

can be understood as a prism in which light is separated according to different, individual perceptions.

If one accepts that the phenomenon I have generally termed creativity is limited in its relation to what may be termed destructiveness, it follows that the ability to 'decode' or understand expressions or 'codings' of light, is likewise limited. Should it seem that I am confining the use of the word creative to tangible products or to what we usually consider measurable entities, I clarify that I consider 'wonder', the reverence of life which light inspires within man, and real love--as opposed to our destructive understanding of the word--to be the highest creative manifestations. Light, to the degree to which we can perceive and thereby embody it, becomes less a real love of something and more real love itself, love without possession or reward, 'no strings attached'. The categories of truth, beauty, and real love fuse as man's relation to light becomes closer: as he sees/becomes light, he becomes it in all forms.

In the poems I refer to several psychological components in man. What I consider man's essence is the true self with which he is born and which can undergo--but is usually denied--continuous development. Christ spoke of the essence as the 'child' within us. The personality, psyche, or social self, is the mechanical learning or conditioning we accumulate from birth. These patterns of behavior which we adopt in order to gain pleasure and approval on all levels, usually arrest the development of essence at an early age. The ego,

which can either manifest itself falsely through personality or boldly--in taking what it wants and complaining and blaming when it can not get it--is the destructive power-craving force in man. It is evident in the phenomena of greed, vanity, and pride.

Whether the destructive ego manifests itself falsely as a 'liar' or boldly as a 'thief', it reflects rather than receives light. It is only the developed essence or true self of man that can receive and transmit light. Such an essence is inner-directed in its desire to perfect and refine itself--to become light--regardless of external approval or disapproval.

For me the 'art of life', the inner effort to become light, is the supreme pursuit. It is realized as a process of transformation or inner alchemy, by which man can free himself from the conditioning of personality, exist fully in essence, and eventually perfect this essential self, purging it of its ego. It is the refining of the essential self which I consider to be the making of the soul. The process has many names in many traditions, but it is invariable. It begins with self-knowledge and observation and, if there is to be permanent change, brings man to a higher state of consciousness or awareness in which he can objectively perceive the various psychological elements of his being in operation. 'The lamp of the body is the eye.'

THE LAMP OF THE BODY IS THE EYE

The essences are each a separate glass
Through which the sun of Being's light is passed.
Each tinted fragment sparkles in the Sun;
A thousand colours, but the light is one.

Jami, 15th century--

The crack in the pavement

The crack in the pavement advances
to my door. Foul smelling clouds rising
from its depths, cast a shadow on my room.
Yesterday an auto, square and shiny
as a box of candy, disappeared in it.
This morning my son tore his knee jumping
over it. I have complained to the authorities
but they are silent. Am I an individual?
It yawns at night. I imagine glaciers splitting,
icebergs skidding stealthily to sea,
unsuspecting ships. It seems there is only
to keep on jumping further and further
or to move.

Reportage

- Sunday trees arrange their leaves impressionistically.
- Monday street lights orchestrate an anachronistic 'Rite of Spring'.
- Tuesday Mount Royal is levelled and ruled in memory of Mondrian.
- Wednesday a nihilist convention.
- Thursday bodies and buildings are stretched into a jaded sky in sympathy with Edvard Munch and Halloween.
- Friday Brownian Movement is exaggerated.
- Saturday in continuance of Friday an exhibition of uncertainty occurs downtown on St. Catherine between Peel and University; a play by Pirandello leaves everyone cold at Place des Arts; a pack of dogs destroys a bake sale in Westmount confirming Kant; in honour of the Synchronicity of Jung all watches tick to the heartbeat of their holders.

An eighth day.

From a spire on St. Louis Square

A dog barks and is beaten.

Automobiles blare at the pietist
praying in the intersection.

A neighbor gives excuses for the sin
he will commit again tomorrow.

Husbands trade infirmities--their wives
slander friends while eating chocolate.

Children learning 'littleness
practice cruelty at the curb.

The corner lord, coveted for coat, medals, face,
figure and vocabulary, leans against a sign.

He, slave to every one of them,
may find freedom in an alleyway at midnight.

The cynic on the steps shouts, 'all is vanity.'
He must climb the stairs.

The self-perfected solitary at the window
on the second floor smiles wryly.

He need only raise his head.

The Performance

for Roslyn Belkin

Umbrellaed gentlemen and women skirt danger in the skidding streets. A thunderstorm half-hides behind a bush atop Parc Avenue and grins: 'I can still set arrogance afoot, induce a crease or two.' Displaying a flair for the dramatic, he directs a flat of cumulus across the sky, a drum of thunder, buckets of water, shafts of lightning. Midtown is enveloped in an atmosphere of apprehension.

Drowned rats wield soggy bowlers in intolerance, delinquent minors shatter puddles in rebellion, arthritic anarchists shake their canes with sympathetic glee. Sweeping up impressions with a white silk glove, he pulls a cord admitting light of day. Hope enters upstage on cue.

A sot stands colossal on Sherbrooke and St. Laurent

A sot stands colossal
directing traffic in the vortex of the storm.
In the jaw of madness
rooted to the very rock of earth
he issues order from insanity.
He is the slender thread.

The Amazon, rabid, menaces his thighs.
Swarthy nimbus play havoc with his brow.
Spun by bitter gales
he nearly stumbles on the steppes of Asia
but nimbly braces on the plains of Abraham.
A tricky business.

Deluge ebbs.
Derangement wanes.
Citizens resume their surety.
Imperceptively the prophet strays into a ditch.

Pirate

Your ship must be in--
I saw you skulking on Sherbrooke
manhandling Lady Southall's silver fox
in your imagination
as you fingered to perfection
that garbage can of neglected treasure.
Anyone less keen
would have pegged you for a bum.

It seems strange--
Why aren't you in the islands
Lying in the shade of swaying palms
eating fruit from island girls
whose one desire is to please?
A real pro
always keeps them guessing.

I've got to hand it to you--
You were the very picture of misery
the mangled face, dragging leg, and hunched back
were a work of art
play their shame and take their change.
An act of compassion
with a little lucre on the side.

Pigeons

Braced on her wooden cane,
she hobbles to the icy bench
at the apex of the concrete triangle,
where traffic veers off
going nowhere fast in all directions.
Recognizing the hunched figure
in tattered coat and shredded scarf,
the pigeons waddle near.
More join from the crags
of nearby citadels.
At the bench she props
her shopping bag
and removes handfuls of bread.
Briefly she disappears
in a cylinder of settling wings.
The surrounding multitude
packs in about her swollen legs.
Smiling, she overturns her palms
in an abbreviated wave.
Again and again she reaches
in the bag until the bread is gone.
Passersby step from the sidewalk
to avoid the woman
cooing to her flock;
those going nowhere fast, sneer.
Where they curse, she cherishes.

Three dogs in a bush

Three dogs in a bush

Three dogs in a bush.

I crawl closer with my telescope.

One is juggling

The second pours drinks

The third discusses dogma.

This does not stop my curiosity.

Snow

Snow has brought the courtier
to the brink of suicide;
to contemplate the qualities
of hemlock, dagger, pistol.
Relentlessly it fell
despite pleading, prayers,
threats and curses;
fell to cause his fall.
The ball is cancelled,
perhaps postponed.

'My God!'

Flowers, tickets, cufflinks,
tie, tux, haircut, car,
the perfect table;
and the afternoon off.

'My God!'

And her,
she may go with someone else.

He telephones to apologize.

Busy.

He drops the receiver
and is flooded
by a Mississippi full of fears.

Imagining the angry Queen
he shrinks into his rented shoes.

On the Silver Star

Down, down, down to black earth--
Hermes, keys in hand, strides the aisle with
expertise, attending his passenger's whims:
fluffing pillows, propping feet, forging
conversations, quelling doubts, and
humming lullabies.

Eerie to be among the voyagers to purgatory--
to be a witness to their blindness on this silver
bullet yanking sleepers to their hallelujah.
Someone grumbles. Our host is right there
grinning with a glass of iced tea, then
takes a furtive swallow from his mickey.

Offhandedly, he checks his pocketwatch--
quickly he stirs the snoring, nudges the noisy,
jolts the jocular, upsets the eased.
'Extinguish cigarettes and fasten seat belts,
we're coming in', he quips as he collects
the paper cups and pillows.

A screeching halt--
the dazed are hustled down the gangway into a Hades
even conditioning can not eclipse. 'This sure is
the tropics', says one of the perceptive as he
drops. Hermes kicks the last one out, slams
the door, and wipes his brow.

A jerk into reverse--
he turns to fix a cool one on the rocks, loosens
his collar, flings his black tie, and wriggles
from his starched white vest. Seeing me, he
walks back with the bottle. 'Cards', he asks,
rolling up his sleeves. I nod and we begin.

Into the misty night

for Michael Harris

Into the misty night;
you and I are carried
along Sherbrooke in the wave
of wind-furled scarves.

Words ride the crest;
not meaning what they mean,
they are mute conductors
of an otherwordly joy.

Phantom cars and buses pass,
streets appear and disappear
between noble buildings hunched
in knavish conversation.

The arabesque uncurls
upon the shores of St. Denis,
and shaking hands we cross
into the misty night.

Before the concert at the café

for Alan Belkin

We round the corners
of the table with our talk of light.
From the center candle
the source separates in spokes.
Van Gogh appears in conversation
to transform the tableware and cloth
into a spectrum of vibrancy.
Seeing us within the compass of his whirl,
Rilke reads a sonnet to Orpheus
to remind us of our sacred trust
to praise nature into spirit.
As we ride these rays of mystery,
we are summoned to the concert
by the tidal chords of Bach
humming the Art of the Fugue.

Bali dancers and musicians

for Michael Springate

Parachuting rose petals,
volcano reds and blues,
penguin shuffle and flamingo stance,
spider hands and lizard glance,
snake-charmed flute and time-suspending chimes,
are silver stitched into the darting butterfly
of your entrancing fan.

Lute concert at Christ Church

At the nave he plays billowing the dome;
a pavane profound in its simplicity,
void of exhortation, sacred in its glee.

The player in this instant transcends man;
not tithes beseeching grace but God himself,
the selfless hand.

I fear that I will never make this sound;
fear because my fingers finger air,
my sinews quiver to his song.

Yet dawn awakes me as a builder of the spire;
to burn the slag of words and melt the elements anew,
to give the ore my finest hand, my own perfection.

In innocence we erect a fragile span of light,
a bridge of man's undying strands
composed across the violence of night.

For Eric Satie

Your scent is of eternity.
Tones diamond-cut from silence
Spell the vision of a seer.

The timeless cartwheels into time.
Gestures from the depths of space
Break into dimension as vibration.

Crystal syllables echo the quintessence.
Sound, swirls as illuminated scripture
In the unbound manuscript of air.

Your sculptured voice bears the signature of grace.
The naked spire pierces sphere after sphere
on its steely thrust to light.

The accountants will not rest

for Henry Beissel

The accountants will not rest

until they figure out

the tricks of the magician.

With eyes fixed earthbound

they seek stars like stolen money

overturning every rock.

Then sated by their explanations

and dulled sufficiently to wonder

they will soundly sleep.

Those at home in mystery

know light is spun from air

like gold from straw.

Remembering Athena

The east wind
has stripped the city of its cover.
A night of mystery
has restored its wonder.
The goddess,
seeing us even as we search,
had veiled her beauty.
Sunless, silent was the city.

How did I, Apollo's son,
walk unmoved amid the guiding cypresses?
What was my transgression,
to be so shielded from your sight?
What error of being
denied for me your hand?
Ungraced, dazed was I by ruined stone.

Now reunited,
it is with pale shame that I see.
Sudden light is a remembrance
of a heart distanced from the instant,
the knell of my impurity.
Sunless, silent was my soul.

Dawn

Your kiss of light
bursts meteoric,
racing quicksilver
across the face of earth.

Having borne the spark,
night withdraws.
In the ebbing hem of mist
you crystallize.

Day and night wax and wane
as stars pass back and forth,
like grains in an hourglass.

Dreams evaporate
and partial man ignites
for his glimpse of wonder.
Condemned a passing player
in an endless game,
he stammers piece to whole,
each interval a sign.

Captive of beauty,
man marvels in countenance.
What sees the pebble of the stars?

Northern lights

As a melting wing
northern lights glaze
from the azimuth
over the crystal globe
tightly tucked under
the frigid arm of night.

Racing heart is pressed
into its bloody fist
and panoramic eyes are fixed
into a tunnel stare
where ice white breath
petrifies into a crystal cloud.

Not as emptiness but all
surrounding silence,
folds the elements
of earth, air, fire, water
back into ether to reveal
an ever instant of eternity.

Westmount Park

After crystal rain
fingering a nocturne,
on cold moonsilver panes,

Before strange voices
steaming
into autumn skies,

Upon forsaken leaves
swaying their uncertain
way to earth,

Behind the wind's
interrogating prowl
through the vacant playground,

there is you.

When the summer is gone

Fire has fled the sky
and left its red
on praying leaves.
When the summer is gone
you too remove your gown.

As the sun rears
rainbows arc down
to their pot of gold.
When the summer is gone
you draw your heaven smile.

Flowers stand in island parks
waiting for the turning worlds
to pass them by.
When the summer is gone
you bend your heavy head.

In the still warm light
lovers and children
fade golden in the street
When the summer is gone
your dreams ice into night.

Piraeus

for Yannis Ritsos

Snow has slashed his summer pact with sun
and erased Piraeus in mid-day;
there will be mayhem in heaven for at least
a week. Honor is not among the elements.
He has, however, been solicitous enough to place
a drop-cloth on my garden and permit a corridor
of light upon my door. I do not deceive myself,
I know his fondness for jasmine, spirited from
China in a silken scarf in a jade carafe.

The fisherman. I had thought to visit--
to drink retsina and trade a limerick
for a fish. A sturdy mackerel or a melancholy
mullet awry from Alexandria.

Too, the wine merchant. No demestica tonight.
Indeed I am fortunate to have a port in this port
whitewashed to non-existence. Feta and tea
will stay me in this unscheduled extinction, and
bracing brandy dull the edge of this reliance.
I shoulder this single beam of light until
decorum is restored among delinquent deities
and the seaport city reappears.

Safety

You are safe now.

As King you can outlaw
Anything you do not do,

Godless snow

Godless snow
has pinched power lines, swallowed streets,
erased facades, paralyzed behemoths, scratched
appointments, cancelled convocations, hushed
oracles, smothered spectacles, sealed doors,
sent each master to his bed.

Alone and shivering with freedom.

Pandora's Box

Her child bursts scarlet through the door,
screaming curses as she stomps into the room.

'Who is this stanger?' asks the woman
shuddering above her polished floor.

Frantically, she tries to block her ears,
close her eyes, turn away, stop the flood,
re-erect the shattered castle at her feet;
but the child remains.

Red-mouthed demons trample antique crystal,
shred patterned wallpaper, set fire tongues
to custom curtains: They will not be
vacuum-packed into Pandora's box.

At the Ritz

Immaculate black sideburns
with a white silk scarf step smartly
from the car, extend an iron arm
to a hesitating shadow:

A silver nest on white fur curses
as she spans the canyon to the curb.

Two killers, hungry daggers panting
under coat and stole, pas de deux
to lobby, restaurant and bar.

What prevents the scarlet spill of blood
upon the mausoleum floor, deprives
the maitre-de of heroism, and the
beardless busboy of an emergency
with grace?

Rules of order

For an instant

I am King

of this mountain of rhetoric.

Until one of the victims

of my razor wit

rebounds to slash me low

with an ungentlemanly

reference to my past.

Biding time

I hold my ground

by questioning his breeding.

The others at the table smile

as he moves in for the kill.

We plunge grappling

to the conference floor

holding bloody phrases

to each other's throat.

We sometimes think we love

The sad-mouthed clown is soundly beaten
with an oar,

The old woman with taped legs trips
over her cane,

The emaciated boy spurts and stutters
trying to order food.

Proud and solid in their misery,

we laugh hysterically.

And when we, bemused and breathless,

sit in splendor to claw

our friends at coffee

pride curls its face

into a perverse smile.

The Wrong Tao

Not realizing that one can be
in the world and not of it,
possess money yet not be obsessed with it,
have a position without the sign of
self-importance,
he condemns the trappings.

Seeing only all or nothing
he can not put knowledge
in its proper place;
being silent when he should share,
spilling when he should be still,
he seesaws helplessly.

He is irresponsible
confusing freedom with indiscipline.
He is eager to open the windows of the world
to remove the veil of ignorance
from every bogus eye
yet sanctifies only what he does.

Finally there is only the balance,
the juggling of paradoxes,
never the comfort of extremes.
Man, the span from animal to angel,
must be at once divinity and dirt.
Pride must conquer pride.

Without a soul

He is a poet from head to toe.

Lips permanently cast in irony part
to utter profound and partially forgotten
metaphors which smell of dust; so casual,
so offhand, as to threaten prose.

His dress is loosely drawn. The coat
of passé and pock-marked tweed has seen action
on impressive fronts: condemned tenements,
disreputable bars, unhallowed halls, and
smoke-choked rooms. Work boots scuffed and
heelless have tramped the muddiest of back roads,
kicked countless cans, cracked innumerable ribs.

In perfect posture at the table
head in hand, the modern saint wills
from the sacred well of inspiration a
gem, earmarked for the obscurity of print.
The fissure of his brow convulses and gives way.
A pencil consecrates the banal, limps a
well-worn course across a soiled napkin--curses,
colloquialisms, clichés--carefully avoiding
rhyme or reason at all cost; going nowhere,
nowhere to go.

When you rouged your ruby lips

When you rouged your ruby lips
you stole the color of the rose.
The brilliance of the living sun
was drained into a finger ring.
The earth's majestic cape
was cut into a low slung dress of envy.
The sea's unfathomed blue
was distilled into a thimble full of shadow
for your sunken eyes.
Now precisely painted
you are an artifact; an icon among icons.

Rub silk gloves in the night,
exchange hypnotic stares and drunken leers,
stretch mechanic limbs across an iron bed.
Dead child when did you die?
Around what lively table
did you accept the unacceptability of truth?
In what dark corner of despair
did you discard your beauty?
Before what lying mirror
did you cease to see yourself?
Beneath what shining knife and grinning god
did you sacrifice the gift of life?

Beaux-Arts: A Genuine Canadian Crucifix/Circa 1860

Who is this drawn and quartered Christ
stretched contorted on your cross?
Have idle dreams of heaven or
fantasies of transubstantiation
misshaped his sunken chest,
bulged his bloody eyes and
wrenched his wire arms?
Will your sacred craft
eradicate your hate,
negate your subtle cruelty
wipe clean Saint Peter's slate?

In silver palms

In silver palms,

Moon collects

The coins of grief.

The spear of sun

Severs the sinews of space

And glances off all vanity.

Suffering is a bowl of fruit

Set upon the altar of earth

For the nourishment of gods.

A man puts his soul into his pocket

And throws into the gutter

The spangled coat of self-esteem.

The Conspiracy

Muscled wind

inflates

the canopy of night.

Chill

drives

deep staves

into the still warm earth.

Fingered stars

lash

the flapping seams.

Clouds

startled

from rocks on the horizon

scan

the landscape for escape. Too late.

The conspirators

rest

uneasily anticipating

the jagged wrath of sun;

then laugh

at the absurd effrontery of man.

Dark Roofs

Dark roofs are split by slivers of the silver moon.
The demented stir, stutter and dance,
dance out doors and spin in silver circles,
smiling wildly, singing.

Their nonsense voices well into a sparkling cloud
which drifts like morning fog over the metal river,
making the universe in twos: mirroring monads.

The dyad halves. Drawn by the scented moon
the mist ascends with its reflection.
Surrounded by the arms of mother and lover
they take their place as stars within her breast.

Dancers file somnambulistically
from fallow fields into their beds
in perfect step, knowing nothing.

Without the burden of creating

for Wynne Francis

Sun sets his chin on the horizon
and blinks before the edge of night.
Moon paces impatiently below
indignant at such cheap theatricality,
but gratified by its significance:
'Apollo is desperate--they scorn
his shield of moderation.'

Applause begins in expectation,
then swells to a resounding chant.
She adjusts her superiority
to blunt his coming brilliance.
Enacting their ritual to a 'T',
Sun, the perfect gentleman, stands on
the landing with his most ironic smile.

Slashing her cape across her face,
she assails the golden steps.
He says 'good evening' with precision
and she hisses.
The pounding clamour of the audience
smoothes the smart of objectivity:
'They are obsessed, I shall bleed their raving.'

Plucking the fiber of the crowd,
tensing the rise of their desire,
the tragedian finally emerges from the wings.
Demonically she scales the stage of night,
slithering her silver cloak hypnotically behind.
A silken spell is spun in plying tones across
the sky, easing prey into the web of dream.

We, in ecstasy entranced,
dance our dark desire.
Abandoned fire flicks as falling stars.
Moon descends drawing the weighted
net of treasure to her breast.
Devoid of magic, we meet the day
without the burden of creating.

The Cupbearer.

As a hypocrite in prayer
you turn your palms with clawing fingers
upward as a cup;
but the rancid alms you offer
arrive 'cash on delivery'.

You who grovel for goodness
and gain pleasure by submission
defile the 'crucified'.
You whom he called blind
have nothing to be meek about
nor any spirit to be poor in.
Fear is not a substitute for peace.

In your masked war with the bully
you are quick to gather sympathy,
but you, sly liar, are as 'evil'
as the brazen thief.
You share the same internal hell,
he because he can not ask
and you because you can not tell.

Your, homemade deity
smiles at you from every mirror.
As a well-rehearsed pharisee
you covet his commandments.
Your piety is poison poured on cue,
and your calculated mercy is a curse.
Crooked hands bestow contagion.

Should the cupbearer appear
you would condemn him
as they did the 'crucified'.
For like the omnipresent sun,
he is beyond the game of give and take.

Alchemic Solve/Reductio

Death alchemical
is not metaphoric.
You ran from your conscience
like a desperate rat;
snapped at anything in sight,
hid under every object.
Until breathless and undrunk,
you were cornered by your self.

Your easy hood of intellect
is a limp rag
on the kitchen floor.
You would grab and drag it
if you could,
but you can not.
Beside it is the pool of grime
that once mirrored your pride.

You have run out of distractions;
they can not fill
the gnawing pain inside.

Arms and legs stretched pinned
from wall to wall
beneath the perfect witness,
everything is seen.

You are the prisoner of truth.
He will catch your hate
before you make it up,
and draw phosphorescent rings
around your lies.

You are left with
bones, flesh, organs, and a spark;
the minimum for new life.

The last straw

Seeing it impossible to win
one man simply stops, says nothing,
puts down his paper cards,
rises from his padded chair,
leaves his stack of plastic chips
to be fought for by his friends,
turns his back to accusations,
follows the transversing slit of light
to the cobwebbed door marked sortie.

An arrow separates the clouds

Suffering in the safety
of the ruthless wing of night,
he hides afraid of freedom,
praying for a miracle
to transform the horizon.

As a stranger he-steps
from the life denying night
into a labyrinth of grey,
searching for the roadsigns
of his destiny.

Seeing his escape,
he mounts the tightrope
stretching from his dead past
to the unknown of his soul,
without hope of return.

An arrow separates the clouds
to strike the flintstone of his heart.

Blackbirds

Blackbirds settle on the spire
with a homily of discontent
pressing for drastic resolution,
Wind leaves its lair
to mock among the vaults;
Moon grins cruelly
through the stained glass,
Cold makes its pilgrimage
from peaks to pews,
Fate, a feather in his cap,
gathers crimson folly in a sack
and lays it at the altar.

All crowd about the nave
to try the patience of a man.
Yet he is tempered by temptation.
The circus of chance
and the carnival of circumstance,
teach him to prize his soul.

'Thoughts out of season' on St. Catherine

Weathered by the streets

he is a scarecrow

rain-soaked on the gritty curb
picking stubs.

She, stuffed and sprayed

poses in a hall of mirrors
to baste her soldered cheeks
with an arsenal of scents.

The starched and swank

on afternoon parade
weave perfect figure eights
between the slow and slimy.

While the old man selling papers

by the bank on Drummond stares
in wonder at the crystal droplets
hanging rainbows from the visor of his cap.

For Edwin Muir

They do not understand--
never have and never will--
the strength that does not need to strike,
the place beyond like and dislike,
the freedom from reaction that is
the only freedom.
The restless sense the silence
that pervades your words as lack of spirit.
Uneasy, they are safe only in troubled water.
Your still sea is a mirror.
Stripped of pose
your self is bitter fruit to those who can
not taste the truth about themselves.
As all light you are priceless,
unperceived by cutting clowns and dancing killers,
who from center ring, stuff the guts
of greedy crowds with travesty.

The Stranger

Night.

The stranger walks.

His face is unfigured,
vacant, unbetraying.

All manner is applied;
determined gesture
constructed motion
measured salutation.

His is the quiet
which in company accuses,
the fearful counterpoint
of silence.

In but not of.

"We are one and alone,
the disclaimer and pearl giver,
an accident no more.

The life of waste is seen.

The weapon is the hand,
wielded by the watchman
of the subtle self.

Do I hear vanity?

Taste fear?

Conscience

the transcendent sense
has impaired the acrobat.

So encumbered

he can not perform
his deadly dance.

Face to face with truth

there is no recess,
no hibernating,
and no forgetting.

There wells within a cry
to be uttered once.
A shriek unmeasured.
A note ascending
to forever split the sky,
ever true, ever felt,
ever flesh.
Regret unsipped.
A cry to whom,
for what?
Tearful I once formed syllables
for the manifold
without and in.

Why do you live?
Why do you not live?
To hurt and destroy?
Your plight is imaginary;
false drama,
tribulation of the mask.
Gladiator
rising on another's pain.

What have you to give?
Nothing.
What object of creation?
Their words, their motions,
their moments, their 'love'.
The eternal past.
Nothing.

Fill your coffers,
display your gold,
measure your worth
with your neighbor's eye.
Bury the essence.
Where is your mark,
your cross of choice?
You are incapable
of one pure act,
one internal motion.
Only something for something.
You squirm
only for the prize.

Illusory being,
one can not stop
your stealing air.
Your dead weight
is shouldered by
the seldom man
of seldom will.
And yet one true gesture,
one something for nothing,
admits you for a moment
to the whole.
A shooting star.

Should you be
so would the secret.
Knowledge
giving of itself,
is unreined by man.
Issuing as to its law
it masters lips,
commands breath.
Phantom
descending to the poor.

A prisoner of truth
the knower is bound
to kiss the core
of ecstasy and pain.
Virtueless
he welcomes wrath
as well as praise.
He is a desert prayer;
meaningless
but for the maker."

Sunrise.
Night breathes
its final sigh.
Dawn arriving
for its glimpse of wonder
is a witness
to the stranger.
Dew expires.
Moon withdraws her kiss
and the voice
of the stranger
fades into the light.

On the slopes of Sils Maria

for Friedrich Nietzsche

Mad. Yes. As all 'idiots'
who sacrifice themselves for truth,
who eschew the flooded plain for peak,
who leave their false and time-bound self
strung ripped amid the brambles for the climb.

How many never penetrate
the thorns which crown the loss of hope.
How many clowning cynics did you pass
gathered at the threshold making conversation
unable to forsake the shackles of superiority.

On the Mount of Sils Maria
where wine replaced the fire
burning on your blistered lips
you became a child and danced. Danced.
How can the valley kiss the sky?

Still light-footed master,
your will-trod trail through bleak heights
from time to time encourages a hedging fool
to risk his watercolor blood and plaster mask
on the thankless slopes of resurrection.

This Blue Night: Images

for Wendy Springate

A space, dark and empty but for a slender single, platform-like bed. Upon the platform bed, which is at the rear of the space, lies a young woman, motionless. Eventually one perceives her silhouette. She speaks in the darkness:

---This blue night echoes without mercy.

Under the iceman's lunar gaze
victors and victims stagger drunken to their beds
to reenact their ritual in dream.

In the emptiness of all-revealing silence
the possessed, terrified to be unmasked and alone
drop trembling lids on bloody eyes but do not sleep.

On wrenched and sweaty sheets in breathless rooms
their contorted bodies shudder, squirm and flail
a dance macabre in orbit across space.

Spinning in the spin of telescoping suns
a screeching pitch strikes forth from their eerie
and demonic whirl as the music of the spheres.

A circular beam of light appears before the woman on the bed to reveal a faceless, black-clad female figure, standing frontward with head bent and clasped hands between her legs. As a gently blooming flower, she straightens, reaching her long arms upwards and then spreading. Her smooth and graceful movement becomes jagged and disjointed. It becomes more rapid and then desperate and darting. She lashes and lunges out in all degrees of the circle of light, periodically crossing into the surrounding darkness. She punctuates her desperate darts by short still poses; they are exaggerated masks and postures. Her frenzied movements, and her more frequent and longer departures from the light peak, and she disappears. There is only the circle of light. After an interval of silence, the figure on the bed, who is now sitting with her knees brought beneath her chin and arms around her legs, speaks:

---Images. Images. The perfect mannikin.

A shade in someone else's daydream, a spectre
in their nightmare, an ever passing fancy.
Sacrifice for anyone's imagination, supplicant
to every graven image, mistress to the fearful bit
they call reality. All things to all people.
Your pipe, sir. Your glove, madam.

Her profile can be seen on the space's edge.
Behind her, the dancer re-enters from the opposite
edge. She moves into the circle of light as it expands.
In this greater light, behind the back of the speaker,
she moves in long, flowing, and powerful strokes
which represent waves of sea. This is harmoniously
integrated with deft, whisking, forceful and
determined gestures which represent air. After this
rhythm has been established, the speaker, gazing out
at the edge unaware of the dancer behind says slowly:

---Until sky and sea enjoin.

Upon the speaker's final word, the dancer in the center
of the light, gradually turns on a spot into a steady
whirl. It seems as if she could continue indefinitely,
but she stops with poise and looks forward. Then the
speaker says:

---Or is my whole a half of something larger?

The speaker holds the word 'larger'. In the echo of
the word's extension, a faceless, black-clad male figure
moves beautifully into the space, at the place from
which the dancing female came and went. The circle of
light enlarges, and he begins to move about the dancing
female who is still stationary in the center. She is
definitely but reservedly aware of him. She moves her
head, and then her arms, in small swirls. They smile,
and gradually she dances with him in the widened light.
They do not touch. Finally, each spins alone from the
circle of light, out of the space in the direction from
which they entered. The female is the last to leave.
The speaker then turns frontward, and pondering, walks
measuredly into the light. She stops in the center and
says:

---Suns; and suns of suns; and suns becoming moons.
 The geometry of being: the cacaphony of fractions,
 the desperate and destructive dance of halves; one's
 solitary dance of freedom; and the loving dance of
 two ones, the harmony of wholes.
 Love; two suns; how rare.

We are each other's for the making, anything
 for envy, anything; just think me special.
 Handfuls of mother earth desperate to be given
 shape; clay re-forming before every eye.
 Pathetic. Attention--approval, attention--
 approval, attention--approval, attention--approval.

Button--food, button--kiss, button--care, button--
 like, button--praise, button--god, button--love,
 button--sex, button--success, button--heaven,
 button--honour, button--hell. Perpetual
 conditioning. Open and shut.

Images: perfect, pretty, empty, hollow, sweet,
 and scattered. We are not one but a thousand;
 never touching. We just trade images like playing
 cards. Mutual hate and admiration.

The woman on the bed rises and walks forward to the
 circle of light. She looks to the source of light
 for a short but definite time, then says:

---Rhea, Hera, Mary, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty,
 White Goddess, Dionysus, Isis, Hestia, Hydra,
 Whore, Athena, Anima, Aphrodite, Luna, Priestess,
 Siren, Maenad, Muse, Witch, Womb, Fate, Medusa,
 Virgin, Yin, Eternal Bitch, Saint Joan, Sacred
 Mother. What survives the images?

One day falseness shows its horror and you stop;
 the mirror on the wall will not lie. Nothingness
 shudders through your plastic frame and you collapse;
 for what may be eternity. Then in deathlike silence
 and simplicity, appears the Self; feeble and
 forgotten. You hear your shallow breath and you are
 home. In another world.

And then. And then to reconcile the parts:
doing--waiting, act--accept, push--patience,
confront--retreat, fight--flight. Always
understood. Over-sensitive to fear, watching
weakness, smelling pride; listening to the snake
weave in and out of every phrase. Divinity and
dirt.

Having spoken the last words, the woman looks
downward and then to the side. She follows her head
to the side, where she stands with her back to the
circle of light. She brings her hands to her face,
opens her palms over her eyes, pulls them across
her cheeks onto her neck, and together again in
front. She bows her head and says softly:

---This blue night echoes without mercy.

She raises her head and speaks:

---Weary of so many nights. Weary of watching,
weary of listening, weary of knowing; of the joy
that is pain, and the pain that is joy.

The circle of light narrows as she says:

---Just one night let me escape this ever pressing
light.

Epiphany on de Maisonneuve

for Lynda Kaufman

We shuffle, skip, and spin
the speckled streets of Westmount
into a head wind.

Amazingly, the autumn rain
has glazed the blazing leaves
impeccably arranged.

We talk about the relativity of time
and your new freedom, your frightening
insight, and the simple why of chaos.
The nearer you approach your self
the more you leave old friends,
habits, and beliefs behind.

Our steps are synchronized
and in that leaping instant you see
your ghostlike second by my side.
Watching yourself watching
you are the unmoved mover, the walker
on water, the eye within the storm.

Ancient metaphors hit home;
descriptions, parables, promises,
and dreams jolt into recognition.
Some wise timeless seer
resides somewhere
within your shaking frame

An occasional shade
unknowingly beautiful or ugly
tracks its mood into the street.
You see your past crypted
in their sleepwalker eyes;
they are the strangers on this sidewalk.

For today the wind sweeps spectres
from the streets and carries
cardboard killers into cozy rooms.

'Amor Fati': the poetry reading

Weary, the poet, prisoner of truth, bondsman
to the rare love wisdom weaves, reads on.
His power, strained but sufficient, is pure bravura;
the solitary in him would prefer to sip the wine
in silence--walk to the window for a star,
spring like an animal to a regal limb
overspreading the savannah,
imagine the child's beloved South.
Yet the seekers sit transfixed; each intoxicated
with their glimpse.

Secrets spill and circulate: a thousand veils,
a myriad lesser selves, a Pandora's box of
sublimated devils dance about the room. Phantoms
only he sees.

'Are you tired?', someone asks him.

'No, I'm self-generating,' he replies, wavering,
breathing deeply, balancing an army.

Even a tired poet, at night, in winter, drawing on
the memory of sun, can wake sleepers to the
possibility of soul.

Midnight strikes prophetically. Smiling, the
magician swoops a wobbly smile into his coat.
He is any fool departing.

At the door one of the audience hesitantly tips
a letter to his hand. He nods with thanks and
seals the evening with his cap.

Unshackled in the sharpened night he swirls, takes
several emancipating breaths, leans against a
street lamp, and reads the letter.

'Always I have suffered ashamed and guilty for my will, unable to believe that the Christ who changed the world, did so from meekness.

Now from you I learn, that he turned his cheek by choice; that the crucified was King.'

Amazed at the surpassing sway of light--somehow serving those who thirst--and at his being but a vehicle--incomplete in his completeness--he spins his paradoxes in the icy street, and shares wonder with the stars.

The treasure of Ithaca

for Tina and Irena Tsirakopoulou

'I see that you believe these things because
I tell you them; but you do not know the
reason for them, and therefore, in spite of
being believed, their meaning is still hidden.'

Dante--

The treasure of Ithaca is fired
in the furnace of Apollo, polished by erosion,
and varnished in a coarse silt. Azure eyes
avert the avid to the comforts of the Orient.

To vagabonds she turns a countenance of crags,
to plunderers a desolate brow gnarled by deprivation,
To vain transients, squanderers, and fools,
she exudes the honey of deception: pungent wines,
haughty cheese, throbbing rhythms, and the libation
of dream. Bacchus' kiss.

Yet one more rugged than complexion stays.
Stubborn in silence, indifferent to plying scents
and dulcet lips, he waits.

Waits for the fulfillment of Pythagoras,
the passing of appearance, To be tolled one
countless night of vigil in the gravel whisper
of Parnassus.

Amanda's dream

Again you dream
of the old man
pressing you in love
above a corpse.

Sun sets, you open your rib cage
to take the burning
coal to the throne
of your desire.

Night falls, the blood moon
stares cold terror
into every heart
but yours.

You scream once
as the child
releases you from love
above a corpse.

The return

You return,
again the weathering headstone
its smooth script undecipherable
has slid downhill
toward the stream
leaving on the crown
the pointing cypress.

And yet, as before, the flora
vines, brush, flowers, grass
have further climbed
the once bare slopes
to kneel before
the rooted spire.

Understanding

Understanding

sees the face behind the veils
and loves the face,
knowing the veils will disappear.
What shall understanding be?
Prince or pauper,
dandy or fool,
controller or controlled,
moon-eyed or indifferent lover;
faces of fight or fear?
Who sees the face that sees,
that is Proteus from love?
Who recognizes understanding
by what it does not do,
knows the fired glance
that transmutes hate?

I am a fist

I am a fist,
a fist that strikes
but can not give;
a fist that can not learn
because it proudly pretends
to be all-knowing.

Nor can I receive,
acting as if I hold
the treasure locked within.
The riches which I covet,
protect and proclaim,
are disintegrating sand.

If I could release
these jagged fingers long enough
I might read the answer sculpted
in the hollow of my asking palm;
but having been so long a sword,
I have not the strength for innocence.

Perhaps I will die before I die,
transform my weapon hand into a cup
and meet the morning sun anew.
Perhaps I will have the courage
to embrace the child I once rejected
and exalt the majesty of light.

The monk

Let me pace to anonymity
that a hymn
made to the artless curve of innocence
may rise into the sky
unsung.

Let me shrink to silence
that solemn words
transmuted in the flame of solitude
may dwell in dark vaults
undefined.

Let me pass the gilded gate
that spirit
made for stone and scentless strand
may soak the wisdom of the sun
unjudged.

The desert of the heart
is the garden of the soul.

Turn it off

Turn off
the flashlight you shine
here and there
on him and her
to show yourself.
This artificial beam
which shoots about the marketplace
in search of praise
is but a shade,
a pleading moon
that blots the glory of the sun,
a shroud before the innocence
which seeks nothing
but receives all.

The tremor of my voice

for Susan Hawkins

The tremor of my voice

is the steady wave

of one stricken by wonder.

Its scent of sadness

is the joyful shudder

of the heart of hearts.

Not seeking a return

the heart of hearts burns

the veils before eternal beauty.

No longer straining to convert

love into conversation

it simply says, 'you are the treasure'.

Kabir* asks:

for Junayd Gallien

Who drinks the wine of no reward,
the nectar without promise?
Who craves the taste that can
not be acquired?

Rare is he who would sacrifice
his suffering;
to be clear and not a cloud.
Rare is the reveller who drinks
not to forget but to remember,
not through but for his nothingness.

What drunken fool is kneeling at the gate
with his hands cupped as a chalice?

* Kabir (1380-1420), a weaver and singer
from Benares, was the greatest lyric poet
and mystic of Medieval India.

Kabir says:

Wake up, sleeping man.
You have years to lay up riches,
months to plot advancement,
days to squander in the bar,
but not a second for your soul.

Why do you think you live?
To squeeze pennies from your neighbor,
to earn the gratitude of priests,
to memorize the classics of the past,
for the ultimate deal?

What stockbroker is fool enough
to trade his reputation for his soul?
Who is this poor accountant?
Let him knock at the door
and be told the mathematics of eternity.

Who is the alchemist

Who is the alchemist?

Who is the alchemist

but the child, the child

but the self, the self

but the seer, the seer

but the poet, the poet

but the magician, the magician

but the soul, the soul

but the master, the master

but the saint, the saint

but the prophet, the prophet

but the cupbearer, the cupbearer

but the sun, the sun

but the gold, the gold

but the alchemist.

The staying rose

As a selfless eye
the empty moon
is but a corridor of
light.

Its molten stare
penetrates
the dark disguises of the
night.

A star bursts
in illumination
burning back the edge of
ignorance.

The staying rose
itself fends off
hell's creeping
vine.

The pearl
presses outward from
its essence against the
shell.

A diver spears
the ocean grave to cleave
the starbound from the
dying.