

NOTES ON INSUFFICIENT LAUGHTER



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ABSTRACT

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The first section of this thesis is comprised of poems in free verse. The title, Poems For a Swollen Age, is meant to convey the excesses which dominate modern society. In order to portray these inflated tendencies, attitudes and desires, Section One contains two types of free verse poems, which for me, are, when contrasted to one another, emblematic of the excesses which the title seeks to suggest. I am referring to the "Anti-poem" (which is flat and understated) and the "deep image poem" (which is hyperbolic and associative in its images). I believe these two diverse types of poetry serve to express the "swollenness" which I am inundated with—one with a whisper, the other with a scream.

The second section, entitled The Angelo/Blaank Letters, with no response from Blaank, is comprised of a series of nineteen (19) letters, written over the period of one year's time. The letters themselves are an attempt by Ramon Angelo, the author of the letters, to communicate with the "otherness"—from which he has become so alienated. In Ramon Angelo's mind, Cornelius Blaank represents that otherness. The letters then, serve as a chronicle of the journey into light by the way of the deepest dark.

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Colorado-North Review:

"It is a thousand droning messengers..."

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"today, I am at a loss for words,"

"Angelo/Blank Letter..." dated Jan. 4th

Los: Report

Concerning Pope Urban III, Who Had The Birds in The

Vatican Gardens Killed, Because They Disturbed Him

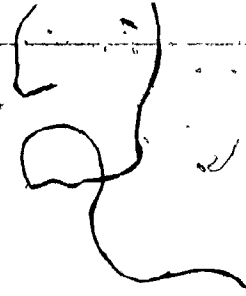
The Song of the Hummingbird

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Gary Geddes for his advice during the preparation of this thesis and for his immense personal faith in my ability.

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SECTION TWO: THE ANGELO/BLAANK LETTERS,  
with no response from Blaank

Letters dated from Jan. 4th, (first letter)  
to the following Jan. 5th, (last letter)

[44-64]



## INTRODUCTION

The following thesis is divided into two very distinct sections. In the first section, entitled Poems For A Swollen Age, there are thirty (30) poems, all written in the free verse format. The second section, entitled The Angelo/Blaank Letters, with no response from Blaank, consists of a series of nineteen (19) letters, covering the period of one year's time.

Although the first section of the thesis is written entirely in free verse, there is, however, another division within this group of poems which should be described at this point. The first subdivision consists of "deep image" poems, a phrase coined by Robert Kelly in the 1940's, to describe what Robert Bly was doing through his Fifties Press, namely, his translations of the Spanish poets: Lorca, Jiménez, Vallejo and others.<sup>1</sup> In the 1960's, when Robert Bly began to publish his own poetry, this notion of the deep image came to be associated primarily with him, and those like him, whose esthetic was more closely aligned with Europeans--Spanish, German, and Scandinavian--than with anything North American.

The deep image, then, concerns itself with a central image (or "leap") as Robert Bly says in his book, Leaping Poetry.<sup>2</sup> This leap should exist at the center of the poem and sprout from the unconscious mind, uniting the known world, i.e., the poem's content, with the unknown world, i.e., the poem's language, by the act, on the poet's part, of creative fusion.

The second type of poem which is to be found in Section One of the thesis, is commonly referred to as the "Anti-poem." This is a term which originated with the modern Chilean poet, Nicanor Parra.<sup>3</sup> What is antipoetry? It is what we get when the thing we're talking about is not definable: we get description. Antipoetry is flat, understated, and relaxed; antipoetry "returns poetry," as Parra says, "to its roots"; antipoetry is honest, unadorned, unlyrical, nonsymbolist; in antipoetry what you see is what you see; antipoetry is chiseled, solid. Antipoetry dispenses with stock poetical devices; instead, it offers dark humor, disjointed logic, flatness of tone and directness of statement.

I sincerely hope these brief distinctions will, to some degree at least, enable the reader to differentiate between the "deep image" poems and the "Anti-poems" contained in the following manuscript.

With regard to Section Two of the thesis, The Angelo/Blaank Letters, with no response from Blaank, I would like to make a few prefatory remarks. The letters are written to an imaginary, though fixed, personality, Cornelius Blaank, by a persona, adopted by me at times, Ramon Angelo. The letters themselves are an attempt to clarify certain profundities: the letters serve as a format for the asking of questions, and at the same time, as a place for Ramon Angelo to make confession. It is, in fact, as if Ramon Angelo is in a confessional, unaware that the priest is not actually on the other side of the booth. Ramon Angelo is being led to the light by the way of the deepest dark, for he knows that only by moving toward what Cornelius Blaank represents, can he finally and properly behead his own demons.

As regards the title for Section Two, "...with no response from Blaank." It must be understood and accepted that Ramon Angelo sincerely

believes he will receive an answer to his letters; the fact that the title suggests otherwise, is no reflection on Ramon's confidence in this matter, for it was I who gave the title to these letters, and then, only after they had been written, not before.

<sup>1</sup>Robert Kelly, "Notes on the Poetry of Deep Image," Trobar, vol. 2 (1961), pp. 14-16.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Bly, Leaping Poetry, An Idea With Poems and Translations (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), pp. 1-6.

<sup>3</sup>Nicanor Parra, Poems and Antipoems, New Directions Books (3rd ed.), edited by Miller Williams, 1966.



...one foot in front of the other  
we are put to sleep like stray dogs  
green pennies over our eyes,  
a collection of boats toward another  
sea.

James Inskcep  
From, "Senility," 1979.

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Section One: Poems For A Swollen Age

The absurd is born from the confrontation  
between human need and the unreasonable  
silence of the world.

Albert Camus  
From, The Myth of Sisyphus.

The Song of the Hummingbird

there is a half-dead poem  
lodged in my heart.  
it lies moaning for days, seeking mercy,  
barely audible and pathetic;  
I do not respond.

this poem is not half-dead through retrogression;  
rather, ~~it~~ is half-alive through my abstinence,  
through my neglect  
of its lonely desire.

what I am doing here,  
is only an exercise;  
so I may sleep through the night  
without having to  
turn on the lights and reassure it,  
coddle it, lie to it,  
tell it that even half-dead poems are okay by me.

this poem  
is a ringing in my ears,  
a hummingbird,  
filled with buckshot,  
its wings still beating in mid-air.

the difference between reality and  
dreams is purely artificial.

Miguel Angel Asturias

in God's cage  
thousands of parakeets sing  
with the futility of monks  
who are fasting to obtain their goal

in God's cage  
serpents breed bigger and stronger  
than was ever thought possible  
before man learned to conjecture

in God's cage  
the mystic Swedenborg  
shares his lodgings with Pandora,  
who is conversant with transformation;  
but neither one knows the reputation of the other

in God's cage  
progress is measured  
by leaps backward  
away from the holy events  
which are sneered at by the soul

in God's cage  
the only thing which is discussed  
is the absurd, impossible notion  
that the bars of the cage are an illusion....

in God's cage  
all is well

Ave Maria,  
flight turns into genuine flight and I  
want to take the Virgin Mary in my arms  
and tell her things  
that harem women only dream of....

...this dance, that was begun centuries ago,  
will finally come to an end. I dream of nothing else;  
my patience turns dragons into little boys.

I need to make love to the Virgin Mary,  
so I can be purged, so the thorns on my soul will shrivel;  
and she, she will be at home in my arms, her eyes will be  
as large as pregnant sapphires....

...the Gods are jealous of my desire, the clouds part  
for my sake alone, while the Gods watch in awe,  
shuffling cards and making bets on the future of  
Kingdom come.

Ave Maria, I see the Virgin Mary smiling  
but I will not look back  
to watch myself turning into stone;  
for where I am going  
only the Mother of Christ can follow....

...the birds are in flight at last,  
and I am moving with them  
toward the limits of human imagination,  
where two lines converge on each other  
and form a single point

A Spasm of Miracles

My lips have had their own history:  
palace of two skins, conclave of moans

My lips have never gone hungry,  
they were sustained during necessary fasts  
by a picture of gulls in flight

My lips have had their own history  
which I cannot proclaim brief or singular  
Noah having built the ark of speech

Women were asked into this history,  
history being a verb of which I am proud,  
and women being an element of which histories are fond;

the history of my lips  
was like an apple  
in search of two snakes

A White Sailfish

The night around her  
seemed holy  
so I entered  
like an inspired man  
with the gaze  
of a gargoyle in heat...

The instant arrived  
— and moved in  
like the nails into his waiting flesh;  
all things inevitably reach this point,  
after invention, decay.

Daybreak wears a soiled face,  
bruised and disfigured with weeping;  
Her wings beat their crazy soliloquy,  
up and into, unconscious flight...

After all,  
Death is a friendly fellow;  
no pretense, no false starts;  
only darkness  
carved into the fiercest obelisk.

After all,  
we can always remember what we stood for  
when we crawled,  
and how silly the stars looked  
hanging there sideways.



After all,

the mountain and its dream remain,

the silence is only our knowing

above the crest of space or time.

She said, "no man will ever write a poem for me."

I said, "sometimes the giving of a poem is an insult in linguistic disguise, for all poems are not happy poems and many poems have been known to steal, lie or cheat their way into the bosom of some kind woman, leaving her scarred forever (or at least infected, in some undiscernable way)."

She said, "no man will ever write a poem for me" but tonight I have buried that lie with these words.

i. I follow your arrival,  
heavy footed and cold,  
in the city of soiled mirrors.  
My hands ache from their stretching.  
My fingertips bleed frowning faces.

The night is hollow  
without your hysterical tendencies toward disgrace,  
but still I am not yours.  
The back of the tortoise is the only place for me now.  
The bees are heading home  
like the cars at daybreak after fasting.

ii. Hollow is the night  
and us in it;  
starving misers at the mercy of turtles and bees.  
I am stretching towards you, my last stretch,  
I am singing the final note from the last song of Aesop.

iii. Now that we are together, however briefly,  
the crack in the soiled mirror  
makes me remember, that I have stretched this far  
only to see my own hands disappear,  
that you are reading from Aesop about my life and laughing  
like the cars at daybreak after fasting

my body aches bright blue circles  
where the knife enters,  
for I am alone in this pain--  
but however deep the knife enters,  
I do not bleed  
but continue to ache  
further into the abyss of your skin,  
surrounded by the ivory circles  
of your arched back,  
like a halo illuminating my need

if a thousand men came riding toward you  
on rare birds,  
all carrying mirrors  
with my face reflecting paradise,  
would you weep with me then,  
would you succumb?

he is chained to the inside wall of this circle,  
your name is the shortest and only prayer he can speak...  
On the other side of paradise  
will you change places with him my love?

her hands  
like those of the idols  
are thin men  
hanging inside my chest;

she,  
she is singing about handsome men  
and leaning/leaning,  
while I am growing large inside myself;

I was told that the day remembers nothing  
after a night like this,  
though her eyes  
are in this immeasurable night  
everywhere at once

My eyes  
were like two bumble bees  
the night I  
pierced the living veil I  
swallowed the deepest gulp of pride I  
stood composed and snarled I  
made the sounds of death I  
moved the mountains clockwise I  
saw her standing there I  
had two drops of blood left  
in my entire body, I  
stung once with each...

My eyes  
like two bumble bees  
will be a sign  
to those who are stronger  
than the black and yellow  
behinds  
of tiny creatures.

I am all eyes tonight,  
not one inch of tongue  
not one thin slice of bone.

I am all eyes tonight,  
two oval, vacuum eyes  
for she is coming:

dressed in a concealed fever of blinding fur.

I am all eyes tonight,  
nothing gets in but sundown  
and her image  
moving quickly  
across the pain  
dressed in snowflakes.

I am all eyes tonight,  
not one inch of tongue  
not one thin slice of bone;  
I am all eyes tonight-  
for she is coming.

I want to see you  
covered  
with silver dollars  
white patches  
of youthful flesh  
peering out  
between the dates and mottos.

I want to see you  
covered  
with silver dollars  
begging/begging  
and afraid to move one thick inch  
your nipples hard  
beneath Queen Elizabeth's cheeks.

I want to see you  
covered  
with silver dollars.  
some heads  
some tails  
and those who watch  
wishing they had thought of this,  
the last time they threw a penny in a pond  
as children sometimes do.



love?

no, she did not want this really;

she did not want

two splendid ends of the same rainbow;

she wanted a shadow of this,

a dead brother of the truth;

she wanted someone else's photographs,

--but love?

no, she did not want this really;

what she wanted was to introduce theatre and subterfuge  
into the living cells of the heart,

to mark the forest path

with new and confusing signs;

--but love?

no,

she did, not want this really

Love is that state in which  
we see things most decidedly  
as they are not.

Nietzsche

It is a thousand droning messengers  
like the swarm which surrounds a pregnant bee.

It is white  
to the point of  
not white at all.

It is heat given back to itself  
through many nights  
of internal bleeding.

It is the woman I desire  
living  
in the cranium  
of a demented priest  
who haunts me,  
even now,  
while the seagulls  
search for food.

You  
are no longer welcome  
in my heart.

The tickets have been given  
to beggars,  
the aorta is closed  
for the duration.

I spit black seeds  
and cough up the dialect of strangers;  
how mighty is the hand of Thanatos:

Your passion was stronger  
than the pull  
of a thousand chinese kites,  
but now the beggars dance  
around the callous  
at the center of my chest,  
and black seeds take root  
in the ensuing dark.

Tarumba's Lament

I put decapitated angels at the foot of your coffin,  
and I threw earth, stones, tears on you,  
so that you won't leave, so that you won't leave.

Jaime Sabines.

Invisibly and already corrupt  
you came seething into Tarumba's abyss,  
and he sheltered you from morning until night,  
when creatures like yourself  
become invisible again,  
and abysses like his become even larger.

You brought your own nails with you  
and then insisted that Tarumba supply the hammer,  
Tarumba's fist was the hammer;  
you'd shriek with laughter and hide the bandaids--  
love was the name by which you called this ceremony.

Tarumba would have supplied you with the earth itself,  
and you would have taken it  
and sold it to the first peddler you met,  
but fortunately, for the rest of mankind,  
who are not as generous as Tarumba,  
the man with the swollen heart,  
Tarumba did not offer you the earth itself.  
Why then does Tarumba call this a lament,  
if your absence can only be taken as a sign  
that God is honestly on Tarumba's side?  
Why does Tarumba call this a lament,  
if your passing can only be a great relief to him?  
Because my corrupt one, in Tarumba's abyss,  
into which you came invisibly seething,  
there is now a large hole,

a space created especially for you,  
when you'd seek shelter from morning until night;  
a large indentation in the side of his abyss,  
which Tarumba finds embarrassingly hard to explain  
and which reminds him far too often of your past presence.

So then, that is why Tarumba has written this lament,  
even though he is rejoicing in your absence,  
he laments the fact that he is ecstatic about it,  
which is Tarumba's way of showing his paradoxical attitude  
toward all things.

Wormwood and Alabaster: A Love Song

don't crowd me, I was born to this  
life of love, this  
love of woman, soft, fragile, naked, and  
thoroughly dishonest woman;

all of my internal organs thirst after women;  
my pancreas dreams only of the feminine pancreas,  
my spleen, likewise, desires only contact  
with another spleen of the opposite sex;  
don't push me aside,  
I am explaining as best I can, how it is  
to have been born to this;

my veins and arteries expand and contract  
in accordance with the physical proximity of certain women;  
my lungs ache when I see women walk (as only women can),  
my fingerprints throb;  
for women have that which men like me were born to desire  
and desire totally;  
they possess not simply a mystery, but rather,  
they contain the mystery itself, they contain the void  
of which the bible speaks, which was without form,  
until women came into being wrapped around it,  
for men like me to perpetually be in search of—

my bones manufacture not only red blood cells, but censors also,  
which I direct outward to the entire female population,  
and then I wait, as I was born to do,  
for my censors to return with women in tow.

But I am insatiable,  
even when I have enjoyed a woman to the fullest extent possible,  
there is always that gnawing sense of actually having gained  
very little,  
for how does a woman transmit the void,  
how does she share the mystery she contains,  
and is she capable of doing so at all?  
I won't go over it again. It's a simple matter;  
simple, because I've wrestled with it for years,  
at first, of course, it was quite complex, irritating, fruitless—  
but when I discovered to what I had been born;

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that my internal organs were going to one day start a fast which would eventually transform me from one who searches, yearns and desires, into that infamous, and up until now, mythical third entity, who would finally unite man and woman into one common being, my life became an easy thing.

and yet I continue to yearn for a woman in the middle of the night, and when I see myself naked, I am reminded of their softness and special curves, by which I was born to be driven mad, and to believe in a being, above/beyond, both man or woman, who can, and someday will, do all I have set out to do and failed--

don't shout at me;  
I am a man with a mission, I was born to this,  
my spleen, pancreas, my lungs, veins, arteries  
and all my other internal organs,  
are at the command of something higher--

but right now, I am consumed with the yearning for a woman,  
soft, fragile, naked and thoroughly dishonest woman,  
any damn one at all.

long before the abject stillness,  
for this was before the opposite of stillness;  
long before the clear lake became frozen,  
for this was before the naming of water;  
long before the mercury sang its song,  
for this was before the temperature had a chance to rise or fall;  
long before the immense corn,  
for this was before the necessity of corn;  
long before the wild zebra,  
for this was before the knowledge of either black or white;  
long before the centipedes crawled,  
for this was before the earth was hard;  
long before the gentleness of lovers,  
for this was before the first occurrence of purring;  
all of this came after,  
before I loved you.



If you never assume importance,  
you never lose it.

Lao Tzu.

We were swollen men,  
ankles highly inflamed,  
with an unnatural sense of importance;

we were mad as hatters, as they say,  
estranged from the moment of birth  
onward and outward  
to and toward  
the (perhaps merry) dance of death;

we were bought and sold at rock bottom prices  
and sang our songs in highly organized falsetto  
to safeguard ourselves from any minor or serious injury;

we were not the men we thought we were, nor the women;  
we were not meant for stardom or starvation,  
though we managed to get a dose of each  
at rock bottom prices;

we were given to outbursts of an infinite variety  
and sat back waiting for the affects to please or displease us  
accordingly;

we applauded, speculated, gave out and gave in;  
we had an (almost merry) splendid time;  
we took and tampered with every available form of amusement  
and now we are naked and crying in the wilderness;  
we were men only by nomenclature  
in the vernacular of a once pregnant heaven

there are people

who don't resemble their own bodies,

whose shadows emerge at midnight,

for that is all there is of them;

beings

whose sole preoccupation is with abstinence,

for they carry the kingdom of absence,

even in their bones;

beings

who spiral inward,

away from any holy others

and away from any external filament,

which may have done them good;

beings

who are perpetually vexed with an absence of certitude,

like those turtles,

whose ability to outrun the Friggit bird

is not possible

even in their lexicon;

beings

whose feet are so strangely formed,

that in their passage through life,

they leave no footprints;

to these beings,

these undone ones,

these human primates;

to them I sing my song of woe;

I, who resemble my own body.

do not assault me so lightly my friend  
for the sky passes slowly  
much too slowly  
for the abrupt angels to take notice  
of such accursed verbiage;

and I shall not relax with corporeal beings much longer  
I shall not stand guard again,  
I shall make no further pitches;

the salesman in me has died  
his words robbed him of his strength  
their innuendos made him see things  
not of this world  
their nuances were like an erratic series of melancholy toccatas;  
and now even my yes's and my no's have fled  
in opposite directions  
searching for the primordial Mother  
to whom things can return  
without payment  
without supplication  
without feigned affection;

imagine it my friend,  
the words have finally take vengeance against me  
they have all deserted me  
and now the sky passes slowly  
much too slowly  
for the abrupt angels to take notice  
of your accursed verbiage;  
verbiage that makes me weep and sing.

Concerning Pope Urban III, Who Had The Birds in The Vatican  
Gardens Killed, Because They Disturbed Him

Pope Urban acknowledged today  
that two hundred birds  
had "mysteriously died" in the Vatican Gardens.

Speaking in a somber tone,  
the Pope then speculated  
as to what may have been the reason  
behind the tragedy:

"Perhaps it was a prank by some rebellious children. Children  
have been known to do all sorts of vulgar  
things to lizards, frogs, birds and the like.

I remember when I was a child, witnessing the shooting of some  
pigeons with B-B guns and sling shots,  
by boys whose parents rarely went to church.

I told no one what I had seen,  
but I remember feeling disgusted  
and sought comfort in the words of Christ, ...and the meek  
shall inherit the earth...

Perhaps it was a child's prank,  
or perhaps it was a political protest,  
veiled in symbolic meaning; a sort of indirect blasphemy  
against the Church itself;

I am having Cardinal Benutti investigate this possibility."

Pope Urban went on to say  
that he has prayed for the souls of these birds  
and that he is confident that they are singing for Christ himself,  
at this very moment, somewhere in Paradise.

Vatican sources all agree,  
it has been very quiet in the Gardens  
since the travesty occurred;  
and as a protest to those responsible,  
and a tribute to the birds themselves,

Pope Urban has ordered that not a single bird be replaced:

"The silence will be a constant reminder of this dark day,"

Pope Urban said, "and the serenity which prevails  
will serve to reinforce our feelings of loss  
in the years to come."

Report

a man has broken into my apartment  
put a gun to my head  
and is making me write this poem:

tell them, he is saying,  
that a man has to take matters into his own hands,  
especially when everyone else's hands are full;  
tell them,  
that a man is not only a man, simply and forever,  
but that a man is part beast, part bastard, part bitch...

he is screaming at the top of his lungs,  
and I expect  
someone in a position of authority,  
to break down the door  
which he has locked behind him,  
and find me  
dead, at this, my final rough draft,  
dead, in the middle of someone else's poem,  
dead, with my hands full of electricity,  
stretched between the murderer's eyeball  
and the victim's plea,  
stretched between what has happened  
and what is about to happen:

tell them,  
tell them that a man has a right  
to have his message repeated,  
even if it's only once...

I tell him, under the circumstances,  
I'm typing as fast as I can,  
that I'm trying to say it with a little finesse:

Just tell them, that a man has to walk the tightrope,  
at least once during his lifetime,  
and that if you don't look down,  
you won't know if there's really a net at all...

I know they will find me here,  
at the keys of my faithless typewriter,  
bleeding and alone, consumed by another man's rage;  
my hands too full, to have signaled for help,  
from this, the 31st floor of my apartment building,  
where a man has entered, put a gun to my head,  
and forced me to write this poem

Poem For Farmers

magic is a phenomenon  
which I am not familiar with  
a formula  
which has eluded my ancestors and me  
for centuries,  
much to our continued chagrin;  
we yearn for the power to create illusions,  
we pray for this and no other  
dispensation;  
to seed the clouds with nothing but a deep breath  
and a furrowed look.

there are children in Spain  
who go to bed wondering  
if they will have any food for breakfast,  
while here, right here,  
a man,  
whose ancestors knew nothing about magic,  
waits for a sign,  
prays for his dispensation  
and hasn't eaten a thing in years.

I take my crooked finger,  
this one;  
and point it at the sky,  
there, up there,  
full of iridescent pigeons—  
and tell the pigeons  
I am coming home.

See, everything is a circle  
which the pigeons fly through,  
they can sleep through a lecture  
on Einstein's theories,  
they are perfectly aware.

But my crooked finger  
which I point at them  
means nothing—  
nor my oratory  
nor my vast desire—  
The pigeons own the sky;  
I am only an invader,  
and the pigeons pay no attention to us,  
until we have died  
and fly past them,  
singing.

cruel man,  
two birds in each fist,  
cruel woman,  
four alligators in each lie;  
and the love between them,  
which took place, every night  
like a cock fight in Hell.

cruel man,  
two tears in each kiss,  
cruel woman,  
four sneers in each laugh;  
and the love between them;  
which took place,  
unrehearsed,  
which kills them both equally,  
in each bite, each tear, each sigh, each instant.

cruel man,  
two drops of sputum in each thank you,  
cruel woman,  
four drops of blood in each your welcome;  
and the love between them,  
which took place,  
on unholy ground,  
to no one's surprise  
except theirs.

cruel man,  
cruel woman,  
six angels tried to separate you  
and failed;  
what am I to do?

cruel man,  
cruel woman,  
and the love between them,  
which takes place  
only God knows why.



O always, never to find the never  
of so much always.

Vallejo.

Bird Song: A Treatise on Masochism

we came to rest  
on the same distorted branch,  
our voices silent  
our little hearts beating;  
and mistook the beating of our hearts,  
for a sign,  
that melody between us  
was possible;  
but when we sang,  
like the two unequal birds we were,  
the truth was in our song,  
and the other birds flew from us;  
such dissonance a threat  
to every sparrow  
on the face of the earth.

like unequal birds,  
singing in two entirely different lights;  
the only harmony between us  
existed, when we flew away from each other,  
our funereal bird song  
a perfect study in syncopation.

...and desire pulls me out  
from between my own teeth.

Vallejo.

to weep with indifference  
at the syntax of angels  
is all a strong man can do,  
and yet,  
the man in the apartment above me  
is playing a guitar;  
the man in the apartment below me,  
is making love;  
while,  
a trillion light years from here,  
the angels converse in a language  
which has never been transposed.

the man in the apartment above me  
has reached the high note of his crescendo,  
the guitar can be heard, following his voice,  
into spheres, articulate with revelation;

the man in the apartment below me  
has reached a state of indecent ecstasy,  
pure, and unlike anything  
the angels could imagine,

while I wonder,  
what curious pattern of exposition  
the angels follow,  
when their language is sung  
or muted in the heights of passion?

In a few days, perhaps sooner,  
the man in the apartment above me,  
will rehearse another song;  
whether composed by him or by another, alters nothing;  
and the man in the apartment below me,  
will make love again, to another, or to the same woman,  
changes nothing;

but I will have grown stronger  
than to entertain such thoughts,  
and you will find me,  
playing a guitar, or  
copulating like a mad beast,  
please believe me.

Perhaps God isn't listening after all,  
not taking down a word,  
not recording a single event;  
a ridiculous notion, I'm sure,  
but none-the-less  
it occurs to me,  
especially when so many have prayed  
and none has received an answer,  
except in his own voice.

Perhaps God grew weary,  
the same messages day after day:  
more of this, please God  
more of that, please God.

Perhaps He simply got tired,  
of pointing down from the sky  
with his big silent finger;  
it's over there,  
no, over there

Perhaps God stopped listening,  
just like that;  
a ridiculous notion, I'm sure,  
but none-the-less  
it does occur to me,  
especially when the cymbals clash  
and no one turns around.

today,

I am at a loss for words,

I cannot proliferate;

I shrink backward like the grapes

turning, turning slowly

into something smaller than myself;

I am not at all like a man alone,

I am yes/yes too connected

and must give up being big

at once

for my own good

and lie down sweet among the happy

who know the value of a smaller feast

who have learned the value of firm restraint;

to be a cactus among men

who can survive without rain

when the words will not come

LEAVES 40 and 43 OMITTED IN PAGE NUMBERING

Section Two: The Angelo/Blaank Letters,  
with no response from Blaank

If we knew,  
If we only knew what we needed,  
then the stars would look to us  
to guide them.

W. S. Merwin

...the pencil with which I wrote  
that letter to the gods is worn down,  
dull, chewed up...

Blas de Otero  
From, The 1937 Howitzer.

Jan. 4

Cornelius,

I know nothing about how the beasts of burden fornicate,  
this letter has nothing to do with fornication;  
this letter is about abstraction, yes Cornelius, abstraction;  
how we homo sapiens stretch all manner and shape of things,  
both positive and negative, into and out of all proportion,  
how we transliterate the paradox to fit our moods,  
how we substantiate the ridiculous with the use of the idiotic,  
how we memorize the mundane and canonize the cunning sons of bitches,  
how we position ourselves accordingly and fear all heights,  
...Like I said, this letter has nothing to do with fornication  
(which is perhaps the only unadulterable act left us). No,  
this letter is about abstraction (pure and simple).

Let me know where you stand on this; abstraction versus fornication,  
or vice versa.

always your,

Ramon Angelo

P.S. We are not Gods though we often trick the demons.



Feb. 10

Cornelius, old man,

You who can so easily screen the mosquito  
but not its bite, tell me then, in what manner  
does the cry of the jackal signify the coming of openness?  
In what manner does the lantern swing, both equally for  
and equally against? In what manner does the belfry  
grow pregnant, and with what poor sucker in mind?

Ours is a monumental task: to put the tunnel in touch  
with the darkest and most similar tunnel, to magnify the  
worship of small cornered animals, to capture, once and for all,  
the olfactory prayer which leads to certain absolution—  
Oh, where art thou absolution?

Our days are numbered, Cornelius, but in a very foreign language.

Ramon

April 2

Look at me Cornelius,  
though your eyes are probably more bloodshot than mine;  
look at me. See how tired I am of waiting; how tired I am  
of speaking in tongues.

Look in my eyes Cornelius and see how little I know of the world  
(Ramon, who knows so much about vice, is still naive about the inner  
workings of the heart?)

I have been waiting for the reinforcements so long, Cornelius,  
my one cross becomes heavier by the day, but perhaps the reinforcements  
are also waiting, waiting for me to succumb, felix nihil admirari....  
Look into my eyes, my friend, one quick glance and you'd understand  
that I have spent too much time looking out the window, too much time  
preparing, and not enough time moving.

I fear that one day my own fingers  
may tell me the whole truth, and then,  
when I have absolutely nothing left to believe in,  
the reinforcements will come down from the mountains  
or out from behind the curtain,  
one can never tell for sure where they may be hiding,  
laughing and putting on their make-up,  
my face reflected in their mirrors.  
Look into my eyes, Cornelius, the time to look has come,  
the time to report back to me has come.

Ramon

April 12

Cornelius,

give me a minute and I'll sail the seven seas,  
one hand on the deck, the other on my heart.

In the dark center of my nights, I have seen you, my old friend,  
teeth clenched and a wizard's grin,  
with that familiar halo of fierce silence circling above you--  
like the clouds over Kilimanjaro, that I saw once on a postcard  
between the pages of an old book, which I bought at the Copernicus  
Bookstore.... But permit me to go forward, Cornelius, for I have lost  
enough sleep the other way, and besides, back there, there is nothing  
for the likes of us to survive on-- and so, forward my Cornelius,  
forward to the beginning of time, where I am told that the truth  
is served up on gold plates, and the Angels lounge with broad smiles,  
watching vagabonds like us, gorging ourselves to the brim.  
Come along Cornelius, the tickets are in the mail, and I have never  
accepted a promise from a man unless I felt sure that he would  
not break it....

Cornelius, the accuracy of an arrow in flight has nothing what-so-ever  
to do with the wagers that are made (presumably) on the archer's  
ability; but who is there among us who knows how to judge, simply,  
one arrow against another? I need to hear from you Cornelius,  
I pray in earnest for nothing else-- give me this day my daily bread  
Cornelius and I will fight to the end to protect your right to give it.

The seas are rough but we have each other-- forward to the brink  
of time, Cornelius. Forward, from here on in,

Ramon

April 20

So,  
how goes it Cornelius,  
now that the pomegranate has been found without a single seed;  
now that Nebuchadnezzar has been found sleeping among thieves,  
—I tell you Cornelius, the time for applause is at hand;  
how goes it,  
now that the monkeys are as certain of their rights  
as we are of ours;  
now that the future exists before it exists;  
now that Vallejo has given up the ghost  
in Paris on a rainy day,  
at a loss for words  
and calling out for Spain;  
how goes it,  
now that the last day of the world has come and gone.

April 23

Look out Cornelius,  
your parachute has failed;  
and I am not at liberty  
to catch a falling star;

The problem with the world  
is that there is always  
one enough too many—

and I hear immense weeping  
coming from the direction  
of the open plains,  
where once, waking from a dream,  
too heavily weighted with lead symbols,  
I heard the cry of a blind man  
searching for his mother,  
without the faintest shred of hope  
of actually finding her,  
in the immense void  
of his solitary life,  
and though his cells kept dividing,  
even this failed to comfort me.

The world is peopled with negation  
but I am fighting for stricter regulations—  
and, someday, I hope,  
that your parachute will open,  
to the sound of applause  
coming from the open plains, where  
a blind man with his face toward heaven  
will not stand transfixed in vain,  
when all will assuredly be well at last,  
on earth  
as it is in heaven.

May 28

Cornelius,  
my calling is not to embellish  
or add stones onto a structure, already wobbling  
under the weight of too many theories;  
Ramon has no desire to invent, he needs to reveal.  
Let the story-tellers proceed,  
he will still be extracting from his innards  
the very stuff their stories are made of...

You feel I have revealed enough,  
that the world will lose its mind trying to fathom it all;  
this may well be true— my obligation, is not to save  
the multitude from gorging itself and dying of gluttony—  
but rather, to make an honest offer, for the sake of  
charity alone—; the consequences of greed and vanity  
are not Ramon's concern— I do what I must needs do,  
I have no apologies to make Cornelius, and I forbid you  
from making any on my behalf; I forbid you to ask for  
special dispensations for me or mine— This much is clear:  
all men strive for the light, but most are attracted by  
the blinding intensity of the dark.

I will keep to the business of revelation until there is  
nothing left to reveal, or, until all have heard,  
all have listened, and all have continued on their merry  
way.

Ramon

May '29

Cornelius,

Mankind has taken a turn for the worse today;  
and the symptoms are staggering:  
hysterical weeping on all four corners of the earth,  
flowers that cannot bloom,  
men buried upside down,

up to their shoulders in mud, begging.

I am afraid to look out the window Cornelius,  
"nothing is plumb, level or square".

All poems tremble before they begin and sigh before they end,  
it is an action requiring both chambers of the heart,  
and I, Cornelius, am always doing penance for some imagined crime  
which I am not quite able to commit;

woe to the man whose ideas are too heavy  
for him to carry from one place to another.

I have a small confession to make, Cornelius,  
I am not afraid of tomorrow.

I know it has been alleged in certain quarters  
that Ramon Angelo shudders at the thought of meeting his maker,  
that the future is a source of fierce anxiety for him,  
that just thinking about eternity gives him hives;  
but I confess to you, Cornelius, I am not afraid of tomorrow,  
it is today Ramon is afraid of.

I must also admit, that so far, your silence has soothed me  
in the wrong direction;

for, instead of fostering a more solid belief in solitude,  
I am beginning to see spots before my eyes and feel faint,  
like a man held fasting against his will.

I am calling out to you one last time, Cornelius,  
I am waiting for your response,  
and I will wait as long as (is humanly possible  
(even the beasts have a certain amount of patience)  
but I must warn you, I cannot wait much longer;  
for mankind has taken a turn for the worse today,  
and you are the only one left  
who has not been infected to the point of immobility,  
for this reason alone, Cornelius, I beg you to strike a match  
in the firmament,  
for those of us whose fingers are already severely burned.

Ramon

June 5

Cornelius,

I've about had it with watching the sun go up and come down, a night after day after night— Christ, the repetition in heaven must drive the saints and sinners crazy. I feel sorry for the man whose heart has never skipped a beat; the horror and exhilaration are tremendous; even you Cornelius, once confided that nightmares provided you with the deepest kind of satisfaction— that at times, they brought you to the brink of the absolute within your own self.

I have not trembled as much as those whose lives are about to be ended against their wills, nor have I had to endure pain, beyond that calibre of minimal discomfort— but internally, inside my fervored brain; I have lived through the most caustic assaults you could imagine— even your nightmares, Cornelius, would be shocked. Your pain is only a preamble to mine. I am looking out the window Cornelius, the sun has not come up today, perhaps it never will.

Ramon



June 12

My friend,

I have never shed enough tears (to actually falter in step)  
while walking toward the abyss;  
nor have I sat cross-legged at any honorable throne (long enough)  
for the serpent of dark or the angel of light  
to tap me on the shoulder and take a look;  
I suppose it comes down (finally) to patience,  
of which my supply is limited at best:

Ah for so much, Ah for so little, and man poor man;  
he swings his crazy eyes, as  
when a man behind us calls by clapping his hands;  
swings his crazy eyes, and everything alive  
is backed up, like a pool of guilt, in that glance.

There are blows in life so violent... I can't answer.

But where does that leave us; those who move, with no thought  
of movement, with no desire to be rooted or uprooted,  
no desire to begin and only the shrug of our shoulders  
at the thought of ceasing?

We are not fit to be soldiers, Cornelius. We are not strong  
enough to entertain such thoughts. But I will not surrender.  
Let the reinforcements withhold their aid, let them discourage me,  
let them lead me astray. Let them anathematize me...  
Ramon may not be strong enough to bring down the temple walls  
but neither is he a coward.

Until we meet again, my arms are yours. Do not let the callouses  
on my hands frighten you; I have been rowing for quite some time;  
I have not moved an inch from where I started, but I have been  
rowing none-the-less. There is room for you, Cornelius,  
at the stern of the ship, for Ramon's eyes are failing,  
and if he should reach solid ground again, he would like you there  
to tell me where indeed he had landed.

So let my offer stand, until a lion lies down with a lamb,  
or until your heart swells (to twice its normal size)  
with the desire to follow me to the ends of the earth.

I am as always,

your most regrettable Ramon

July 5th

all is hocus-pocus, abracadabra, poof, goodnight--  
all things are relentlessly pushing backwards,  
shrinking inward;  
past finite, past miniscule, past iota, past atom--  
toward infinity;  
toward the unbiased arms of nada y pues nada;  
Imagine that, Cornelius,  
the final stop, the eternal resting place,  
for us and our big ideas, does not actually exist,  
even for those who are convinced they are heading there.

What I'm saying, Cornelius, is let us live it up while we have  
the strength to; afterwards, well, I leave that to the wizards  
to discuss among themselves.

I have spent too much of my life thinking about death,  
and the possible (more than probable) finality of such a state  
of existence-- but I feel the weight of the preceding contradiction  
so heavily at times, that all I can muster is a gigantic shudder  
and a desperate prayer; a prayer, at the center of which,  
is a silence, holy beyond my comprehension; a prayer which pleads  
for the son of god to appear again and clarify the mysteries  
he inspired in the first place-- but I have as much chance  
of my prayer being answered  
as a drunken sailor has of passing through the eye of a needle.  
I know, all things are possible-- all things except this, Cornelius.  
Another contradiction, but so be it-- language always collapses  
in on itself when a man goes too deep within his own psyche,  
which in some way lends credence to the claims of the mystics--  
who, so far as I'm concerned, shouldn't be trusted, until the  
world's most respected cryptographer comes forward  
with the key to break their code.

in sickness and in health,

Ramon

August 12

I've been wondering, Cornelius,

Do zebras have one more white stripe or one more black stripe, either way I mean? I have to know, because the mystics believe that God planted a key to the mystery somewhere, and I think the zebra is a good place to start.

Everything dissolves, Cornelius. Even the bat's radar fails at the end; but I don't want to end; I just want to start something, which will take my mind off everything else— an anesthetic for the unconscious, like counting backwards from infinity.

You are so quiet, at times, that I fear for your safety my friend. Sometimes it crosses my mind that, perhaps, I am writing to a ghost, or to the shadow of a ghost, or at least, to someone who is familiar with the habits of ghosts. Perhaps you've begun to spiral in another direction since I saw you last; perhaps ascension is better than neutrality, after all. You'll have to let me know about that, Cornelius. You will have to try and bring yourself to make a confession, no matter how small— and what better way, than to confide in an old friend about the mysteries of this (or any other) life, about how many stripes the zebra really has after all, and about how God never found the time to talk with you.

I am almost out of flares, Cornelius; I cannot signal indefinitely, but I must praise you for listening, even if your response has been lost in the cool night of indifference— as I said, I fear for your safety my friend; I fear for the geese in flight, and I am beginning to fear, that my time has come or is coming.

I have heard about a mirror

)  
in flight,

Ramon

September 5th

Cornelius,

I have never desired what I needed, only what I have wanted; Christ, therefore, has no blood left to shed for me. My body won't listen to a word I say. It flatly refuses me, in public places—laughs silently and out loud. My body has a mind of its own, Cornelius, though not my mind.

Christ! I invoke that name when I cannot think what else to say, when I am too consumed to go on and haven't the strength necessary to grab (and hold on) to even a single word. When the void appears, out pops Jesus.

There is nothing on this earth to smile about, Cornelius. Once we realize this simple truth, we need not suffer again, and yet, I continually suffer— and worse, I suffer on account of my suffering.

What does all this mean, eh, Cornelius? Down which foul road has Ramon led you again and with what foul pictures in hand? Can't Ramon dance? Can't Ramon sing? Who knows, Cornelius, perhaps Ramon's tears are but the prelude to a great symphony that he has been secretly writing for years, in his own blood. And someday, my friend, he will play the world his one song and dance his one dance— but for now, and for as long as I can remember, my life has been heading directly for my death.

Your Ramon

Oct. 15

Listen to me, Cornelius,  
for the sake of Art, for the sake of the undone, the human  
primates; for the sake of all the oceans that have gone under  
the bridge; for God's sake, Cornelius, listen:

only one battle has been fought;  
during the entire history of man,  
only one fire has raged, only one sun has set  
and only one moon has waned. Listen to me Cornelius;  
only one man has dreamed about the Cosmos, only one man has  
bled to death and only one man has died in his sleep, peacefully.

I have been a man of too many words, "a perfect poem has an  
infinitely small vocabulary..." I have been a man of too many  
moods; variety has added only a panoply of excuses for excessive  
behavior in both directions; the man who goes crazy in a bell-  
tower in Houston, and the one who crosses the enemy lines in search  
of a soft bed-- both suffer from a desire to flee themselves--  
but this desire cannot be satisfied, Cornelius; for when we flee  
one thing, we are of necessity attracted by another.


One thing more, Cornelius, your seeming indifference to my pleas  
and sermons; what am I to make of it? I imagine that you sit  
reading these words as if they had been written to someone else,  
that this, and other letters of mine, have fallen into your hands  
by mistake, and that your response is not necessary or expected.  
This is not the case. These words are for you and those like you.  
It is your obligation, Cornelius, to say something on behalf  
of those you represent, even if your capacity to answer for  
yourself is limited by your desire to remain aloof and anonymous.

Again Cornelius, only one man has bled to death and only one man  
has died in his sleep, peacefully. I am not that man, Cornelius,  
but you my friend, must stand up and be counted; your voice must  
rise above the clouds and then crash down upon the earth with  
such force that those who are waiting will finally be assured  
that their prayers have been answered-- so delirious with thanks  
that they will not even care to inquire whether the answer to their  
prayers has been yes or no-- rejoicing only that someone heard  
and someone answered.

In this, and in other endeavors, the stars are on your side, and I,  
Ramon Angelo, half saint, half whore, am always on the side of the  
stars.

to you Cornelius, and to those like you,  
I am as always,

Ramon



Nov. 25

No more excuses, Cornelius,  
the paltry promise, "all will be well in the end",  
cannot sustain me any farther  
into this intolerably long night,  
almost of the iguana, but certainly of the restored eunuch.  
I've seen a vision, Cornelius,  
a vision no beast could be forced to endure;  
my vision is like solid oak in my veins,  
my vision has made me stand erect for the first time in months,  
my vision is an implosion, directed against the cells themselves;  
my vision says, "do not be divided against yourself Ramon,  
do not bend to the desire of the great magnet in the sky,  
do not break man into two grotesque and separate entities;  
one solid, the other liquid; one of the flesh and the other  
of the spirit; there is no wage in making distinctions which  
drive you to the very brink of madness..."  
This is what my vision says to me, Cornelius,  
while you remain, "my silent friend of many distances",  
and what has become of you, Cornelius, how many songs  
have you sung, and to what twisted melody have you languished,  
in the center of your silence, directed toward me,  
at no wage to yourself?  
I am done with silence, I am done with ghosts,  
done with hollow men, with swollen men, desolate men,  
men who cannot answer even one simple question, ever...  
I am ready to sing my one song and dance my one dance,  
I am ready to leap across the great abyss, without my blindfold on,  
my bejeweled and sacred blindfold,

with no faith in my heart and no hope in my head;  
to leap for the sake of the leap, remember Nijinsky;  
I will send back a photograph of myself on the other side;  
I will do that for you, Cornelius,  
I, who keep my own promises, my silent friend of many distances.

Ramon Angelo

Dec. 2

Cornelius,

I think it is time to tell you something which I have kept to myself long enough. Little girls are for little boys, real little boys; not the little boy in us all, nor the little boy in me. They understand each other, or at least they have the capacity to. Ramon has been trying to fool himself for years, straining familiar adages, into grotesque counterproductive hypes, which now fit him like a glove, but leave little, if any, room for breathing. You know the kind, Cornelius: experience is the best teacher, and so on. If I have not spoken to you of love before, Cornelius, it is precisely because of my predilection for the undernourished women of this world; a fascination which has cost me much more than I had bargained for, if such things can be bargained for at all. For me, love has always been a movie theatre, where the projectionist died of fright, viewing a film, someone had substituted for the one which he was familiar with.

Many times I have convinced myself of love's presence, through sheer imagination and quintessent desire. When a man is thirsty he will drink even of stagnant water. And that is why, Cornelius, I have not spoken to you of the women in my life, for there were none— little girls, of course, there were many. They run faster and lie better.

But I must leave the little girls behind.

I have been fasting between their legs long enough.

The time for Ramon to assume himself has come.

The time for decent laughter is upon him,

and so, I am loosening up my jaw  
hoping for the best;

Ramon's laughter is the holy medicine my soul needs.

as always,

Ramon



Dec. 10

And what if after so many words,  
the word itself does not survive, eh Cornelius?  
What if after the sledgehammer has pounded its final nail,  
the nail itself vanishes? What if after the seventh seal  
has been lifted, the soil then shrinks back into obscurity  
and disappears?

Don't tell me to concern myself with the substantive  
and dismiss the vacuous. All things are conceived in the mist  
and dissolve forward, back into the mist. Hasn't this proposition  
played havoc with you, at least once, in your solid life?  
Hasn't the scent of things past startled you in your most  
secret depths, at least once, causing tremors and creating doubt;  
the only road which leads to any certainty at all.

For me, doubt is a fixed reality.. It isn't that I have no hope.  
I simply have found nothing to have hope in. I have plenty of hope.  
It swells in my innards. My veins stand out as proof, my eyes bulge.  
I even have faith in my hope, Cornelius, which is all I can say--  
until the item to which my hope can stick, comes dancing out from  
the tunnel, or, until the reinforcements release the cryptographer's  
minute book-- so that I may determine for myself, if my faith  
in my hope has been in vain or, a glorious fast which has  
begun to pay off.

As for you, Cornelius, and those like you, your faith is given  
too easily; mine, I hold back. I wait like a rogue by the wayside;  
I bide my time and give my attention, and what I may call my  
affection, to the wind, to the clouds as they pass, and to my faith,

which is continually nourished by my hope; my hope, which is living  
the solitary life, inside my veins, waiting for the supreme release,  
which may or may not come.

as is my habit, I remain,

Ramon

Dec. 31

I had a dream last night, Cornelius,  
in which a herd of zebras came charging toward me,  
out from a tunnel, which seemed to begin and end in a mountain,  
the kind trains pass through when the mountain is too high  
to traverse any other way.

The zebras had large human teeth and were baring them at me.  
I was running away from them, looking back from time to time,  
running on, what I took to be a savannah, an open and empty plain.  
When I looked back again, I noticed the zebras didn't have  
the heads of zebras at all, but rather, they now had the heads  
of chinese eunuchs, heads like those sometimes see  
on old snapshots, of men such as these who attended the Emperor's  
every desire.

And as I ran, I continually looked ahead and from side to side,  
seeking a place to take refuge from these horrid beasts,  
but then I realized that the zebras were neither gaining on me  
nor retreating further away from me. I was perpetually (so it seemed)  
trapped in the middle of a great pursuit, of which I was to be  
the eternally pursued.

Then, out of nowhere, a mountain loomed from the horizon,  
large, foreboding and magnificent. And down from the mountain,  
thousands of assorted reinforcements were coming to my rescue;  
the cavalry of the 1800's, the doughboys of World War I, the  
Green Berets of the 1960's. Hundreds of kinds of uniforms,  
hundreds of nationalities, all coming to my aid. And I perched  
myself on the side of the mountain and watched the reinforcements  
and the zebras, with the heads of chinese eunuchs, fight each other  
on my behalf, until not one zebra nor one soldier remained,  
and then I walked into the tunnel where the dream began  
and awoke.

Jan. 5

Cornelius,  
Hallelujah, and then some;  
I will not sing another sad song, my friend;  
laments are no different than defeats,  
and I forbid the darkened ember, I forbid the eulogy.

I have discovered that we need not jump into the abyss,  
we need not even contemplate it, we need only come as close  
to the precipice as is physically possible, without falling off;  
this is the way to accurately test our reflexes.

Ramon was waging a war of severe dissimilitude;  
pride forbids my making it any clearer,  
suffice it to say, Cornelius, that the zebra is now one with  
its own kind;  
the blind man has found his mother;  
the tunnel has been excavated, and it is nothing more than  
a hollow cave;  
the stars are shining;  
the eunuchs are not content after all, they've nothing to  
smile about;

I am wandering the open plain, applauding myself and grinning,  
looking for the tips of the arrows which I misplaced,  
in my searing apprenticeship to Doom;

And now I must report to you, Cornelius,  
that I see your parachute foiled neatly under the largest  
cactus tree one could imagine;  
the reinforcements must have left it for me,  
for me or for Christ; Christ the man, not Christ the exit,  
or, Christ the exclamation— But I do not need a parachute;  
I lift quietly off the ground of my own free will,  
and in doing so, Ramon is finally free of you and of himself.