

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 creative neons.

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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the magazine revealing all your dirty little secrets

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ISSN 1068-5154

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Freedom & Strength Press



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