

When Elephants Last in the Dooryard Bloomed, Ray Bradbury

This One To The Memory Of my grandmother Minnie Davis Bradbury and my grandfather Samuel Hinkston Bradbury, and my brother Samuel and my sister Elizabeth Jane, long lost in the years but now remembered.

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Remembrance

And this is where we went, I thought,

Now here, now there, upon the grass

Some forty years ago.

I had returned and walked along the streets

And saw the house where I was born

And grown and had my endless days.

The days being short now, simply I had come

To gaze and look and stare upon

The thought of that once endless maze of afternoons.

But most of all I wished to find the places where I ran

As dogs do run before or after boys,

The paths put down by Indians or brothers wise and swift

Pretending at a tribe.

I came to the ravine.

I half slid down the path

A man with graying hair but seeming supple thoughts

And saw the place was empty.

Fools! I thought. O, boys of this new year,

Why don’t you know the Abyss waits you here?

Ravines are special fine and lovely green

And secretive and wandering with apes and thugs

And bandit bees that steal from flowers to give to trees.

Caves echo here and creeks for wading after loot:

A water-strider, crayfish, precious stone

Or long-lost rubber boot—

It is a natural treasure-house, so why the silent place?

What’s happened to our boys they now no longer race

And stand them still to contemplate Christ’s handiwork:

His clear blood bled in syrups from the lovely wounded trees?

Why only bees and blackbird winds and bending grass?

No matter. Walk. Walk, look, and sweet recall.

I came upon an oak where once when I was twelve

I had climbed up and screamed for Skip to get me down.

It was a thousand miles to earth. I shut my eyes and yelled.

My brother, richly compelled to mirth, gave shouts of laughter

And scaled up to rescue me.

“What were you doing there?” he said.

I did not tell. Rather drop me dead.

But I was there to place a note within a squirrel nest

On which I’d written some old secret thing now long forgot.

Now in the green ravine of middle years I stood

Beneath that tree. Why, why, I thought, my God,

It’s not so high. Why did I shriek?

It can’t be more than fifteen feet above. I’ll climb it handily.

And did.

And squatted like an aging ape alone and thanking God

That no one saw this ancient man at antics

Clutched grotesquely to the bole.

But then, ah God, what awe.

The squirrel’s hole and long-lost nest were there.

I lay upon the limb a long while, thinking.

I drank in all the leaves and clouds and weathers

Going by as mindless

As the days.

What, what, what if? I thought. But no. Some forty years beyond!

The note I’d put? It’s surely stolen off by now.

A boy or screech-owl’s pilfered, read, and tattered it.

It’s scattered to the lake like pollen, chestnut leaf

Or smoke of dandelion that breaks along the wind of time…

No. No.

I put my hand into the nest. I dug my fingers deep.

Nothing. And still more nothing. Yet digging further I brought forth:

The note.

Like mothwings neatly powdered on themselves, and folded close

It had survived. No rains had touched, no sunlight bleached

Its stuff. It lay upon my palm. I knew its look:

Ruled paper from an old Sioux Indian Head scribble writing book.

What, what, oh, what had I put there in words

So many years ago?

I opened it. For now I had to know.

I opened it, and wept. I clung then to the tree

And let the tears flow out and down my chin.

Dear boy, strange child, who must have known the years

And reckoned time and smelled sweet death from flowers

In the far churchyard.

It was a message to the future, to myself.

Knowing one day I must arrive, come, seek, return.

From the young one to the old. From the me that was small

And fresh to the me that was large and no longer new.

What did it say that made me weep?

I remember you.

Iremember you.

PRETEND AT BEING BLIND,

Which Calls Truth Near

The backyard of my mind is filled this summer morning

With a soft and humming tide

The gentle glide and simmer, the frail tremoring

Of wings invisible which pause upon the air,

Subside, then come again at merest whisper

To the lip of flower, to the edge of wonder;

They do not tear asunder, their purpose simple

Is to waken me to wander without looking

Never thinking only feeling;

Thoughts can come long after breakfast….

Now’s the time to press the air apart

And stand submerged by pollen siftings

And the driftings of those oiled and soundless wings

Which scribble waves of ink and water

Flourished eye-wink fluttering and scurry

Paradox of poise and hurry,

Standing still while spun-wound-bursting to depart,

Swift migrations of the heart of universe

Which surfs the wind and pulses awe;

Thirsting bird or artful thought the same,

Sight, not staring, wins the game,

Touch but do not trap things with the eyes,

Glance off, encouraging surprise;

Doing and being… these the true twins of eternal seeing.

Thinking comes later.

For now, balance at the equator of morn’s midnight

With wordless welcome, beckon in the days

But shout not, nor make motion,

Tremble not the sea nor ocean of being

Where thoughts in rounded flight fast-fleeing

Stone-pebble-skip

Across the surface of calm mind;

Pretend at being blind which calls truth near….

Until the hummingbirds,

The hummingbirds,

The humming—

—birds

Ten billion gyroscopes,

Swoop in to touch,

Spin,

Whisper,

Balance,

Sweet migrations of gossip in each ear.

THE BOYS ACROSS THE STREET

ARE DRIVING MY YOUNG DAUGHTER MAD

The boys across the street are driving my young daughter mad.

The boys are only seventeen,

My daughter one year less,

And all that these boys do is jump up in the sky

and

beautifully

finesse

a basketball into a hoop;

But take forever coming down,

Their long legs brown and cleaving on the air

As if it were a rare warm summer water.

The boys across the street are maddening my daughter.

And all they do is ride by on their shining bikes,

Ashout with insults, trading lumps,

Oblivious of the way they tread their pedals

Churning Time with long tan legs

And easing upthrust seat with downthrust orchard rumps;

Their faces neither glad nor sad, but calm;

The boys across the street toss back their hair and

Heedless

Drive my daughter mad.

They jog around the block and loosen up their knees.

They wrestle like a summer breeze upon the lawn.

Oh, how I wish they would not wrestle sweating on the green

All groans,

Until my daughter moans and goes to stand beneath her shower,

So her own cries are all she hears,

And feels but her own tears mixed with the water.

Thus it has been all summer with these boys and my mad daughter.

Great God, what must I do?

Steal their fine bikes, deflate their basketballs?

Their tennis shoes, their skin-tight swimming togs,

Their svelte gymnasium suits sink deep in bogs?

Then, wall up all our windows?

To what use?

The boys would still laugh wild awrestle

On that lawn.

Our shower would run all night into the dawn.

How can I raise my daughter as a Saint,

When some small part of me grows faint

Remembering a girl long years ago who by the hour

Jumped rope

Jumped rope

Jumped rope

And sentme weeping to the shower.

AND FRIEND TO NOAH, SPEAKS HIS PIECE

At night he swims within my sight

And looms with ponderous jet across my mind

And delves into the waves and deeps himself in dreams;

He is and is not what he seems.

The White Whale, stranger to my life,

Now takes me as his writer-kin, his feeble son,

His wifing-husband, husband-wife.

I swim with him. I dive. I go to places never seen,

And wander there, companion to a soundless din

Of passages, of currents, and of seas beneath a sea.

I linger under, down, and gone until the dawn;

Then, with a lumbering of flesh, old Moby turns him round,

Peers at me with a pale, lugubrious eye.

As if to say: God pinions thee,

Your soul against your flesh, your flesh against the sea,

The sea nailed down to land in passionate lashings of its stuff.

You are mere snuff, I sneeze thee!

You are the snot of Time, but, once exhaled, O, Miracles!

You build a spine and stand you tall and Name Yourself.

What matters it the name. You are my sequel on the earth.

The sea is mine. The land belongs to you.

All compass themselves round in one electric view.

I am the greatest soul that ever ventured here,

But now your soul is greater, for itknows,

And knows that it knows that it knows.

I am the exhalation of an end.

You are the inhalation of a commencement of a beginning,

A flowering of life that will never close.

I stay in waters here and salt myself with tides

For dinners of eternity to eat me up

While your soul glides, you wander on,

You take the air with wings,

Test fires, roar, thrash, leap upon the Universe Itself!

And, breathing, move in breathless yammerings of broadcast Space.

Among the energies of abyss-void you bound and swim

And take a rocket much like me

The White Whale builded out of steel and loxxed with energy

And skinned all round with yet more metal skin

And lit within and filled with ventings of God’s shout.

What does He say?

Run away. Run away.

Live to what, fight?

No. Live to live yetmore, another day!

Stay not on tombyard Earth where Time proclaims:

Death! Death to Moby! Clean his polar bones!

Doom to the White Whale!.

Sail on. Who was it said that? Sail, sail on, again,

Until the earth is asterisk to proclamations

Made by God long years before a Bible scroll

Or ocean wave unrolled,

Before the merest sun on primal hearth was burned

And set to warm the Hands Invisible.

I stay, I linger on, remain;

Upon my rumpled brow my destiny is riven deep

In hieroglyphs by hammerings of God

Who, ambled on my head, did leave his mark.

I am the Ark of Life!

Old Noah knew me well.

Do not look round for ruins of an ancient craft,

I kept his seed, his love, his wild desires by night,

His need.

He marched his lost twinned tribes of beasts

Two and two and two within my mouth;

Once shut, there in the Mediterranean north,

I took me south,

And waited out the forty days for dove to touch my skin

And tell by touching: Earth has perished. Earth is washed

As clean as some young virgin’s thighs from old night and sin.

Noah looked out my eye and saw the bird aflutter there

With green of leaf from isle somewhere at sea.

I swam me there and let them forth

Two by two, two by two, two by two,

O how they marched endlessly.

I am the Ark of Life. You be the same.

Build you a fiery whale all white…

Give it my name.

Ship with Leviathan for forty years

Until an isle in Space looms up to match your dreams,

And land you there triumphant with your flesh

Which works in yeasts, makes wild ferment,

Survives and feeds

On metal schemes;

Step forth and husband soil as yet untilled,

Blood it with your wives, sow it with seeds,

Crop-harvest it with sons and maiden daughters,

And all that was begat once long ago in Earth’s strange waters

Do recall.

The White Whale was the ancient Ark, You be the New.

Forty days, forty years, forty hundred years,

Give it no mind;

You see. The Universe is blind.

You touch. The Abyss does not feel.

You hear. The Void is deaf.

Your wife is pomegranate. The stars are lifeless bereft.

You smell the wind of Being.

On windless worlds the nostrils of old Time are stuffed

With dust and worse than dust.

Settle it with your lust, shape it with your seeing.

Rain it with sperming seed,

Water it with your passion,

Show it your need.

Soon or late,

Your mad example it may imitate.

And gone and flown and landed there in White Whale craft,

Remember Moby here, this dream, this Time which does suspire,

This kindling of your tiny apehood’s fire;

I kept you well. I languish and I die.

But my bones will timber out fresh dreams,

My words will leap like fish in new trout streams

Cone up the hill of Universe to spawn.

Swim o’er the stars now, spawning man

And couple rock, and break forth flocks of children on the plains

Of nameless planets which will now have names,

Those names are ours to give or take,

We out of Nothing make a destiny

With one name over all

Which is this Whale’s, all White.

I you begat.

Speak then of Moby Dick,

Tremendous Moby, friend to Noah.

Go now.

Ten trillion miles away.

Ten light-years off.

See! from your whale-shaped craft:

That glorious planet!

Call it Ararat.

WHEN ELEPHANTS LAST

In The Dooryard Bloomed

When elephants last in the dooryard bloomed

Brought forth from dusts and airing attics where they roomed

For many a year and faded out the roses on their flanks

And sucked the dust and trod the ancient grass in ranks

Beyond our seeing, deep in jungles on our parlor floor,

These old familiar beasts we led into the light

And beat upon their pelts and hung them in the sight of sun

Which glorious made the panoplies of thread.

What grandeur here!

What pomp of Hannibal and Rome and Alps,

Egyptian cerements and tombs, Troy’s ruins, Delphic glooms—

Across such arabesques as these once walked Victoria.

Now in the lost great animal boneyard these lively skins are stretched,

Unravel, fall to pollen and to rust.Sic transit gloria.

All this has passed, is dim as ill-recalled rococo

But in my youth I stomped out cinnamons from these

God-awful paths and raised up such a flour of scents

As would reel down kings and make rise up to kingship

Lunatic lepers and foul penitents.

Old creatures, slung upon a wire in wind and light

And years’ ebbtide

I beat you gently with my howdah wire-racket beater,

Search tigers in the shade of your deep hills

And stand, a monarch made, along your blind impatient old

And slumbrous side,

And know that modern carpetings and rugs, so bland, so broad

So nothing, and so shallow

Were made for snails

And men who breakfast, lunch, and dine

Upon the safe, sure, ever-recurring marshmallow.

Still somewhere in this world

Do elephants graze yards?

In far towns toward the East and North toward Michigan

Do grandmothers and boys go forth to lawns,

And lines strummed there ‘twixt oak or elm and porch,

And tie thereon great beasts of Indian grace

Loomed taller than their heads?

Still on such days do heartbeats throng the town

Where elderwitch and tads,

Where toms and great-grand-crones gone feverish with sweat

Goad Time out of the warp and weave,

The tapestry of treaded hearthwarm woolen flesh,

Beat Time into the breeze and watch the billion footfalls

Sift clouds into the greening insufferable beauty of young trees?

Do old and young still tend a common ground?

Vast panoply and firewalk spread of God’s most patient brute

Whose firecoal eyes observe and well-worn hide

Now feels the woman tire, so Boy takes up the beat:

Where one thump dies, another heart begins.

Along the cliff of dusty hide

From either end, with centuries between as well as miles,

Old looks to young, young looks to old

And, pausing with their wands,

Trade similar smiles.

DARWIN, THE CURIOUS

Old Curious Charlie

He stood for hours

Benumbed,

Astonished,

Amidst the flowers;

Waiting for silence,

Waiting for motions

In seas of rye

Or oceans of weeds—

The stuff on which true astonishment feeds—

And the weeds that fed and filled his silo

With a country spread

By the pound or kilo,

Of miracles vast or microscopic,

For them, by night, was he the topic?

In conversations of rye and barley,

Didthey stand astonished

By Curious Charlie?

DARWIN, IN THE FIELDS

Darwin, in the fields, stood still as time

And waited for the world to now exhale and now

Take in a breath of wind from off the yield and swell

Of sea where fill the clouds with sighs;

His eyes knew what they saw but took their time to tell

This truth to him; he waited on their favor.

His nose kept worlds far larger than a goodly nose might savor

And waited for the proper place to fit the flavor in.

So eye and nose and ear and hand told mouth

What it must say;

And after a while and many and many a day

His mouth,

So full of Nature’s gifts, it trembled to express,

Began to move.

No more a statue in the field,

A honeybee come home to fill the comb,

Here Darwin hies.

Though to ordinary eyes it might appear he plods,

Victorian statue in a misty lane;

All that is lies. Listen to the gods:

“The man flies, I tell you. The man flies!”

DARWIN, WANDERING HOME AT DAWN

Darwin, wandering home at dawn,

Met foxes trotting to their lairs,

Their tattered litters following,

The first light of the blood-red sun adrip

Among their hairs.

What must they’ve thought,

The man of fox,

The fox of man found there in dusky lane;

And which had right-of-way?

Did he or they move toward or in or

On away from night?

Their probing eyes

And his

Put weights to hidden scales

In mutual assize,

In simple search all stunned

And amiable apprize.

Darwin, the rummage collector,

Longing for wisdom to clap in a box,

Such lore as already learned and put by

A billion years back in his blood by the fox.

Old summer days now gone to flies

Bestir themselves alert in vixen eyes;

Some primal cause

Twitches the old man’s human-seeming paws.

An ancient sharp surmise is melded here

And shapes all Dooms

Which look on Death and know it.

Darwin all this knows.

The fox knows he knows.

But knowing is wise not to show it.

They stand a moment more upon the uncut lawn.

Then as if by sign, quit watchfulness;

Each imitates the other’s careless yawn.

And with no wave save pluming tail of fox and kin

Away the creatures go to sleep the day,

Leaving old Charlie there in curious disarray,

His hair combed this, his wits the other way.

So off he ambles, walks, and wanders on,

Leaving an empty meadow,

A place

Where strange lives passed…

And dawn.

EVIDENCE

Basking in sun,

Age 37, mid-Atlantic, on a ship,

And the ship sailing west,

Quite suddenly I saw it there

Upon my chest, the single one,

The lonely hair.

The ship was sailing into night.

The hair waswhite…

The sun had set beyond the sky;

The ship was sailing west,

And suddenly, O God, why, yes,

I felt, I knew…

So was I.

TELLING WHERE THE SWEET GUMS ARE

Even before you opened your eyes

You knew it would be one of those days.

Tell the sky what color it must be,

And it was indeed.

Tell the sun how to crochet its way,

Pick and choose among leaves

To lay out carpetings of bright and dark

On the fresh lawn,

And pick and choose it did.

The bees have been up earliest of all;

They have already come and gone

and come and gone again

to the meadow fields

and returned

all golden fuzz upon the air

all pollen-decorated, epaulettes at the full,

nectar-dripping.

Don’t you hear them pass?

hover?

dance their language?

telling where the sweet gums are,

The syrups that make bears frolic and lumber in bulked ecstasies,

That make boys squirm with unpronounced juices,

That make girls leap out of beds to catch from the corners of their eyes

Their dolphin selves naked

aflash

on the warm air

Poised forever in one

Eternal

Glass

Wave.

EMILY DICKINSON, WHERE ARE YOU?

HERMAN MELVILLE CALLED YOUR NAME

LAST NIGHT IN HIS SLEEP!

What did he call, and what was said?

From the sleep of the dead, from the lone white

Arctic midnight of his soul

What shy albino mole peered forth and gave a cry?

Or was it just the wind asifting through the winter screens

Upon the attic windows

Where the dust looks out at dew on empty lawns?

Or did the dawn mist find a tongue

And issue like his mystic seaport tides

From out his mouth while, all-unknowing, drowned, he slept

And dreamed on… Emily?

O what a shame, that these two wanderers

Of threeA.M. did not somehow contrive

To knock each other’s elbows drifting late

On sidewalks-vast inhabited by only leaves

And mice and tracks of silver from lost hieroglyphic snails.

How sad that from a long way off these two

Did not surprise each other’s ghosts,

One sailing lawns, the other ocean storms,

Strike up a conversation out of single simple words,

Alarms repeated and re-echoed, and so make up a life

From halves which separated long before the oceans rolled

Still sought each other, but in different towns.

Un-met and doomed they went their ways

To never greet or make mere summer comment

On her attic mothball or his sea-dog days.

Death would not stop for her,

Yet White graves yawned for him,

Each loved one half of that which, grim, enticed and beckoned,

Yet neither reckoned it as half a life for each;

With sudden reach they might have found

Each other and in meld and fuse and fusion

Then beheld between the two, two halves of loving Life,

And so made one!

Two halves of sun

To burn away two halves of misery and night,

Two souls with sight instead of tapping

Long after midnight souls skinned blind with frost,

Lost minds turned round-about to flesh,

Instead of lonely flesh, for lack of company,

Alone with mind.

But, then, imagine, whatdoes happen when some ghost

Of quiet passes and in passing nudges silence?

Does his silence know her vibrant quiet there

All drifting on the walk with leaves and dust?

It must. Or so the old religions say.

Thus forests know themselves and know the fall

Of their own timbers dropping in the unseen,

And so non-existent, wood;

Such things should hear themselves

And feel, record, and ridge them in their souls—

And yet…?

I really wonder if some night by chance

Old Herman and that lost and somehow always old dear Emily

Out late and walked five hundred miles in dreams

Might not have made some lone collision

At a crossroads where the moon was lamp

And trees were winter sentry to their soft encounter there.

One pale gaze finds the other,

One blind hand stutters forth to reach and touch the air,

His wry hand comes the other way,

So frail the night wind trembles it,

Both shake as candles shake their fires

When old time turns ashuttle in its sleep.

The houses keep their shutters down.

The moon expires. The sidewalk ghosts remain

And, touching palms, at last walk almost but not quite

Arm in arm, soul hungering soul, away, away

Toward loss of midnight, toward gain of fog and mist

And day.

So walk they round the buried town all night.

Seeing their spectral shadows in the cold shop window glass,

Bleak mariner and odd mothball closet attic maiden lass.

No word they speak, nor whisper, nor does breath

Escape their nostrils, but they share

A strange new sense of being, everywhere they wander, go.

No thought, no word is said of dining,

Yet in the middle of a midnight pond of grass they do

Toss down their souls

And bring some wild thing up that writhes and gasps

And dances in their arms and is all shining.

Then on through night the love-drunk strangers browse

And in conniption clovers do their fevers douse.

Thus round the courthouse square

Where Civil cannons boom beneath their breath

And on to country lanes where ancient death

Keeps syllables on stones, those unseen words

That only sound from graveyard birds.

And stop at some sweet dark orchard yard

Where, panics stifled, ancient Melville skins on up

With gouty reach

To bring and offer, peel and eat

Some last lone sexual-pectin-covered farewell summer peach.

So nibbling in silence, mouths covered with gums,

Hands counting and touching and softly adding odd sums

Of affections —hips on occasion nudged in soft collisions,

They go cupping and hugging and surprised by derisions

And calamities of love, which in marrow and blood

Fix secret alarms set to waken wild needs.

And behind on the pavement leave trackings

Of seeds from apple and pear and apricot and cherry,

Wherever a farm offered food, their merry cries rose

As Emily chose and advised and sent old Ahab ashore

To come forth with his hands full of loot;

The smell from his nostrils and mouth

A whole summer of fruit.

Then at the far end of the town

They turn them round and make ready to depart forever,

She on meadow concretes where no grass

Obtrudes, seethes through,

And he upon an ocean sea of rye and late-mown hay

That takes him rudderless to break of day;

He walks out in the tides, the grass foams round his feet,

She with her skirts now glides and calmly cleans

The leaves straight down the middle of this cold town’s street.

Both turn but do not wave, look with their eyes,

A look of love, a look of mad surmise?

They cannot tell, they mirror each the other’s

Lonely statue, one in fallow moonlake meadow lost,

One like female dog who trots the night

A thing of frost and mildewed echoes

Where her feet set up a ricochet of battles

Fought for no gain from both sides of the street.

She dwindles, goes, is gone.

He slowly sinks from sight in weed and briar

And toadstool silages and dew.

All silence is.

All emptiness.

And now:

The dawn.

O GIVE A FIG FOR NEWTON,

PRAISE FOR HIM!

Mad Isaac, snoozed beneath a tree,

Was shaken by surprise;

A sneeze of happenstance and fruit

Knocked wide his eyes and sprang his wild thoughts free

To watch the Force Invisible pluck apples down.

From there, informed, he jogged about the town

And told what he was bold to tell:

Apples fall gladly, held in the spell of Force,

With neither hesitation nor remorse.

The Truth is this: They Fall.

Friends listened, looked, and they themselves saw All.

Glad Isaac, back beneath his tree

Pressing old truths to new cider myth or scientific sauce,

Hauled off and kicked to help the Yield, the Unseen Source.

That last kick shook a billion seeds to fall;

Thus Gravity, invisible till now, was found, revealed.

Within the hour, ten thousand nimble scientists

Dodged out to scowl beneath strange trees,

Through orchard field they loped to sprawl,

Waiting for ripe fruit or o’er-ripe Theory to fall.

Apple or Isaac?

Which did it matter?

But in their secret, unscientific hearts—

Preferably the latter.

I WAS THE LAST, THE VERY LAST

I was the last,

The very last;

You understand?

No one else in all the land saw him as then I saw.

They opened up the tomb a final time

When I was nine

And held me there and said:

Look on him dead, boy, look, oh, look you well,

So some day later on you then can tell,

Describe, remember how it was.

That’s Lincoln there,

His face, his withered jackstraw bones;

Within this case from which we lift the lid

Is that beloved man.

You be the final one,

You young and fresh

To see and memorize his ghosted flesh.

So, look, ah sweet Christ, look,

And print the backwall of your gaze

With photographs to be immersed in fluid memory,

Developed in your ancient days.

I was the last!

The very last to see him!

There in Springfield’s keep

One summer day

They tacked and hammered, grunted, groaned

To summon Lincoln from his sleep.

So many robbers had come round

To sack his soul;

Many an odd and evil mole had burrowed hard

To ransom forth his brow and beard and hand,

And kidnap him who died so long before.

So now upon this final day

Before they locked and poured the concrete round

And kept him really buried deep

In his home farm and land

A crowd had gathered to unpry his secret box of bones

And look a lingering while on greatness gone to farewell summer,

April’s promise lost in snow.

All came, all gazed, to see, to know.

I was the last to go.

They held me high, a boy, they turned my head.

I saw the man strewn lonely in his crypt.

That’s him, they whispered, he who was shot,

Old Gettysburg man, and Grant’s night-camp,

Dawn damps at Shiloh,

Gentle playmate of Tad;

Look, boy, look! Slept away! Kept in sod.

Jesus gentle his bones.

Gone to God. Gone to God.

Lincoln; what of him?

What in all of this was his cold part?

I thought I heard his icy heart start up

As if my small fists, pounding it, had knocked an echo in the tomb!

I thought I saw an old sad smile

Re-etch itself around his mouth,

A vagrant wisp, a tired nod,

Acknowledgment that funeral trains and trips

Were still ahead,

And crowds by sidings in the noon-but-now-late day.

But over all, I thought I heard him say

Less than a dozen words, no more.

Clear whispered, only I, leaned forward, heard.

The words thus softly breathed upon my cheek

Were, late remembered, funny, sad, or country-plain absurd.

He spoke! I cried.

He’s dead, the folks behind me tenderly explained,

He died some forty years ago.

Oh, no! Oh, no! He said! Not dead! Not dead!

What?! cried the stunned people round-about.

But I saw doubt in them and kept his words for me

And just myself.

I took them off and filed them on a country shelf

And only on occasion in late years

Took memory forth and heard again

The old man’s sad odd prayer and rambling refrain.

I looked a last time on his bones and parchment skin,

They nailed the box flat shut

And fixed one hundred tons of marble on his place.

We walked away.

Midnight stood amidst our unreal day.

What said? what said?! were whispers all about,

People clutching my elbows, touching my head,

But I wanted to grieve alone and know what he said

And understand; I brushed them aside and ran.

And now, very old, some sixty years on,

I sit up half the night and light a candle and look toward the tomb

And remember the words that Lincoln whispered in that dusty room:

I’m tired.

I’m tired of the infernal buttoning and unbuttoning

And the buttoning again.

That’s what he said.

An old farmer gone to law,

Just simply fed and done with getting out of bed

And washing up to start the day,

Or washing up and going to sleep.

He had had it with buttoning and unbuttoning,

He was ready for clay.

What did Lincoln say?

That was it.

To a boy in a marble tomb who was the last to see

The look and shape and size of eternity

And the man kept there.

No vast grandiloquence, no sweeping phrase,

No fourscore and seven years ago to warm my own late days

But just his old bones tired

And unslept by night prowling the White House rooms,

Searching for dawn;

An old man put out by dressing and undressing,

Done with the whole nuisance,

More than ready to be gone.

So one night not so long ago I walked through midnight Springfield

Thus to Lincoln’s tomb,

And scanned the marbled syllables and great stone words,

And took a crayon from my coat and in a scribbled trace,

Upon the wall above his place,

Where none but I might see,

Wrote his last words to a boy held high to view his drowsy face,

The last lone words that Abe would ever say:

I’m tired.

Tired of buttoning and unbuttoning

And buttoning again.

I smiled.

Then, suddenly, suchmirth!

I heard his slept bones laugh,

And knock and shake warm harvest earth!

I turned.

I wept.

I walked away.

MAN IS THE ANIMAL THAT CRIES

Man is the animal that cries;

That sweet beast dumb in a wilderness of world

Yet knows to weep

And thus, astonished, finds those lost sea tides

In rivulets from out his eyes and on his cheeks

And thus to trembling hand.

But is it elsewhere so?

On far worlds do the inner-human outward-awful creatures go

With such mute shivers in their blood

That they must spring them forth,

Deliver them in shudders and wild cries?

Do their strange eyes leak sorrows to the day,

Show weathers of the spirit and the soul?

Confounded by the Universe, do they despair

And wring their marrows and convulse those dread machines

Of air and bone which, caught up in their skin,

Would seem constructs of sin to us if we might see them?

So we to them might seem a nightmare moth or poisonous fly

Which hung upon an endless night in

May Upon a most odd world

Were better killed than left to fade away.

No matter.

Shapes are not the stuffs from which we humans run us up our dreams.

No, in our strange genetics lie

The circumstantial motes that hunger light

And not to die but live beyond the Night.

So all odd beasts on worlds which name themselves

Most rare, most bright—which means a fair humanity—

Share out their yellow suns and think on basking dusts

And immortality.

And if our shapes and sizes,

Eyes and ears and warbling mouths

Amuse or, gods! confuse us in their multiplicities,

Get down to blood which, summoned by the heat,

The sweet explosions of far suns,

Did call us forth, some to a nightmare south,

Some to a feared and awesome north.

Aroused from most dissimilar slimes and primal mud,

A fear of darkness pulses, looms, habituates our blood.

Forever separate from them by 90 billion hours, years,

Our need is theirs, theirs ours;

We trade a fine supply of tears.

And if the eye that sheds them, hand that finds them,

Is disproportionate,

Our wild fate is the same:

To know the winds of dawn and fear the ever coming-on

Of suns to dusk and worse than dusk… that Night

Which threatens all our candles where we hearth our hands

And cup our lives against a damping breeze.

All walking—wounded shapes, to one another spider-apes

Yet similar our fears.

And so, ah, look!

On old worlds light-years lost,

Un-met,

They weep! We weep! in funerals that sanctify and save,

Thus daring to rebirth ourselves

With simple gifts of tears.

N

O, Nemo, where’s your dream tonight?

I used to dream of you in any moment I found right

When I was ten;

Behind my lids I’d rush across the world

Then back again, knowing your death

But hoping to find

Somewhere the man whose ink of octopi

Flourished in nights and dawns across my mind.

I ached to make tomorrow dawn for you:

That somehow underneath a polar sea on some strange afternoon

I’d swim in diver’s suit and find

A great White Shape,

A long and dazzling iceberg fathoms deep

That shoaled much like a whale.

I’d crack its skin of ice! I’d break away the frost!

To find within that chrysalis all safe and kept

A ship we thought was lost:

That lean submersible with fierce and awesome prow,

And on it one initial: N!

The billion waves that beat and tossed to rake this ship

Have not erased this sign.

Initial, craft, and what lies deep within the craft, are mine!

I break the frosted seal.

The airlock gapes.

I enter there.

I tread an ancient floor,

Wondering at N for Nil for Naught,

For Nothingness, or more?

In mazed apartments, past untouched foods

And unplayed organs now with stealth I go and find

A man laid out on laboratory table frosted white

And frozen so his lips, mouth, ears, eyes, soul are blind.

I touch the white-tomb shape: it melts.

The beard, the cheek, the brow, the mouth, the eye

Come forth and flush, grow warm; they move,

And such their fame, when asking I receive

From one cold gasp that awful name,

That name of beauty, that name of wrath and Time,

Nemo! breaks forth from ice-crusted tongue!

Nemo! makes frost and rime to fall and flake

In syllables magnificent for my sweet sake!

And (Renaissance from snow!) you rise to take me where

All wild lost-wandered silly travel-romanced boys must go.

Half blind you teach me how to see

And hear the grindings of your dread machinery;

They fill my soul. I burrow like a mole with you

Beneath Mysterious Islands where you keep

A hideaway or two or three.

All madness maddened, like old Ahab,

Tack and hammer we the bones and skin and heart

Of circumnavigating Whale namedNautilus

With which the two of us set sail,

Wild Nemo, and wild half-constructed boy,

The sea our bowl of soup, this iron whale our toy.

We trough the world around and, hand in hand,

Make Friday footprints on the sand of isles half coral

And half sifting hour-glass dust.

Your moral madness anchors us at yet much farther islands

On a hunch,

To run from cannibals who favor us for lunch

And running laugh, for all of this is larks!

We dive back in to breakfastings of sharks

And sink us deep and keep us snug and warm,

Thus hid and snug, we talk late in the night

And plan for what? For all that’s Good and Right?

Why, to Cure the World of War!

That was your boast.

Comparing madnesses, failed dreams, wild enterprise

The sinking of a White Whale

Or a warship by surprise,

Ahab’s dread Bible-planned and heedless

Self-destruction

Or your lost reconstruction of our world and sphere?

I think, old Nemo, I do love your madness most.

Your aims are closer to the Host

Whose Peace would walk upon your seas.

Half out of sun, half into night,

Your crooked shadow, leant toward goodness

Seems half right. I fill the other half with me.

O, gladly would I sail with Nemo

Against the lords and brutes who breed annihilation,

And live alone with you, our ship our nation.

The N upon your prow which Nothing signifies,

Your unshelled soul being raw, and empty now your cup,

I would, with the numerals of my twelve brave years

Fill up for you to drink, and again and again

With loud sweet cries

Fill up: Nemo! I say! And “You, R. B.!” your echoes sigh.

All dreams must end.

That dream is long since gone, I know,

So from this unkempt world we turn and go

ToNautilus, to deeps, to sleeping ice,

To dreaming snow.

There you to drowse and snooze a little hundred years or more

Until some other aging boy cracks wide the seatide door

And creeps to touch and whisper—waken you

To rise from out the sea

In hopeful times of Peace, eternally at ease,

O,can it be?

May it please God.

No, more, may it please Man.

It can be so if he but make the plan

And sign it NEMO, for it was Nemo’s scheme

To still the scarlet waters and fulfill Man’s dream.

But there, bound up in whiteness and soon lost

To sleep and time and winter’s mortal frost,

Your lips, dear Captain, twitch a final gasp,

I bend to catch your breath

And hear you still outwhispering all tides, all death,

And this your lasting cry:

“Dear boy, with such good reading, dreamer lads like you,

Why, bless me.NEMO! shout the name!

Willnever die!”

AIR TO LAVOISIER

Lavoisier, when just a boy,

Did suffer vital gas to joy;

He’d snuff a lung, he’d sniff a quaff,

Then let it forth, much changed, to laugh

Which, echoed on the sides of seers

Who had not laughed in sixty years,

Convulsed their bones, ground them to dust

In hyperventilated lust.

And then, when grown, he sniffed the air,

That vital flux which everywhere

We lean upon with heart and lung,

And readied up a tune which, sung,

Changed Science’s antique brass band.

Here’s Oxygen, he said,

And on the other hand, here’s Hydrogen;

They dance like gypsies down the strand

And in our blood these twin stuffs caper,

Half drunken gas, half flaming vapor.

So said Lavoisier’s report;

Then stopped, he took another snort,

Cried, “Gods, one cannot get enough

Of this invigorating stuff!”

This secret to our Race bequeathing,

All cheered. Forgot.

But went on breathing.

WOMEN KNOW THEMSELVES;

ALL MEN WONDER

Women know themselves;

All men wonder.

Women lie still with themselves;

Men and dogs wander.

Women appraise themselves;

Men mustfind.

Women have seeing eyes;

Men are blind.

Women stay, women are;

Men would be, all men go yonder.

Women walk quietly;

Most men blunder.

Women watch cool mirrors

And there find mortal dust;

Men crave fast creeks

That break the sun and light

And shimmer laughter and show no sight

Save residues of lust;

So it is women accept

While men reject

The night.

Women bed down with child against the cold;

Men drink to shake the winter lodged in summer bones

Grow bold with beer

And thus more certainly

Grow old.

When death sighs whitening the sill

Women give way, cry welcome, stand still;

But men run fast

Thus racing for the hill

Where all lie lonely under stones

Where harvesters lie harvested by grass.

In sum: it is man’s dear blind and blundered need

And begging after life

To break, to run, to leave;

And woman’s to walk all warm with seed

All lit by candle-children

To look in midnight mirrors, finding truth,

And, happy in late years, recall,

And sometimes, grieve..

DEATH IN MEXICO

I thought it strange to see them on the path

That led them up in sun and lemon-shadow

Through winds that smelled of summer and of wine.

I thought that they were only passing

The delicate and fern-scrolled iron gates

The winter-white, the marble cemetery

Carrying their lunch in a little silver case.

Murmuring, all,

And chattering, and smiling;

One held a soft guitar and touched it with a whorled thumb;

And they were dark birds wheeling south at winter’s call

I saw them chewing tangerines and spitting seeds,

I saw them move, night among day-whitened stone.

And the food that they ate upon was Death,

And the sustenance they bore in a silver box

Was the fossil imprint of a child.

They carried her like jewels overhead;

The father balanced her, hand up, gently as a plume,

A crated feather, a valley flower, an April grass.

And no one wept.

But each was eating of the air and of the day,

As quick, as quickly as they could.

They ate the sky with eyes,

And the wind with teeth,

And the sun with their flesh;

And it was good to be alive,

If only to be walking here

With Death crowned upon their heads,

Death delicate as moss and leaf mold

Borne in a box.

Within the box was running and laughter and dark hair,

Within the box was the eye of the antelope

And the breath of the moon,

Within the box a fevered but cooling apricot, a pear,

Within the box all life that was or ever comes to be,

Within the box some picnic tinsel, silver amulet, mountain shade.

They moved on with their murmuring guitar,

I saw the great fern shadows of the iron gate blow shut.

How strange—I smiled—that I should think them picnicking,

How strange to think they carried wine above their heads;

For, in reality,

Those souls were eating long before the noon

And long after the midnight,

They ate forever and never stopped their eating.

Even as I, hurrying in an icy wind,

Sculled down the quiet avalanche of cobbled street and hill

Eating of the clear air, and drinking of the mellow wind,

And eating of the blue sky

And taking the golden dust with my mouth

And feeding the yellow sun to my soul.

I passed a coffin shop where hammers

Were ticking like clocks.

I woke in the night so hungry that I wept.

ALL FLESH IS ONE;

WHAT MATTER SCORES?

The thing is this:

We love to see them on the green and growing field;

There passions yield to weather and a special time;

There all suspends itself in air,

The missile on its way forever to a goal.

There boys somehow grown up to men are boys again;

We wrestle in their tumble and their ecstasy,

And there we dare to touch and somehow hold,

Congratulate, or say: Ah, well, next time. Get on!

Our voices lift; the birds all terrified

At sudden pulse of sound, this great and unseen fount,

Scare like tossed leaves, fly in strewn papers

Up the wind to flagpole tops:

We Celebrate Ourselves!

We play at life, we dog the vital tracks

Of those who run before and we, all laughing, make the trek

Across the field, along the lines,

Falling to fuse, rising amused by now-fair, now-foul

Temper-tantrums, sprint-leaps, handsprings, recoils,

And brief respites when bodies pile ten high.

All flesh is one, what matter scores;

Or color of the suit

Or if the helmet glints with blue or gold?

All is one bold achievement,

All is a fine spring-found-again-in-autumn day

When juices run in antelopes along our blood,

And green our flag, forever green,

Deep colored of the grass, this dye proclaims

Eternities of youngness to the skies

Whose tough winds play our hair and re-arrange our stars

So mysteries abound where most we seek for answers.

We do confound ourselves.

All this being so, we do make up a Game

And pitch a ball and run to grapple with our Fates

On common cattle-fields, cow-pasturings,

Where goals are seen and destinies beheld,

And scores summed up so that we truly know a score!

All else is nil; the universal sums

Lie far beyond our reach,

In this wild romp we teach our lambs and colts

Ascensions, swift declines, revolts, wild victories,

Sad retreats, all compassed in the round

Of one October afternoon.

Then winds, incensed and sweet with dust of leaves

Which, mummified, attest the passing of the weather,

Hour, day, and Old Year’s tide,

Are fastened, gripped and held all still

For just one moment with the caught ball in our hands.

We stand so, frozen on the sill of life

And, young or old, ignore the coming on of night.

All, all, is flight!

All loss and ept recovery.

We search the flawless air

And make discovery of projectile tossed

The center of our being.

This is the only way of seeing;

To run half-blind, half in the sad, mad world,

Half out of mind—

The goal-line beckons,

And with each yard we pass,

We reckon that we win, by God, we win!

Surely to run, to run and measure this,

This gain of tender grass

Is not a sin to be denied?

All life we’ve tried and often found contempt for us!

So on we hied to lesser gods

Who treat us less as clods and more like men

Who would be kings a little while.

Thus we made up this mile to run

Beneath a late-on-in-the-afternoon-time sun.

We chalked aside the world’s derisions

With our gamebook’s rulings and decisions.

So divisions of our own good manufacture

Staked the green a hundred yards, no more, no less.

The Universe said “No”?

We answered, running, “Yes!”

Yes to Ourselves!

Since naught did cipher us

With scoreboards empty,

Strewn with goose-egg zeros

Self-made heroes, then we kicked that minus,

Wrote in plus!

The gods, magnanimous,

Allowed our score

And noted, passing,

What was less is now, incredibly, more!

Man, then, is the thing

Which teaches zeros how to cling together and add up

The cup stood empty?

Well, now, look!

A brimming cup.

No scores are known?

Then look down-field,

There in the twilight sky the numbers run and blink

And total up the years;

Our sons this day are grown.

Why worry if the board is cleared an hour from now

And empty lies the stadium wherein died roars

Instead of men,

And goalposts fell in lieu of battlements?

See where the battle turf is splayed

Where panicked herds of warrior sped by,

Half buffalo and half ballet.

Their hoof marks fill with rain

As thunders close and shut the end of day.

The papers blow.

Old men, half-young again, across the pavements go

To cars that in imagination

Might this hour leave for Mars.

But, sons beside them silent, put in gear,

And drive off toward the close of one more year,

Both thinking this:

The game is done.

The game begins.

The game is lost.

But here come other wins.

The band tromps out to clear the field with brass,

The great heart of the drum systolic beats

In promise of yet greater feats and trumps;

Still promising, the band departs

To leave the final beating of this time

To older hearts who in the stands cold rinsed with autumn day

Wish, want, desire for their sons From here on down, eternal replay on replay.

This thought, them thinking it,

Man and boy, old Dad, raw Son

For one rare moment caused by cornering too fast,

Their shoulders lean and touch.

A red light stops them. Quiet and serene they sit.

But now the moment is past.

Gone is the day.

And so the old man says at last:

“The light is green, boy. Co. The light is green.”

They ran together all the afternoon;

Now, with no more words, they drive away.

THE MACHINES, BEYOND SHYLOCK

The Machines, beyond Shylock,

When cut bleed not,

When hit bruise not,

When scared shy not,

Lose nothing and so nothing gain;

They are but a dumb show:

Put Idiot in

And the moron light you’ll know.

Stuff right, get right,

Stuff rot, get rot,

For no more power lies here

Than man himself has got.

Man his energy conserves?

Machineries wait.

Man misses the early train?

Then Thought itself is late.

Sum totalings of men lie here

And not the sum of all machines,

This is man’s weather, his winter,

His wedding forth of time and place and will,

His downfall snow,

The tidings of his soul.

This paper avalanche sounds off his slope

And drowns the precipice of Time with white.

This tossed confetti celebrates his nightmare

Or his joy.

The night begins and goes and ends with him.

No machinery opens forth the champagne jars of life.

No piston churns the laundered beds to summon light.

Remember this:

Machines are dead, and dead must ever lie,

If man so much as shuts up half one eye.

THE BEAST UPON THE WIRE

Suppose and then suppose and then suppose

That wires on the far-slung telephone black poles

Supped up the billion flooded words they heard

Each night all night and saved the sense

And meaning of it all.

Then, jigsaw in the night, put all together,

And in philosophic phrase

Tried words like moron child,

Numb-shocked electric idiot, mindless babe

Alone upon its spider-threaded harpstrung poles,

Incredulous of syllables that shimmer dazzle down

Along swift thunder-lightning streams

In sizzlings and fermentings of power.

Thus mindless beast, all treasuring of vowels

And consonants,

Saves up a miracle of bad advice

And lets it filter, seep, experiment,

One hissing stutter heartbeat whisper at a time

So one night soon someone in dark America

Hears sharp bell ring, lifts phone

And hears a voice like Holy Ghost gone far in nebulae—

That Beast upon the wire,

That pantomimes with lipless, tongueless mouth

The epithets and slaverings of a billion unseen lovers

Across continental madnesses of line in midnight sky,

And with savorings and sibilance says:

Hell… and then O.

And then Hell-O.

To such Creation—

Such dumb brute wise Electric Beast,

What is your wise reply?

CHRIST, OLD STUDENT IN A NEW SCHOOL

O come, please come, to the Poor Mouth Fair

Where the Saints kneel round in their underwear

And say out prayers that most need saying

For needful sinners who’ve forgotten praying;

And in every alcove and niche you spy

The living dead who envy the long since gone

Who never wished to die.

Then, see the altar! There the nailed-tight crucifix

Where Man in place of Christ gives up the ghost,

And priests with empty goblets offer Us

As Host to Jesus Who, knelt at the rail,

Wonders at the sight

Of Himself kidnapped off cross and Man nailed there

In spite of all his cries and wails and grievements.

Why, why, he shouts, these nails?

Why all this blood and sacrifice?

Because, comes from the belfries, where

The mice are scuttering the bells and mincing rope

And calling down frail Alleluias

To raise Man’s hopes, said hopes being blown away

On incensed winds while Christ waits there

So long prayed to, He has Himself forgot the Prayer.

Until at last He looks along a glance of sun

And asks His Father to undo this dreadful work

This antic agony of fun.

No more! He echoes, too. No more!

And from the cross a murdered army cries: No more!

And from above a voice fused half of iron

Half of irony gives Man a dreadful choice.

The role is his, it says,

Man makes and loads his own strange dice,

They sum at his behest,

He dooms himself.

He is his own sad jest.

Let go? Let be?

Why do you ask this gift from Me?

When, trussed and bound and nailed,

You sacrifice your life, your liberty,

You hang yourself upon the tenterhook.

Pull free!

Then suddenly, upon that cross immense,

As Christ Himself gives stare

Three billion men in one blink wide their eyes, aware!

Look left! Look right!

At hands, as if they’d never seen a hand before,

Or spike struck into palm

Or blood ad rip from spike,

No! never seen the like!

The wind that blew the benedictory doors

And whispered in the cove and dovecot sky

Now this way soughed and that way said:

Your hand, your flesh, your spike,

Your will to give and take,

Accept the blow, lift hammer high

And give a thunderous plunge and pound,/p>

You make to die.

You are the dead.

You the assassin of yourself

And you the blood

And you the one Foundation Ground on which red spills

You the whipping man who drives

And you the Son who sweats all scarlet up the hills to Calvary!

You the Crowd gathered for the thrill and urge

You both composer and dear dread subject of the dirge

You are the jailor and the jailed,

You the impaler and you the one that your own

Million-fleshed self in dreams by night

Do hold in thrall and now at noon must kill.

Why have you been so blind?

Why have you never seen?

The slave and master in one skin

Is all your history, no more, no less,

Confess! This is what you’ve been!

The crowd upon the cross gives anguished roar;

A moment terrible to hear.

Christ, crouched at the rail, no more can bear

And so shuts up His ears with hands.

The sound of pain He’s long since grown to custom in His wits,

But this! the sound of willful innocence awake

To self-made wounds, these children thrown

To Revelation and to light

Is too much for His sanity and sight.

Man warring on himself an old tale is;

But Man discovering the source of all his sorrow

In himself,

Finding his left hand and his right

Are similar sons, are children fighting

In the porchyards of the void?!

His pulse runs through his flesh,

Beats at the gates of wrist and thigh and rib and throat,

Unruly mobs which never heard the Law.

He answers panic thus:

Now in one vast sad insucked gasp of loss

Man pries, pulls free one hand from cross

While from the other drops the mallet which put in the nail

Giver and taker, this hand or that, his sad appraisal knows

And knowing writhes upon the crucifix in dreadful guilt

That so much time was wasted in this pain.

Ten thousand years ago he might have leapt off down

To not return again!

A dreadful laugh at last escapes his lips;

The laughter sets him free.

A Fool lives in the Universe! he cries.

That Fool is me!

And with one final shake of laughter Breaks his bonds.

The nails fall skittering to marble floors.

And Christ, knelt at the rail, sees miracle

As Man steps down in amiable wisdom

To give himself what no one else can give:

His liberty.

And seeing there the Son who was in symbol vast

Their flesh and all,

Hands Him an empty cup and bids Him drink His fill

And Christ, gone drunk on laughter,

Vents a similar roar,

Three billion voices strong,

That flings the bells in belfries high

And slams then opens every sanctuary door;

The bones in vaults in frantic vibrancy of xylophone

Tell tunes of Saints, yes, Saints not marching in but out

At this hilarious shout!

And having given wine to dissolve thrice ancient hairballs

And old sin,

Now Man puts to the lips and tongue of Christ

His last Salvation crumb,

The wafer of his all-accepting smile,

His gusting laugh, the joy and swift enjoyment of his image:

Fool.

It is most hard to chew.

Christ, old student in a new school

Having swallowed laughter, cannot keep it in;

It works itself through skin like slivers

From a golden door

Trapped in the blood, athirst for air,

Christ, who was once employed as single Son of God

Now finds Himself among three billion on a billion

Brother sons, their arms thrown wide to grasp and hold

And walk them everywhere,

Now weaving this, now weaving that in swoons,

Snuffing suns, breathing in light of one long

Rambled aeon endless afternoon….

They reach the door and turn

And look back down the aisle of years to see

The rail, the altar cross, the spikes, the red rain,

The sad sweet ecstasy of death and hope

Abandoned, left and lost in pain;

Once up the side of Calvary, now down Tomorrow’s slope,

Their palms still itching where the scar still heals,

Into the market where so mad the dances

And the reels, Christ the Lord Jesus is soon lost

But found again uptossed now here, now there

In every multi-billioned face! There! See!

Some sad sweet laughing shard of God’s old Son

Caught up in crystal blaze fired out at thee.

Ten thousand times a million sons of sons move

Through one great and towering town

Wearing their wits, which means their laughter,

As their crown. Set free upon the earth

By simple gifts of knowing how mere mirth can cut the bonds

And pull the blood spikes out;

Their conversation shouts of “Fool!”

That word they teach themselves in every school,

And, having taught, do not like Khayyam’s scholars

Go them out by that same door

Where in they went,

But go to rockets through the roofs

To night and stars and space,

A single face turned upward toward all Time,

One flesh, one ecstasy, one peace.

The cross falls into dust, the nails rust on the floor,

The wafers, half bit through, make smiles

On pavements

Where the wind by night comes round

To sit in aisles in booths to listen and confess

I am the dreamer and the doer

I the hearer and the knower

I the giver and the taker

I the sword and wound of sword.

If this be true, then let the sword fall free from hand.

I embrace myself.

I laugh until I weep

And weep until I smile

Then the two of us, murderer and murdered,

Guilty and he who is without guile

Go off to Far Centauri

To leave off losings, and take on winnings,

Erase all mortal ends, give birth to only new beginnings,

In a billion years of morning and a billion years of sleep.

THIS TIME OF KITES

The day burns bright;

The morning, clear,

Has made its way to noon;

And all that seems most special and most dear

Is held encircled by the flaring sun itself.

This weather is for kites

Or earthborne people who

Upon a hill string up their souls

And send them flying in the glare

That brings quick tears to eyes

And warmth to hearts

Which, knowing autumn,

Feel the season change

As birds fly north again

Against the tide of time and time’s unreason.

This weather is for children

Or children-men who, melted by the sun,

Find need for toys;

Who stand like boys bedazzled by a sum,

Who thrive on chalking life on hopscotch walks,

Stand here, leap there, run fast, stand very still,

But this now most of all: Be Much Alive.

So in this time of kites,

Autumnal springs, toys, men dwarved small again

In the hot rain

Of sunlight,

Take this string,

Let go with me, let fly the colored paper

On November’s wind made March,

And ask with me what color we have flown:

Does Love put up such flags?

And if so, are they white?

Or colored like a hearth gone drowsed and sleepy warm

Deep into night?

Does lust fly high or low?

Some one of us must know;

In chorus, paired, or giving answer

Simple and alone,

Each calling out the color of the kite

Which flies so high on this clear day ?

Must name his own.

IF YOU WILL WAIT JUST LONG ENOUGH,

ALL GOES

If you will wait just long enough, all goes;

Young woman, if you wait, I’ll step away.

O God, it may well take a dozen years,

But finally my tears will dry, my passion wander off

To dust itself in ancient dreams,

My straight loins wither to dried plum,

My words go dumb, adroit excuses for rare matinees

Put unused tickets under pillows,

If you wait long enough, dear one, yes, if you wait

My gait and pace will surely slow.

These are the penalties of age:

That sweet rage dies, that shouts tide down to whispers

And that whispers still themselves in flesh,

That the cogs of love-mad beast no longer even try to mesh,

That suddenly long morning sleeps and naps in afternoon

Are much preferred to wrestling and to luncheon gymnast feats,

That nibbled sweets of thigh no longer seem

The center of the day. They simply idiot-maunder off away

Leaving one stunned to wonder and to doubt.

Why shout of jealousy, why envy of another’s size?

What prize was that which lay beneath one’s chest?

Why wrest such sweetmeats, why that young girl’s cries?

Why melt her eyes and yours with happy tears,

Why sighs and cheers and lamentations over endless brawls,

Why squalls and calms, then fiercer storms of must,

Why gusts of meat-machismo, mask-bravado, super-male?

Why flail and torment, doubt: to seed or not to seed?

Why endless need cupped close in need in nest of need?

Sweet Christ, what was it all about?

And was it Aristotle who awoke one morn,

Looked down and gave a shout of glad release

And ran to show the servants so they all might see,

The pendant thing hung cold and not aroused,

So down the chamber aisles he cried:

“I’m free! O God, at last, I’m free!”

Well, what a shame.

Or, also, knowing lust, who can blame him?

Yet, oh, it’s hard to think that one day all the gods

Will truly pack, depart and leave Olympus in the rain,

That falling down erosions will slide flesh

To ruin in the dusk-lit sea,

As even high gods sink and founder in the soul

And vanish out of sight,

So nights fill now with only dreams,

Remembrance of a time when stallions pissed the air

And brought the mares encircled to their thrust,

When lust was every breath you gave or took,

When earthquakes shook your flanks,

And thrived her blooded subterrane with this and this

and this!

Again, again, again!

No more.

Whatwas all that?

Now you, young woman,

Lovely one curled there, cat-feet tucked under;

Your rare June earth sweet-welcoming this wry

November’s snow,

You, now, you!

What, what, oh, God, oh, what—

(Help me remember!) please!

What’s your name…?

FOR A DAUGHTER, TRAVELING

The child goes far in worlds within a world,

The girl goes far in green within a green,

That English land where all her blood was born

And rivers run to sea in summers washed by rain and sun.

My light and flesh look out her eye aware

And live I in another time and splendid place;

My face somewhat looks lost.

And hidden from within her face,

And mingled there, my awe and ingasped worshipping

Do travel far because of her…

I visit there with grace,

I know the crossroads of all time,

I wander where the weather is both cold and warm.

To wake at nights near Blenheim where the storm

Is like old battles and artilleries drowned deep

In leafage from another year;

I gather flowers by serenities of stream

And touch old stones gone green with velveteens of moss,

Soft edge to granite toothings of an ancient dream.

I stay, I go, one flesh is here, the other wanders there,

My older self kept spelled by California airs

My younger, garden-lost in Britain’s maze,

But what a joy such days of lostness be!

How wondrous to be lovely-puzzled endlessly!

The sum and thought is good: that even when I stay I go,

Gone quiet here, my other self

Stands even much more silent still,

That one more mystery of myself,

That girl run round the wide circumference of earth

Dares take a step, a step, another step,

And then, behold!

All that was gray at sunset

Mints itself to gold;

All that was cold

Is for a moment, on the hearth of evening, kindled warm.

This self, stayed here, calls out a prayer

And asks a promise from the world:

To keep my other lost and wandering self from harm.

OLD MARS, THEN BE A HEARTH TO US

Why, damn it all,

You once werefull of life!

It dripped and fell from off your ruddy edges into Space!

Long years before our time

When dreaming tribes of men lurched in dim caves

And burnt their paws at fires newly made,

They eyed your blazing shape far up the sky

October nights and wondered what you were.

The Greeks, they wondered too,

And so along the line to men who grouped

With Galileo or some-such

Confirmed or dis-established you.

While authors, later on, competed to outfit your latitudes

And longitudes with peoples some bleached fair

And others green,

And some with gills, by God, and others saffron gone astride

Rare beasts with spider legs;

Some hatched from eggs because dear Mr. Burroughs wrote it so!

While others snatched quadruple swords,

One for each arm and hand.

Great gods in multiples, oh what a land you were,

Yes, what a land! We all of us, as boys, stretched minds in orchestras of need,

First one, and then another and another

So, signaling, we hoped that you might mother us,

Pull us like teeth, yank soul from body,

Spirit raw from bloody dreaming flesh

Across the void to land us safe in dust

To run in childish tides among blue hills!

Such thrills were common and from such common stuff

We made up armies of romancers who, full-grown,

Built metal thus to underpin the dreams

And so as astronauts strode forth on fire

And found a moon much less than halfway up to you.

For now, inadequate, ‘twill do, oh, yes, ‘twill do.

While we save up our spit to make another try

On some day soon this side of century’s end,

Put landfall down and self-destruct the dream

That caused us to commence.

Some few days hence we will set out, the boys-grown-men

And shuttle us forever back and forth again

Between your far red beacon light

And green and blue and white and mortal Earth.

Our mirth will answer all,

Our laughter in the face of, Nothing’s smile

Will ring across the abyss mile on light-year mile.

Old Mars, then be a hearth to us some little space

Before we leave your nest to start again a race

That we must win completely or be lost,

And, winning, gain Forever, so not count the cost.

Three billion lights extinguished if one light but stays?

One last light, yes, to touch the fuse and detonate

Three billion unborn men to life, to fire forth

Three billion years of everlasting joys and endless days.

Old Mars, can you help out with this?

Why, can boys piss?

And write their destinies across the skies?

Their names in sand as well as stars?

Oh, yes!

…and cross the t’s.

…and dot the i’s.

THE THING THAT GOES BY NIGHT:

THE SELF THAT LAZES SUN

Night shades a side of me

Which leans unto the North

And calls upon a polar wind to hair my spine

And fills my lungs with dread

That part of me, half-dead,

A left-hand sort of thing gone claw

Is creep and crawler on my bed;

By night I feel my spider hand cup blood

And move of its own itching pride

To throttle up my soul.

Then I have need of sun and my warmed Southern self,

My right hand called from noon

To wrestle with the dark,

To tromp the spidered clutch,

Let loose my soul in brighter gasps of climes

More yellow and more perfect

Than a Savior’s exhalations.

So noon and midnight’s self cell up in one wild flesh

And own me, each in its own time,

Or turnabout and own me in an instant fused

Where black and white twins mix to make a perfect paint

To color out my mask and make a curious sight

Within a mirror’s gaze prolong themselves

Half nights, half days.

What man is that? I ask,

Which singer of what song?

And image answers back:

The Thing That Goes By Night:

The Self That Lazes Sun.

Both answers wrong.

GROON

What is the Groon?

My young dog said.

What is the Groon;

Is it live, is it dead?

Did it fall from the Moon,

Has it arms, legs, or head?

Does it walk,

Or shamble and amble or stalk?

Does it grumble or mumble or whisper like snow?

Is it dust, is it fluff?

Is it snuff

For a ghost that will sneeze itself inside-out,

Then, outside-in, turnabout!?

Can it walk on the wall?

Will it rise, stay, or fall?

Does it moan, groan, and grieve?

What tracks does it leave

When it walks in the dust

And makes prints by the light,

By the moldy old light of the Moon?

What’s the Groon?

Is it he, she, or it?

Does it sprawl, crawl, or sit?

Is it shaped like a craw or a claw or a hoof?

Does it tread like a toad in the road

Or mingle on the shingle-high path

Of our roof?

There, aloof, does it tap in the night

And go down out of sight in the rain-funnel spout?

Is it strange going in,

But even more strange coming out?

Has it shadows to spare?

Is it rare?

Does it croon for a loved one, oh,

Much like itself

Put away on a shelf

In a grave or a tomb

Where it shuttles a loom,

Spins new shapes for itself

Made of moon-moss and lint,

Sparked with Indian flint

Struck from Indian graves

Where old Indian braves

Put their bones up on stilts

Where their mummy-dust silts

Join the corn-stalks in dance;

And the wind off the hills

Chills wild smokes torn from rooves

And the dust churned from hooves

Of ghost horses stormed by

In the middle of night—

What a sight! what a sight!

Isthis, then, the Groon?

&nbap;

Is it old as the Sphinx?

Is it dreadful, methinks?

Is it Dire, is it Awe?

Does it stick in your craw?

Is it smoke or mere chaff?

Do you whimper or laugh

At this skin of a snake left to blow on the road?

Is it cool-iced hoptoad or deep midnight frog

That goesSplash! if you jump?

Does it… bump… ‘neath your bed

Near the head or the toe?

When it’s there,is it there?

When it’s gone, where’s it go?

What’s the Croon?

Tell me soon…

For the Moon’s growing older,

And the wind’s growing colder,

And the Croon? It grows larger and bolder!

And darker and stranger!

Mysoul is in danger!

For there creep its hands

Twitched from shadowy lands,

Reaching out now to touch

And to hold and to… clutch!

&nsp;

Quick, sunlight, bring Noon!

Fight shadows, fight Moon!

Give me morning, bright sun!

Then my battle is won.

For the Groon cannot fight

What is Sun, what is Light!

It will wither away

With the dawn, with the day!

But… !

… come back… next midnight

With its scare… and its fright..

Once again we will croon:

What’s the Groon!

What’s… the… Groon…?

THAT WOMAN ON THE LAWN

Sometimes, gone late at night,

I would awake and hear

My mother in another year and place

Out walking on the lawn so late

It must have been near dawn yet dark it was

The only light then in the gesture of the stars

Which wheeled around in motionings so soft

They took your breath to see; and there upon the grass

Like ghost with dew-washed feet she was

A maid again, alone, quite singular, so young.

I wept to see her there so strange,

So unrelate to me, so special to herself,

So untouched by the world, so evanescent, free,

With something wild come up in cheeks

And red to lips, and flashing in the eyes;

It frightened me.

Why should she wander out without permit,

Permission saying go or do not go

From us or any other…?

Was she, or My God, wasn’t she our mother?

How dare she walk, a virgin, fresh once more

Within a night that hid her face,

How dare displace us in her thoughts and will?!

And sometimes even still, late nights,

I think I hear her soft tread on the sill

And wake to see her cross the lawn

Gone wild with wishing, dreaming, wanting

And crouched down there until dawn,

Washing her hair with wind,

Paying no mind to the cold,

Waiting for some bold strange man

To rise up like the sun

And strike her beauteous-blind!

And weeping I call out to her;

Oh, young girl there,

Oh, sweet girl in the dawn!

I do not mind, no, no.

I do not mind.

FROM AN ANCIENT LOCOMOTIVE

PASSING THROUGH LONG AFTER MIDNIGHT

Far Rockaway…

It seems a state of mind

And not a place.

Is it the Country of the Blind or merely

One more face lost in a fog upon a stretch of sand

That, near the sea, squanders itself in rock

And muffled heartbeats endlessly

Aform, atumble with the crumbled dregs of foam

And murmurings of travel where the wandering

Daft stumbler of the roads gives up and stands,

His shoulder creaked with weights

Of toys left over from a time when he ran out with boys

Who, in the hour, then grossly grew to men,

Have left him for some other roads to town.

So he went out through hills to where

The customs, laws, aims, dreams

And circumventures ran them down

To nothingness

Where fences rusted, rotted and gave way,

Where open fields barked foxes, sang with sparrows

Mocked with crows, accepted snowflakes

In sparse payment for old crimes

Those summers killed, deep buried now, and best forgot

And laid with white.

There, every night, a nightmare rouse and whirl

Of chaff and seed

Snuffed up, is sneezed in four directions;

Thus spent free it flounders, wanders, lingers

Molders deep across the dry and cereal land.

No matter, look, but more than looking, hear:

At starting of the dawn, at spent of dusk,

Beginning or shutting down the storms of year

The paper blowing in a dustboll on the empty road

The seaweed thistling the sand shore shoals

In murmured rustling code which speaks to naught

So Nil gives back a throated trickling of sound:

Far Rockaway.

That Rockaway which Far, which Rocks, which tumbles down

The landfall-click-away-along-away

Like time which dusts to ruin and to brine

Down destiny’s incline to desert stills,

To ruined clay

Like trollies which excursioned off the cliff

And fell in ticket-punch confettis celebrating dooms

To plunge, to steep, to drown in deeps, and dream of summer days

Now in Forever’s Keep…

As whirlwind dying in your ear lets pollen say

In soughing whistled whining all awhisper

Far

Far

And far beyond far

Rock O rock to sleep in deep night crumbling to night,

To rambled star…

Far Rockaway…

PLEASE TO REMEMBER THE FIFTH

OF NOVEMBER: A BIRTHDAY POEM

FOR SUSAN MARGUERITE

Across the green of years

A croquet ball comes rolling in the tender moss

To kiss the bright-striped wicket-pole

A kiss of Time.

Through hoops, beneath the shade of trees grown old

When fogs themselves grew tired of their mist

And so turned gray and fell to mold,

Through hoops, the summer sun spins like a globe

Unraveling

Forever circuiting a game

Where players change their faces

Prompt with every thirty years…

And shadows of the men upon the lawn

Grow tall at dawn or short again at dusk,

Or, drenched by rain, erased,

Are sketched out by a newer light

As gulls dip down the freshened air with cries

Like beggars gone asouling Harvest Night.

Forever rolls the ball, the wooden round,

Forever waits the wicket to be touched,

Then, ricocheted, the bright stuff spins aback

To start the game again around about;

The toys always the same,

The players always stunned by miracles of doubt.

But yet, for all the seeming lateness of the day,

How rare to find one player who refused to play…

We linger here in sun with mallet tender in our hands awhile

And all just finished, in the midst, or new begun; we smile

Taking or giving the weapon,

Standing aside,

A groom of time or tomorrow’s bride,

Retiring to the convent of eternity

Or, rawborn, yelling for some fame

We feel, deserving, waits us on the field in that long game.

The tide of players gently rolls,

The ball goes wafted on from each,

The tide subsides but then to rise again

And where the Keeper? and what the Score?

We gaze about, give sums, make calculation

To our secret selves and thus, while never knowing more

Move on, our turf prints denting here and there the green

Until late showers of rain in afternoon

Urge grass to rise and all the faint-made hollows fill,

Gone off down hill we turn upon the scene

To find no trace, no track, no path

Where we have, endless, been.

And from the far side of the field we stand and wave

To others who commence, who breach the day

Assured that it will never end.

A lie? A joyous lie;

To them we cry, we shout,

“By God now, yes! You’re right!

There is no night!

But only dawn and noon

There is no moon!

But only sun and day!”

In silence then we sadden forth bur private smiles and go our way.

The ball rolls on the whispered grass.

The wicket waits. The hoops resound like harps.

And all the ground of nineteen wondrous years is filled with cries:

“Begin! Begin!”

For what is always trembled on beginning

We know now never dies.

THAT IS OUR EDEN’S SPRING, ONCE PROMISED

What I to apeman

And what then he to me?

I an apeman one day soon will seem to be

To those who, after us, look back from Mars

And they, in turn, mere beasts will seem

To those who reach the stars;

So apemen all, in cave, in frail tract-house,

On Moon, Red Planet, or some other place;

Yet similar dream, same heart, same soul,

Same blood, same face,

Rare beastmen moved to save and place their pyres

From cavern mouth to world to interstellar fires.

We are the all, the universe, the one,

As such our fragile destiny is only now begun.

Our dreams then, are they grand or mad, depraved?

Do we say yes to Kazantzakis whose wild soul said:

God cries out to be saved?

Well then, we go to save Him, that seems sure,

With flesh and bone not strong, and heart not pure,

All maze and paradox our blood,

More lost than found,

We go to marry stranger flesh on some far burial ground

Where yet we will survive and, laughing, look on back

To where we started on a blind and frightful track

But made it through, and for no reason

Save it must be made, to rest us under trees

On planets in such galaxies as toss and lean

A most peculiar shade,

And sleep awhile, for some few million years,

To rise again, fresh washed in vernal rain

That is our Eden’s spring once promised,

Now repromised, to bring Lazarus

And our abiding legions forth,

Stoke new lamps with ancient funeral loam

To light cold abyss hearths for astronauts to hie them home

On highways vast and long and broad,

Thus saving what? Who’ll say salvation’s sum?

Why, thee and me, and they and them, and us and we…

And God.

THE FATHERS AND SONS BANQUET

Strange grief, grand joy, remember? Once a foolish year

We gathered in some old gymnasium

That smelled of sweaty seas that dried to dust;

There sexual exercisers, going gray,

Came them to table

With their sons, not yet, yet hopeful, after lust,

And sat in twins along the white and silver way

To eat back chicken and sad peas

And drifts of long-departed winter snows,

Those sweltered and destroyed-by-summer-night ice creams.

Then strangely for one moment in it all,

Someone said something that wasright.

And each sat tall up in his flesh and knew his bones

And none knew whether he was boy or man,

Son or father of the son;

When all was Team,

Found twin.

Suddenly bemused, befuddled and befogged by tears,

By love surprised, expressed,

Only to be lost a second later

When, hands unclasped, shoulders unhugged,

Clean ears unkissed, brows uncaressed, all bent them once again

To the untouchable flavors of swiftly melting time.

The scheme that was divined into the light

Sinks now again in yarns of numb spaghetti

Never to be unknit by rhetoric.

So, unspun, the dream retreats

To its dumb and brute-bone hiding place

As tears salt-dry the cheeks, start back in stunned

And blinded eyes

And leave no trace.

Remembering all this last night,

I saw my father stride within a memory film

Which ran the length of me

But measuredhim!

Behir-d my flesh in amiable disguise

I found him lurked in my not-knowing

But now seeing and appraising eyes.

He long has slept away to moss.

All the more reason then for my sad searching

And my sense of loss.

For he is hardly here in nose or jaw or ear.

But, ah, look! There! atumble in the hair on wrist and arm

Like glints of gold and amber and bright sun,

There everything I was and am and will be soon

Deep run.

O, sometimes twice a day I catch him treading by!

Or, if alert with only simmers of half-vision

On the flexed wide sill of patient eye,

Some dozen times or more, especially at noon,

I capture him in fry and burn and brazen heat;

He lifts my hands to catch a phantom ball,

He runs my feet to hurdles that fell down

And ruins stayed some forty years ago.

I plan to catch him so, in shocks, abrupt entrapments,

Rare delights,

A hundred thousand times or more before I die.

My dad, old pa, that loving father there

Awrestle in bright sweat,

All nestled in the clockspring copper twine

That furs me with a sunset fire

And speaks with light and tells more with a silence

Than my lost sad soul can half divine.

He rambles where the ants of childhood scurried on my knuckles,

Now lost, now found, he waves for me to see him

On that most strange hearth, my wheat-field arm,

My whorled palm and fingertip, my harvest flesh.

Dear God, praise Him, that He connives,

That He burns wide my gaze withboth these lives:

To see the father in the son all snug

And tucked and warm and happy-fine inside.

Miraculous! that pore and blood

And cell and gene and chromosome

Are that odd immortality we rarely note or speak of

For a home.

Yet home it is, and threshold of the fire

Where father, playing at a death

Did sink, retire, and stoke him up a warmer blaze:

Myself… a bon rekindled with genetic praise.

His fingers hover as I hover out my grasp,

My breath of exultation, thanking Providence,

Sighs out a prayer with every gasp.

Thankful for me, I give my thanks to him,

In twin thanksgivings then we share our single heart with grace,

And love this soul, this flesh, these limbs,

Our basking place.

We are the stuff of each other’s dreams;

He the long since melted and vanished

And I all that remains of those dimly remembered

Warm June summer night ice creams…

And now at last

From the long lazing drowsy fathers and sons banquet of life

We wander home

Two on the same sidewalk

Ambling as one.

And still tonight, tonight,

Alone and shaving, the rippled mirror bright,

My own gaze seeks beyond this lather-mask and foam;

Old One, I miss but find you here,

This is your home

And yours my marrow

And I your son.

Never were there two of us but only one.

Once the one was you.

But with the changings of the sea

The tide, gone out, returns,

And now, now, now, O, now…

… that one is me.

TOUCH YOUR SOLITUDE TO MINE

Sweetest love, come now to meet me,

Touch your solitude to mine;

Take, enfold, protect and greet me,

Save me from my world with thine.

Give me more than I might borrow,

Much of joy, yet some of sorrow;

Search and find in Love’s high attics

Horizontal mathematics,

Toys to prove the simple sums

That honeys, nectars, pollens, gums

Of Love’s taking, giving, grieving,

Sweetly seeding and conceiving

Will thrive our days to myth and lore:

Two separate minds, one flesh the score.

Deftly sing it, lady, praise

How I lose me in your maze,

Gladly lost there, never found,

In your honeyed underground.

People asking then for me,

Tell them where I buried be.

Tangled in your private wild,

Say that you grow large with child,

So one day from secret earth

Middle age will find rebirth.

I not to tomb, but hence to womb

Where your maidenhair then growing

Clothes this ancient peach afresh,

Robes it round with April flesh.

O, men by thousands, such as I

Would gladly ‘neath your sweet grass lie

To claim what’s tucked beneath your lawn

Will rise as fresh and young as dawn.

Love’s Time Machine will shelve me there

And chaff the old to new and fair

And, nurtured, kept, by nectars mild Be born again as your last child.

GOD IS A CHILD;

PUT TOYS IN THE TOMB

God is a Child;

Put toys in the tomb

And He will come play.

What’s new in this?

Why, not a thing at all.

It was known and tried

So many years upon a year ago,

When kings knew swift-lost sons

Who went to dust in summers

That turned wintry chill

Within a night.

All humble-proud, those captain kings departed

To the tomb

And there by still sarcophagi of amiable sons gone cold

And rambled off across the abyss rim

Astroll upon the meadows of parched space,

The weeping monarchs set down toys

That only yestermorn were in the hands of child.

These fragments of lost play,

Strewn all about like breadcrumbs for some mighty bird

To come and pluck and eat,

Were thus left there

In hopes that God or gods, a singular or plural Presence

Might, paused curious, see,

And step in across the mortal sill

To spend a while each night in splendid joyful wakes

By sleeping son;

To nudge his stuffs, to wake his soul perhaps;

So boy and God might squat awhile

On tombstone floor and rattle numbered bones

Or tremble ghostly xylophones and shiver harps

Or trace in dust a hopscotch pentagram

And dive in it

To swim on river tides of moon

Let down through windows of the vault.

Could God refuse such sport?

No, no. Our God, Forever’s Child,

Will always play and show rambunctious wills

Among the molecules and atom storms

As well as knockabout of toys within a silent dungeon keep.

Let the world sleep.

Let father sit outside the door

And only now and then peek in at toys

Placed there about the box where his son hides;

And if he hears twin laughters,

One seedling-sparrow small,

The other vast as weathers off the sea,

Let him not look at all

But weep, and turn his tears to joys

That there, hid down, asprawl in floury gusts of midnight tomb,

There be a frolic of brothers/fathers/sons…

Oh listen! Let the sound fill up your heart!

That tumult of the large

And oh so pitifully weak small happy boys.

ODE TO ELECTRIC BEN

Ben Franklin was that rarity:

A man whose jolly-grim polarities did tempt our God

To hurl his bolts which, fastened to Ben’s ears,

Lit up his cerebrum for years

And thus illuminated reams of history.

His dreams, electric dreams,

Were knocked together out of Boy Mechanic schemes;

He wet his finger, held it to God’s Mystery and Storm.

God, in turnabout, gesticulated, touched

To know Ben’s warm or cooling weather.

So somehow these unconvivial two

Fell in together and were friends.

Their means quite different

But most similar-same their ends:

To Light the Universe,

Or light a world,

Large thing or small.

God blinked and Lo! the Nebulae!

Ben blinked; electric founts poured from his hands;

Within a century his sparks had lit the lands

And filled the towns with noon at night.

Such was God’s vision.

Such was Ben’s sight.

And after long years, some eighty-odd or more

Of intemperate days, good afternoons, storms, calms,

Bad fights, then making peace,

Vast multiples of weather,

God yawned, Ben gummed his eyes,

But still arguing… went off to bed together

SOME LIVE LIKE LAZARUS

Some live like Lazarus

In a tomb of life and come forth curious late

To twilight hospital and mortuary room.

From one womb to another

Is but a falling step;

Yet Innocence unbandaged

Blinks at Truth in terror

And would blind itself again!

But better the lame drags forth at last

From morning sickness waxed to twilight sleeps

Thine own self litter forth in autumn’s self-consume

Than linger in one room.

Let summer wander idiot in these eyes

Which stricken wide one wild sweet moment upon day

Fix, transfix, and die,

Than, warned by widows, stifled in a cage

All stillborn stay.

From first cry to last breath

If all one knows is death upon a frost-rimed path

To yet more ice,

Let one warm breath suffice

For July dawns of hail

And August snows when stormbound senses fail.

Best Lazarus born of witch-hag, shocked, miscarrying

Than, senses shorn, gone ill with thought

Of marrying ear to music,

Eye to luscious color,

Nose to time and tide’s caprice,

Hand to squalor.

Tongue to late sour wine must answer sweet.

Mere roadway dust-track now name street.

Best Lazarus born a dwarf dismembered

Than cat-sick hairball choked in half-out,

Hid moth-hair, chaff-seed, cold steam of un-lust

Unthrust, by hungry Death himself quite ill-remembered,

Never birthed at all.

Better cold skies seen bitter to the North

Than blind unseeing sac-bile gone to ghost.

If Rio is lost, love the Antarctic Coast.

O ancient Lazarus!!

Come ye forth.

THESE UNSPARKED FLINTS,

THESE UNCUT GRAVESTONE BRIDES

The ladies in the libraries

Do not go home at night;

Stand watch, be sure, just wait

Outside the mellow place at nine

Crouched down in bush and elderberry vine,

Look in through windows tall

Where virgin brides go quiet as the dust

By shelves where titles ranked, gold-bright as foxes’ eyes,

Glint sparks of lust.

Among the million dead and million more to perish

These unsparked flints, these uncut gravestone brides

Do nourish silence, and their tread

Is stuff of moss and downfell rust.

They do not touch the floor, incircling the dark,

To one-by-one pull strings to snatch the light,

Extinguish and move on to next and snatch again,

Keys at their waists ajingle in a gentle rain,

Like skaters in a summer dream,

Their spectacles agleam beneath the greenglass shades.

The smell of hyacinth pervades where they have been

And goes before as harbinger of youngness kept

Clasp-corseted in Iron Maiden flesh.

Where air was warm and bounteous on the sill,

In passing, such as these give vapors and the chill

To airs that touch and move aside.

They hide themselves a moment in the stacks

To shove long needles murderous in their hair

And find themselves in mirrors, unaware;

Both seer and seen the Queen of Iceland’s crop,

A blind stare, a strange drift of unshaped snow.

Then, at the door they go, give last looks round the shop

Where Time is vended in the books,

Where skin prolapses from the dinosaur,

Then wheel again to knife the air, go out and down the street

To places no one knows.

They do not go.

Their coats all buttoned tight,

Their spectacles fresh-washed, they spin to call:

“Is anybody there?”

In hopes that some deep terrifying voice of man

Might some night soon reply, “Ah, yes.”

Their ringless fingers tremble on their dress.

They hold their breath, their souls, they wait.

Then reach up for the last light-string and yank.

The night drops down.

But in the instant of eclipse

They snap-close-clench themselves like

Ancient paper flowers of Japan.

A wind from basements dank and attics desert-dry

Breathes up, breathes down the air,

These scentless flowers shower everywhere!

And where before the brittle women stood,

Some vagrant tattered crepes now tap the floor.

As for the rest, the lustful books on shelves gape wide

And into these the funeral-flower souls now rattle,

Tickle, rustle, hide, and, hiding, rest;

Each to its age, each to its own and proper nest.

This maid to Greece and Rape of the Sabines,

That one to Child’s Crusade

Where knights shuck off their stuffs

To bed the sixteenth summer maid;

The third and last cold statue turned to farewell summer’s dust

Flies up the Transylvania height

And welcomes lust by showing it her neck

And trading randy bite for bite.

All, all turned to bookmarks!

Slipped in dreadful books

Where loving makes a din

Ten times as loud as loving in the world beyond the shelves.

Tucked in warm dark the bookmark maidens

Feel themselves crushed and beauteously mangled,

Scream and gibber all the night,

Only swooning down to dreaming sleep at dawn,

Smiles creped about their mouths.

Squashed flat ‘twixt Robin and his nimble nibbling men,

And Arthur who, if thanked,

Will pull Excalibur from them at breakfast-time,

And so be King, his weapon free of stone

That held it fast, all hungry for a fight.

Such screams! Such gladsome mourns of happiness!

List, listen! by the library.

But, soft… the books, gummed shut, do muffle it.

The maids all night each night are maids no more.

Come back at noon.

And see the ancient cronies three, aswoon,

All somewhat tipsy-drunk and tenterhooked with memory

Propped up at desks as if the sun were still the moon.

Give nod,

Give book,

Go off, but never ask, for you will never know

Where, where o where at night

These long lost cold-chipped marble ladies go.

Ask silence,

Linger on awhile

But all you’ll have for answer

Is a sad remembrance smile

They’ll quickly cover with a Kleenex, wipe away.

So, old again and lonely and unsquashed

And ringless, pale, and breathing only ice,

They face the heatless noon,

The sunless hours of day,

Reckon your question,

Recommend files,

And give virginal advice.

AND THIS DID DANTE DO

The truth is this:

That long ago in times

Before the birth of Light,

Old Dante Alighieri prowled this way

On continent unknown to mad Columbus;

Made landfall here by sneaking, sly Machine,

Invention of his candle-flickered soul

Which, wafted upon storms,

Brought him in harmful mission down.

So, landed upon wilderness of dust

Where buffaloes stamped forth

A panic of immense heartbeat,

Dante scanned round and stamped his foot,

And hoofed the trembling flints l

And named a Ring of Hell.

With parchment clenched in tremorous fist,

He inked out battlements of grime

And arcs of grinding coggeries which, struck,

Snowed down a dreadful cereal of rust

Long years before such iron soots were dreamt

Or made, or flown,

Long long before such avenues of steel in sky were sought.

So, in a guise like Piranesi lost amidst-among

His terrible proud Prisons,

The Poet sketched a vaster, higher, darker Pent-up Place

A living demon-clouded sulphur-spread of Deep.

From tenement to tenement of clapboard dinge

He rinsed a sky with coal-sack burning,

Hung clouds with charcoal flags

Of nightgowns flapping like strange bats

Shocked down from melancholy steam-purged locomotive caves.

Then through it all put scream of metal flesh,

Great dinosaur machines charged forth by night,

All stomaching of insucked souls Pent up in windowed cells.

Delivered into concrete river-shallow streets,

Men fled themselves from spindrift shade

Of blown black chimney sifts and blinds of smoking ghosts.

And on the brows of all pale citizens therein

Stamped looks of purest terror,

Club-foot panic and despair,

A rank, a raveling dismay that spread in floods

To drain off in a lake long since gone sour

With discharged outpouring of slime.

So drawn, so put to parchment, so laid down

In raw detail, this Ring of Hell (No mind what Number!)

Was Dante’s greatest Inventory counting-up

Of Souls in dread Purgation.

He stood a moment longer in the dust.

He let the frightened drumpound heart of buffalo tread

Please to excite his blood.

Then, desecration-proud, happy at the great Black Toy

He’d printed, builded, wound, and set to run

In fouled self-circlings,

Old Dante hoisted up his heels,

Left low the continental lake shore cloven, stamped,

And hied him home to Florence and his bed,

And laid him down still dreaming with a smile,

And in his sleep spoke centuries before its birth

The Name of this Abyss, the Pit, the Ring of Hell

He had machinery-made:

CHICAGO!

Then slept,

And forgot his child.

YOU CAN GO HOME AGAIN

They say you cannot, no, in any way

Go home again.

Yet home I came,

And picked an hour when the train

Slid in upon the golden track of twilight to the town.

I rode in bronze and saw the panoply of ore

Laid out on every leaf and every roofing cope

And balustrade;

The train rode high on trestle as it braked on toward its stop

And I gazed out upon that special dusking sea

Which washes for scant minutes on the world

At rise and set of sun.

Stepped down, I moved upon the yellow planks

Torn up from all the halls of ancient myths. The station sign was gold.

The trees, my god, the trees wore epaulettes!

The ivy on the old school wall was dazzling braid.

And in the shade the eye of cat sent forth

A minted signaling which could be spent!

The walks I trod were saffron from an Indian sand;

The lawns were amber carpetings

Where warrior ants climbed stricken with such luscious tints

As made them seem the richest armory in time.

Mere bees upon the air were tapestries.

And down the slanted beams of now-lost afternoon

And soon-come night

A spider made his way

On harps of honey-colored twine

Which struck might cry with pure delight.

All, all was light!

The very air swam syrupy with tunes of wind

And rattlings of coins which tufted every branch.

The leaves beneath each tree were jackpot avalanche.

A dog trot-rambled by

His fur made up of stuffs from out Fort Knox,

His eyes cuff-links he sported without pride,

Accepted, knew, forgot, and took in stride.

The house where I was born,

My grandma’s house,

Most terrible, most beautiful of all!

As I came by

Aflame it was, all fire in the windows

From the plunging sun;

Each glass a meld of brazen metals

From old shields on which a thousand dead

Were proudly borne toward sunset cairns.

As if raised high upon the instant of my coming

The windows dazzled, clamoring the lawns,

Then rushed to set more torches

On the blazing rose-filled porches,

And attics danced with firefly dust

As cupolas took light like lust

And virgin chandeliers were crazed

And cracked with flame.

I stood amazed,

I trod the flaxen grass;

Let smoldering towers blind my gaze.

Never such welcome!

In all my days of going forth and coming back,

Never such wealth.

The sunset knew my lack

And sparked a million bons to show the way,

All celebrant, a burning down of happiness

Before my river-running, gladsome-fractured eyes.

All of its banks it opened,

All of its wealth it spent

In one last great pervading spree.

I sensed but one cool shade of Death behind a single tree

Waiting for the silent river of light to ebb

So it might seize not only cash but me.

But now it was an hour all sweetly met;

I did come home and chose by clumsy miracle

A time which made the world stand still

Mute-struck to bronze.

A statue, then, I fed myself the splendid prides of air

And heard the birds that sang with jeweled throats:

You’ll live forever. This, your summer, gone eternal,

Will stay fair.

I stayed.

The sun went out.

The sky shut down its light.

Gone wise, a few days later, rising up near dawn

I made my way through streets of night

To train and left the way I came—

As sun fired gold to mint the town;

Still the same king I was upon arriving

All royal gowned I left in a lie of light.

The last I saw of it

The town was, avenue and shop, bright swathed

In goldleaf touching and renewed.

A tree all dripped with Spanish royal doubloons

Shook with premonitions as I passed

And mouthed farewells.

In Chicago

Some hours later,

The railway station men’s room

Smelled like the lion house

At the zoo

In Dublin.

When I was very old.

AND DARK OUR CELEBRATION WAS

And dark our celebration was,

For Death was sweet to us;

By that I mean it filled our sacks so full

We leaned atilt round moonlit corners of the town

And sprinted on to doorways where we buzzed and rang

And lit the pumpkin windows and held forth our hands

To take the treasures of the time,

Then ran again, my lovely thistle girls and I

Gone old within a night yet young with them.

How grand such Eves, how good such girls

That they slowed pace for ancient boys like me.

Who could not give it up, stay home, put by that holiday.

I had to go, to lurch, to tap, to laugh, to walk at last

All happy-tired home in cold wind blowing

With the full-lit moon to wife and hearth and aunts

Come by to wait for us: the crazy man and his wild pride

Of maiden beasts.

Long years ahead, dear girls, on nights like those,

Do please drop by at dusk, come sit upon my stone

And speak glad words

To spirit gone but wishing to be still

With you when you go forth with your own children

Thus to filch and prize and laugh at every door.

No more. I stay.

But save for me a single sweet, some Milky Way to munch

Or bring a pumpkin cut and lit and place it so to warm my feet.

Then on the path run, go! knowing that I’m not dead,

For you are my head, my heart, my limbs, my blood set free;

You are the me that is warm,

I am the me that is cold,

You are the me that is young,

I old.

But what of that?!

Death’s mean at all his Tricks, God, yes,

But you the Treats

Who run to beg my life and yours

In all the Future’s wild, delirious, dark

But warm and living streets.

MRS. HARRIET MADDEN ATWOOD,

WHO PLAYED THE PIANO FOR THOMAS A. EDISON

FOR THE WORLD’S FIRST PHONOGRAPH RECORD,

IS DEAD AT 105

And did you know that still she was alive?

Somewhere, old Harriet Madden Atwood, there’s a name!

And freshly gone now at, listen to the sum:

One hundred years plus five!

Why, gods in multiples, there’s no one else alive

Recalls what she recalled just some few days ago

When in her bed, remembering, she tuned pianos past

our ken;

She outlived twenty-on-a-thousand better men

And women who shored up their bones

And lived out lives on borrowed blood

And loans of vital stuffs,

While kindling up her dreams with echoings of song

That needle-hissed her mind all midnight long.

She played for Edison!

Old Thomas asked her talent to begin.

So she began and in beginning knew no end.

George Atwood came to find her at Old But Then Young Edison’s request.

Timidly she came, all doubt, and saw the strange machine

In which he would entrap, wind up her trembled soul,

There nest her sound like fragile mail To be delivered in some unfrequented year

She would frequent by song and song alone,

Her body gone, her touch would linger on the sill

And fill the year Two Thousand Ninety-Nine with chords.

Her late rewards?

A tumult of applause broadcast down shoals of stars

And Space

From all the future places where the race

Has gone, will go, to hide and seek,

The billions of them nameless as they go.

But, strange—

The name of Harriet Hadden Atwood they will know.

For Edison she played.

This maid another year did sit her down

In some small glade of time

And place her fingers to the keys

From which sprang old but now-made-new within-the-instant

Melodies.

Her claims were modest, Nor did she take a fee

She removed her gloves and gently kicked the pedals

A trimly perfect mediocrity—

Which means not bad nor yet a hair beyond

The median good;

She was a known commodity in the tuneless humming of bees

That was her green-fern, sharp-thorned summer rose

And cut-grass neighborhood.

All children, with their butterflies like Fates

Caught up in nets, nodded as she passed,

Their fingers aching at remembrance of strict lessons

That she taught;

She baked and bought the simples of her Time.

When in between a lesson or recital

Less than humble are her vital statistics,

Less than a complication the logistics of supply and demand

In her life.

Tom Edison needed a sweet-sour pound of high green summer apples;

George Atwood looked and found: a pianist, then a wife.

Both were gladdened by her sound.

Now that sound will gladden out the hearts of girls unborn

Beyond Poughkeepsie, Saturn, Jupiter,

Far Rockaway, Moon, Mars, or Matterhorn.

In nebulae at present kept beyond our gaze

Harriet Madden Atwood, who played for the now-long-dead

In other days,

Will, in future ages,

Doubtless in Alpha Centauri,

Be counted as one of their new and unpredictable culture rages.

Unknown in her own time,

No titan talent she.

Yet since she was the start of some new thing,

One billion years from tonight

She will bloom in eternal spring.

Five light-years away and away,

Miss Maiden-Lady Madden, later found-and-married Atwood,

Will play and play and play.

Tom Edison asks it!

In seance he sets her task ever on:

More, yes! once more, yes, now, more!

Five presidents heard and sent notes

On her birthdays recalling some raggedy tunes

They’d last heard on some late summer night

Now-gone-forever excursion boats.

Such threadbare keys,

By a passaging of time beyond the lees of every planet

In our basement system of the Void

May well outlive the off-beat hummings of a Freud,

Linger with Beethoven,

Stay with Berlioz.

Made up of humble clay, ?

Harriet Hadden Atwood, a girl whose only Cause

Was to play

Piano

Trapped by Thomas Alva E.,

Now lives Forever!

Give or take a day.

WHAT SEEMS A BALM

IS SALT TO ANCIENT WOUNDS

All things are mixed.

The very flesh of God

Is compound eye which looks upon a world

And cracks the light,

And fixes star at very blackest heart of night,

And shades the noon with ghost

And leans the shadow tree

Across the flowered lawn,

And fringes, all serene,

The sea with teeth of carnivore

Which boil in hungry schools beneath the calms;

What seems a balm is salt to ancient wounds;

What seems a death, gone teeming unto worms,

From splendid garbage rouses up new forms;

Beneath the mask of Peace

Old War hones swords and builds

A battlement of scrimshaw bone;

Beneath the battered shield

Soft flesh, gone simple with a summer’s day,

But waits for asking and then, asked, gives yield.

So round-about all goes, now hard, now soft,

Now mild, now mad, the sheep and wolf arun in tandem flocks:

Lost man, found world,

Fused paradox.

HERE ALL BEAUTIFULLY COLLIDES

The sky is inked with blue

The grass, sketched, scribbled, drawn, is green ink, too,

And all about ravines take children to their Deeps;

While from the east at dawn and west at sunset seeps

A color of life’s blood

Where clouds amass

And spread the tincture.

At the airport, dragon-shadows pass

Kites shuttle

Shadow down

Becoming planes

Which

Oh

So

Softly Land On…

…grass.

On rooftops roosters cut from metal

Whine with wind and nose gone-far directions

Where only children with their secret

Gum-chewed mint impacted wisdom go.

The eaves glide-whisper soft of summer nights

Now letting flow

The silk discumberments of dreams:

Remembered snow.

Rivers run here not filled with summer dust

Or sun-crazed rock and idiot stone

But actual water.

At noon the streets are church-nave deep in cool green shade

Across the lawns: battalions of glare,

Sun-dandelions

Clock-light the drifting grin and footpad ease of dog,

The vacuum-cleaner exhaled dust-fluff cat,

The rubber tread of never-silent boy.

Here all beautifully collides

Unfrictioned;

Summer heals all with an oiled and motioned fcase.

Here no disease.

Here health of world in distilled proportion,

Here gyroscope ahum kept spun by bees

Who drowse-drown lusciously entrapped by flowers

Or hummingbirds which fatten forth the hours with pure dripped sound…

In libraries where dry flowers drop

From books of printed flowers

Old clocks run dry of time keep rigid frozen pointed

At never known, so never remembered, so never forgotten, hours.

The librarian has been there forever.

She was never young; But will seem younger as we grow years.

The stamping of the purple inkstamped data in the books

Is like the tread of wisdom in this place;

The lily-pages blow and whisper

Boys go lost and murmuring in the stacks

Where all is mystery of green-mossed well

Where ignorance shouts to hear a learning echo.

These be the granite cliffs and quarries where we swim

In cooling words on summer midnights

And come forth printed o’er with poems

Which toweled from our flesh yet drip from fingertips

And stifle up the eyes with most sad joys.

All, all town, home, shop, Elite Theatre, library: first class.

A first class summer in a first class town.

Where green ink skies make green rains fall, enfilter down.

While at the airport,

Oh, God, look!

How Soft,

How sweet and rolling,

See! They pass! All dragon-shadow!

The kited planes

Strings cut,

Laze….

… drifting…

Down…

To land…

On

Grass.

GOD FOR A CHIMNEY SWEEP

What’s rough is this:

That life, which was a building up of bricks

From which one piped one’s exultations,

Now crusts itself within,

The nested stuff keeps soot,

So every cell upon a cell is darkened

With accumulant small dooms,

Some deft disasters of those lesser morns

Which were forgot by noon

But now in numbers rank themselves

And by their very armies overwhelm.

The spirit suffers at the count,

The soul is smothered by their waves.

One’s laughter is stopped up and jugged

Within the boneyard cage of rib;

One wants to shout these damned molecules away,

With single rear-backed roars and declamation

Give jolt and pound and hammering of chimney bricks

So all the soot falls down, an evil snow,

And life and flesh and soul gust up,

Are cleansed to joy themselves again

And morns are sweet when one wakes up

And feels a boy stir over, hid within

And turned all smiling to hear cries

Of other boys, all juiced with sun and desperate betew

Tossing soft light pebble laughter up to rap

The ice-clear window panes

Till life runs out to meet

Before the body joins

The soul on summer paths to drowning wilderness.

O, God, give strength to those like me

Who in their middle years so dearly wish

To pay with laughs the lurking Dustman

That most strange Chimney Sweep,

So he might knock this hearthing place

This frame of brittling skeleton

And wash all back to rinsed pink brick again,

Restart the fires

And dampen not their ardor

Yet a while.

I would stand baked in my own blood

Warm hands with self’s hid fiery surprise,

A fire in each cell and all cells swarmed

With the vast true sun’s uprise.

But how knock soot, clean dirt away

Which blinds the soul to its own lineaments,

Which tamps the ears so one can miss

The rare teakettle simmer of warm breath

From out one’s grateful mouth?

For Christmas then, O God, kick me a holy kick

Of great outcharged delight.

Gone midnight with too many dusks

And dawns of knowledge,

Knock me white,

O God, yes do!

Strike me with laughter’s downflashed lightning;

Make me Light!

TO PROVE THAT COWARDS DO SPEAK BEST

AND TRUE AND WELL

O, tell me not, dear Will,

That cowards die a thousand deaths;

I know, I know!

Why every breath I take does crack my bones,

Tear my flesh asunder,

Undermine my mask with moans and sighs.

And yet, while full of death and lies,

More full of pomegranate life and truth this coward be;

I am reborn, O Jesus’ nailed and frightened breath, why, hourly.

And with such mirth!

Why, listen,

Even though my shocked eyes burn and glisten

With tears torn free by griefs and mad surprise,

What cries of joy, also!

At the crazed and awful triumph up from Death,

Again and again and again I cull in breath

With equal seizures of fright,

Shout back the night, call in the morn,

Thus being reborn and, O much thanks! reborn.

And all of ye brave

Who die but once?

Get you to the grave.

For you dumb remain, and go all mute to mounds and worms.

My terms for life are better,

For while brother to night and dying each hour,

I, seeded with terror and handsome dread,

Am rebirthed as funeral flower

Which speaks again and, with panics of heart’s lost blood, again.

Your panoply of Will is steel which keeps out pain and thought,

From which you cannot speak.

My life is dearly bought;

I strike from shadows some few flints of light

While strickened is my heart

And flesh so thin to wounds it bleeds me white.

Yours is the bravery of fools

That will not last the night;

Death and the tomb your wit, your law,

Your first and final Rite.

Ride high in pomp, strut, drum, and flutter flags,

And go to Doom all bound up brave.

Your destiny is dumb.

Long after dark, my tongue will writhe

Like sunset snake within my grave

To prove that cowards do speak best and true and well.

And trumpeters and drummers of bravado,they…?

Go to Hell.

Go to Hell.

I, TOM, AND MY ELECTRIC GRAN

At night she came within my room

All breathing out of weather kept from Time…

A summer here, a summer there,

Spent days, warm haze and blue delights,

Remnants of some spun-toy winter nights,

A sound of sleds that rocked the sleep of worlds.

A tinsel cry of icicle on upper tower keep

A sound of wakening

A sound of sleep,

All these, transistorized

Packed in the cells and whorls

And thumbprints of her hum-spun spirit glass

Then caused her Ouija hand to move

And write in quiet motions large my name and Fate

Upon the loving dark over my bed.

Yes! Yes! to all I asked she said,

And firmly No when No was needed.

This woman warm as breast of slumbering fowl,

With wisdom seeded,

Kept safe my years and lanced my most infectious tears

With careful hand or handkerchief,

And held me close to smell her secret whispering

And murmuring machines,

The armory of electric creatures which

With echoings of kites on high March days

Said, “Boy, you’ll live forever. Go in peace…”

Then went I, running,

Tom, from my electric Gran.

And now when grown into a man

I look me back and see her all aglow in dark,

Her mind a circuitry,

Her veins pale tapestries of spark,

Her hair full panoplied with light

A dim torch wavering of Liberty by night

Electric hive of wisdom from which bees……

Lit forth and stung me to my chores…

A library, a toyshop vault, a keep of wisdom’s spores;

Where centuries of freshly dusted gray philosophers

Wake from sleep

And speak out of her mouth

And from her tongue

Use her for bell and clapper

And there all clung and hung upon a lightning tower

They announce the Past, an amiable present,

And some future hour sung of in banged voices from the bell,

Here Schopenhauer gives shout,

There Dante trudges Hell.

Sweet Gran, electric Grandma of my life

You keep in minuscule a.c.-d.c. dungeons deep

The poets of an Age, a deaf-mute Sage perhaps

Who speaks but from your eyes

And cavemen also from a time of brute surmise

All these are shadow-painted on your brow

And throng your pomegranate soul

In which I burrowed like the monkey-mole

Now leapt akimbo, now thrusting sod

Now nosing Devil and now vaulting God.

O grandmother of years,

O, mother of the mineral soils of Earth,

I see you wandered on the midnight lawn,

A stillness kept, a waiting to begin.

A woman? No. A pageantry of wheels?

Much more.

A tin soul, trapped and mouthed, which felt the Universe

And spoke its mysteries at dawn.

BOYS ARE ALWAYS RUNNING SOMEWHERE:

A POEM

Boys are always running somewhere.

Ask them where, in running, they all go?

They’ll prance around, dance backward,

Answer, puzzled:

They don’t know…

And with a glance that says you’re sad or mad for asking,

On they’ll flow.

They are a river-run of Time;

Theirs not to ask or answer but to fit

The rhyme of circumstance and old beginnings without end;

God sends them forth for His own Reasonings

To south-east-north or why not west?

Whichever’s first is best.

Whichever’s second, well, that’s second-rate,

But better to be second, moved, in motion

Than be late for beckonings of Fate and rare fell plights

That wait beyond horizons, atop hills,

Fired by dawns,

Or gone acold in dreadful deep November nights.

Boys are always running somewhere.

Not to start is a sin.

Who’s to say they should not leap from bed,

Roar from house, chockful of hotcakes, rituals and rites,

Ever ready to begin?

Men are always running somewhere.

Ask them on the train, the jet, the rushing sidewalk, where?

They’ll shift their suitcase or their gum

Or their cigar,

To ponder, wonder, peer, then, shut up, wander off,

Thinking you even madder and somehow sadder

Than the boys who thought you mad and sad,

And thus immunized to joys.

Twelve years before,

If boys were all yearning,

Now, as men, they have been to where they wanted to run,

Reached the end of the line, had their tickets punched

And circle back again

With tossed confetti-stuffs on hatbrim and lapel

To prove their madcap learning,

To show wherever it was, was a party!

And what the hell.

But, brushing the unknown Mardi Gras from off their eyebrows,

Hefting their great-coats stuffed with memos,

Ask them now not where they’re going

But where’ve theyBeen?

They’ll cudgel up their brows and scowl

As if some survey-maker had just been delicately obscene,

Recheck their datebooks, shuffle

Maunder,

But not spell those Destinations Past…

They’ve Gone! So what’s to tell?

Going was all the custom.

Now the custom is: Having Been.

And you?

Standing there with your battered kite and no string?

It’s obvious you’ve never went or gone

Or made the scene or, trying, failed,

Or done a thing!

You go not barefoot,

Neither are you shod by Mercury, Apollo,

Or any other plain or fancy god.

Where were they going?

Where last seen?

The man and boy stand tall and small before you;

One gray, the other green,

And, damn it! cry:

They’ve been Far Traveling…

Boy running to meet the man,

Man running to meet the boy,

Collision-course; struck bruised,

All tender-fused, why, look!

They make a troop,

A regiment of two

Who ramble thus forever in their single, simple,

Rare rambunctious joy.

So, suddenly, we see

Where the one was wandering, what he wanted to be;

Where the other has been and, having been, will forever know.

Ask, yes, but answers are absurd.

Like dogs they’ll stand and cock their heads at you

And tell no word.

But looks can say:

“I ran to be the man.”

Or, “Once I was a boy in summer, rushing to be me.”

It is no sin to not know where you’ve come from,

Or where go. Why should they tell,

When at their secret hearts they spell

The finest truths, and, spelling, mow the lawns of summer,

Barking, snapping, circling, biting, yapping,

There they vault, sunsets

There they share dawns.

There, ambidextrous to delight, they flow.

And who’s to stop that joy which hides and seeks

Like child in man?

And who’s to warn and tell, prevent,

The man who calls out to the boy?

Here lie their tandem prints in blowing sands—

Quick! here they turn back!

To wipe out their prints with a smile, a shout,

With quick paws that are hands.

Boys are always running somewhere.

Where, where, where O where?

They know.

Men are always running running running somewhere.

O woman, woman of all the sad wise years,

Let them go.

O TO BE A BOY IN A BELFRY

O to be a boy in a belfry

Tilting summer noon in tumults,

On your back, the sun squeezed lemon in your eyes,

The blue heaven all bright fries,

Your feet raw naked to the light,

Strewn warm in bed of straw high up in tower

And this your hour to summon all to prayer.

An incense burns the wind,

The altars wait to tremble,

The ancient dust to tingle

As you kick heel and toe,

Strive up, fists under rump

To patter-slap, to shape, to drive the bell

And start its voice athunder

In your bones and swarming through the air

To shake blue snows of summer sky

Invisible and drifting on the glare.

The bell swings traveling; you kick it on;

Returned, you thrust it, hungry-mouthed and lolling

Forth again, now lashing iron tongue

To lick its clangorous rims,

To bang, to detonate in glorious pronunciamentos:

I’m here! ‘Tis me!

‘Tis me who hooves the cannon bell!

To wake the summer dead out of their drowse.

‘Tis me! A mouse

Of boy gone high in belfry dins!

Who with pure iron sound would douse your sins!

All, startled, listen, rouse,

And come, drift-dusted down the roads!

I summon you with freshly washed pink toes

And bell-creased crimsoned heel,

Upon my back I bicycle the wind

To rotor-thump the bombshell clangs!

Its great mouth hungers me;

I feed it feet.

Sprawled laughing, bell-sound in my lungs,

Prone underneath,

The sun all gone to shards, asplinter in my lids,

My mouth blood-rust from giving shout

To answer iron shout of bell:

Here’s heaven! heaven! heaven!

Bang. Not hell. Not hell. Bang! Not hell!

Until the church below is full of summer breath

And priest then wanders forth to make discussion,

His nave much shaken to sense with wild concussion.

Now one must cease.

But sometimes in the uptilt, ever-frenzied dance, forgets;

So priest must send on mission yet another boy

To stop the bell

To still the belfry and the iron-spilled joy.

Now lie there yet awhile, fine lad, upon your back,

As bell tilts down to quiet, soft asimmer.

Long before loves and beds are known you have known this:

Bells are a loud communion,

Belfry-banging bells are bliss.

Glistered with holy sweat you lift your head

And send a bright salt golden rain down free from brow

With one shake, smiling.

It blesses the distant ground.

You touch the bell:

It trembles still with sound.

You touch the sky with glance:

It shivers bright with quakes you’ve given

It will, long gone days beyond, remember.

You laugh one last triumphant burst.

Great seas of prayer wait murmuring below

Carefully, holding to your soul

And sweet-bruised tender wits,

You descend the belfry stair,

Inexplicably wild with thirst.

IF I WERE EPITAPH

What would I say of me,

If I were Epitaph?

That there were silly bones in him?

The grim but made him laugh?

The jolly made him serious?

The glum made him delirious?

That lawyers talked him sleepy,

And made him snooze at noon,

But bed was his by nine o’clock

So he could rise with moon?

And roll upon the meadows

While other people dreamed,

With windows up and chilly

He smiled and only steamed?

They sealed him in a coffin

But could not make him stay,

His laugh too large, his smile too wkie

For any Death to lay?

No matter what the molder,

The maggot in his bin,

No measuring-worm could inch and cir—

Cumnavigate his grin?

If Universe should claim me

And keep me with a sleep

I’d open up my laughter

And drop the Abyss deep;

There we would lie all friendly,

The empty stars and I

And speak upon Creation

And with God occupy

The time that’s left for burning,

A billion years to sup,

Then open wide God’s laughter

And let Him eat me up.

IF ONLY WE HAD TALLER BEEN

The fence we walked between the years

Did balance us serene;

It was a place half in the sky where

In the green of leaf and promising of peach

We’d reach our hands to touch and almost touch that lie,

That blue that was not really blue.

If we could reach and touch, we said,

‘Twould teach us, somehow, never to be dead.

We ached, we almost touched that stuff;

Our reach was never quite enough.

So, Thomas, we are doomed to die.

O, Tom, as I have often said,

How sad we’re both so short in bed.

If only we had taller been,

And touched God’s cuff, His hem,

We would not have to sleep away and go with them

Who’ve gone before,

A billion give or take a million boys or more

Who, short as we, stood tall as they could stand

And hoped by stretching thus to keep their land,

Their home, their hearth, their flesh and soul.

But they, like us, were standing in a hole.

O, Thomas, will a Race one day stand really tall

Across the Void, across the Universe and all?

And, measured out with rocket fire,

At last put Adam’s finger forth

As on the Sistine Ceiling,

And God’s great hand come down the other way

To measure Man and find him Good,

And Gift him with Forever’s Day?

I work for that.

Short man. Large dream. I send my rockets forth between my ears,

Hoping an inch of Will is worth a pound of years.

Aching to hear a voice cry back along the universal Mall:

We’ve reached Alpha Centauri!

We’re tall, O God, we’re tall!