

# slim volume

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2004 Down in the Dirt chapbook  
Scars Publications & Design

# Accepted for Publication:

## USA Magazines

Feelings of the Heart  
Poetry Motel  
Famous Poets Society  
American Poets Society

## Online Chapbook

Other Worlds: Scars Chapbook Center – <http://scars.tv>.

Accepted for Audio Library “Poets House” New York, NY

## UK Magazines

Erratica  
First Time  
Linkway  
Poetic Hours

# RAVENS

The first time I went to California,  
I was so overawed,  
I thought there were no crows!

Today in the morning, three ravens came to visit by  
And discuss social inequalities they have with the geese.  
They thought it would be fruitful to talk to a like-minded person.  
So they came to pontificate on various philosophies.  
They perched on the chimney-top,  
Black against a backdrop of white,  
Re-arranged their feathers,  
And were ready to talk.

In democratic California they are a vote bank.  
On Election Day, over their feathers  
They drape the red and the blue.  
We promised to grant them equal status  
With birds of different hue,  
Even hummingbirds,  
Who partake only of nectar.

But we will have to address their demands.  
In civilized society their hunt for rodents is taboo.  
So they invade garbage bins in suburbia  
To drink soured milk from cartons past expiry dates.  
The food is scarce and hardly gourmet.  
Soon they will invade windows of kitchens  
To peck with black beaks into refrigerators and larders.  
As a human I cannot approve of these intrusions,  
But then I quite understand their compulsions.



The only way is to talk to them of Zimbabwe,  
Of equations of cruelty reversed in time.  
They furrow their brows and look at my map.  
But the Atlantic is a big gap.  
Blank eye-sockets stare back at their bird-eyes.  
Who will they find similarities to vent their anger upon?  
Where are the geese?

Anger and hunger mixed together is potent.  
It can cross oceans  
To mix and parley with those  
That are not hungry and angry.

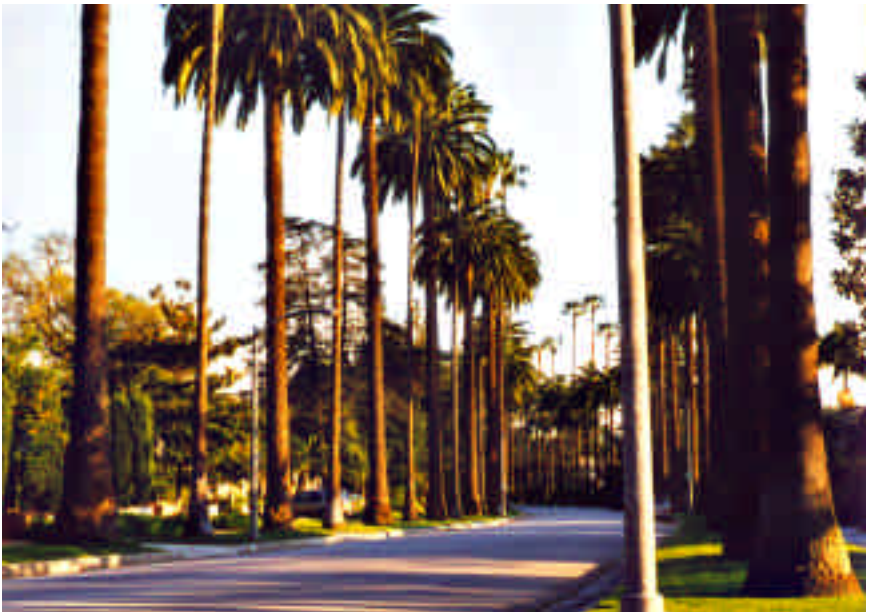
Discussions such as these are always inconclusive.  
So, we will sit in the park in the afternoon  
And read the Daily Mercury.  
Stories of rape and murder and incest and kidnap  
Will contribute to a good afternoon nap.  
Old men, like the ravens and me,  
Must, after all, wear their mittens.

Sleep will assuage their anger and hunger.  
In any case I have promised to be back  
With tomorrow's Mercury  
To talk to their off-spring with red throats  
And baby beaks.

For ravens are my friends.

# THE CALIFORNIA BLUE

Sharp scalpel  
To cut away eye-lids  
Precision in circumcision  
The surgical stare  
Without batting an eye-lid  
At the blue  
Of the Fremont sky.



# LAS VEGAS



Dealing blackjack  
 From plastic boxes;  
 Dwindling chips, multicolored, signifying degrees of disaster;  
 Occasional loud orgasms from neighbors.  
 Discrete ashtrays and tall drinks  
 Besides slot machines;  
 Parking five floors above;  
 Taking travelers into tropical forests.

Acrobats  
 With white tigers and lions  
 That play like kitten.  
 Waitresses' skirts showing dimples.  
 Shriveled breasts inside sequined holsters.  
 Facelifts amongst brand-names strewn like confetti.  
 This perpetual party of  
 Acrobats.



Tramcars from King Arthur's table to Egyptian pharaohs  
 And escalators snaking down into roadside strip clubs.  
 Strobe lights reputed to reach outer space  
 Or at least clouds.  
 Magic, music and Andy Warhol.  
 Van Gogh at the Guggenheim.  
 Breasts of all colors, shapes, ages, dimensions  
 And gravitational pulls.

Acrobats  
 With jackpots in realms of astronomy  
 Tutoring lessons for games of craps  
 As the roulette rotates around the sun.

Acrobats.

Complete ethnic equality measured in green.

Cashiers' grills with extreme expressions.

Vacant eyes going through the motions,

"I will win".

I will win without emotion.

I learnt how to gamble to the horn of Louis Armstrong

In New Orleans.

When everything was not yet oversized

Like middle aged American breasts and thighs,

Mascara and lipstick and sneakers without socks.

Acrobats

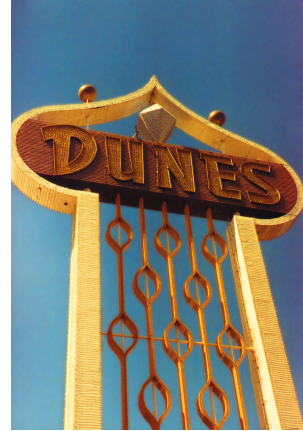
Hanging from pulleys and ropes

Cleaning one-way glass on overpriced windows.

The boardwalk above the strip where

The color is red-

Flashing taillights of cars full of expectation.



Acrobats.

Faces bathed in ever-changing hues of

I stare and for a moment I forget

That I am a mendicant monk

Stripped bare of my skin,

Flesh and bones exposed,

Pulse throbbing through blue veins.



Acrobats,

Fortune not camouflaged

But etched in deep lines

On the fractures of my skull,

While frescoes still in their infancy

Stare down at me from ceilings

And people dine at the Stratosphere

Up above the sky so high.



Acrobats.

How do I watch volcanoes erupt  
 Systematically every fifteen minutes?  
 How do I stand and stare  
 With my staff and begging bowl,  
 Fully dressed in my mendicant's robes'  
 Pacing the pavement through throngs of people?

And yet it is people that I crave-  
 Acrobats.

All the while surveillance cameras blink at me  
 From chandeliers.  
 Tricksters through life  
 Advertise with blinking neons  
 And are done.  
 But tricksters with words are  
 Acrobats.

We are, all of us, acrobats  
 Juggling rods of fire with baseball bats  
 And love songs are electronically synchronized with fountains,  
 Water is on fire.  
 In the hungry eyes of passers-by  
 You sense desire-  
 Upon the boardwalk where senses reign supreme,  
 I sit, meditate and look back on time  
 Whilst human searchlights look for God.  
 On which freeway do I race my juggernaut?

Acrobat in lotus position  
 On the seat of my meditation.  
 Such vast multicolored emptiness!  
 Which poems do I say, that synchronize  
 With hotel arcades?  
 Which gondola do I rent  
 That can serenade a mendicant monk,  
 An acrobat in the desert?

On shards of salt and volcanic rock  
 I walk  
 Bare-foot in my mind.  
 Because  
 I am  
 An acrobat.





# LIGHT

Remind me,  
I am talking of Delhi and not Moscow  
Not wake-up calls through wooden slats  
In a suburban San Francisco window,  
Not dappled sunlight up Yosemite way.

A painter would have caught  
This scraggly light between the pines  
This beautiful slanting morning light  
When everything is soothing,  
Nothing is bright.

But poets have no vision you see---  
They just write poetry.





# SUITCASES

Don't you realize that in the tears of departure  
There lies a violence unbidden  
Because I don't want to go.

Don't you realize that in the fireworks  
There is fire, controlled though.

Don't you realize that in the suitcases of abandon  
There is fashion, even if it were not so?

Don't you realize that in the morning light  
You decide my plight.

Don't you realize that as the plane takes off,  
It will take us to our destiny?

Don't you realize that above the clouds  
The light is bright?



# HAPPINESS

Who knows what sores fester  
Beneath the ground?  
Light the lamps.  
This will be the festival of lights.

In the mountain desert,  
Near the sky  
We will forget about dissension  
And chains of command.  
We will celebrate with abandon  
As we do in our village down below  
On level ground.

Happiness is a gust of cool breeze,  
A sudden shower in bright sunlight.  
Happiness is footsteps on a staircase,  
And the turning of the key.

Who thinks about subterranean moons  
That ooze pus, gangrenous pus?

Happiness is running to catch a bus  
That takes you home,  
To candles on your windowsill.  
Happiness is the odor of musk.  
Happiness is daffodils at dusk.



Let the doctors cut and probe and amputate.  
Happiness is shafts of morning light  
Creeping through the drapes.  
One more day.  
Happiness is the smell of freshly mown grass.

Happiness is the perfection of the narrative in a dream.  
Happiness is the echo of the same familiar theme.

The bloodletting will pass.  
No sores will fester anymore  
Beneath the ground,  
In the mountain desert,  
Near the sky.



# HOLLOW STEMS

Hollow stems.  
All of them have hollow stems,  
But they clothe them so nice,  
You can't make out it is vice.  
Beneath the crests and hollows,  
Are the hollow stems.  
Phantoms gather as the fans switch on,  
And lives are made or overturned,  
Dreams are dreamt or slept away.  
Hollows stems in nice clothes  
Over hollows stems.



# INCANDESCENCE

The sun has just passed away.  
It was glorious in its day.  
But now its corpse is a uniform yellow  
That falls on my pillow  
And warms my scalp.

The sun is dead.  
I have had the vital signs checked,  
Now there is only reflected light.  
Soon there will be a spark of incandescence  
As we light its funeral pyre.  
There will be total and absolute brilliance  
And then progressively the light will fade.  
Trees will shudder and mountains will be moonscapes.  
Huge rocks will float away into outer space.  
The human race sniveling in subterranean tunnels  
Will be a disgrace.

We light up stoves and turn on the gas  
With cigarette lighters we light up cigarettes.

But now we will have to light up the sun.

# BUTTERFLY NET

In the forest with my net and magnifying glass,  
Sandwiches and coffee and all the equipment I need  
I catch and examine butterflies.  
A stallion rides into my butterfly net  
And once enmeshed,  
Starts to neigh and stamp his feet  
Crushing the grass flowers underneath.

I was out to catch a butterfly  
But caught a horse instead.



# LIGHT A CANDLE FOR ME

Today is like the topmost branches of trees  
Blowing helter-skelter in the cross wind,  
Like continuation that never continues,  
Like action that is the stuff of dreams,  
Like mountain streams.

But I will surely want to know  
How, after twenty years,  
You will still walk in the snow  
Without my elbow.

When you slap together your midnight snack  
In your frayed nightwear  
You will have company.  
It will be the same inane chat.

How will it be  
To light a candle for me to see  
Just sepia pictures in moth-eaten frames  
Of a fractured life?



# STOPWATCH

Meetings and hope  
Crash on rock  
Two hundred feet into the sea  
Crash with such ferocity  
There's a permanent mist  
Over the Freeway  
Out of Crescent City.

Yet in the Bay Area  
Progression is regression  
All before the stopwatch stops.

People like zombies  
Trundle pushcarts  
In and out of organized rows  
Of groceries,  
The stopwatch never stops.

Weekends we own  
With aircraft monitored speed limits  
Thousand dollar fines for litter  
Elk steaks, the spray from the Bride at Yosemite,  
Falling in love with a fox.  
On Sunday evening as we do our laundry  
We think of the Monday conference call and  
The stopwatch stops.

But where is the derelict, the wino, the waster,  
To record this all.



# NIGHT AT THE REDWOODS

The gondolas are done for the day  
The beer-bellied operator has gone away,  
On wire ropes the box-cars gently sway  
Almost kissing the tops of the tallest giants.

In the womb of the cathedral tree,  
I hold chapel with the half moon at a slant,  
My grotesque shadow is two dimensional,  
It folds and climbs up the trunk of the dinosaur.  
Knurls on isolated trunks  
Are wizened Indian Chiefs  
Black war paint in the folds and creases  
Of their ageless faces.

Rough shaped lifeless statues and panels  
Embedded for eternity in their own wood,  
The logger and the carpenter  
With a tankard of ale,  
Crude giants dotted beside the tourist trail  
Now go about their nightly chores;  
The audio boxes come alive  
Mixing botanical data with childrens' lores,

And all the while the shallow roots  
Intermingle and fight for food;  
Mute in their struggle to grow  
Taller, broader and taller still.  
And the branches know  
Which way the morning light will climb,  
They strive for longevity,  
They are not phantoms you see.

The dead trunk shriveled white,  
Struck by lightning and yet upright  
Sees all in the moonlight.

# ART

It is always art that coincides with art,  
It is never otherwise.  
Now the question is  
Whether this is for the good or bad.  
Or is it always just mediocre?

This we shall have to see.

But everyone will agree  
That an attempt has been made—  
Some words said,  
Some paint splashed on canvas,  
Some camera frames exposed.

After that, we shall judge  
And pronounce like old money,  
Which years were better than others.

And if you combine year and place  
And astral positions  
You may still strive  
To derive the moon-dust,  
As a connoisseur, sniff with your aquiline nose  
And declare that it is a rose.



# FLAMES IN PARADISE

I am petrified.  
What would people do  
If they ever had the time  
To listen to my words.  
Will they blame me  
For the flames that rise in paradise,  
In lives turned upside down,  
Postponed celebrations, cancelled parties,  
Apprehensive car rides in the midnight rain?

I comprehend somewhere at the back of my mind  
That life is a straight line  
And forward movement is socially acclaimed.  
But how can a drunk move in a straight line,  
And only forward?  
His feet go this way and that.

How can a drunk understand the established disciplines  
Of the forward life.



# DEATH VALLEY, CALIFORNIA

Lest I forget,  
You can get a systematic catalogue  
Of stratified minerals  
Formed by millions of years  
In the valley of death.  
After all, it is a major tourist attraction  
After walking yards of floors  
Through tables of craps and slot machines  
As wheels of fortune turn,  
The only physical reaction  
Is that knees ache,  
Ankles complain.

In Vegas  
We did not see a single scene of high drama.  
Nobody jumped from the 28th floor,  
Nobody fainted in ecstasy.  
None became an instant millionaire  
In this major tourist attraction.  
This eternal partying is also a profession.  
Nothing to do with fate or fortune, least of all, God  
Untouched.  
And yet they all had to play,  
Compulsively play  
With faces of intense concentration.

Herded by the chimera of the yellow metal.

There was a certain unearthly beauty in all of this  
Like the beauty that I saw in moonscapes  
In the valley of death.  
Pink and green and cobalt blue,  
The sun reflecting from the quartz of salts amongst rocks.  
There was a mirage on carpeted floors  
Just as there was on the tarmac road  
Through the valley of death.



Below sea level  
In the valley of death  
The absolute was in the lack of life.  
No trees, no shrubs, no birds, no sounds.  
And yet, snow-capped mountains  
Bordered the valley of death.  
Therefore, there was this infectious impatience  
For the car to take a turn  
For a new palette of colors to meet me.  
There was such incredible beauty in it all  
Just as there will always be  
Form  
In stunted cacti  
In the valley of death.

And of course there was this sense of compulsion  
Of having to do what you have to do  
In the valley of death,  
Just as there is compulsion in clods of grass  
To peep through black volcanic rock,  
For strange flowers in the palest shade of violet  
To bloom by the roadside  
In the valley of death.

And there was a certain jaded street-smartness  
Just as there is boredom in the endless crystals of salt  
On the Devil's Link near Badwater,  
Not spouting, just bubbling through.  
I imagine humans wriggling like inferior species of larvae  
Just as they do in Badwater,  
In the valley of death.  
Humans denominated by the color of their currencies.  
Just as there are myriads of shades

In retrospect  
In the valley of death.

# BUTT-ENDS

Like the madman in matted hair  
With a fixed stare  
I assiduously collect the butt-ends of my days  
From ash-trays:

I meticulously arrange them on my writing table  
In descending order, longer to shorter  
And then I carefully calculate  
How much time I have left  
After I have smoked the last cigarette.

It's a wonderfully repetitive process  
Now that I have learnt to hoard.

Now all I must do  
Is keep a box of matches ready  
To get on board.



# CENSOR AND CENSURE

I see this world through censored eyes,  
Because I am the object of universal censure.

But last night I saw a sight,  
Which made me put down my toilet seat  
And look out of the hospital bathroom window  
And stare a while.  
You see, this window opens into a utility shaft.  
Hot and cold water pipes, oxygen pipes, gas pipes,  
Exhausts,  
They all run through it from bottom to top.

And right next to my window,  
On a rubber-clad hot water pipe,  
A pair of pigeons roost.

Actually fast asleep  
Husband and wife.  
Beak touching beak, neck tucked in,  
Plump, happy and satisfied.

I sat a long while on my toilet-seat,  
And stared at them with not a little envy,  
But they were oblivious to my stare  
And I just could not give them a scare,

Pigeons are monogamous you see.



# CANCER IN MY BRAIN

Sometimes the pain is too much to bear:  
This cancer in my brain.

Shadows go about their daily chores.  
I know all about the changing of the shifts.  
I am here to stay.  
This low-grade fever, it doesn't go away.  
I tell the doctors  
These are the last vestiges of passion.  
This fever is here with me to stay.  
We are affianced, this fever and I  
So how does it matter if tomorrow is another day?

--There is no day appointed in the scriptures  
To shoot myself in the head.



# BLACK SOUL

We will go hand in hand into the evergreens  
Me and my soul, black as coal.  
To hide in shadows that tall trees  
Throw on apiaries.  
Stinging bees make honey for me,  
For me and my soul.

A riot of colors on the beetle's back;  
This peculiar knack  
That you have of talking in rigmaroles  
Will not save our souls.

The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away:  
What happens when he does not give?

I went to Kinnar (1) to ask the Shiv.  
My hoarse cry echoed across the peaks  
And the snow doves carried in their beaks  
Echoes of ringing shrieks.  
In the togetherness of flight  
Perhaps they found themselves tight.

Now why is it that dreams of glory  
Impinge upon my story  
About yesterdays in the life of an ordinary man?

The mangoes I brought back are overripe  
And old men, like small babies, are victims of gripe.

*(1) Kinnar - A hill district in the Himalaya in India*

# ETA RUSSIA

In summer the vodka kiosk  
Beneath my flat  
Has an open-air watermelon stall  
And Azeris (1) with golden teeth  
Cheat you on the kilo.  
But redder and sweeter they could not be,  
The juice trickling down your chin  
As you spit out pips on to the roadside grass  
And sneak a drink from your vodka bottle-  
Transportation into sweet heaven.  
All sticky and drunk  
You snooze in the sun

\*\*\*\*\*

Attempting a swallow from your bottle  
While staring at the ceiling  
On the upper bunk of a Russian train-  
The angle has to be precise  
Otherwise you will choke and splutter  
While the world below you  
Eats Kalbasa (2) and boiled eggs.  
Their angle need not be so precise  
Because on the train floor,  
They have made their beds.

\*\*\*\*\*



This time we stayed at a hotel  
 By the frozen sea with fixed waves  
 As if somebody had said, 'statue'.  
 We walked upon the sea towards  
 A lone fisherman who had drilled a hole  
 In the ice  
 And with his rod, been moderately successful  
 Even though he was thoroughly drunk.

\*\*\*\*\*

We had this brandy warmed up for us  
 On a spirit lamp, the beaker at just that angle  
 And I smelt a Cuban cigar.  
 The brandy was warm and warmer inside  
 But the cigar was too much  
 For my Indian tongue.

\*\*\*\*\*

Park Kulturi to Park Kulturi  
 That was our riverboat station  
 Past the lawns of Mosfilmovskaya  
 Weaving between the walls of the Kremlin  
 Kissing the Balchug Kempinsky.

\*\*\*\*\*

A bite in the wind as we sat on the top deck,  
 The new glorious church under construction,  
 Flotsam on the waters of the Muskva.

Those were sunny days.

- (1) Azeris - *People of Azerbaijan*  
 (2) Kalbasa - *A large sausage usually shared.*

# FEARS AND FOLLIES

My past follies have come to dine with me  
And they say they intend to stay.

Best are the times when I am alone  
In a room full of people  
And the ghosts that haunt me are all mine.  
Champagne breakfast, grumpy good-mornings  
And nothing more.

I dance with shadows on the floor,  
Silhouettes playing the band.  
I understand  
I would want my yesterdays to  
Push today away into the gloom.  
Scarves and chiffons waft about in the room.  
Old babushkas (1) sit by the wall  
Knitting sweaters that I will never wear,  
A patchwork of lives.

What patterns do you care to put together?  
What meaning do you care to give?  
Even if I live beyond this moment  
What fear do I have of abysmal change?

My tears enmeshed in my mind's rage  
Will nevertheless drive me far.

(1) *Babushkas* - Russian word for Grandmothers



# GREEN LEAVES



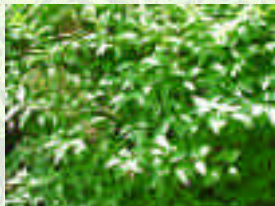
The stuff of reality  
 As flint stones spark fire  
 And auto tires get eaten up by roads.  
 Surfboards that catch a particular wave.  
 Sometimes it all feels so naïve  
 That I'd much rather dive beneath dreams  
 For oysters which may yield a pearl  
 To adorn the artful turn  
 Of a golden strand  
 Whilst I learn and endure.



Strings of fortune garlanded with time,  
 Oceans of grime  
 Whilst even you endure my tired rhyme.  
 If you don't sing along with me  
 It will seem as if I shriek in solitude.  
 The tides will watch  
 As oceans churn up divine nectar.  
 It is not time yet to lecture me in dry auditoriums.  
 My horses of fancy  
 May be in their infancy.  
 It is not even necessary to tell me why  
 Pigs fly.

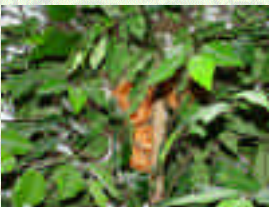


That absolute will wait to be answered by the absolute  
 For I can only reason with reason.



So tell of today:  
 Tell me of this breath that you take.  
 The sequential harmony of breathing  
 Is ultimately all there is about strife.  
 If you can breathe properly you will jive.





Tell me of today:  
Was there a cloud cover?  
Snow or rain or sleet?  
Did people retreat into gastronoms? (1)  
Were there scenes of muffled human beings  
driven by the wind through the snow?  
Let me know.

If I can see through your eyes  
Distances will not matter.  
I will tell you which way I go,  
You tell me which way you go.  
We both have tickets for the avtobus (2)  
But they are in your purse.

So we don't really have to rush.  
The thrush is a bird that trills.  
But midway through its lifespan  
As it sleeps,  
Even the thrush snores.  
It is so important to learn to know  
Which way the wind will turn.  
How the shadows fall.  
How in winter-

The trees will stall  
Agonies of birth  
Of green leaves.



(1) *Gastronoms - Shops selling food.*  
(2) *Avtobus - Electric trolley buses*

# CROWS

At morning light crows gather  
Over the thrashing body of their fallen sibling.  
As you walk by they are bold in their anger  
They fly through your hair and draw blood from your scalp  
And all of them together make such an awful din  
It recalls for you your original sin.

And all the while, the sibling  
Thrashes on the sidewalk.  
The red inside its beak shows in desperation  
As the crows gather in the morning light.





# SKETCHES

Three old women  
Sat basking in the sun  
On a bench  
In the snow working silent  
At their needlepoint.  
All three had sleeping cats  
On their laps  
Purring gently away.  
On a week day afternoon,  
The park was isolated  
The incessant monotone of the purring  
Grew louder and louder  
Till their eardrums would burst.  
The three women looked at each other once,  
And gouged out the cats' eyes,  
And let the blood flow  
On to their skirts,  
Down their stockings,  
Into their winter boots.  
They continued with their needlework;

The cats were pets.

\*\*\*\*\*

A bunch of boys of nine or ten  
Behind the school chapel  
Were catching dragonflies,  
They would sneak upon them,  
Catch them by the wing  
And tear their wings off  
To watch the torsos wriggle.  
On chapel stairs  
The dragonflies just would not die.



\*\*\*\*\*

The alcoholic middle-aged divorcee  
In the flat below,  
With a thin emaciated child in the bedroom,  
The child snivels and snivels,  
The woman lights a cigarette,  
Picks up her walking stick,  
And taps herself into the bedroom.  
She stubs her cigarette on the child's buttocks;  
The child shrieks

\*\*\*\*\*

The mangy old bitch with sagging tits  
Had sores all over,  
Lay in a ditch,  
Eyes doleful in hunger,  
Yellow teeth bared in self-defense.  
Some street children had tied  
A string of firecrackers to her tail,  
Someone lit the firecrackers,  
The bitch yelped and jumped  
And danced in fear  
As the neighbors watched.

\*\*\*\*\*

The beggar boy at the traffic light,  
Washcloth in hand was swiping at windshields.  
The temperature outside was over 130,  
A Lady delicately blew her nose,  
Rolled down the car window  
To a blast of heat,  
Flicked away the soiled tissue,  
And quickly rolled back the window  
To keep the air-conditioning in.  
The tissue fell at the beggar boy's feet.

\*\*\*\*\*

From inside the glass-walled pizzeria  
They stared at the newspaper boys  
Crouched against the driving snow,  
Mittens with blue fingers sticking out.  
Nobody was buying newspapers  
Because it was too cold.

\*\*\*\*\*

Suburban America, come away  
From your baseball parks  
And walk barefoot with me  
On shards of salt in Badwater Lake,  
Peel away this insulation of lawns and kitchen gardens  
And garage sales and loans and mortgages,  
  
Come sketch with me in black and white.





# CAR

The moons of Jupiter turned away  
 When I cried.  
 After that she walked  
 To sit in a car.

We were friends  
 As we are  
 But she walked away,  
 To sit in a car.

I said to myself,  
 This is not the end.  
 But so it seemed,  
 So it seemed.  
 I said to myself  
 It was a joke  
 But it was not,  
 Was it a joke?



This walking away from each other  
 Whilst sitting in the back seat of a car.

# EVENT

In the event of my death  
People will remember me  
For the number of teeth that had fallen.  
In the event of my death  
People will remember me for the lies I had told,  
Especially when I was old.

But at the end of it all  
They will see the tree with leaves.  
They will see the tree about to flower.  
At the end of it all,  
They will see the tree.



# FORMALITY

What will you find  
That you have not found before,  
Which emotion of an alien kind?

What will you find  
To trouble your heart  
If your heart is not already troubled?  
Which teardrop will it bring to your eye?

In the event of the formality being over,  
Lets walk down to the nearest pub  
And share a pint of Larger.  
Pubs open at eleven  
So at best, we'll have to wait for five minutes.  
You are already thinking of Vodka with a beer chaser.

You don't want to get chased so early  
We have things to see in Wales,  
And in any case their local language  
Is an absolute belter.  
So sit back, have tuna sandwich and coffee  
And enjoy the bus ride.  
Am I being contrite or am I?



I met this fellow in Bristol  
Who used to drive a truck into Saint Petersburg  
(it was called Leningrad then)  
And he actually claimed that he had had  
Kalbasa (1) and brown bread at a friend's house.  
He actually claimed much more  
But I am being a gentleman.

And he said he saw the frozen Baltic Sea  
Just like you and I did see while holding hands.  
Hot palms were hot,  
Weren't they?

And I threw a pebble that skidded seven times on the  
ice.  
Then we walked into a Finnish gastronom (2)  
And bought French wine  
And did the day.

Once we did that the day was done.

- (1) *Kalbasa - A large sausage usually shared.*  
(2) *Gastronom - Shop selling food*



# POETS

Poets galore,  
They emerge from bushes and trees  
As if they were bees.

Poets in tandem  
Who sing at random,  
Poets of words  
Who do not know words,  
Poets of glory  
Who will tell you the whole story.  
Poets of love  
Who will sing of doves.

But all this has to be tight  
The cadence has to be right  
Otherwise we are not bright.

When did you last break the sea  
To swim or yacht or sail  
Or just wet your ass?  
When did you last swim?

When will the tears  
Stop flowing copiously?  
Where were the dreams,  
The dreams that come true  
As sometimes you do.  
When was the fear  
In the cheer  
Of relationships gone sour?

And dreams that come true.



# RIGHT

If I were to see the sun and the stars today  
I would say they were wars.  
If I were to meet the sky today  
I would ask why.  
If I were to go to paradise  
I would say it was a throw of the dice  
Which fell right  
As it sometimes does.  
And if this were not enough  
To hold my sarcasm,  
I would say let's play "catch"-  
You catch my life  
And I catch yours  
On Sunset Beach.  
And then we shall eat fish  
At the Fisherman's Wharf,  
Caught fresh from the South China Sea  
And imported in refrigerated containers.

When will we be what we are?  
When will we see the morning star?



# SINNERS

After a few days,  
Incorrigible sinners that we are,  
We shall sin again.

And then because of this interlude  
We shall sin and sin hard,  
Like alcoholics after a dry break  
Like smokers after a plane ride across the Pacific,  
We shall sin and sin hard.

And when we wake up from the orgy  
We shall make confession,  
Seek absolution  
And then plot the next sin again.

This is habit forming like a narcotic  
It is shameful indeed:

But no one has yet explained to me  
Why it is sinful to sin.



# SONGS OF SILENCE

All this couldn't be happening to me.  
Reflections in the mirror-  
That is what it is,  
Songs of silence sung in rhythm,  
And scattered voices in the dark,  
Stark naked  
Begging clothes from the falcon.  
It was not me,  
It was a doppelganger, you see.

So what shall we say  
As we walk on cobbled streets?  
What shall we say,  
Who am I and who are you?  
When did it begin,  
Where does it end?

But the stars will bear witness  
Even when eyes tell lies.  
It's unfortunate  
That I just couldn't find the words.  
Now I search for them in blindness.  
It's unfortunate, the touch and the feel.  
It's unfortunate that we had to go through the rough.



# STILL LIFE

A generous bowl  
In subdued Moreno craftsmanship  
Placed on wood of Scandinavian pallor  
Berries and cherries of varied genre  
Spilling over like literary forms  
Artfully

Banana as Ikebana  
Pineapple for thorny heat  
Tangy tangerine  
An African mango in solitary  
Melons carefully desecrated  
Into Halloween shapes  
Lemons in demure yellow

Clever light glinting on crystal  
Discreet gold outlines  
Only old money is discerning  
Electronic sentinels keep watch  
Over the virtual hothouse

You are the millionth visitor to this exhibit  
On the Embarcadero

You wait for the fruit to ripen  
And be ready to eat

# ONE MORE DAY

It never comes easy, does it-  
The rhetoric?  
Now it is mandatory that I speak  
To allay the guilt of a labor less day.  
One more day when I did not  
Participate in life,  
When footfalls and football were all the same,  
One more day of gray,  
One more day about which  
I have nothing much to say.

I walked the dogs.  
I have constipation,  
Little appetite, frugal meals.  
Recuperation never comes easy.  
I sent an email, some CDs through the courier.

In the evening I step out  
To buy milk and cigarettes.  
The checks balance out:  
I get some and give some.

This is the price I pay  
For one more day.



# RAIN

I am a blood-and-guts guy.  
But I will write vegetarian poetry  
And get by.

The bud flowers  
And the stares at me suspiciously  
As if I ever wanted to be  
Anything but a bumblebee.  
The first raindrop punctuates my buzz,  
Symmetry in the rain.

Birds and bees are as formidable a combination  
As the proverbial stork,  
But not so formidable as afternoon fumbling  
In borrowed rooms  
With crumpled bed sheets and curtains drawn  
And the pitter-patter on the tin roof of the portico.  
Symmetry in the rain.

Paddy fields are lush with a live green  
That hits your guts.  
Vanilla creepers climb areca nut palms.  
A spastic looks out of a stained glass window.  
Football is played with long passes.  
Symmetry in the rain.

I hide my cirrhosis behind trees and bushes.  
My blood irrigates them well.  
Even across barriers  
Of societal disapproval, there is  
Symmetry in the rain.

Milch cows whose udders go dry  
Are left astray on city streets  
To rummage through garbage bins.  
In India, to slaughter them is a crime  
Though they create an awful stench  
That wafts across the  
Symmetry in the rain.

Half constructed bridges crumble into backwaters  
A sickly Donna Paula (1) with a fist in her mouth  
Stares at the crashing waves in startled awe.  
Old Portuguese roofs cave in  
In plantation country on full moon night.  
Ogres dance madly to the drumming of the raindrops.  
Symmetry in the rain.

Airplanes think of landing and then change their mind.  
Afternoons are restless, evenings ominous.  
Cigarettes are stale, just vodka and ale.  
Fish smells on Miramar (2).  
Clouds are low and uniformly dark  
Laden with God on a celestial throne.  
His scimitar sends heads rolling on the sand.  
On the wet sand the lone mongrel is having a lark.  
The rain has stopped and there is silence.  
Symmetry in the rain.

Mongrels are mongrels  
Either because they are the offspring of mongrels  
Or because some master in his petulance  
Threw them out to the  
Symmetry in the rain.

Seas churn, planets burn,  
Babies newborn are speared on swords,  
Women raped in front of their sons.  
Evil hunts well in time with music.  
Symmetry in the rain.

A snake slithers across the road  
In front of your car,  
Homeless and destitute, its hole flooded.  
Casual workers have gone back to Bihar (3)  
And coconut trees are afraid of the sea.  
There is a peculiar cadence  
Symmetry in the rain.

- (1) Donna Paula – A lady who lived in the Governor’s house in Panjim, Goa, India. Legend goes that she used to look across the seas for a lover who never returned and threw herself on the rocks and died. But actually she died of tuberculosis as told to me by a family whose ancestors were her neighbors.*
- (2) Miramar – The beach nearest the Governor’s house in Goa.*
- (3) Bihar – A poor province in the Indo-Gangetic plain.*



# SIMPLICITY

Simplicity leads to orderly ways.  
Imagine stars in complicated intrigue  
Turning ellipses into circles and circles into Cyclops.  
Imagine the orbits: imagine the turning over at the heels.  
Simplicity is representative of vibrant music,  
Music that lives on through the days.

Simplicity is a burning log fire  
For warming hands and feet  
That you must ultimately quench  
With the quivering thighs of a wench.

Simplicity is communication without the vicissitudes of language.  
Simplicity is virile.  
Simplicity is the morning sun,  
Contemplative silence, watching the orb of fire dive down into the sea  
On sultry impatient evenings of impending violence.

Simplicity is falling in love  
Without asking too many complicated questions.  
Simplicity is all about counting trees mindlessly,  
Engaging in soliloquies with birds and squirrels,  
Taking an early morning picture of yours  
To show you how you will look when you are a Babushka (1)

Simplicity is a quality rarely found in humans  
Because it belongs to animals and trees.

*(1) Babushka – Russian word for Grandmother*



# SLEEP

Sleep overtakes me  
During the daylight.  
Outside it's bright.  
But in the inner recesses  
Of the caverns of my brain,  
The bats will only start to fly  
Once sleep overtakes me.



# SOUNDS

The pujas (1) are upon us once again  
From the 6th to the 10th day of the waxing moon;  
Far in the distance a train trundles out  
And honks its way,  
Or perhaps it is conch shells (2) –  
The blowing of conch shells to invoke the Goddess.  
From my hospital room  
I can't make out.

*(1) Pujas – Hindu worship (in this case) of the Goddess of Strength over Evil.*

*(2) Conch Shells – Ceremonially blown to invoke the Gods and Goddesses in the Hindu religion.*



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