

# Early Papers: Juvenilia

c. 1984-1990

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Brian Kim Stefans

## Set One



### The First Morning

Shadows trembling, silent cries,  
Mystic goblin steals my clothes,  
I escape into the corner,  
Try to shield my tortured eyes,  
Try to warm my freezing toes.

Pleasure echoes, silent call,  
Bird of passion careless flies  
I soon spy you in the center,  
Curled into a naked ball,  
Lonely, luring, sapphire eyes.

\*

Darting glances, silent kiss,  
Shred of light breaks through the floor,  
We collide inside the armor,  
Jointed fire, moment's bliss,  
Escapes and burns the iron door.

Ancient highway, silent wing,  
Griffin rises, waters glow,  
I fall soft into your cushion,  
Skin awakens, bodies sing,  
Mouths can speak and fingers grow.

Stars maneuver, silent climb,  
Rubber trees are by winds blown,  
We soon melt into the moisture,  
Breaths sustain and motions rhyme,

The sky and hell a monotone.

Ivory heaven, silent cry,  
Ocean seeks a word in vain,  
We retire into the vapor,  
Speeding through the violent sky,  
Pelted by the stagnant rain.

Stark confusion, silent fall,  
Waxes freeze and candles die,  
We try hard to run together,  
Legs entangle, falter, fall,  
Upon the ice and gravel lie.

\*

Drowning thunder, silent fight,  
Ill-bred creatures gasp and wheeze,  
I try hard to break the metal,  
Meet the walls in starless night,  
Rivers bleed from hands and knees.

Passions slumber, silent night,  
Drafts and roaches scurry, run,  
I awake without your presence,  
Grounded, now a skyless kite,  
Longing for the winds of one.

## **Little Governments**

little governments  
are her attractive blue eyes –  
sapphire confusion

## These Crying Streets

*"Petals on a wet, black bough" - Ezra Pound*

I'm pretty sure that it was music I heard  
while slowly wandering down  
these naked midnight streets

and I 'm pretty sure that if this had happened earlier  
when there was no need for streetlights  
and no time for dreaming  
that I would never have sensed it

– somewhere in this city  
he lies down and eyes  
the four walls of his room  
the place he was so proud of  
when he was so young  
and he wonders why he hasn't yet moved

– somewhere in this city  
she scolds the ancient  
typewriter as if it  
is the devil that's keeping her  
from her prospective nimbus  
and she wonders if she 's dead already

– somewhere in this city  
he examines the razor  
intently as if he  
expects the blade to respond  
to his questioning gaze  
and he wonders what he will see next

– somewhere in this city  
she waits within the  
confines of her sheets  
for his figure to appear

at the bedroom door  
and she wonders if he really exists

and though I 'm not too sure what one would call it  
whether or not it was jazz  
or something more classical  
I do know that something echoed beautifully that night  
throughout the cluttered alleys  
and over the tortured streets  
and I'm pretty sure that it was music

– and somewhere in this city  
he walks a crooked  
line down a lonely  
side street babbling about  
some stupid song

but he never really wonders about tomorrow

these crying streets are his only concern

## Four Years, “The Age Demanded”

### I. Trenches

Blood, blood,  
The fire's on the front line,  
But they all fought in any case,

And !myriads of them fell to pass,  
(They never wanted it that way).

To the trenches! A bitter draft,  
Though all their eyes did search the land,  
Few did know to where it was,  
To whom it was their guns were aiming,  
To where it was  
                  this road they're paving  
Would leave them;  
                  if there was an end,  
And if this end was still worth saving.

Blood, blood,  
There was blood on the front line,  
But the blood caked thick  
                  in the smoke-filled trenches  
And the grass did make its way.

(Their eyes could never hope to catch  
The crook that took their last.)

## II. The Fat Man Speaks

The Fat Man adjusted his seat again  
And spoke this time with fierce intent:

“Fear, fear is what splits the rocks  
And time, time is the carver’s tool!  
Create the seed, but make it aware  
That it, the ‘moment’s monument’  
Should be a growing being, intent  
To strong take sprout, take to the air;  
That it should yearn to rule the sky  
As it does believe no other seed dare!

“Yes, fear, fear should be the hand  
That lifts the branches to the sky;  
The fear of an arid seed should be  
The fuel that assures its potency;  
Fear and you won’t sleep too well  
But nothing you say will meet regret;  
Fear, with fear, and all you said  
Will become a ‘moment’s monument’.”

Sp spake the corpulent being, content  
Till he twisted his aching rump again.

### III . Two Poems

Red, red, a verbal intensity  
Flows from your mouth like juice, like wine,  
Pounds the ground until the framework shakes,  
Tortures the bricks until dust dribbles down.

Limp, limp, you abuse your crutches  
Your complex words, for all that they're worth;  
Polysyllabic, your rhetorical thunder  
Is painted prattle, a starved man's verse.

Down, down, thus I can't admire  
Your proud creation, your opaque front,  
For your roots, as impressive as they are in numbers,  
Are composed of wax, lost to the sun.

\* \* \*

You always speak with fragments of knowledge,  
Of genius! I see it fill your eyes, ·  
But disordered, your train never fails to falter,  
Crashes! Littering the mountainside.

But working quick, your fingers, your hands  
Collected, could turn this rail-side death;  
Pieced, glued, and properly jointed,  
Your creation could breath as the sun itself.

So lose your breath, but spend it well,  
Then time won't make such bitter bounds;  
Your speed shouldn't mar your smooth progression,  
Create! The balance is in the clouds .

#### IV. Rats

We are as rats, meant to stock  
The bitter morsels left behind  
By a day's worth of constant journey. We are meant

To escape to a corner, a soundless  
Lightless nest, and then to fill our stomachs  
Until rendered immobile. We are meant

To fear the tracks. The tracks ! The cool  
Gray steel of the railroad tracks,  
The given enemy, given to us

When we were pink and ignorant.  
                                But I can see.

I can see my father, leaping out of the darkness.  
He knew, "No answer

Is no answer," and it was he  
That braved the tracks, kissed  
The tracks, leapt

Until it felt like hell. Until it felt  
"Real." He, the light of Prometheus' torch  
Feared the corners as much as the steel.

We are as rats, meant to bite the darkness,  
Meant to bite the bitter darkness –  
Ash that cakes at our lips .

## V. The Poet's Corner

Once again they enter my shop,  
The old poets, to read from their “works”,  
To mumble from behind the podium.  
I see the actors,  
    freezing outside the window,  
Waiting for the bus, trying hard  
To blow warmth into their hands.

The sight of the actors  
    becomes most unbearable  
As the poets take their seats.

*I strike the nail and am not idle;  
My kin I lay to rest.*

The sunlight shifts on the flowerpot  
And my attention is drawn  
    once again to the window.  
Square jaws, bright eyes – the actors' discussion;  
Trying desperately to forget  
    this part of the plan,  
Waiting, as the poets each take turn  
To mumble from behind the podium;  
Mumble until the language  
Is not English anymore.

*I strike the nail and am not idle;  
My kin I lay to rest.*

A sea, a sea it is  
That drowns me. My ears  
Are lost among the voices of the poets,  
And my eyes among the fingerprints  
Slowly reproducing on the glass.

But the poets are always

invited to here  
To read of their conceits.

*I strike the nail and am not idle;  
My kin I lay to rest.*

I still feel arrogant  
among these beaten poets  
But only until  
The old bus leaves.

*The sky retires to the fold,  
This night I can't repress.  
Rage! Rage! I strike the nail!  
My kin I lay to rest.*

## VI. Envoi

Sleep, sleep,  
The sky is starting to smear,  
Leave me with my pillow.

Leave me lying on the floor,  
(I never wanted it this way).

Blue, blue,  
The eyes you hold so dear,  
She's waiting for you  
on the steps of the cornerhouse,  
That great old house the sings when it rocks  
Whenever a hard wind blows.

Sleep, sleep,  
And she will soon come near.

## Composed by the Waterfall

I felt the prostitute's cold dark hand  
move down my chest. In fury, in a heated rush,  
I struck her, the sight of her body  
so becoming inhuman, inescapable,  
I needed assurance. The rust on the bed,  
the angry gray of the walls, the street  
and streetlights, I  
was not of the elements. I  
was the conflict in case.  
Motion was my escape.

\* \* \*

By the waterfall it seems so far away,  
that incident, and yet  
correcting the time as it happens,  
as common as these actions are,  
creates no less than a scar, a blood vessel broken  
and never mended. I think of an image of Yeats,  
and how no sooner had I entered the room  
reflection! And memory  
bled into reality. Matter  
bled into matter. and once again  
the falcon couldn't hear the falconer.

Two histories for one second,  
and a whirlpool won't let me forget.

## Set Two



### Salutation

Nymphs, centaurs, fauns  
and other strange forms, danced on his forehead  
*and tickled the yarns, and tickled the yarns*  
until whiteness bled into the midnight  
and crawled alone until dawn.

And the horses galloped among the spires  
of black forest, on a dark promontory  
and the maiden sang, only whispers – sweet conspiracy!  
– this charming flesh, but beyond his grasp  
thus down to Kimmerian seas.

And what was this that had caught him there?  
but lunar intimations, piercing the evening air  
like red whips, that scarred in starless sleep?  
– the wail of raging oceans through the walls  
that had set his blood fire deep?

Or was it but whispers from the other room  
– that soul shuffling candles in his shadowless head  
needlessly thanking for compliments,  
tut then settling down to an exile's sleep  
but pleased, or should be, having ramped with the dead?

Then pondered further in his quivering bed  
– *or was it the sinner who weighed his breast?*  
but this fell short, unrealized  
for never before had ever met his eyes  
the vision to support such a lofty head!

Or was it the sinner who weighed his breast?  
– but missed, thought quite the opposite  
having never experienced what kind Phidias wrought  
in measurement, thus betrayed his thought  
of the finest song, but in its simplest caught:

*The winter scans its imperious skies  
it its thirst for blood and its bandit eyes  
– winter scolds, and the vulture cries!*  
Thus, thus inflicted by a cultured wound  
he pays faulty heed to the draw of the muse!

## Wallflowers

### 1. Dancers in Costume

We saw the purple, red and gold  
flesh, that was  
profundity, through colored goggles.

### 2. Poem

*for Bob Myers*

Three pieces of crisp brown paper  
rest on your forehead. Fly, say to them,  
that they take to the sky, blind men.

This is autumn too. Once writ,  
the leaves may shuffle cross ground like ashes.

Though the moisture of our woman's breast  
may someday take them back again.

### 3. “Le Mot Juste”

1.

The gay tomcat poled  
ferry music, its hind  
legs the attraction.

2.

These furry limbs, once  
of mistresses, now  
of distant children.

3.

The boat escaped, around  
one corner, patiently  
the town realigned.

## Jessica

Jessica wheels around, not  
through air, through memory.  
This decaying surface rests on my mind  
troublesome, as if growing.  
This growth is in recognition  
until all is decayed, then its gone.

What have you, that a lonely dancer  
slowly cuts plains, until light  
free in space, and time, instant  
and then drawn out, is subtracted.  
Crawling along, the desert is  
hard, quiet, but not tacking.

Tease, and then weave, into memory.  
The cloud is a white sheet – silhouette  
of body, dance at will! softly.  
In a second, fear hinders, don't  
worry! in the absence, ignorance.  
In decline, beauty snaps her reigns.

## A Resurrection

I

Crows feet set with the nail through it.

II

The bramble so thick,  
one could almost see eyes.

## **One Man**

Yellow bags of green light  
appreciated

The dog is dead, only  
uninviting

## Poem

The ego  
makes-insects  
of humans,  
                  the  
tiny legs, play at my forehead  
like lover's tips, rattling  
two frozen stars, in a burnt out walnut shell.

## Otter

*for Andrea Steinbusch*

I

If there vere asps, I  
wouldn't see  
white dresses,  
cannons, not  
cloud  
their naive pursuit.

II

In an eye's pace, could  
be caught  
an otter.

Among stones, slick  
among,  
this form

would be there, and all ways  
dumb.

## Elegy

Emaciated dog, circling

raging, what  
    bowel seeks  
to spoil the earth?

Caught through morning's veil.

And there,  
    desperate for sun.  
picking flowers, and then  
    *holding* them,  
        what  
god knows it?

What

god in the hayfields, hunting  
*viands*?

## Defense of a Mystic

“Trees? no  
government was built on  
these,” so  
said,

whv  
snakes inhibit passing?

“Clay nails, the light  
bends through this ocean;  
and escaped the light, discovers  
no current  
sensation,  
thus  
forward.”  
Tease in the

wind,  
banished the night to relics, brought  
room to mean, then  
no room.

Huddled under tight.

## Fragments

What pretty sand. Stay by me,  
I've crossed my hands across my chest,

in April. Kyongchon  
told me I was pretty. In Korea,

I am not in Korea.  
Walking on the beach with you Heather.

Chowder house, e passed it up.  
Frail bird. Sneeze. That was Ezra  
Pound. Where are we?

Drew Gardner, wearing ratty white  
sneakers suddenly  
appears from around the chowder

house. That Asian boy  
told me I was pretty. Korean boy told me.  
I was petty.

green mist. Lisa

Steal. That's how he poem  
ends! That was Ezra Pound. Bird.  
Drew is carving an orange

for Heather.

Jungle, the low  
green mist. Toucans' colors

in my cereal  
ball! End

fact. Try religion?  
Drew appears from behind the chowder

house. He hums.  
Imagine Drew humming.

Gods float.

*from* The Aeneid

Aurora rose in the meantime;  
surging, she left Ocean.

Through the gates

the forms of the select youths, bathed  
in light, went

with thick nets, and tipped spears, and  
then

the Massylian horsemen! the sharp-nosed strength

of hounds! All forth  
in a straight rush.

The queen

dallies

in her chamber.

The foremost of chieftains of Carthage, those first

men, await

her

at her doorstep, and

arrogant in gold and scarlet, foaming at  
the chain bit, kicking dust, her steed

also stands.

Finally, before the  
hot crowd, the queen makes her entrance.

Enclosed in Sidonian cloak, with colored  
fringe, her hair

is bound in gold;

she wears a golden quiver,

and a golden brooch holds fast

a purple cape.

With like pride,  
beside her Asanius goes, bouncing with big glee,

beside him the towering  
Phrygian cohorts, and  
in that group, he most splendid,

before other most graceful  
Aeneas, who comes

with his line of troops, which he joins to hers  
an ally.

Just as

Apollo, when he deserts Lycia, in winter  
floods

frost over-ridden. Just as

that god, who visits the land of his mother  
just as he churns the chorus, just as he sparks

the dance! Cretans and Dryopes  
take part in this dance!  
the Agythysri

with painted flesh! round  
the alters. Just as  
Apollo, who walks

in silence  
the high ridges of Cynthus, and bands  
his hair, with twisting

Aeneas:  
nimble as that god, with like glory on his face.

And when they have gained  
their mount  
on the height of the peaks, in pathless thicket:

the field,  
crossing the troops, rolling  
together in concord, forsaking the

mountains.  
Ascanius,  
high on a fierce steed, cuts down the middle  
passes these, the she-goat! then  
the stag;  
with prayers he then begs

that in this slothful herd, a beast with spirit  
be found, a wild  
foaming boar! or

perhaps  
a great blond lion from the mountain.

## Set Three



### Blast

“Quant aux bas, ils sont inutiles.”

— Rimbaud in a letter to his family

The general's horses — HIS horses even  
Are tired. Three weeks on the cavalry  
And these too DIE BY THE ROADSIDE. Is there such  
Exhaustion in London? The men here eat  
From tin cans, FLIES  
BITING AT THE NEW EARTH. Women now have  
DEATH ONLY with which to argue, and sight  
SLOWLY DIMINISHES, as shells burst,  
Seeming ONLY in the FOREGROUND. Do you feel  
Such confinement in your own home?

The air remains thick and yet  
For all these trenchant things, NOTHING  
HAS CHANGED. LIFE REMAINS  
The SAME STRENGTH that propels EACH  
SMALL INDIVIDUAL to assert.

This morning I nipped  
From an enemy a MAUSER — and image  
Of PERFECT BRUTALITY.  
I found I did not like it.  
I broke the butt off and fashioned  
A gentler feeling. Both images TAUNTED  
MY SENSES. I emphasize,  
Both images, of GUN AND SCULPTURE  
GOT THEIR EFFECTS from a SIMPLE COMPOSITION  
Of LINES AND PLANES.

This war is a great remedy.  
It kills ARROGANCE  
SELF ESTEEM and PRIDE. It kills NUMBERS  
Of those USELESS UNITS that have proven  
SO NOXIOUS to our economy. It KILLS FEAR,  
Refers it back to MORE BASE RELATIONS  
As ONLY LIFE remains. But with all this  
Know that my views  
Remain ABSOLUTELY THE SAME.

A man with NOT YET  
EIJEN A SCAR of his lost arm  
Sings into a harmonica, his torso  
ALL BUT CHARRED. His music cries, but Ah  
The notes sound sweet.  
Is this the falcon  
Losing sight of the falconer?  
Is this the sensation  
Of DEATH'S PALE BREEZE  
That TIGHTENS MY SKIN in this fervor?  
I only hope  
I return to my country soon.

*(after Gaudier-Brzeska)*

## Pierrot

Three pages of *Cantata for a Clown*, three  
more I think  
possible:

given the mode of presentation,  
limp rhythm,  
myopic like a paperback supermarket novel.

The creatures dance celebrating a passion,  
well enough  
intended, I think:

but the vogue went out  
with Pound  
for dribbling until terribly over-extended.

Fettered with the burden of truth, alone,  
the hero falls

broken:  
but you are not Edgar Allen Poe,  
the poet's  
praise was reserved for a praise unspoken.

And finally, the interest in old Chinese  
thought, not  
profound, I think:

as ridiculous as fish  
ate raw,  
potent for a crutch of impressive sound.

But who, in this sense, is as honored as I  
think myself,  
diseased with ability:

the historical man  
of letters,  
or Merlin, the local street-corner priest?

## Ursula

My black coat is musty with heavy German rains  
– chasing Ursula up and down the streets of  
    the Eiffel. My soul remains,  
however, completely unscarred by that love.

Face bleeding with mismanaged adolescence  
– that is, I washed my face, still thinking  
    I'd somehow obtain the essence  
of poster-boy glamor – still shirking

the tides of reason I associated with age  
framing the millions. – I followed her down  
    each road, a perfect sage,  
apotheosizing rain and weather to her frown.

How this all seems delightful “in a frame”  
– and I, repented, now foolishly free  
    to laugh again? The same  
dark hooded criminal tantalizes me

behind each corner, with a Latin tongue,  
cherishing the blade he holds as prosperity  
    in Jersey City – the young  
naif whistling, announcing his place. It's me

ecstatic, loud down these trashy urban  
streets. – Oh, Ursula, that your white touch  
    might someday reach me again,  
me, floundering now, there, my stupid crutch

dissolving in this American rain,  
my coat which survived the German rain!

## Pierrot: an entertainment

*A creative writing class. Pierrot is among the students, as is Maria, and Rob Fuller. There are six other students, three girls, three boys.*

Teacher (intimidated): Pierrot,  
the lines you submit...  
let me be more subtle with it.  
I am not able to understand  
the relation of a Thanksgiving turkey  
to Genghis Khan's conquering of China, true  
the footnote here clears  
“I am the phosphorescent appleseed of North New Jersey”,  
from its obscurity, eh...  
What I mean is, eh...to start  
from something simpler yet, eh...Are you  
in love? Let’s start with that.

Maria: Yes,  
he’s in love.

Pierrot: Love!  
What do you know of love! And you,  
what do you know of poetry!  
(pause)  
I should not be required to explain myself.  
(pause)  
What was dealt from my unconscious is what you sensed.  
(pause)  
A poet isn’t required to “clarify” it!  
(finally)  
I am insulted, to say the least, by this academic  
insolence.

Teacher: I am sorry.  
I was just wondering, innocently,  
whether you could explain the text to me,

that I enjoy it more! My wife and I  
have taken to enjoying your texts,  
the recurring motif of the phosphorescence,  
it has us berating our ears  
that we cannot hear you better,  
in our years. Don't provide us  
with the clues  
if you don't think you must.  
If the pleasure is in this purest state  
unadulterated, unfootnoted, pure, and  
as you say  
straight from the unconscious, well, then ...  
I do like your unconscious, Pierrot!  
(I don't say that often about men, you know.)

Pierrot: Thank you, sir.

Maria (aside): What a lot of bullshit!

Teacher (sensing her chagrin): Yes, and...  
Mr. Fuller has something  
to offer, a monologue in formal iambs, concerning  
the library in Alexandria, I believe,  
and its burning?

Rob (nervous): There is a little Greek in it.  
“Toyos ubumbos” it means “burning hair”

The building housed upon the Nile  
not books, but papyrus  
intended to run the centuries' mile  
and bring the classics to us  
upon which teacher and student smile  
knowing the wisdom carried thus.

But storms are oft in Egypt now  
as then, and once a gust

betrayed the spine of a palm, and down  
the tree fell, as it must  
leveling man and many a cow,  
kicking up a whole mess of dust.

And there for days did lay the tree.  
One day it did combust,  
left out, so far from liquid sea,  
so dead and dry it was,  
burned down the whole damn library:  
Apollo, Athena, Mercury, Zeus.

The elders, when they saw it burn  
created quite a fuss:  
“Why,” they struggled then to learn,  
are the gods so mad at us?”  
Till one should raise his voice, discern  
the truth of it: toyos ubumbos.

Teacher (nervously, looking to the class):  
Refreshing, er, in its ...humor?

Student 1: The juxtaposition  
of Nile imagery to Greek mythology,  
the dialects of two national regions  
wedded in such a text as this,  
the ending, which recalls  
Mauberley, the Wasteland, what else?  
The rhythm, which swoops down and takes  
the reader, as in an ecstatic, living monsoon!  
Not very  
modern though,  
is it?

Student 2: Three Chinese  
laundrymen giving  
paper tea cups

to children.

Student 3: Recalls  
Auden in a fashion most commendable.

Student 4 (obviously in love with Rob): I liked it, too.

Student 3: The coupling  
of ancient motifs with modern concerns is a lot like  
Auden!

Student 4: Yeah.

Student 3: The meter...the meter... Have you ever read  
“The Unknown Citizen”, a poem I believe  
written by W.H.  
Auden?

Rob: No.

Student 4: No?

Students 5 and 6 (suddenly, in unison):  
Oooooh. I don't know.  
It's nice. Hee hee hee hee.

Teacher (baffled): Well,  
thank you Mr. Fuller.  
Eh, Pierrot, you  
look as you have  
something to say.

Pierrot: There being no fine line here  
between idiots and dingbats  
I would like to offer my suggestions  
as to the improvement of this poem.  
Seeing as you have... not a tender subject,  
not something one should be too wishy-washy about,

not something one should even have to be too subtle about,  
why not, hmm...  
in the interest of a better aesthetic product,  
a poem one could, in a sense, read,  
why not, hmm....Why not make it  
shorter! You see,  
I understand poetry  
to be something someone says quick, as if  
in a scream! Something  
curt,  
digestible...quickly,  
expansive  
in the moment, an object, even,  
in space. Eh... Why not  
the last two  
verses. Lop 'em off!  
The poem would be the better for it.  
(suddenly)  
You'd have two for the price of one, too!  
(then, as if defeated)  
I'd do it.

Rob (slowly convinced): Hmmm...yes,  
an idea.  
(growing excited)  
I can see this poem turned  
into something even more sincere!

Pierrot: You are quite a good poet.

There is a long pause here, the other students quite stunned. Then, en masse, they begin to complement Rob and Pierrot, timidly at first, then excessively. Alone, Maria observes. As the noise dies down, she delivers her final, disgusted, aside...

Sad shit.

...at which all action freezes, and the chorus begins.

“Three, it’s a magic number...”

## Seaside Heights, New Jersey – 1957

This presents, after a particular growth:

Charging, sea-wise, the fragrance of life,  
She, content, a new understanding,  
The sky, caught, above the lighthouse green,  
The sands, a service on this cold estate,

Her slippers, worn from seagull watching...

She could now sees families slumbering on the beach  
Twelve weeks ago when winter was away...

Her eyes, hollow and dry, and gray,  
And the wind through the reeds only whistling.

## Set Four



### A Day at the Courts

The bonnet-queen enters. and parrots, three, trailing  
and, in some underground dance, the possum-king.  
“What, in this house, is that smell!”, she is railing.  
Our king ,to wit: “Your chorus, they’ve yet to sing!”

The parrots shudder, twisted at this, and not laughing.  
She parries: her look. a white venus, eyes of blue-lit,  
breaks forth a frothing stream, nectral thirst, gaffing  
our king, in a King-sized, spit-lined net. To wit.

The chorus sings, finally, the parrots chirp applause,  
and fast, the queen takes her place, charmed, front-center,  
what feelings concealed, escape in a cold, lone dimple.

The possum twists: shadows, the swinging of light claws,  
makes his wav, and with thirst, far to earth’s center,  
again, shares tea with the dead. The queen grows a pimple.

## Sestina

*for Thomas Crofts*

1.

Like a true American, I've reverted  
to a dead form. To a dead fawn,  
I've hacked up and sold her vitals  
as boon to a wondrous market.  
Now I await the spurious retort:  
Thyestes never knew one slain!

2.

What to say of a French poet slain  
but to the faith he'd not reverted,  
this despite his sister's retort,  
high-pitched, strained, like a fawn,  
which, effeminate, grated his vitals.  
She sold them, then, to market.

3.

Or of his mother, who never to market  
was able to sell those promises slain  
by books, and experience. On her vitals  
she choked. She farted. She reverted  
to the old joke, a degenerate retort:  
she chained him to her side, fawn.

4.

Arthur Rimbaud was always a fawn  
teasing the doe as he eyed the market  
each desperate Sunday, till the retort  
of the continent he believed slain  
by sloth, and ennui, grossly reverted  
to sex, massacred his vitals.

5.

He in his heart found hate for vitals  
soon, and soon he was living fawn  
dreamt of times he coolly reverted  
to the child he'd pawned at market.  
He believed sights of his youth slain,  
absinthe gave violent retort.

6.

And Paris itself was a living retort,  
breathing, circulating its vitals,  
impatiently lost to be counted slain.

No respite for the heart of a fawn,  
seeing ancestors hung at the market,  
to inanimacy cruelly reverted.

7.

Rimbaud's retort would be I've slain  
a fawn. What death for a market  
sadly reverted, studied in its vitals!

## Book and Instinct

1.

Goodnight creatures!  
Off to insensitive sleep.  
In my keep,  
the dogs howl logarithms from intuition,  
I bring hasty memories to peak fruition,  
*I am a creep.*

2.

Tonight, the bestiary  
is a gray-washed sea.  
Vanity  
leads me to betray the ubiquitous passion,  
to departures all out of moral fashion,  
for no pity.

3.

By night, perhaps,  
the officer has forgiven me  
my truancy.  
Noticed they the lacking in conversation?  
My silence, taken as demonstration  
of prudency?

4.

Goodnight creatures!  
The company in my keep:  
A basenji  
knowledgeable in all eastern mystic rights,  
a doberman specializing in troglodytes  
realize me.

## Poem, “As”

1.

As  
with Caddy in Faulkner’s  
novel, at least that  
third, I the  
mute  
am stuffed with futile girls  
like another poet more heavy (I pass  
life with less Hegel,  
have mastered *nichts*, and not the steel-smith’s  
turn)  
                        am twisted  
not stagnant, a maggot not dutifully  
fired.

2.

Leave that  
last image in a blade of  
grass, by which  
the souls of the paper  
christs,  
timorous, passively (those souls first fettered most  
painless-  
ly to the kingdom’s sinecure) rule  
mourning the passing  
of the heart, that only the possum  
in the night  
                        rules  
and that the shadows in the lantern halls  
am stuffed with intoxicating girls, I’ve lost my  
speech.

## “Envision...”

Envision, in the  
arena, lax Zeus  
bleeding each wrist  
for the lost music,  
pale Zeus. The  
yellow child,  
knee-bent at his  
side, smiles,  
conjures dragons.  
Fitful queens,  
bosomless, their  
black pools of  
want  
exceeding to rivers. Ever-  
green spires  
punching pinholes  
in the blue milk  
of sky.

The  
procession is  
tolling, boredom succeeding  
that spent way. The  
child has jacks in  
each eye. He  
will not confess  
murder of Zeus.

## Mystic Fragment

Babel creeps an arm  
shaking Minos' rattle,  
taking children green  
turning them to cattle.

Zeus in ennui  
bleeds a soporific  
stench from open wrist  
– deliberate music.

Griphins in the air  
drop the daily Dis  
punctually to spare  
punks from great bliss.

## Intellectual Hymn

I

None can know  
the loosening lava of my reproach,  
the curious victim of my approach  
through space, stained and  
    curtained  
    like glass.

II

Physics lie  
pigeoning the forum of my sky  
– Freudians in my lullaby  
will tire, tooling,  
    sex lost,  
    my fire.

II

Fade away  
the terrified people or my day  
when Helen's chased the day away.  
I, then, laugh, a Pi-  
    errot  
    again.

IV

– still in love  
shapeless in the shattered glove.  
God may send a perfect dove  
but think the poem still  
    termed, “her-  
    metic.”

V.

Moles, then, see  
only, that which tortures me,

the curved dolphins in old seas,  
no sound, the pre-  
pubescent  
cold round.

## Set Five



### Returns

Fiction betraying  
found outside the  
    whole life  
not entertaining  
    not quite  
home to many  
expected inhabitants  
creeps to my cognizance.

Never betraying  
past or present  
    then found  
fatally boring  
    old ground  
evanescent  
assurance of interest  
past the first dinner guest.

Wondrously lying  
my progression  
    here or  
trust not denying  
    the door  
in digression  
an eye on the prior cares  
then to the victory stairs.

Foolishly paying  
some attention  
    the oaths

pledged by the weighing  
high hopes  
minus mention  
the yawning inconsequence  
counter experience.

Insinuating  
egotism?  
the sort  
all to berating  
mean sport  
of the schism  
between face and content  
wielded like armament

not to regard spring  
illustrative  
to pains  
cautiously inching  
from rains  
to the plaintive  
remember the sacrifice  
witness my paradise.

## Gedanke

This futile thing  
an innocence  
holy fabled  
hermetic sense  
of emptiness

incredits things  
remembered us  
duly violenced  
at terminus  
hypocritus.

## The Burnt Flower

1.

You greeted me  
and time stood still  
ridiculous that I should think  
such sentimental things  
after discussions

of Spinoza

2.

Inseparably we  
walked the shrill  
enveloping of autumn's link  
of winter to what sings  
summers to visions

of Spinoza

3.

You cautioned me  
that time could kill  
near everything if one should blink  
a second more than rings  
true to persuasions

of Spinoza

4.

And wretchedly you  
paid the bill  
and left the park cafe to sink  
into a thought that stings  
hearts of the lost sons

of Spinoza

## Ophelia

The essence of Ophelia who  
    thanked the skein of Hermes' fire  
who found the trailing to be true  
    of this quick and solid fire  
        who reveled in consistency  
            of a blank illumined sea

The essence of Ophelia who  
    danced the pilgrim's dance of life  
who found the falling to be true  
    of a wide and tended life  
        who celebrated ignorance  
            of determining chance

The essence of Ophelia who  
    wept a state of common bliss  
who found the flowing all untrue  
    of a pure and honest bliss  
        who honestly unreconciled  
            viciously denied the child

The essence of Ophelia who  
    spoke of an accepting place  
who found the picture to be true  
    of a whole and other place  
        who ambitiously conspired  
            to provide what is desired

## Jazz

The fingering of time in jazz  
like weather in a tonic taken deep  
awakes the stifled comic from his sleep  
    the cornie who in dance  
reorganizes space with female hands  
is now the swaying branch and singing leaf.

The sky is now the pattern leaf  
the wind is now the professor of jazz  
the cold is touch of mitigative hands  
    the well which is not deep  
in pulses strong and weak will keep the dance  
forever, now, until the crowded sleep.

Who wishes when in ready sleep  
to fall to frozen ground like reddened leaf  
participate in winds and in the dance  
    in time which is not jazz  
in space which falters congruously deep  
in space which drops like old, rheumatic hands?

The criminal in cautious hands  
returns, a painted knight, in sweated sleep  
in quest to realize the springs of deep  
    inside of branching leaf  
which more than symbolize the fated dance  
which grow in minds like swingers set to jazz.

Before one takes the hint to jazz  
to reassure the mind of hidden hands  
of silly feats and turns observed in dance  
    in hollows of one's sleep  
the step and shudder of remembered leaf  
will prove a lesson well and print it deep.

And never in this witnessed deep  
have ever two grown souls united jazz  
so well as those who like submitted leaf  
    are limber in the hands  
of midnight guided all too vicious sleep  
who as the pitted beast resign to dance.

The suffered dance and deep  
respite of sleep define the jazz  
like interested hands the fallen leaf.

So  
have  
you up  
there begot  
more mysteries of  
sounds and confusions  
walks and your profusions a  
new way to take up your interests  
to conform with my inevitably demanding  
self? I am lucky there is no compromise, for  
here in this dock, with no one to talk to but the old  
vague and possible selves which clutter these  
drawers I am not too keen on selling so  
I hold onto it, again in spite of  
the fact of all the silence  
issuing from the spot  
I leave it Shrine  
of Solace I  
simply  
call  
it

I  
nor  
you nor  
anybody who  
sleeps in these  
woods could ever keep  
promises from these trees (as  
the forest is a lonely place) to deny  
it your favorite story or the  
joke for which you're  
famous would be  
a thing too  
cruel a  
too  
limited  
function of  
confession that  
will bring about true  
isolation That is many things  
weighing down on the heart and on the  
trees so all the forest be in  
a dark which is false  
as there is the  
space where  
lie you  
and  
I

## Set Six



### Houseboat

Roger Rabbit kicks off a sneaker.  
Lofting through the air,  
the sneaker seems to land in a plate of  
cookies,  
oatmeal, Oreo, but  
with a quick turn,  
we see the nose sink in Yosemite Sam.  
The shoelaces hang from his mouth like spaghetti.  
Understand

the ways beneath the ways.  
The houseboat sings when the Delphic waves  
prick a lost strand in the consciousness  
fixing the stare as a soulless, dark eminence.  
But nothing in the houseboat seems to stay.

With the refracted  
light through the crystalline  
proprioception  
of the vamp donning her Maybeline,  
the schooler with legs like Bruce Jenner,  
the priest with his  
CDs in his corvette,  
the housewife who, apotheosized,  
is a demon who should not bleed your eyes  
– all, now a  
trick of the light.

Know the curtain  
closing on our first days  
when we were taught  
reality really does not matter.

In the silent  
forum of our earliest thoughts  
one could hear  
a hairpin drop  
under the shattering tea-tray's disaster,  
under our first saint's lisp.  
Were it a lesson:  
veil the creature with a neon fiction.

## The Library

1.

Having most recently escaped  
That cubed cloud of books,  
the Mississippi revealed  
by Mark Twain's simple crooks  
of invention,  
the charm of boy  
America  
– who over heard a table-turned tale  
of creeping ghost barrel.  
I know the novel  
is more in America.

2

That strawberry-headed girl  
meets death with generous cigarette  
obscuring a nose  
for more refined comfort,  
unknown beyond the painless throes  
and aches of a liquid dream,  
she,  
a ghost  
stalking these halls,  
ignores the glance and call,  
she balks.

3

Meting the rage of centuries  
these walls' institution  
finds fruition in a room  
dedicated for all  
peculiarly to talk, peculiarly to smoke.

4

The lamps flicker:  
We are all Tiresias:  
Wordless, we hear sounds.

5

An upright posture  
enters with an air of old money,  
tied around his waist  
an old straw dummy,  
invaluable until scrupulous  
attention reveals— I'd say  
nothing his chalked, undramatic  
voice has not just revealed  
to involuntary audience.  
Nothing, only nothing.  
(I wish he were a poodle.)

6.

No Huck Finn could ignore  
the leer of harelip from the corner,  
document it with a strength  
not betrayed ignoble, grace  
of gesture and silence— insures  
there is heart in that flesh.  
Don't let careers get you yet!  
Exist in that careless state,  
it is nothing less than death we await.

## Open Letter

The obscene leaf  
bearing your desire  
was paltry, more so  
stacked contrary the

page after page  
of poetry sent you  
– pregnant  
with resoundings of my

quest, a lumbering, gagged  
achievement.  
Not to harp on  
incongruities

the complementary  
hermitage of your  
word  
to my *poseur*

did provoke laughter  
and a spit back  
even from cautioned  
devils, a phallic

critique,  
chorically agreed,  
deserved.  
– Or to talk

of “form to content.”  
Humor, lady,  
hysteria  
disassembled with flames the

political umbra  
separating sage  
from a hell-bent other  
– the sadist, who

together, then  
deduced  
the portion proper  
to your emotional cramp,

a generous third  
of the postage stamp.

## **“Your Beauty...”**

Your beauty, or the figure  
of it, shaded by word  
processor, now supine  
on a grandpa bed of iron  
frame and inhibition,  
the metal clock and calen-  
dar set teetotaler-  
ish on the safe dresser,  
smart head to the magnet-  
ed interest in that  
central mission, is simple  
like the macrocosm symbol  
in my book, the dream.

Twisted in earnest drama  
ill-spent on the crowd  
of kids in Sunday tow  
by aunts, lisp and muscle  
spasm, rewards of fickle  
day may seem unsettling  
like fish as compromising  
meal at Lent, or dance  
tainted with circumstance.

## “What, With Whitman...”

What, with Whitman my great  
predecessor and a music  
Plato would be ashamed of  
the Loreleis are mad? The  
pleasant earth now reeling  
arteries now coursing with  
the question of cognizance  
and of anatomy?

No high  
curse of the Dionysian can  
eradicate for me the waned  
significance. Nor history  
of suffragette and consti-  
tutions avert the attention  
cerebrally. Having thus  
sent the violent fruits of  
those efforts, I advocate  
the political and accused  
damaged couplet:

a pleasant  
dress is all what meant.

“The students are all gone asleep...”

The students are all gone asleep  
at twelve o'clock; presently  
stirs a beetle underneath  
my brightened desk; honestly  
no cause could ever make me creep  
below my desk, courageously,  
to certify my naked feet.

It drives itself with crippled wings  
against the floor, hallowing  
territories taking in  
a greater ground, visioning  
no charms begot by fancied round  
of destiny; and countering,  
I do not stir and let it win.

**“The time is killing me...”**

The time is killing me; I cringe  
at smug hero, the syringe.  
Shapes which falter for my eyes  
coursing arteries disguise;  
irony which sure persuades  
me to fury, dizziness fades.

All persons, who my company  
may regret, soon bore with me,  
thus inhibited I'm safe:  
damning hands and temple quake.  
Time is killing me. The rook  
of my conscience, remedy took.

## The Voyeur

The light switched on, thus  
my guessing the ten minutes  
passed and fooled solitude:

but my deductions falter  
heavenless, and sight  
inhibited by four walls and

more: the light switched on,  
I saw no ghost depart, not  
later, the penitent divorce.

## The Scholar

Sit and think the night's not over,  
She's not yet dressed, in all her colors  
For the cool taste of bed. I can't see her body  
Resplendent in a cool shore's gasps .  
She is not yet naked in my mind.

And climbing up apple trees he used to wonder,  
And watch her skin, soft beneath her touch  
Time would not be his, then , but did  
He know? Her skin, forever behind windows,  
Her hands, forever by her side.

I wrote until the lightbulb flickered  
And tried to imagine the weight of her breasts  
In my hands. Her eyes did greet me, I know,  
Her smile burned. But I have been there  
Too many times. She walks away.

He didn't know why, in summertime,  
Sweat would crawl between his legs as he watched  
Each garment fall, not too quickly.  
Ten years of his life spent not knowing,  
Ignorant, and ten years more.

## A Dream for Winter

*after Rimbaud*

Winter, in a railroad carriage  
to Niagara (pink, with blue cushions, and  
sleepily in the corners,

kisses, with goblin smiles, howling “Stretti!”)  
We will leave together, and we  
will be comfortable.

You’ll close your eyes, you don’t want to see  
“the evening shadows with mocking faces! those snarling  
monstrosities! black elves

and black wolves!” (I ask  
if you don’t want a cigarette. Then you feel  
your cheek scratched. A kiss

like a mad spider, runs round your neck.  
You scream, “get it!,” you bend your neck.  
Your neck, quick! I see, and I soon realize

that it will take a long time  
before we really grab that creature  
who laughs, and travels a great deal.

## Set Seven



### Complaint of Pierrot

*from Jules Laforgue*

Oh, that model soul  
bade me her adieu  
because my eyes... too?  
lacked principle.

She, such tender bread  
(now a Wonder loaf)  
...typical! gives birth  
to one more brat.

For, married, she is  
always with a guy  
who is a “nice guy,”  
hence his genius.

## II. Pierrot (One Has Principles)

*from Jules Laforgue*

The girl decided (oh in her vain way!)  
“I love you, simply, for yourself.”  
O la la! what conventional cribs!  
just like art,  
but let's have calm  
and indulge in our capitalist ideals!

Then, she whispered to me, “I wait...  
Here I am, but I just don't know,”  
her gaze affected by milling moons.

O la la! was  
it just for prunes  
we attended, in our town, the school?

Then, one beautiful evening, perfectly  
lit-starred... the moment just right!  
the girl dies. O la la! now that's  
original song!  
You will be reborn  
as we know, some time on the third day.

if not in person, then in the streams  
and smells of spring months, taking  
up more fools in quest of the Zaïmph  
veils of the Gia-  
conda, and the Skirt.  
I may possibly be one of those fools.

## Toto Merumeni

*from Guido Gozzano*

### I.

With its rambling gardens, vast rooms, and its  
seventeenth century balconies overrun with verdure,  
this villa seems like something from my verses,  
yes, the typical villa from a *Book of Letters*.

The villa thinks, sadly, of better times. It thinks  
of gay parties beneath century old trees, of  
illustrious banquets in immense dining rooms,  
of the festive salons raped for their antiques.

But where, in olden times, came the House of Onsaldo,  
House of Ratazzi, House of Azeglio, House of Odone, now  
stops  
a sputtering automobile, trembling, twitching,  
and some hairy stranger walks to knock the Gorgon.

A barking is heard, a passing... cautiously the door  
opens... in this cloistral and barrackish silence  
Toto Merumeni lives with his "convalescent" mother,  
his schizophrenic uncle, his gray-haired great aunt.

### II.

Toto is twenty-five years old, melancholic,  
quite cultured, with a taste in the inkwell works;  
slight in brains, slight in morals, and scary  
in his hunches... he is a true child of our times.

Not rich, one day he decided to "peddle my wordlings"  
(there's his Petrarch!), an embezzler, a gazetteer...  
He chose exile. Liberated, he reflects presently  
on his follies. We're safer not to print them here.

Oh, he's not bad. To the poor, he sends money  
to keep them going... to his friends, a basket of fruit.  
He's not bad. Students come to him for a topic;  
for connections... he's a service to most emigrants.

Cold, conscious of his self, his faults,  
oh, he's not bad. He's the Good Man sketched by Nietzsche:  
“...in truth, I must deride that fawning creature  
called *good*... simply because he lacks claws...”

After draining studies, he runs to his garden, plays  
with his sweet friends, the earth inviting...  
His sweet friends are: a caterwauling blue jay,  
a pussy cat... and Makakita his little monkey.

### III.

Life had taken from him all his early promise.  
For years he dreamed of loves that would not call.  
Despairing, he conjured a princess, an actress;  
today he loves the cook... she is eighteen years old.

When the house sleeps, this girl, barefoot,  
a fresh chill plum in the day's first light,  
comes to his room, with lips to his bounces  
onto him... he possesses her blessed and supine.

### IV.

Toto cannot feel. Some latent, untamed illness  
dried up the prime founts of his sentiments;  
analysis and sophistry have made of this man  
what flames make of a house in healthy winds.

As that ruin, however, that has seen fire  
produces gladiolas with colorform flowers,  
his parched soul loosens, oh little by little,  
a scattered efflorescence of consolatory verses.

V.

So Toto Merumeni, after sad events,  
is near grace. He alternates research and rhyme.  
He is locked in, meditates, expands, explores, understands  
the Life of the Spirit which he never understood.

For the voice is small, and his treasured art  
immense... and because Time (even as I write!) flies...  
Toto writes apart, he smiles, sees a future.  
He lives. One day he was born. One day he dies.

## The Ship of Gold

*from Emile Nelligan*

There was a mighty ship carved of massive gold:  
Its masts touched the azure, on the unknown seas;  
The Cyprus of love, hair loose, with nude torso  
Stretched herself on its prows, in excessive suns.

One night, however, there came the great danger  
In those clever oceans where the Sirens sing;  
This horrible shipwreck inclined the ship's bottom  
Toward the depths of the abyss, unchanging grave.

There was a ship of gold, and its diaphanous flanks  
Displayed its rich hold to those profane sailors,  
Disgust, Hate, and Nerves... they split it between them.

What is left of the ship from that so brief Tempest?  
What has my heart become, but a deserted ship?  
Alas! it has foundered on the vacuum of the dream.

## Love's Labor

If this Christmas you feel  
nothing but unique gall  
at ceremonies which seem  
the indecipherable sum  
to a human mathematic:  
the human mind is stuck  
in Thought's thorns and pricks  
– might as well get him socks!

If through winter's mist  
shouts the routine Must  
and pleasures for the kids  
don't taunt experienced heads  
like color for a sister's  
nightgown, or dear brother's  
difficult taste in hats  
or brand-names for the aunts

If for the special racket  
you finger the vacant pocket  
swear one time you had it  
now some bureaucrat's got it  
to finance a mutual war  
– if in department store  
your spiteful credit card  
whispers what you most feared

If you have marked dissent  
of a conscience sorely bent  
by measures you have taken  
to service each guest wine  
– though not wine for a king  
the mind now fully swung  
to conclude the season's ill  
with a long, long-distance call

– Then, presuppose a pass  
a lucky, explored course  
between the gift of chance  
and awkward social science  
– a poem is what you mean:  
the riddle of deliberate man  
whether object or good dead  
is solved by the schemer's word.