

# *Running Grass*

*Peter Levitt*

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*Running Grass*

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*Poems 1970-1977*

*Peter Levitt*

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*Foreword by Robert Creeley*

*Eidolon Editions*

RUNNING GRASS

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*for Joanie*

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Peter Levitt tells a charmingly useful story of himself, to wit: He was one day walking the streets of Los Angeles, and a classic black heavy comes up to him and asks his help apropos the following. It seems a local bartender owed him some money but wouldn't pay off, so he figured that if Peter were to come with him, not get involved you understand, but just stand in the doorway where the man could see him, then he'd come across. So Peter, being of sympathetic disposition, accompanied his new friend to the bar, took his position at the door while the other went in to accost the bartender—and then, to his wonder, he sees him pull out a gun, point it at said person, and ask for all the money in the till. At which point Peter splits.

The point is, it truly takes a "willing suspension of disbelief", as Coleridge put it, to get into this world at all. It isn't just taking a chance, to see whether this or that will pay off, but climbing out on the proverbial limbs forever, no matter the cynical laughter of the very probable observers. Jesus, a *poet*, man? You got to be kidding. What do you do for real?

I was young once, like they say, and I've hardly forgotten what that all was like. Certainly *love*—of all that would stand still for it, and of the words

you could give them instead of the rent. There's a very close company between so-called con men and people of Mr. Levitt's and my disposition. I suppose the only difference is that they're trying to get out, while we are trying to get in. Again it's our wistful naivete that saves us.

It's a particular pleasure to be even this small part of this active demonstration of what poems can do. For example, consider the shopping list here turned to mantric power: *tomato sauce/ mushrooms/ and dog biscuits. . .* Or the melos of *let seeing, let/ sighing, empty/ persons filled/ with love,/ be enough, ever.* Or the whole damn world: *Landscape for Han-shan.*

Finally—because there's a definite Chinese edge here—consider Pound's translation of this Confucian analect (XVIII, 1.): "He said: Those who know aren't up to those who love; nor those who love, to those who delight in." Fair enough.

Robert Creeley  
Placitas, N.M.

RUNNING GRASS: combines two tao's of Chinese calligraphy

*"In the transformation of his mind the calligrapher borrows the brush."*

Yu Shih-nan  
7th cent. Taoist calligrapher

SHORT POEM IN SHADOW

There is a short poem in shadow.

Flowers,

    who lean back with grace  
against the wall, who  
wear a woman's name,  
call her Emily, it  
is a name a lover might call,  
flowers in his hand, his  
coat undone, arm  
reaching out, a hand, fist-  
ful of flowers, he  
lowers them like a light,  
or the way he dreams  
she'll look at them,  
upon the mantel. Flowers,  
that exist only in shadow  
on my wall. Flowers that are grey,  
charcoal flowers, flowers  
that will fade when the sun  
tilts its real head  
through my window. There  
is a short poem in shadow.

It is a poem that hides  
among weeds, waits  
for a young girl there,  
crying,  
    in the moon's light,  
    waits there for her,  
is the rock she will sit on,  
stone she will pick up,  
fondle, feel its cool smooth promise,  
and toss away. It  
is air that seems to be silent,  
light that reveals only  
one tear, one side of her face,  
it could be a horse,  
it could ride away with her,  
she could feel it galloping  
between her thighs, feel  
the sweat rise up in her,  
the lather, as she strains  
her neck back  
like a violin waiting  
the first touch of the bow,  
it is shadow. It is the cool  
veil of wind that winds itself  
around her legs, lets her feel

skin that is her own, gives  
her warmth, or dreams, a  
moist eye, heart  
broken like the field in which she rides,  
it is shadow, it is shadow,  
and there is a short poem in shadow.

"Me and my shadow,  
    strolling down the avenue....."

In childhood,  
    I learned that song,  
I sang of shadow beside my father  
in the car. In childhood,  
where there is light, I  
sang of shadow. It was an ancient  
wail I stole from candles,  
lit for the dead, while  
I watched them cast each thing  
against the wall. It lay coiled  
in the deep marks of my grandmother's  
eyes. It lay there like a dead child,  
like some dream of Russia she no longer  
recalled. It lay on the tables,  
it was candy. It lay on the chairs,

in the sound each foot made,  
in the distant drum each foot  
played on the carpeted stairs.

It was a foreign tongue, a  
hand that struck out with no warning,  
deep into my flesh, it was pride,  
it was confusion, it was a small  
dog in every corner of the room.  
Shadow of uncles, aunts and cousins.  
Shadow of mental institutions.  
Shadow of the Czar arriving in Brooklyn.  
And later, when I got older,  
shadow of friends smothered  
in their dreams, leaving  
only a shadow behind.  
There is such a short poem in shadow.  
I will not stop to tell it now.

## THE BUTTERFLY

The day's heart  
flew in, on  
wings of burnished,  
redwood color,  
with blue  
individual eyes like lace,  
as if the wings'  
outer edge, by  
nature, desired  
to see. I've seen  
myself in its motion,  
as the rich leaf  
of each wing  
closed, or  
trembling, opened,  
clinging to the wind-  
blown flower as  
I've held my lover, beneath  
the arms, her  
legs drawn up,  
and together,  
my body's full  
length on hers,

we made a butterfly,  
with softly arched spine  
an arc of pleasure. And  
in the moment between,  
wings no longer  
beating,  
but still,  
silent like a circle  
we've both  
entered into,  
the butterfly,  
leaf, myself  
and lover, holding  
each other in the gesture  
of not moving at all  
the sun a deep amber,  
man or woman  
creates an art,  
spinning  
out of oneself  
the clear thread  
of genius,  
call it, one  
may properly measure.  
So this butterfly,

whose body and wings  
are a human soul,  
drinking  
because he has to,  
the clear  
nectar of this  
pale, white flower,  
bell-shaped and  
dangling in the wind's  
constant change—  
let seeing, let  
sighing, empty  
persons filled  
with love,  
be enough, ever.

## HOW THE FOREST GROWS

for Douglas Carroll

Your foot

falls

not so lightly  
as the snow, tho  
at times I see it  
with one wild eye  
ranging over  
the ground. It  
creates the space,  
as we go, contains  
the sound  
of all beauty,  
as we follow  
the earth's curve  
in our shoes, through  
the white needled pine.  
The deer come  
and go, criss-  
crossing our path,  
one we choose,  
and follow. I  
feel like placing

a poem, one  
made in my hands  
of this air  
grown intimate with my face,  
one that is cold, creating  
a warmth within me  
like the hand  
my lover  
places quickly on my spine;  
I feel like placing  
a poem at the foot  
of each tree as  
we pass by. But  
instead, walk with my arms  
clothed in  
wool & leather, skin  
of another animal  
once native  
to the isolate beauty  
of this wood,  
and let the air  
feel my face, tangle  
my hair, as  
the silence  
flows through me like a tree,  
from under ground.

THERE MUST'VE BEEN A MILLION

But twenty bees,  
black & yellow  
jerseys

    like a hockey team  
on a Sunday bash,  
are devouring the speckled, rotting  
flesh of a pear,

        just  
fallen from the tree, say  
yesterday, day  
before maybe,  
two before that?

And boy are they busy.  
Busy as, well,  
you can imagine,  
busy as can be.

They're so busy  
I've stopped swinging in my hammock  
to watch them, thinking,  
may be, a real lesson in store.

Buzz, buzz, buzz,

Buzz, buzz, buzz.

“Don't sit under the apple tree,  
With anyone else but me.....”

Man, they're at it!  
Some already fat & lazy,  
laid out on their backs  
in the sun, little legs  
wiggling in the air.

Sweet and sassy.  
Feel like reaching over &  
giving their furry little bodies  
a rub. But unh unh.  
Just watch 'em nod.  
Some of 'em so slow,  
now, they're sleeping  
nuzzled in the pear.  
Sweet dreams.

Till another pear falls,  
suddenly. Crushing twenty bees.

Well, that's interesting.

I don't dare move.  
Or say a word.  
(To whom?)

And pretty soon, sure  
as shooting, sure  
as can be  
twenty bees are buzzing,  
twenty buzzin cousins,  
lovin and a huggin  
'neath the old. pear. tree.

## LANDSCAPE FOR HAN-SHAN

He laughs the impossible  
like stones rolling up a hill,  
and they laugh back at him  
rolling down, clouds  
bursting with laughter  
and birds, insects, the  
whole mountain visibly  
shaking, hills rolling with it,  
the world beyond hysterical,  
laughter transparent as hands,  
goddesses and gods thunderous in silent applause.

AIR

The wind chimes  
w/ cool incessant  
fingers at my door.  
I rise in the pale  
light and fling  
my heart open  
to the mountain air,  
which swirls the leaves  
of three copper peonies  
into a children's dance  
at the gate, and  
takes my breath away.

THE STONE THROWS A CHILD INTO THE WATER

1.

He tries to make stone  
or else  
    & this  
an equal occupation  
    clips a foxtrail  
to the thin nape  
                    of the wind  
and joins the long,  
    sloping river.

2.

Not the going  
or coming back   childhood gone  
    into imagination  
    but the return,  
                    splashing  
    clear as gills of riverfish  
into the mind's great lakes,  
                    eyes

3.

The cold      outside  
meeting deep piles of warmth  
within,      a skin  
growing human features,  
between      moving over the surface  
till goats sacrifice  
the clarity of their skins,

wearing gloves    hats  
in the presence of night,  
                                 stars

4.

The child was taken  
into the swirls,  
                         his head  
gone now,  
                         roots of trees  
embedded in his dreams,  
his tongue  
                         wet on one side,  
like a stone.

Epilogue

The stone selects a child,  
cuts him off  
                         from others,  
dull shine,  
                         hard  
in his hand,  
                         till he makes something,  
a cry,  
as he enters  
                         the water ?

THE WAVE

The young girl,  
whose skin was a brown  
smooth stone in the sun,  
whose body had not  
often been touched  
by a man's hand, or  
woman's,  
or the hands of age—

this young girl,  
stretched out on the sand  
like a wild bird  
drifting in air, un-  
concerned, or mindful,  
hardly aware of sea's  
sound, feeling it  
her own heart's echo,  
perhaps, or the moon's—

this girl whom sleep entered  
like a myth, or lover  
breathing the life of love  
into her bones,

whose eyes  
shone like the pale white  
dogwood flower in autumn,  
each blossom  
trembling on the bough,  
a perfect reflection of the moon—

curled into the cool  
sudden wave of beauty,  
which rose out of the sea  
without warning,  
and carried her away.

AT SEA

for Paul Culberg

I want to be here,  
in a place, a  
part, the children

at the water's edge,  
the car parked, house  
locked some distance

away. All of that  
behind me now.  
The sea's breeze

has brought a form  
through the haze  
of waves breaking

upon each other.  
She lies down  
with me, speaking

in a voice  
more  
of color, some

deep place, and  
moist, I had dreams  
of, but was shy

or hopeless of approaching.  
My eyes open, take in  
the large flat sky,

and another form,  
a runner, his  
hair curling

in the wake of motion  
his body makes,  
like the lovely ducks

bobbing in or out  
of sight, at  
the sea's knowing

repetition. I  
can't make out  
his expression, the

set line of mouth,

or the eyes, where  
are they looking?

But the sun's  
hard edge  
breaks in on me,

literally turns my head,  
and the children's  
voices, hard also,

in their return,  
make me long  
for the space, and color,

of that other form  
receding, I don't  
want to lose her,

almost rise, half  
sit up  
on an elbow,

and watch the boats,  
their sails, nodding  
in the wind, at sea.

## ONE DAY IN CALIFORNIA

The mirror reflects,  
thinks better  
of it, goes blank,

everything disappears.  
I don't love you  
anymore, there are no buses  
in the street, no people—

this is a poem called One Day in California Every-  
[thing Disappears

## AFTER MANY YEARS

I enter you  
not  
without some shyness  
or flutter, a  
rose  
straining upon its stem,  
toward the dark  
eye of the sun.

We make love in the daytime,  
the sound of birds,  
or some progeny,  
mingling with our sound,  
tangled like the hair  
and hands  
of our bodies.

It's a sweet life  
we give, each  
the other,  
filled with sharp cries,  
in the night,  
of love.

## THE HORSE WITH PATCHED BLOSSOMS

I want to stay outside  
where the moon is a banjo  
and the night zings  
along like some crazy hill

I can hear music in those trees.  
I can hear us fucking  
on the dark California ground.  
Our bodies are water,  
we flow in and out of ourselves.

Our children sleep in a quiet pond  
and dream of fishes their  
eyes shine in the morning  
They run like stars

We make love and our teeth are a thousand clouds  
Our brains flood with the sperm of memory  
The earth, soil, settles in beneath us,  
warm and comfortable in our form.  
We will die this way.

Our children will say:  
They lived well. Our people.

SONG: FOR A JEWISH POET

for Milton Kessler

A man with my face  
is looking at me. It's  
unbelievable. Another man  
with my nose. My lips.  
He could be kissing my wife.  
He could be driving  
through the Negev, dust  
rising like smoke into his nostrils,  
he could be looking for a place  
below the horizon, a place to drive,  
and he very well might turn to her,  
with my face, and who knows,  
he could be wearing the same  
short-sleeves, baggy trousers  
with a belt twisted through the loops  
like rope a fisherman might use,  
and he would kiss her. He might even  
stir up a little breeze she would find  
refreshing. And she'd look at my face,  
see the gardens sprouting there  
on such unlikely soil,  
and say I love you. And the almost  
six thousand years it took  
to finally have this vacation.

THE WILD

I had grown wild,  
and within me, a  
bird, whose wings  
and feathers  
spread out against the sky,  
the colors of dawn! My life  
had lifted, up  
and into that pattern  
of flight  
light makes,  
chiming among flowers,  
(flowers are bells,  
ringing with light).  
I had learned,  
to see,  
with the eye of a nightbird,  
to see ten thousand  
blades of grass swept  
beneath the shadow  
of my wing,  
my eye turned liquid,  
gold, as any medallion.  
I had pounded the shore,

my hair straight up,  
my breath, a  
white cloud sailing  
over the ocean, my  
mouth filled  
with wild laughter,  
and open. There  
was a brilliance  
that shone, teeth  
were pure, glistened,  
like ancient bits  
of crafted stone,  
they bit the air  
as I ran, flew  
by, with my heart  
the shape of lotus,  
with my hooves,  
a stallion. I  
can remember  
thinking, no thought  
at all, but the wind  
was my companion,  
it blew  
because I ran,  
and the sun, then,

warmed the beaches  
for all lost souls—  
there was a world,  
there, I saw,  
and love  
possible, one could  
make that world,  
there was a  
purpose,  
to all these hands.

SPRING

Spring, the rainsweet  
smell of lilac  
in city gardens,

wind chased  
back into the long  
tunnels of evening

by a thousand children's  
voices, the sky  
fading blue against

skyscrapers and  
lonely elms, a  
man with hurried

feet, a dog beside  
him, strolls now  
with a breezy crown

in his hair, hands  
tucked idly  
behind his back,

he watches a boy  
come along, listens,  
as if someone

close had whispered  
his name, into the cool  
tomb of night.

## NIGHTHAWK

Rain is endless,  
falling, on the wings  
of nighthawk,  
half-crazed  
& wheeling,  
wailing, at the sky.  
His cry is endless.  
His sorrow. I  
had thought to return,  
but stopped  
to watch this crazy  
bird, caught as I  
sometimes am  
by a made sound  
somewhere in the night.  
I could see, by  
the faint light,  
his body, wings  
arced slightly,  
as a bow  
not yet stretched  
to the imagination.  
I could see the rain,

then, as it spilled  
through the half-  
filled broken cup  
of the moon, each  
drop falling to earth,  
the fleeting birth of  
light, and sorrow.

It is to this,  
the flowers  
that now lie  
in their damp beds,  
petals crushed  
like the small dreams  
children make,  
while they are able....

It is to this,  
I come, and  
turn, my body,  
shoulders  
hunched up  
inside my coat,  
like any proper man  
in this constant shower,

the moon's light,  
now, streaming down my face.  
I think to return,  
go home, I  
think  
to leave this place,  
but turn again,  
as if rooted  
in this galaxy  
where the moon,  
and rain,  
uncover me,  
and see  
the nighthawk,  
still wailing  
at the sky. See,  
as finally  
he makes his break,  
light  
on his belly  
like a dagger,  
as he flies,  
enters,  
the heart of night.

## CAT'SEYE

The cat  
whose eyes  
are frozen amber  
in the night

with the door  
flung open  
the cat in fright

with the light  
the cat  
is still in sight

nothing moves

not the heart  
not the hand  
the girl whose  
white dress flutters in the wind

death is still a promise  
the poet never goes back on his word

## AUTUMN SONG

These flowers are not dead,  
and their shadow, in  
the small light Autumn  
allows, is still painted  
on the wall, still  
faintly seen as a dream  
which comes and goes  
at the opening, or  
shutting of an eye. Their  
perfume, like the moist  
translucent skin of a leaf  
at the birth of each summer  
morning, has not been shed,  
I hear no mythical, final  
cry of an owl at dawn.  
But I am afraid.  
The jasmine outside my window  
remains so still, as  
if the wind had nothing  
left to say, not a final  
breath for an old friend  
whose head nodded, or  
shook with laughter

in the wild face of rain.  
If it were an animal  
a small dog of the neighborhood  
who barked all summer long, or  
a child whose cry entered  
my dreams  
calling me now by day,  
I would not sit here, un-  
moved, silent and cold as lovers,  
a chill between us. But  
as I see the long brittle stem  
of these flowers reach  
out for me, see  
the gesture it makes  
against the coming season,  
each petal straining  
together, toward the bleak  
autumnal sun, I rise inside  
like the moon's frail body  
in water. It is I,  
who have died,  
and cruel,  
that the mind may grasp  
what the hand will never touch.

BOOKS BY DEAD MEN MAKE ME HUNGRY

I take two books up to the counter.  
One by Blackburn. Perkoff's  
the other. One by Stuart.  
One by Paul.

The guy at the counter says  
Did you know Stuart?  
& I say Yeah.  
He says I haven't seen him  
look like that in a long time  
and he points to the cover shot.  
I say Yeah, I know,  
I never did. He says  
He sure looks good  
& Yeah I say,  
not much else.

Both of these guys are dead.  
Both were barely forty.  
Paul got his tongue chewed out of his mouth.  
Stuart's back was eaten to the bone.

Paul and Stuart.  
Stuart and Paul.  
They almost sound like saints.  
St. Stuart.  
St. Paul.  
They could live in Minnesota.  
But they don't.

I say I spoke to you when Stuart died,  
I'm Peter Levitt.  
He says Hello Peter,  
and when he rings up the books  
he doesn't charge me tax.

I go home & Joanie reads to me from Blackburn.  
I pick up Stuart's book & return the favor.  
Together we read Stuart & Paul.

Paul & Stuart.  
Stuart & Paul.

Outside a car chokes, wheezes and dies.  
I get up and stir the spaghetti.  
It goes around. Around and round and round.  
Like Paul & Stuart. St. Stuart. St. Paul.

## THE SEED

The deep-green leafy flower  
grows in your body, spreads  
its wings wounded by light  
till you sing for darkness  
and welcome death as a star

## LOVE IS A STAR

Love is a star  
and you are a star;  
you are love and  
I see by you—

Love is a star  
with a broken wing,  
plum branch shaking  
in the wind, our song.

THE KISS

for Robert Creeley

Not to kiss,  
but lips  
placed closely

by the ear,  
a clear  
sense of what

went unheard,  
flying by. A  
bird, the soft

owlish feathers  
fanning a cove,  
a cave, in color.

This, and age-  
old possibility  
of some aunt

or other, wizened,  
her mouth  
filled with teeth

of insistent yearning,  
her lips  
cracked with all

such failure, in  
love, in life  
now passing.

The *sense* of it,  
the lovely, awful  
sense, and crime.

POEM

When we kiss  
it is a wound  
coming together, at last

SERENADE

Your breath sustains,  
floats  
like a moon,  
through my tangled  
half-lit, and  
sometimes haunted

mind. It grows  
as a fruit,  
borne on the long  
branch of your desire,  
flows there, like  
the fountain

your hair makes,  
down the pale,  
delicate  
crescent of your spine.  
I've heard it  
rush, or fall,

sweep through  
the silent trees,

their leaves  
spinning like golden  
cymbals  
in the sun. I've

slept to the whisper  
it made, constant  
by the sea,  
been grateful,  
of all, and slightly  
amazed,

that into my ear  
the clear bell  
of your life  
chose to serenade.

#### THE ORIENTALIST'S LOVER

I go out to see the moon.  
Not even bamboo chimes  
stir in the trees.  
When I return

Look at your hair!  
The wind has surely replaced me.

THE MANDOLIN

for David Raphaelson  
1946–1974

I'll never play the mandolin  
again; but cut the strings,  
as the old Chinese did, at  
the passing of a friend. And  
let its voice sing out! like a hollow bone of wind.

One may imagine, and one may not,  
the frail neck, the taut thin wires  
of its voice about to snap, even  
its brilliance flashing beneath  
a human touch. I have no use  
for the sensuous form, or  
the warm wooden glow as the fire's  
extended finger adds a tone  
to any present song. You are dying.  
I came home and they said he's dying.  
Your body is bent, they said, a  
constant bowed sculpture as you pour  
your stomach into the toilet. I  
don't want to hear the mandolin. I  
shined it, it's new, you said take it,  
the dust piles up, I have no use—

and then looked at me. It's just been  
lying around. It's just been lying.

David I don't know what to say to you.  
I'm not going to show you this poem,  
you're going to be dead and I don't know  
what to say. You got lousy teeth, they  
won't get any worse while you're dead.  
The mandolin. I put it near a flower  
but it won't grow. It hasn't got a chance.  
I thought I'd smash it, I'd throw it on the ground,  
I'd get my heavy boots and smash it.  
The strings would break, the body fall apart,  
the neck dangle like a stupid chicken  
with its nerves shot. It could  
make a final song, David. It could make a  
final song for me. Then I could say it's gone,  
the dust piles up and it's gone, we won't hear  
it goddamn crying in the night, and anyway,  
David, I'll never play the mandolin again.

I have a friend, he doesn't live anywhere.  
When he died I made a mountain disappear.  
I closed my eyes, it was gone, but my friend  
was still in my arms. I carried him in a blanket.

I walked to a food stand and laid him on the bench,  
there was a girl there, behind the counter, I  
asked for something to drink, a Coke, I do the same

[thing everyday.

When you die I'll just read this poem. The mandolin  
will live in silence, with the flower.

One day I'll awaken, the sun in the window,  
you know the scene, I'll get up and leave the house,  
close the door behind me, and you'll be gone.

4 bullets moving through time  
they have no names, they travel

## I GET UP OUT OF BOREDOM

and find a wound in my heart  
the shape of your finger, out-  
side heat cracks the sky  
into an ancient Chinese puzzle:

a piece of it falls through my window  
so I hide it quick in my closet thinking:  
Daybreak! T-Bone! Clitoral Ingenuity!  
When will they fix this leaky ceiling!

It must be true the stars conceal  
Silence. Hold it in their pointy  
glove like a coin. Orion's a goddamn  
Sleepwalker, I know! I keep his foot

in my toilet for rainy days.  
When you see him coming you better  
Watch Out! His dog carries the sky in his mouth,  
holding it like a plate of thunder.

When he drops it you better run!

## THE BROKEN RECORDING

melts  
into  
a  
simple  
needful  
loving  
leg tired mind perverse in clarity  
eyes soft as blue fur of sated wolves drinking  
peacefully at edge of deep inner streams lone  
deer racing through tall black bark of white pine forest  
it begins one man dipping his hands into the warm  
oxblood a libation among the silent fir it will return  
in kind friends living without ceilings in adobe hand-  
made houses in the mountains of New Mexico fingers  
stiff from packing mud smoothing it into walls  
to protect their children the way I caress my  
woman's spine to protect myself her blood  
rising to the thin surface of her skin warming my fingers  
fish darting beneath the lake's cracked sky of early winter frost  
the lake itself drawing in bound by snows of future loss  
I tremble penetrated is it by  
what rears so clearly before me or

comes  
up  
again  
behind

the line remains unbroken- it is  
umbilical from friend to friend, nourish-  
ment passes through as when lovers sleep  
with their bellies together though one is  
often far away

#### NORTHERN WIND

What wind is this  
scowling out of Liang?  
Only Bodhidharma  
crossing the Yangtse  
on a reed!

SOMETHING DIFFERENT

The rain falls  
articulate on the tin roof of the car;

Bim-bam, Tam-bam

little dents of conscious-  
ness, suchness

on the tin roof of the car.

I remember lying up there  
with a mushroom tattoo  
blazing at the sun

little dents of nothing-  
ness, sun spots

little discs of sun in my eyes  
little eyes, yes

my body warm & clean & open  
to a hot blade of sun,  
the perfect incision

but this is something different;  
this is little dents  
Bim-bam; suchness;  
I'd go home and think about it,  
and get wet, if I were not myself.

FOG

The soft wave  
rolls  
from the sea,  
  
its voice silent,  
calling  
out of the womb,  
  
warm like a  
curled  
bun on your neck:  
  
Come back! come  
home  
to me, dark  
  
is so lonely  
without  
you, clinging,  
  
the walls, this  
place  
aches, falls in,

the natural damp,  
moistness,  
the lips, all empty,

all gone. Light  
cuts  
in on me,

cuts you out.  
I  
had not thought,

nor you, but  
see  
you walking

up the hill,  
feet  
on the pavement,

slapping, no intention,  
rise  
over the slope,

your shoulders a  
deep  
red sunset sinking

into the ground.

## WALKING

tomato sauce  
mushrooms  
and dog biscuits

tomato sauce  
mushrooms  
and dog biscuits

tomato sauce  
mushrooms  
and dog biscuits

## A ROSE

The ladder of stitches smiling up  
your green behind and the tulip  
between your legs like a child  
beneath the Arc de Triomphe and  
I'd know you anywhere Aunt Rose

## RUNNING

The harmonica plays,  
is played. Lips  
surround it, a  
wind blows through  
its separate holes,  
a breathing, personal,

described, comes  
out as one, long  
statement of breath,  
each note a  
succulent  
berry, dripping

into mind's  
vast  
memory, running  
barefoot in  
thickets,  
a panther of some

kind, at your side,  
mother, or father,

a tiny child,  
perhaps, naked,  
calling  
through the trees:

Come home! bring  
yourself. Or,  
later, who is this  
woman beside me,  
her fingers  
playing wild numbers  
on my spine, and  
how did any of  
us, get here?

Time and  
time again

IN THE MIDDLE OF AN EXISTENTIAL CRISIS

I GROW STUPID

Can't get away from worms.  
If you cut a worm in half,  
In a green light, on a slide (?),  
Will it look like a green onion,  
A scallion? If you cut a scallion  
In half, no light in particular,  
Will the severed ends grow together,  
Or one, both possibly, grow a head?  
Does this have something to do with electricity?

PEARL

I wanted to hide,  
in a place  
where birds, shot  
through with terrible  
imagination  
could not touch me

with their sound.  
There is no grace  
in a dream  
where children,  
with bellies  
like the awful

swollen moon,  
slip in silence  
beneath the sea,  
their heads turned  
in anguish,  
and finally, drown.

Their breath rises  
as a mist, calls,  
at last surrounds us,

like the pale shrouds  
their bodies made,  
in the final

trundled sleep  
the water  
gave to them,  
and me. I lay  
in their arms,  
in their bodies'

twisted form, attached  
by life's blood  
to the ocean  
which rocks me  
in my dream, an  
unborn child.

And with the eyes  
of a lover  
turned away,  
morning steals  
into the sad bed  
of my bones.

## THE WATER FALLS

The water falls,  
reigning over all,  
or else a  
horse unleashed  
splashing the great  
night window  
with stars.

        If

I had my eyes,  
or your thirst  
insistent  
at my back door,  
oh I'd give you  
everything, each  
small or some-  
how

        needed virtue,  
for all the pain  
you'd taken.

WHEN THE DOG

When the dog  
dies .

    the world  
reflecting there in his eye  
continues turning, its  
axis pinned right  
through his brain,  
his head cocked,  
one

    ear laid open,  
on the wooden stair.

When the dog  
dies .

    the world  
loses one, and  
he loses one, too.

VENICE HAIKU

    Steaming on pavement,  
Even the flies stay away;  
    A pile of dogshit!

NO FALSE MOVES

for Kenneth Patchen

When he died they said  
he's dead

and lifted him nice and easylike  
as the sound of hollow reeds  
filled the air so he could go  
out to a tune and they bought  
a real good artist who could  
make the air sound like distant  
falling water, who could make the birds  
sing just right and not chatter  
and they carried him to his grave  
and pulled the grass over him  
just like a flag and covered his head  
with a stone so he'd always have the  
sky above him and when they were all  
through when they left him there  
they said that'll keep him.

AT BENSON'S

Outside this cabin, where  
walls have stood,  
and turned old,  
where their whorls  
no longer  
        spiral  
through the wood  
like tall stalks of Kansas  
wheat, but are cracked  
instead, shot through  
by some distant rifle,  
or perhaps the rain,  
as it first grew fat  
in the sky, and began  
to fall,  
        and fall again,  
        where  
groans were heard  
like some absurd  
old man turning over,  
and over one more time,  
never learning  
even in sleep,

you could not ever  
turn your face away.

Outside the walls, outside  
cold stones  
buried like faceless  
children in a cradle  
of mud, where the wind  
sang its good prayers  
over their bodies, and  
the earth turned,  
and turned again,  
until they rose  
in a weird birth  
as if from under sea,  
dirt clinging to the body  
like blood, and then washed  
away in a sudden shower.

Outside windows  
which hang  
                  like tears,  
and hold the warm body  
of Sun, but have no  
light of their own,

a poem  
moves across the land,  
at first in shadow, then  
out into the open field  
like a stray mare,  
a poem spoke first  
in China, perhaps,  
made by a hand  
ancient as the walls  
of this place, seen  
by the same eyes,  
a face, a  
human form whose heart  
fluttered, and  
stopped, and flew again  
like an ordinary moth  
from light to light.

Outside those walls,  
what bird was it  
that flew through centuries  
to rest in me, that  
I might see this poem,  
now, as it roams  
up the far side of the hill

toward the standing oak,  
and night falls  
like the light grey  
eyes of an owl,  
which deepen,  
and darken beneath its hood,  
which close, and  
open, and close again.

from *TWO BODIES DARK/VELVET*

Two bodies  
in one  
space, in

one place  
together.

HANDS

Stars,  
if we let  
them, her breasts

fall lightly there.

FEET

First she comes  
and he  
comes their

feet face  
each other:  
over, under, roundabout & through

EYES

Eyes  
he holds her  
with

there,  
now elsewhere.  
Two eyes,

one face  
in each  
of them.

SHE HOLDS

A hand full  
of berries,  
juice she

squeezes there.

ELBOW

The crook  
in one's  
arm, a

head of  
another.

BLACK ROSES

Their tongues  
grow  
into one.

THE ROOM

Inside each  
flows  
free-form,

arms, legs  
torso a  
weaving.

MOON

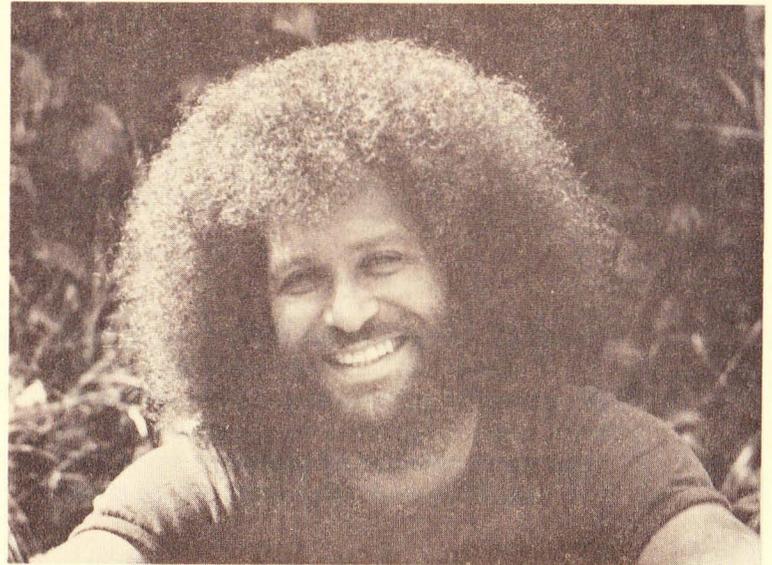
So full  
so soon.

BREATH

He takes  
in three  
breaths, re-

leasing four  
after, the  
laughter

soon empty  
without her.



PETER LEVITT was born in New York City. He attended public schools there and later rattled around several colleges and universities, ending up at SUNY at Buffalo, where he received an MA. His work has appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies. Previous books include *Poems by Peter Levitt* (Slow Loris Press, 1972) and *Two Bodies* (Dark/Velvet Momentum Press, 1975). He withstood the requisite twenty-five jobs in five years before his grateful retirement. Currently, he lives in Santa Monica, California with his daughter Sheba and Joan Sutherland, with whom he translates Chinese poetry, practices walking meditation on the beach, etc. He teaches a writing workshop at UCLA Extension.

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