in the archives in the moth holes in the palace,
 And he tightens the torture boot around the spinal
 column,
 The steel twilight gleaming with the sweat of his malice.

II

Now that the battle is on, keep off the palace grounds,
 You can hear the dwarf rummaging in the elephant inside:
 It's better to draw a curtain of birds around your eyes—
 Fall into the picture book under the thumb of a land-
 slide—

Than to come upon spiders eating the iris of the eyeball,
 Glimpse the yellow dwarf digesting the members of
 princes,
 Or see famous paintings loll, like tongues, from their
 frames
 Into a roomful of heroes pretending to harass pretenses.
 The sagging structure propped between thought and
 thinker,
 The gilded lawns flow on under the smokescreen of the
 laws:

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The allover attack of a decaying body infiltrates to the
atom,
Even the beast in the violin hangs out with lopped-off
paws.

Run! run into the first thicket of verbs, the nest of deeds!
Place a skyline between yourself and the grandiose
emblem!

For the inquisition wears the hypocritical jowls of a palace,
There's nothing here to salvage, and yours is another
problem.

Oscar Williams

I SING AN OLD SONG

I sing an old song, bird on a charcoal bough,
Silver voice on the black black bough, singing,
Rolling heirloom eyes, burning holes in time,
Drenching the flank of nearness with drip-music:
The disturbed owner who hides everywhere
Lumbers through the miles of thick indignation:
The subconscious parts the nap-gold of afternoon.

I sing an old song, bird scything the silence,
Bundling sabres at the cornerstone of sense:
Bird, pulley on a hillheap of elves' eyelashes,
Silver piston sunk to a bud on the bough,

Sing, bird, sing, from the black black bough,
Shake the enormous atmosphere from your small fist
Of body, tear the colossal ear of the all around
Hanging loosely, like forest outside a window:
Open all the fluteholes of days until the world
Weeps music, and sweats light from every facet,
And tumbles to the smoking knees of its orbit.

I sing an old song, bead in the hair of the park,
Bird-knot in the weave of leaves, nugget in sieve
Straining gravel of Utopia to shining beginnings,
Deed, navel of matter, fleck of the future,
Knuckle knock on finality, sing, bird, sing:
Ride the groundswell of heartbreak, tap thick wrist
Of branch, lump of utterance in the cup of sunlight
Melt into the sweetness of reality, O:
Sprinkle effigies on the gauze of stillness,
Aim your gold beak from the nest, from the crook
Of the leafy black arm, toward the poised sun
Swing girders from your beak through tin pretense
Into the underground room of man, the pallid palace.

I sing an old song, bird, toe-hold of song on bough,
Bundle in the bush of radiance: birth-cry of poem!

Oscar Williams