

MONA LISA

Through seven mountain frontiers
barbed wire of rivers
and executed forests
and hanged bridges
I kept coming—
through waterfalls of stairways
whirlings of sea wings
and baroque heaven
all bubbly with angels
—to you
Jerusalem in a frame

I stand
in the dense nettle patch
of a cook's tour
on a shore of crimson rope
and eyes

so I'm here
you see I'm here

I hadn't a hope
but I'm here

laboriously smiling on
resin-colored mute convex

as if constructed out of lenses
concave landscape for a background

between the blackness of her back
which is like a moon in clouds

and the first tree of the surroundings
is a great void froths of light

so I'm here
sometimes it was
sometimes it seemed that
don't even think about it

only her regulated smile
her head a pendulum at rest

her eyes dream into infinity
but in her glances snails are asleep

so I'm here
they were all going to come

I'm alone

when already
he could no longer move his head
he said
as soon as all this is over
I'm going to Paris
between the second and the third finger
of the right hand
a space
I put in this furrow
the empty shells of fates

so I'm here
it's me here
pressed into the floor
with living heels

fat and not too nice signora
loosens her hair upon dry rocks

hewed off from the meat of life
abducted from home and history

with horrifying ears of wax
smothered with a scarf of glaze

the empty volumes of her flesh
are set in diamonds

between the blackness of her back
and the first tree of my life

lies a sword
a melted precipice

LAST REQUEST

she could no longer move her head
she nodded for me to bend over her
—here's two hundred zlotys
add the remainder
and have them say a Gregorian mass

she didn't want
grapes
she didn't want
morphine
she didn't want
to gladden the poor
she wanted a mass

so she got one

we kneel in the heat
in a numbered pew
my brother wipes his brow with a hankie
my sister fans herself with a prayer book
I repeat
as we forgive those
I forget how it goes
and start over again

the priest
walks the path
of seven lit lilies
the organ wails
seems it'll open
and air will flow

but no
everything is shut

THE RETURN OF THE PROCONSUL

I've decided to return to the emperor's court
once more I shall see if it's possible to live there
I could stay here in this remote province
under the full sweet leaves of the sycamore
and the gentle rule of sickly nepotists

when I return I don't intend to commend myself
I shall applaud in measured portions
smile in ounces frown discreetly
for that they will not give me a golden chain
this iron one will suffice

I've decided to return tomorrow or the day after
I cannot live among vineyards nothing here is mine
trees have no roots houses no foundations the rain is glassy flowers smell
of wax
a dry cloud rattles against the empty sky
so I shall return tomorrow or the day after in any case I shall return

I must come to terms with my face again
with my lower lip so it knows how to curb its scorn
with my eyes so they remain ideally empty
and with that miserable chin the hare of my face
which trembles when the chief of guards walks in

of one thing I am sure I will not drink wine with him
when he brings his goblet nearer I will lower my eyes
and pretend I'm picking bits of food from between my teeth
besides the emperor likes courage of convictions
to a certain extent to a certain reasonable extent
he is after all a man like everyone else
and already tired by all those tricks with poison
he cannot drink his fill incessant chess
this left cup is for Drusus from the right one pretend to sip

then drink only water never lose sight of Tacitus
go out into the garden and come back when they've taken away the
corpse

I've decided to return to the emperor's court
yes I hope that things will work out somehow

ELEGY OF FORTINBRAS

To C.M.

Now that we're alone we can talk prince man to man
though you lie on the stairs and see no more than a dead ant
nothing but black sun with broken rays

I could never think of your hands without smiling
and now that they lie on the stone like fallen nests
they are as defenseless as before The end is exactly this
The hands lie apart The sword lies apart The head apart
and the knight's feet in soft slippers

You will have a soldier's funeral without having been a soldier
the only ritual I am acquainted with a little
There will be no candles no singing only cannon-fuses and bursts
crepe dragged on the pavement helmets boots artillery horses drums
drums I know nothing exquisite
those will be my manoeuvres before I start to rule
one has to take the city by the neck and shake it a bit

Anyhow you had to perish Hamlet you were not for life
you believed in crystal notions not in human clay
always twitching as if asleep you hunted chimeras
wolfishly you crunched the air only to vomit
you knew no human thing you did not know even how to breathe

Now you have peace Hamlet you accomplished what you had to
and you have peace The rest is not silence but belongs to me
you chose the easier part an elegant thrust
but what is heroic death compared with eternal watching
with a cold apple in one's hand on a narrow chair
with a view of the ant-hill and the clock's dial

Adieu prince I have tasks a sewer project
and a decree on prostitutes and beggars
I must also elaborate a better system of prisons
since as you justly said Denmark is a prison
I go to my affairs This night is born

a star named Hamlet We shall never meet
what I shall leave will not be worth a tragedy

It is not for us to greet each other or bid farewell we live on archipelagos
and that water these words what can they do what can they do prince

NAKED TOWN

On the plain that town flat like an iron sheet
with the mutilated hand of its cathedral a pointing claw
with pavements the color of intestines houses stripped of their skin
the town beneath a yellow wave of sun
a chalky wave of moon

o town what a town tell me what's the name of that town
under what star on what road

about the people: they work at the slaughter-house in an immense building
of raw concrete blocks around them the odor of blood
and the penitential psalm of animals Are there poets there (silent poets)
there are troops a big rattle of barracks on the outskirts
on Sunday beyond the bridge in prickly bushes on cold sand
on rusty grass girls receive soldiers
there are as well some places dedicated to dreams The cinema
with a white wall on which splash the shadows of the absent
little halls where alcohol is poured into glass thin and thick
there are also dogs at last hungry dogs that howl
and in that fashion indicate the borders of the town Amen

so you still ask what's the name of that town
which deserves biting anger where is that town
on the cords of what winds beneath what column of air
and who lives there people with the same skin as ours
or people with our faces or

REFLECTIONS ON THE PROBLEM OF THE NATION

From the fact we use the same curses
and our incantations of love are alike
they draw much too bold conclusions
nor should any shared school syllabus
become a premise sufficient
for killing
and the same is the case with the land
(willows sandy road wheat field sky plus feathery clouds)

I would like to know in the end
where the indoctrination stops
and the real connection begins
whether as a result of historical experience
we have not suffered psychic damage
and now react to events with shrill righteousness
whether we are still a barbarian tribe
amid artificial lakes and electric forests

to be honest I do not know
I'm only making the claim
that this connection exists
it manifests itself in pallor
and in a sudden reddening
roaring and arms flung up
and I know it may lead to
a hasty hole in the ground

so to end in the form of a will
that it be known:
I rebelled
but I think this bloody knot
should be the very last one
a man freeing himself
should tear loose

which does not exist
from polar space
from the stern reveries of the inner eye
a chair

beautiful and useless
like a cathedral in the wilderness

place on the chair
a crumpled tablecloth
add to the idea of order
the idea of adventure

let it be a confession of faith
before the vertical struggling with the horizontal

let it be
quieter than angels
prouder than kings
more substantial than a whale
let it have the face of the last things

we ask reveal o chair
the depths of the inner eye
the iris of necessity
the pupil of death

PEBBLE

The pebble
is a perfect creature

equal to itself
mindful of its limits

filled exactly
with a pebbly meaning

with a scent which does not remind one of anything
does not frighten anything away does not arouse desire

its ardor and coldness
are just and full of dignity

I feel a heavy remorse
when I hold it in my hand
and its noble body
is permeated by false warmth

—Pebbles cannot be tamed
to the end they will look at us
with a calm and very clear eye

MR COGITO STUDIES HIS FACE IN
THE MIRROR

Who wrote our faces chicken pox for sure
marking its o's with a calligraphic pen
but who bestowed on me my double chin
what glutton was it when my whole soul
yearned for austerity why are my eyes
set so closely together it was him not me
waiting in the scrub for the Vened invasion
the ears that protrude two fleshy seashells
no doubt left me by an ancestor who strained for an echo
of the thunderous march of mammoths across the steppes

the forehead not too high it doesn't think very much
—women gold land don't get knocked off your horse
a prince did their thinking for them and a wind bore them along
they tore at walls with their bare fingers and with a sudden cry
fell into the void only to return in me

but didn't I go shopping in art salons
for powders potions masks
the cosmetics of nobility
I held marble up to my eyes Veronese's greens
I rubbed my ears with Mozart
I trained my nostrils on the musk of old books

in the mirror the face I inherited
a sack of old meats fermenting
medieval cravings and sins
paleolithic hunger and terror
an apple falls not far from the tree
the body is locked into the chain of species

that's how I lost the tournament with my face

WAWEL

To Jerzy Turowicz

He who likened you to a marble edifice
surely had a patriotic cataract in his eye

O Pericles
your column must be embarrassed
a simple shadow warheads' pomp
the harmony of outstretched arms

and here's a comic brick farrago
a royal apple of the Renaissance
in a setting of Austrian barracks

maybe only at night in a fever
in a frenzy of woe a barbarian
who from crosses and gallows
learned how mass is balanced

and maybe only under a moon
when the angels leave the altar
to ride roughshod over dreams

and only then
—an Acropolis

An Acropolis for the dispossessed
and mercy mercy for those who lie

A PARABLE OF KING MIDAS

At last golden deer
quietly sleep in the glades

and mountain goats as well
their heads on a stone

aurochs unicorns squirrels
in general all game
predatory or gentle
and also all birds

KING MIDAS DOES NOT HUNT

once he got it into his head
to lay his hands on a Silenus

Three days he chased him
till at last he caught him
hit him with his fist
between the eyes and asked:
—what is best for man?

The Silenus neighed
and said:
—to be nothing
—to die

King Midas returns to his palace
but gets no pleasure from the heart of a wise Silenus
stewed in wine
he paces pulls at his beard
and asks old men
—how many days does the ant live
—why does the dog howl before a death
—how high would a mountain be

Message II

Long since the years
letters songs Mantras
eyes apartments bellies
kissed and gray bridges
walked across in mist
Now your brother's Welfare's
paid by State now Lafcadio's
home with Mama, now you're
in NY beds with big poetic
girls & go picket on the street

I clang my finger-cymbals in Havana, I lie
with teenage boys afraid of the red police,
I jack off in Cuban modern bathrooms, I ascend
over blue oceans in a jet plane, the mist hides
the black synagogue, I will look for the Golem,
I hide under the clock near my hotel, it's intermission
for Tales of Hoffmann, nostalgia for the 19th century
rides through my heart like the music of The Moldau,
I'm still alone with long black beard and shining eyes
walking down black smoky tramcar streets at night
past royal muscular statues on an old stone bridge,
Over the river again today in Breughel's wintry city,
the snow is white on all the rooftops of Prague,
Salute beloved comrade I'll send you my tears from Moscow.

March 1965

Big Beat

The *Olympics* have descended into
red velvet basement
theaters of Centrum
long long hair over skeleton boys
thin black ties, pale handsome
cheeks—and screams and screams,
Orchestra mob ecstasy rising from
this new generation of buttocks and eyes
and tender nipples
Because the body moves again, the
body dances again, the body
sings again
the body screams new-born after
War, infants cursed with secret cold
jail deaths of the Fifties—Now
girls with new breasts and striplings
wearing soft golden puberty hair—
1000 voices scream five minutes long
clapping thousand handed in great ancient measure
saluting the Meat God of XX Century
that moves thru the theater like the
secret rhythm of the belly in
Orgasm
Kalki! Apocalypse Christ! Maitreya! grim
Chronos weeps
tired into the saxophone,
The Earth is Saved! Next number!
SHE'S A WOMAN
Electric guitar red bells!
and Ganymede emerges stomping
his feet for Joy on the stage
and bows to the ground, and weeping, GIVES.
Oh the power of the God on his throne
constantly surrounded by white drums
right hand Sceptered beating brass cymbals!

Prague, March 11, 1965

Café in Warsaw

These spectres resting on plastic stools
leather-gloved spectres flitting thru the coffeeshouse one hour
spectre girls with scarred faces, black stockings thin eyebrows
spectre boys blond hair combed neat over the skull little chin beards
new spectres talking intensely crowded together over black shiny tables late
afternoon
the sad soprano of history chanting thru a hi-fidelity loudspeaker
—perspective walls & windows 18th century down New World Avenue to
Sigmund III column'd
sword upraised watching over Polish youth 3 centuries—
O Polish spectres what've you suffered since Chopin wept into his romantic
piano
old buildings rubbled down, gaiety of all night parties under the air bombs,
first screams of the vanishing ghetto—Workmen step thru prewar pink-blue
bedroom walls demolishing sunny ruins—
Now spectres gather to kiss hands, girls kiss lip to lip, red witch-hair from
Paris
& fine gold watches—to sit by the yellow wall with a large brown brief-
case—
to smoke three cigarettes with thin black ties and nod heads over a new
movie—
Spectres Christ and your bodies be with you for this hour while you're
young
in postwar heaven stained with the sweat of Communism, your loves and
your white smooth cheekskin soft in the glance of each other's eye.
O spectres how beautiful your calm shaven faces, your pale lipstick scarves,
your delicate heels,
how beautiful your absent gaze, legs crossed alone at table with long
eyelashes,
how beautiful your patient love together sitting reading the art journals—
how beautiful your entrance thru the velvet-curtained door, laughing into
the overcrowded room,
how you wait in your hats, measure the faces, and turn and depart for an
hour,
or meditate at the bar, waiting for the slow waitress to prepare red hot tea,
minute by minute
standing still as hours ring in churchbells, as years pass and you will remain
in Nowy Swiat,

how beautiful you press your lips together, sigh forth smoke from your
mouth, rub your hands
or lean together laughing to notice this wild haired madman who sits weep-
ing among you a stranger.

April 10, 1965

The Moments Return

a thousand sunsets behind tramcar wires in open skies of Warsaw
Palace of Culture chinese peaks blacken against the orange-clouded horizon—
an iron trolley rolling insect antennae sparks blue overhead, hat man limping
past rusty apartment walls—
Christ under white satin gleam in chapels—trembling fingers on the long
rosary—awaiting resurrection
Old red fat Jáček mortal in Florida—tears in black eyelash, Bach's farewell to
the Cross—
That was 24 years ago on a scratchy phonograph Sebastian Sampas bid adieu
to earth—
I stopped on the pavement to remember the Warsaw Concerto, hollow sad
pianos crashing like bombs, celestial tune
in a kitchen in Ozone Park—It all came true in the sunset on a deserted
street—
And I have nothing to do this evening but walk in a fur coat on the cool gray
avenue years later, a melancholy man alone—
the music fading to another universe—the moments return—reverberations
of taxicabs arriving at a park bench—
My beard is misery, no language to these young eyes—that I remember
myself naked in my earliest dream—
now sat by the car-crossing rueful of the bald front of my skull and the gray
sign of time in my beard—
headache or dancing exhaustion or dysentery in Moscow or vomit in New
York—
Oh—the Metropol Hotel is built—crowds waiting on traffic islands under
streetlamp—the cry of tramcars on Jerusalemski—
Roof towers flash Red State—the vast stone avenue hung with yellow bulbs
—stop lights blink, long trolleys grind to rest, motorcycles pass ex-
ploding—
The poem returns to the moment, my vow to record—my cold fingers—&
must sit and wait for my own lone Presence—the first psalm—
I also return to myself, the moment and I are one man on a park bench on
a crowded streetcorner in Warsaw—
I breathe and sigh—*Give up desire for children* the bony-faced white bearded
Guru said in Benares—am I ready to die?
or a voice at my side on the bench, a gentle question—worn young man's
face under pearl gray hat—
Alas, all I can say is "No Panamay"—I can't speak.

Easter Sunday, April 18, 1965

Kral Majales

And the Communists have nothing to offer but fat cheeks and eyeglasses and
lying policemen
and the Capitalists proffer Napalm and money in green suitcases to the
Naked,
and the Communists create heavy industry but the heart is also heavy
and the beautiful engineers are all dead, the secret technicians conspire for
their own glamour
in the Future, in the Future, but now drink vodka and lament the Security
Forces,
and the Capitalists drink gin and whiskey on airplanes but let Indian brown
millions starve
and when Communist and Capitalist assholes tangle the Just man is arrested
or robbed or had his head cut off,
but not like Kabir, and the cigarette cough of the Just man above the clouds
in the bright sunshine is a salute to the health of the blue sky.
For I was arrested thrice in Prague, once for singing drunk on Narodni
street,
once knocked down on the midnight pavement by a mustached agent who
screamed out BOUZERANT,
once for losing my notebooks of unusual sex politics dream opinions,
and I was sent from Havana by plane by detectives in green uniform,
and I was sent from Prague by plane by detectives in Czechoslovakian
business suits,
Cardplayers out of Cézanne, the two strange dolls that entered Joseph K's
room at morn
also entered mine, and ate at my table, and examined my scribbles,
and followed me night and morn from the houses of lovers to the cafés of
Centrum—
And I am the King of May, which is the power of sexual youth,
and I am the King of May, which is industry in eloquence and action in
amour,
and I am the King of May, which is long hair of Adam and the Beard of my
own body
and I am the King of May, which is Kral Majales in the Czechoslovakian
tongue,
and I am the King of May, which is old Human poesy, and 100,000 people
chose my name,
and I am the King of May, and in a few minutes I will land at London
Airport,

and I am the King of May, naturally, for I am of Slavic parentage and a Buddhist Jew
 who worships the Sacred Heart of Christ the blue body of Krishna the straight back of Ram
 the beads of Chango the Nigerian singing Shiva Shiva in a manner which I have invented,
 and the King of May is a middleeuropean honor, mine in the XX century despite space ships and the Time Machine, because I heard the voice of Blake in a vision,
 and repeat that voice. And I am King of May that sleeps with teenagers laughing.
 And I am the King of May, that I may be expelled from my Kingdom with Honor, as of old,
 To show the difference between Caesar's Kingdom and the Kingdom of the May of Man—
 and I am the King of May, tho' paranoid, for the Kingdom of May is too beautiful to last for more than a month—
 and I am the King of May because I touched my finger to my forehead saluting
 a luminous heavy girl trembling hands who said "one moment Mr. Ginsberg"
 before a fat young Plainclothesman stepped between our bodies—I was going to England—
 and I am the King of May, returning to see Bunhill Fields and walk on Hampstead Heath,
 and I am the King of May, in a giant jetplane touching Albion's airfield trembling in fear
 as the plane roars to a landing on the gray concrete, shakes & expels air,
 and rolls slowly to a stop under the clouds with part of blue heaven still visible.
 And *tho'* I am the King of May, the Marxists have beat me upon the street, kept me up all night in Police Station, followed me thru Springtime Prague, detained me in secret and deported me from our kingdom by airplane.
 Thus I have written this poem on a jet seat in mid Heaven.

May 7, 1965



Robert Lowell

KRAL MAJALES

And the Communists have nothing to offer but fat cheeks and eyeglasses and lying policemen
 and the Capitalists proffer Napalm and money in green suitcases to the Naked,
 and the Communists create heavy industry but the heart is also heavy
 and the beautiful engineers are all dead, the secret technicians conspire for their own glamor
 in the Future, in the Future, but now drink vodka and lament the Security Forces,
 and the Capitalists drink gin and whiskey on airplanes but let Indian brown millions starve
 and when Communist and Capitalist assholes tangle the just man is arrested or robbed or had his head cut off,
 but not like Kabir, and the cigarette cough of the just man above the clouds
 in the bright sunshine is a salute to the health of the blue sky.
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 once knocked down on the midnight pavement by a mustached agent who screamed out: *BOUZERANT*,
 once for losing my notebooks of unusual sex politics dream opinions, and I was sent from Havana by plane by detectives in green uniform,
 and I was sent from Prague by plane by detectives in Czechoslovakian business suits,
 Cardplayers out of Casazne, the two strange dolls that entered Joseph K's room at noon
 also entered mine, and ate at my table, and examined my scribbles, and followed me night and morn from the houses of lovers to the cafes of Centrum—
 And I am the King of May, which is the power of sexual youth, and I am the King of May, which is industry in eloquence and action in amour,
 and I am the King of May, which is long hair of Adam and the Beard of my own body
 and I am the King of May, which is Kral Majales in the Czechoslovakian tongue,
 and I am the King of May, which is old Human poetry, and 100,000 people chose my name,
 and I am the King of May, and in a few minutes I will land at London Airport,
 and I am the King of May, naturally, for I am of Slavic parentage and a Buddhist Jew
 who worships the Sacred Heart of Christ the blue body of Krishna the straight back of Ram
 The Beads of Chango the Nigerian singing Shiva Shiva in a manner which I have invented,
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May 7, 1965

Allen Ginsberg

0922



The Mouth of the Hudson

(FOR ESTHER BROOKS)

A single man stands like a bird-watcher,
and scuffles the pepper and salt snow
from a discarded, gray
Westinghouse Electric cable drum.
He cannot discover America by counting
the chains of condemned freight-trains
from thirty states. They jolt and jar
and junk in the siding below him.
He has trouble with his balance.
His eyes drop,
and he drifts with the wild ice
ticking seaward down the Hudson,
like the blank sides of a jig-saw puzzle.

The ice ticks seaward like a clock.
A Negro toasts
wheat-seeds over the coke-fumes
of a punctured barrel.
Chemical air
sweeps in from New Jersey,
and smells of coffee.

Across the river,
ledges of suburban factories tan
in the sulphur-yellow sun
of the unforgivable landscape.

Fall 1961

Back and forth, back and forth
goes the tock, tock, tock
of the orange, bland, ambassadorial
face of the moon
on the grandfather clock.

All autumn, the chafe and jar
of nuclear war;
we have talked our extinction to death.
I swim like a minnow
behind my studio window.

Our end drifts nearer,
the moon lifts,
radiant with terror.
The state
is a diver under a glass bell.

A father's no shield
for his child.
We are like a lot of wild
spiders crying together,
but without tears.

Nature holds up a mirror.
One swallow makes a summer.
It's easy to tick
off the minutes,
but the clockhands stick.

Back and forth!
Back and forth, back and forth—
my one point of rest
is the orange and black
oriole's swinging nest!

July in Washington

The stiff spokes of this wheel
touch the sore spots of the earth.

On the Potomac, swan-white
power launches keep breasting the sulphurous wave.

Otters slide and dive and slick back their hair,
raccoons clean their meat in the creek.

On the circles, green statues ride like South American
liberators above the breeding vegetation—

prongs and spearheads of some equatorial
backland that will inherit the globe.

The elect, the elected . . . they come here bright as dimes,
and die dishevelled and soft.

We cannot name their names, or number their dates—
circle on circle, like rings on a tree—

but we wish the river had another shore,
some further range of delectable mountains,

distant hills powdered blue as a girl's eyelid.
It seems the least little shove would land us there,

that only the slightest repugnance of our bodies
we no longer control could drag us back.

Buenos Aires

In my room at the Hotel Continental
a thousand miles from nowhere,
I heard
the bulky, beefy breathing of the herds.

Cattle furnished my new clothes:
my coat of limp, chestnut-colored suede,
my sharp shoes
that hurt my toes.

A false fin de siècle decorum
snored over Buenos Aires
lost in the pampas
and run by the barracks.

All day I read about newspaper coups d'état
of the leaden, internecine generals—
lumps of dough on the chessboard—and never saw
their countermarching tanks.

Along the sunlit cypress walks
of the Republican martyrs' graveyard,
hundreds of one-room Roman temples
hugged their neo-classical catafalques.

Literal commemorative busts
preserved the frogged coats
and fussy, furrowed foreheads
of those soldier bureaucrats.

By their brazen doors
a hundred marble goddesses
wept like willows. I found rest
by cupping a soft palm to each hard breast.

I. Waking Early Sunday Morning

O to break loose, like the chinook
salmon jumping and falling back,
nosing up to the impossible
stone and bone-crushing waterfall—
raw-jawed, weak-fleshed there, stopped by ten
steps of the roaring ladder, and then
to clear the top on the last try,
alive enough to spawn and die.

Stop, back off. The salmon breaks
water, and now my body wakes
to feel the unpolluted joy
and criminal leisure of a boy—
no rainbow smashing a dry fly
in the white run is free as I,
here squatting like a dragon on
tune's hoard before the day's begun!

Vermin run for their unstopped holes;
in some dark nook a fieldmouse rolls
a marble, hours on end, then stops;
the termite in the woodwork sleeps—
listen, the creatures of the night
obsessive, casual, sure of foot,
go on grinding, while the sun's
daily remorseful blackout dawns.

Fierce, fireless mind, running downhill.
Look up and see the harbor fill:
business as usual in eclipse
goes down to the sea in ships—
wake of refuse, dacron rope,
bound for Bermuda or Good Hope,
all bright before the morning watch
the wine-dark hulls of yawl and ketch.

I watch a glass of water wet
with a fine fuzz of icy sweat,
silvery colors touched with sky,
serene in their neutrality—
yet if I shift, or change my mood,
I see some object made of wood,
background behind it of brown grain,
to darken it, but not to stain.

O that the spirit could remain
tinged but untarnished by its strain!
Better dressed and stacking birch,
or lost with the Faithful at Church—
anywhere, but somewhere else!
And now the new electric bells,
clearly chiming, "Faith of our fathers,"
and now the congregation gathers.

O Bible chopped and crucified
in hymns we hear but do not read,
none of the milder subtleties
of grace or art will sweeten these
stiff quatrains shovelled out four-square—
they sing of peace, and preach despair;
yet they gave darkness some control,
and left a loophole for the soul.

No, put old clothes on, and explore
the corners of the woodshed for
its dregs and dreck: tools with no handle,
ten candle-ends not worth a candle,
old lumber banished from the Temple,
damned by Paul's precept and example,
cast from the kingdom, banned in Israel,
the wordless sign, the tinkling cymbal.

When will we see Him face to face?
Each day, He shines through darker glass.
In this small town where everything

is known, I see His vanishing
emblems, His white spire and flag-
pole sticking out above the fog,
like old white china doorknobs, sad,
slight, useless things to calm the mad.

Hammering military splendor,
top-heavy Goliath in full armor—
little redemption in the mass
liquidations of their brass,
elephant and phalanx moving
with the times and still improving,
when that kingdom hit the crash:
a million foreskins stacked like trash . . .

Sing softer! But what if a new
diminuendo brings no true
tenderness, only restlessness,
excess, the hunger for success,
sanity of self-deception
fixed and kicked by reckless caution,
while we listen to the bells—
anywhere, but somewhere else!

O to break loose. All life's grandeur
is something with a girl in summer . . .
elated as the President
girdled by his establishment
this Sunday morning, free to chaff
his own thoughts with his bear-cuffed staff,
swimming nude, unbuttoned, sick
of his ghost-written rhetoric!

No weekends for the gods now. Wars
flicker, earth licks its open sores,
fresh breakage, fresh promotions, chance
assassinations, no advance.
Only man thinning out his kind
sounds through the Sabbath noon, the blind

swipe of the pruner and his knife
busy about the tree of life . . .

Pity the planet, all joy gone
from this sweet volcanic cone;
peace to our children when they fall
in small war on the heels of small
war—until the end of time
to police the earth, a ghost
orbiting forever lost
in our monotonous sublime.

2. Fourth of July in Maine

[FOR HARRIET WINSLOW]

Another summer! Our Independence
Day Parade, all innocence
of children's costumes, helps resist
the communist and socialist.
Five nations: Dutch, French, Englishmen,
Indians, and we, who held Castine,
rise from their graves in combat gear—
world-losers elsewhere, conquerors here!

Civil Rights clergy face again
the scions of the good old strain,
the poor who always must remain
poor and Republicans in Maine,
upholders of the American Dream,
who will not sink and cannot swim—
Emersonian self-reliance,
lethargy of Russian peasants!

High noon. Each child has won his blue,
red, yellow ribbon, and our statue,
a dandyish Union Soldier, sees
his fields reclaimed by views and spruce—
he seems a convert to old age,
small, callous, elbowed off the stage,
while the canned martial music fades
from scene and green—no more parades!

Blue twinges of mortality
remind us the theocracy
drove in its stakes here to command
the infinite, and gave this land
a ministry that would have made
short work of Christ, the Son of God,
and then exchanged His crucifix,
hardly our sign, for politics.

Liberty and Revolution, Buenos Aires

At the *Hotel Continental* I always
heard the bulky, beefy, breathing herd.
I had bought a cow suit and matching chestnut
flatter pointed shoes that hurt my toes.
That day cast the light of the next world: the bellow
of Juan Peron, the schoolgirls' Don Giovanni—
frowning starch-collared crowds, a *coup d'état*—
I missed it—of the leaden internecine soldier,
the lump of dough on the chessboard. . . . By darkening cypress,
the Republican martyrs lie in Roman temples;
marble goddesses calm each Liberal hero
still pale from the great kiss of Liberty. . . .
All night till my shoes were bloody—I found rest
cupping my soft palm to her stone breast.

Statue of Liberty

I like you like trees . . . you make me lift my eyes—
the treasonable bulge behind your iron toga,
the thrilling, chilling silver of your laugh,
the hysterical digging of your accursed spur,
Amazon, gazing on me, pop-eyed, cool,
ageless, not holding back your war-whoop—no chicken,
still game for swimming bare-ass with the boys.
You catch the frenetic spotlight we sling about
your lighthouse promontory, flights an inch
from combustion and the drab of ash. . . .
While youth lasts your flesh is never fallen—
high above our perishable flesh,
the icy foamrubber waterfall stands firm
metal, pear-pointing to eternity.

Can a Plucked Bird Live?

From the first cave, the first farm, the first cage,
inalienable the human right to kill—
“You must get used,” they say, “to seeing guns,
to using guns.” Guns too are mortal. Guns
failed Che Guevara, Marie Antoinette,
Leon Trotsky, the children of the Tsar—
chivalrous ornaments to power. Tom Paine said
Burke pitied the plumage and forgot the dying bird.
Arms given the people are always used against the people—
a dolphin of spirit poking up its snout
into the red steam of that limitless daybreak
would breathe the intoxication of Rimbaud. . . .
Are there guns that will not kill the possessor?
Our raised hands—fear made wise by anger.

The March I

(FOR DWIGHT MACDONALD)

Under the too white marmoreal Lincoln Memorial,
the too tall marmoreal Washington Obelisk,
gazing into the too long reflecting pool,
the reddish trees, the withering autumn sky,
the remorseless, amplified harangues for peace—
lovely to lock arms, to march absurdly locked
(unlocking to keep my wet glasses from slipping)
to see the cigarette match quaking in my fingers,
then to step off like green Union Army recruits
for the first Bull Run, sped by photographers,
the notables, the girls . . . fear, glory, chaos, rout . . .
our green army staggered out on the miles-long green fields,
met by the other army, the Martian, the ape, the hero,
his new-fangled rifle, his green new steel helmet.

The March 2

Where two or three were flung together, or fifty,
mostly white-haired, or bald, or women . . . sadly
unfit to follow their dream, I sat in the sunset
shade of our Bastille, the Pentagon,
nursing leg- and arch-cramps, my cowardly,
foolhardy heart; and heard, alas, more speeches,
though the words took heart now to show how weak
we were, and right. An MP sergeant kept
repeating, "March slowly through them. Don't even brush
anyone sitting down." They tiptoed through us
in single file, and then their second wave
trampled us flat and back. Health to those who held,
health to the green steel head . . . to your kind hands
that helped me stagger to my feet, and flee.

Pacification of Columbia

Great dome, small domes or turbans, a child's blue sky,
exhalations of the desert sand—
my old jigsawpuzzle Mosque of Mecca
flung to vaultless consummation and consumed
by Allah—but the puzzle had no message. . . .
The destructive element emaciates
Columbia this Mayday afternoon;
the thickened buildings look like painted buildings,
Raphael's colossal classic sags on the canvas.
Horses, higher artistic types than their masters,
forage Broadway's median trees, as if
nature were liberation . . . the blue police
chew soundlessly by the burnished, nervous hides,
as if they'd learned to meet together in reason.

The Restoration

The old king enters his study with the police;
it's much like mine left in my hands a month:
unopened letters, the thousand dead cigarettes,
open books, yogurt cups in the unmade bed—
the old king enters his study with the police,
but all in all his study is much worse than mine;
an edge of malice shows the thumb of man:
frames smashed, their honorary honours lost,
all his unopened letters have been answered.
He halts at woman-things that can't be his,
and says, "To think that human beings did this!"
The sergeant picks up a defiled *White Goddess*,
or the old king's offprints on ideograms,
"Would a human beings do this things to these book?"

Leader of the Left

Though justice ascribe it to his blind ambition,
and blinder courage (both sowed their dirty germs)
not some ostracizing glandular imbalance—
the miracle of poverty opened his eyes;
his whole face took on a flesh of wood,
a slab of raw plastic grafted to his one
natural feature, scars from demonstrations
borne like a Heidelberg student for the New Left. . . .
His voice, electric, only burns low current;
by now he's bypassed sense and even eloquence—
without listening, his audience believe;
anticipating his sentence, they accept
the predestined poignance of his murder,
his Machiavellian Utopia of pure nerve.

Flaw

(Flying to Chicago)

My old eye-flaw sprouting bits and strings
gliding like dragon-kites in the Midwestern sky—
I am afraid to look closely, and count them;
today I am exhausted and afraid.
I look through the window at unbroken white cloud,
and see in it my many flaws are one,
a flaw with a tail the color of shed skin,
inaudible rattle of the rattler's disks.
God is design, even our ugliness
is the goodness of his will. It gives me warning,
the first scrape of the Thunderer's fingernail. . . .
Faust's soul-sale was perhaps to leave the earth,
yet death is sweeter, weariness almost lets
me taste its sweetness none will ever taste.

After the Democratic Convention

Life, hope, they conquer death, generally, always;
and if the steamroller goes over the flower, the flower dies.
Some are more solid earth; they stood in lines,
blouse and helmet, a creamy de luxe sky-blue—
their music savage and ephemeral.
After five nights of Chicago: police and mob,
I am so tired and had, clichés are wisdom,
the clichés of paranoia. . . . Home in Maine,
the fall of the high tide waves is a straggling, joshing
mell of police . . . they're on the march for me. . . .
How slender and graceful, the double line of trees,
slender, graceful, irregular and underweight,
the young in black folk-fire circles below the trees—
under their shadow, the green grass turns to hay.

From Prague 1968

Once between 6 and 7 a.m. at Harvard, we counted
ten jets, or maybe forty, one thunder-rivet
no one could sleep through, though many will.
In Prague on the eve of the *Liberation*, you woke
to the Russian troop-planes landing, chain on anvil,
and thought you were back at Harvard. I wish you were,
up and out on our tramp through the one museum.
You thought the best paintings between the Sieneese
and Haitians were photographs. We've kept
up flirting since the fall of Harry Truman.
Even an old fool is flattered by an old girl,
tights, shoes, shirts, pinkthings, blackthings, my watch, your bra,
untidy exposures that cannot clash. . . . We lay,
talking without any need to say.

Election Night

Election Night, last night's Election Night,
without drinks, television or my friend—
today I wore my blue knitted tie to class.
No one understood that blue meant black. . . .
My daughter telephones me from New York,
she talks *New Statesman*, "Then you are a cop-out. Isn't
not voting Humphrey a vote for Nixon and Wallace?"
And I, "Not voting Nixon is my vote for Humphrey."
It's funny-awkward; I don't come off too well;
"You mustn't tease me, they clubbed McCarthy's pressroom."
We must rouse our broken forces and save the country:
I even said this in public. The beaten player
opens his wounds and hungers for the blood-feud
hidden like contraband and loved like whisky.

Women, Children, Babies, Cows, Cats

"It was at My Lai or Sonmy or something,
it was this afternoon. . . . We had these orders,
we had all night to think about it—
we was to burn and kill, then there'd be nothing
standing, women, children, babies, cows, cats. . . .
As soon as we hopped the choppers, we started shooting.
I remember . . . as we was coming up upon one area
in Pinkville, a man with a gun . . . running—this lady . . .
Lieutenant LaGuerre said, 'Shoot her.' I said,
'You shoot her, I don't want to shoot no lady.'
She had one foot in the door. . . . When I turned her,
there was this little one-month-year-old baby
I thought was her gun. It kind of cracked me up."

Identification in Belfast

I.R.A. Bombing

The British Army now carries two rifles,
one with rubber rabbit-pellets for children,
the other's of course for the Provisionals. . . .
"When they first showed me the boy, I thought oh good,
it's not him because he is a blond—
I imagine his hair was singed dark by the bomb.
He had nothing on him to identify him,
except this box of joke trick matches;
he liked to have then on him, even at mass.
The police were unhurried and wonderful,
they let me go on trying to strike a match . . .
I just wouldn't stop—you cling to anything—
I couldn't believe I couldn't light one match—
only joke-matches. . . . Then I knew he was Richard."

Non-Violent

Honor . . . somehow our age has casually lost it;
but in the sick days of the code duello,
any quick killer could have called us out—
a million died in the Spanish war, ninetenths murdered—
viva la guerra, viva la muerte!
Could one be Christian and non-violent?
As boys, we never hoped to dig to China;
in the war, our unnegotiable few fell
the first to die for the unnegotiable flag,
pluming as crusaders from left to right. . . .
To die in my war of words, the lung of infinitude;
past history is immobile in our committed hands . . .
till Death drops his white marble scythe—Brother,
one skeleton among our skeletons.

Sound Mind, Sound Body

Mens sana? O at last; from twenty years
annual mania, their chronic adolescence—
mens sana in corpore insano.
Will I reach three score ten, or drop
the work half through? Each new birthday is the last?
Death is final and a fly-by-night,
the dirty crown on a sound fingernail.
On healthy days, I fall asleep mid-chapter—
death made Attila die of a nosebleed
on the first night of his child-bride. I linger,
I sun without sweating, hear out the old,
live on the dirt of family chronicle.
The married swallows on my work-barn scent
my kindred weakness, dare swoop me from their nest.

Reluctance

Out through the fields and the woods
 And over the walls I have wended;
 I have climbed the hills of view
 And looked at the world, and descended;
 I have come by the highway home,
 And lo, it is ended.

The leaves are all dead on the ground,
 Save those that the oak is keeping
 To ravel them one by one
 And let them go scraping and creeping
 Out over the crusted snow,
 When others are sleeping.

And the dead leaves lie huddled and still,
 No longer blown hither and thither;
 The last lone aster is gone;
 The flowers of the witch-hazel wither;
 The heart is still aching to seek,
 But the feet question 'Whither?'

Ah, when to the heart of man
 Was it ever less than a treason
 To go with the drift of things,
 To yield with a grace to reason,
 And bow and accept the end
 Of a love or a season?

Loyalty

NORTH OF BOSTON

Mending Wall

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
 That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
 And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
 And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
 The work of hunters is another thing:
 I have come after them and made repair
 Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
 But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
 To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
 No one has seen them made or heard them made,
 But at spring mending-time we find them there.
 I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
 And on a day we meet to walk the line
 And set the wall between us once again.
 We keep the wall between us as we go.
 To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
 And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
 We have to use a spell to make them balance:
 'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'
 We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
 Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,
 One on a side. It comes to little more:
 There where it is we do not need the wall:
 He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
 My apple trees will never get across
 And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
 He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'
 Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
 If I could put a notion in his head:
 'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
 Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
 Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
 What I was walling in or walling out,

TWO OR MORE

The Gift Outright

The land was ours before we were the land's.
She was our land more than a hundred years
Before we were her people. She was ours
In Massachusetts, in Virginia,
But we were England's, still colonials,
Possessing what we still were unpossessed by,
Possessed by what we now no more possessed.
Something we were withholding made us weak
Until we found out that it was ourselves
We were withholding from our land of living,
And forthwith found salvation in surrender.
Such as we were we gave ourselves outright
(The deed of gift was many deeds of war)
To the land vaguely realizing westward,
But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced,
Such as she was, such as she would become.



like 2000?

TENOCHTITLAN

✓ *La Noche Triste*

TENOCHTITLAN.

Changed is the scene: the peace
And regal splendor which
Once that city knew are gone,
And war now reigns upon
That throng, who but
A week ago were all
Intent on joy supreme.
Cries of the wounded break
The stillness of the night,
Or challenge of the guard.
The Spaniard many days
Besieged within the place,
Where kings did rule of old,
Now pressed by hunger by
The all-relentless foe,
Looks for some channel of
Escape. The night is dark;
Black clouds obscure the sky—
A dead calm lies o'er all.
The heart of one is firm,
His mind is constant still,
To all, his word is law.
Cortes his plan hath made,
The time hath come. Each one
His chosen place now takes,
There waits the signal, that
Will start the long retreat.

THE FLIGHT.

Anon the cry comes down the line,
The portals wide are swung,
A long dark line moves out the gate,
And now the flight's begun.

Aye, cautiously it moves at first,
As ship steered o'er the reef,
Looking for danger all unseen,
But which may bring to grief.

Straight for the causeway now they make,
The bridge is borne before,
'Tis ta'en and placed across the flood,
And all go trooping o'er.

Yet e'er the other side is reached,
Wafted along the wind,
The rolling of the snake-skin drum
Comes floating from behind.

And scarcely has its rolling ceased,
Than out upon the lake,
Where all was silence just before,
A conch the calm doth break.

What terror to each heart it bears,
That sound of ill portent,
Each gunner to escape now looks,
On safety all are bent.

Forward they press in wild despair,
On to the next canal,
Held on all sides by foe and sea,
Like deer within corral.

Now surging this way, now in that,
The mass sways to and fro,
The infidel around it sweeps—
Slowly the night doth go.

A war cry soundeth through the night,
The 'tzin! the 'tzin! is there,
His plume nods wildly o'er the scene,
Oh, Spaniard, now beware!

With gaping jaws the cannon stands,
Points it among the horde;
The valiant Leon waits beside,
Ready with match and sword.

The 'tzin quick springeth to his side,
His mace he hurls on high,
It crasheth through the Spanish steel,
And Leon prone doth lie.

Falling, he died beneath his gun,—
He died at duty's call,
And many falling on that night,
Dying, so died they all.

The faithful guarders at the bridge,
Have worked with might and main,
Nor can they move it from its place,
Swollen by damp of rain.

On through the darkness comes the cry,
The cry that all is lost;
Then e'en Cortes takes up the shout,
And o'er the host 'tis tossed.

Some place their safety in the stream,
But sink beneath the tide,
E'en others crossing on the dead,
Thus reach the other side.

Surrounded and alone he sits,
Upon his faithful steed;
Here Alvarado clears a space,
But none might share the deed—

For darkness of that murky night
Hides deeds of brightest fame,
Which in the ages yet to come,
Would light the hero's name.

His faithful charger now hath fall'n,
Pierced to the very heart.
Quick steps he back, his war cry shouts,
Then onward doth he dart.

Runs he, and leaping high in air,
Fixed does he seem a space,
One instant and the deed is done,
He standeth face to face—

With those who on the other side
Their safety now have found.
The thirst for vengeance satisfied,
The Aztec wheels around.

So, as the sun climbs up the sky,
And shoots his dawning rays,
The foe, as parted by his dart,
Each go their sep'rate ways.

Upon the ground the dead men lie,
Trampled midst gold and gore,
The Aztec toward his temple goes,
For now the fight is o'er.

Follow we not the Spaniard more,
Wending o'er hill and plain,
Suffice to say he reached the coast,
Lost Fortune to regain.

The flame shines brightest e'er goes out,
Thus with the Aztec throne,
On that dark night before the end,
So o'er the fight it shone.

The Montezumas are no more,
Gone is their regal throne,
And freemen live, and rule, and die,
Where they have ruled alone.

1890

Song of the Wave

“Rolling, rolling, o'er the deep,
Sunken treasures neath me sleep
As I shoreward slowly sweep.

Onward peacefully I roll,
Ever thoughtless of the goal,
Sea-bells round me chime and toll.

There is peace above, below,
Far beneath me sea-weeds grow,
Tiny fish glide to and fro,

Now in sunlight, now in shade,
Lost within some ocean glade
By the restless waters made.

Pushing onward as before,
Now descry the distant shore,
Hear the breakers sullen roar;

Quicken then my rolling pace,
With glad heart I join the race
O'er the white-capp'd glittering space,

Thinking naught of woe or grief,
Dancing, prancing, like a leaf,
Caring not for cliff or reef.

Lo! black cliffs above me loom,
Casting o'er me awful gloom,
And fortell my coming doom.

O! that I might reach the land,
Reach and lave the sunny sand,
But these rocks on every hand—

It may be wine, but much more likely love—
 Possibly just well-being in the body,
 Or respite from the thought of rivalry.
 It's what my father must mean by departure,
 Freedom to flash off into wild connections.
 Once to have known it nothing else will do.
 Our days all pass awaiting its return.
 You must have read the famous valentine
 Pericles sent Aspasia in absentia:

*For God himself the height of feeling free
 Must have been his success in simile
 When at sight of you he thought of me.*

Let's see, where are we? Oh, we're in transition,
 Changing an old King for another old one.
 What an exciting age it is we live in—
 With all this talk about the hope of youth
 And nothing made of youth. Consider me,
 How totally ignored I seem to be.
 No one is nominating me for King.
 The headsman has Darius by the belt
 To lead him off the Asiatic way
 Into oblivion without a lawyer.
 But that is as Darius seems to want it.
 No fathoming the Asiatic mind.
 And father's in for what we ran away from.
 And superstition wins. He blames the stars,
 Aldebaran, Capella, Sirius,
 (As I remember they were summer stars
 The night we ran away from Ctesiphon)
 For looking on and not participating.
 (Why are we so resentful of detachment?)
 But don't tell me it wasn't his display
 Of more than royal attributes betrayed him.
 How hard it is to keep from being king
 When it's in you and in the situation.
 And that is half the trouble with the world
 (Or more than half I'm half inclined to say)."

*Lines Written in Dejection
 on the Eve of Great Success*

I once had a cow that jumped over the moon,
 Not on to the moon but over.
 I don't know what made her so lunar a loon;
 All she'd been having was clover.

That was back in the days of my godmother Goose.
 But though we are goosier now,
 And all tanked up with mineral juice,
 We haven't caught up with my cow.

POSTSCRIPT

But if over the moon I had wanted to go
 And had caught my cow by the tail,
 I'll bet she'd have made a melodious low
 And put her foot in the pail;

Than which there is no indignity worse.
 A cow did that once to a fellow
 Who rose from the milking stool with a curse
 And cried, "I'll larn you to bellow."

He couldn't lay hands on a pitchfork to hit her
 Or give her a stab of the tine,
 So he leapt on her hairy back and bit her
 Clear into her marrow spine.

No doubt she would have preferred the fork.
 She let out a howl of rage
 That was heard as far away as New York
 And made the papers' front page.

He answered her back, "Well, who begun it?"
 That's what at the end of a war
 We always say—not who won it,
 Or what it was foughten for.