



Paul  
Auster

Collected  
Poems

USA \$24.95  
CAN \$37.50

# Paul Auster Collected Poems

*Introduction by Norman Finkelstein*

Paul Auster's penetrating and charged verse resembles little else in recent American poetry. Taut, densely lyrical, and everywhere informed by a powerful and subtle music, this collection begins with the compact fragments of *Spokes* and *Unearth* (both written when Auster was in his early twenties), continues on through the more ample meditations of *Wall Writing*, *Disappearances*, *Effigies*, *Fragments From the Cold*, *Facing the Music* and *White Spaces*, then moves further back in time to include Auster's revealing translations of many of the French poets who influenced his own writing—including Paul Éluard, André Breton, Tristan Tzara, Philippe Soupault, Robert Desnos, and René Char—as well as the provocative and previously unpublished “Notes From A Composition Book” (1967). An introduction by Norman Finkelstein connects biographical elements to a consideration of the work and takes in Auster's early literary and philosophical influences.

“Magnificent poetry; dark, severe, even  
harsh—yet pulsating with life.”

—JOHN ASHBERRY

C O L L E C T E D   P O E M S



COLLECTED  
POEMS

PAUL AUSTER



THE OVERLOOK PRESS  
WOODSTOCK & NEW YORK

First published in the United States in 2004 by  
The Overlook Press, Peter Mayer Publishers, Inc.  
Woodstock & New York

WOODSTOCK:  
One Overlook Drive  
Woodstock, NY 12498  
www.overlookpress.com

[for individual orders, bulk and special sales, contact our Woodstock office]

NEW YORK:  
141 Wooster Street  
New York, NY 10012

Collection copyright © 2004 by Paul Auster  
Introduction © Norman Finkelstein, 2004  
Cover painting by Sam Messer

All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system now known or to be invented without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who wishes to quote brief passages in connection with a review written for inclusion in a magazine, newspaper, or broadcast.

The poems in this book have been taken from the following collections and anthologies: *Unearth* (Living Hand, 1974), *Wall Writing* (The Figures, 1976), *Effigies* (Orange Export Ltd., 1977), *Fragments from Cold* (Parenthèse, 1977), *Facing the Music* (Station Hill, 1980), *White Spaces* (Station Hill, 1980), *A Little Anthology of Surrealist Poems* (Siamese Banana Press, 1972), *The Random House Book of Twentieth-Century French Poetry* (Random House, 1982), *René Char: Selected Poems* (New Directions, 1992). *Spokes* originally appeared in *Poetry* (March 1972).

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the following for permission to include the translations in this book: Editions Gallimard for the poems by Paul Éluard, André Breton, Robert Desnos, Tristan Tzara, and Jacques Dupin; Librairie José Corti for the poems by René Char; Mercure de France for the poems by André du Bouchet; and the Estate of Philippe Soupault.

∞ The paper used in this book meets the requirements for paper permanence as described in the ANSI Z39.48-1992 standard.

Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available from the Library of Congress

*Book design and type formatting by Bernard Schleifer*  
Manufactured in the United States of America

FIRST EDITION  
ISBN 1-58567-404-4  
1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

# Contents

INTRODUCTION	9
SPOKES (1970)	19
UNEARTH (1970-1972)	35
WALL WRITING (1971-1975)	63
White Nights	65
Matrix and Dream	66
Interior	67
Pulse	68
Scribe	69
Choral	70
Meridian	71
Lackawanna	72
Lies. Decrees. 1972.	73
Ecliptic. Les Halles.	74
Dictum: After Great Distances	75
Viaticum	76
Still Life	77
Fore-Shadows	78
Ireland	79
Prism	80
Wall Writing	81
Description of October	82
Covenant	83
Shadow to Shadow	84
Provence: Equinox	85
Hieroglyph	86

White	87
Horizon	88
Ascendant	89
South	91
Pastoral	92
Incendiary	93
Song of Degrees	94
Fire Speech	95
Lapsarian	97
Late Summer	98
Heraclitian	99
Braille	100
Salvage	101
Autobiography of the Eye	102
All Souls	103
DISAPPEARANCES (1975)	105
EFFIGIES (1976)	115
FRAGMENTS FROM COLD (1976-1977)	123
Northern Lights	125
Reminiscence of Home	126
Riding Eastward	127
Gnomon	128
Fragment from Cold	129
Aubaude	130
Testimony	131
Visible	132
Meteor	133
Transfusion	134
Siberian	135
Looking Glass	136
Clandestine	137
Quarry	138



FACING THE MUSIC (1978-1979) 13

Credo	141
Obituary in the Present Tense	142
Narrative	143
S.A. 1911-1979	144
Search for a Definition	145
Between the Lines	147
In Memory of Myself	148
Bedrock	149
Facing the Music	150

WHITE SPACES (1979) 153

TRANSLATIONS (1967-1969) 163

*PAUL ÉLUARD*

The Lover	165
Second Nature	166
Equality of the Sexes	167
The Deaf and Blind	168

*ANDRÉ BRETON*

All Paradise is Not Lost	169
No Grounds for Prosecution	170

*TRISTAN TZARA*

Approximate Man I	171
-------------------	-----

*PHILIPPE SOUPAULT*

Servitudes	175
Georgia	176
The Swimmer	177

*ROBERT DESNOS*

At the Edge of the World	178
I Have Dreamed of You So Much	179
Like a Hand at the Moment of Death	180

*RENÉ CHAR*

Lacenaire's Hand	181
The Violent Rose	182
Poets	183
The Fired Schoolteacher	184
Chain	185
Observers and Dreamers	186

*ANDRÉ DU BOUCHET*

The White Motor	187
-----------------	-----

*JACQUES DUPIN*

Mineral Kingdom	193
Thirst	194
My body. . .	195
Opened. . .	196
The wave. . .	197
Let us salute. . .	198
Gripped. . .	199

NOTES FROM A COMPOSITION BOOK (1967)	201
--------------------------------------	-----

# Introduction

## I

LONG BEFORE Paul Auster used “the music of chance” as the title to one of his novels, his work was already the embodiment of that phrase. Throughout his career, his writing has been set to that music but simultaneously opposed to it: an ecstatic, frightening investigation of chance and a resistance to its power. How much credit should we give to coincidence? And if we refuse to give it credit, is a belief in determinism our only alternative? And how would a writer make a music out of that? For many years now, Auster’s work has happily wandered between the poles of these beliefs, saved from the merely philosophical by the confidence, grace, and sly timing of the born storyteller. Auster has succeeded so brilliantly in giving life to this heady debate—and in doing so, has given us some of the most compelling fiction of our time—because chance, and its equally daunting alternative, fate, have not just been themes that he has chosen to engage in his novels. Rather, as he attests in his interviews and autobiographical works, chance and fate have had everything to do with the literal course of his career, much more so than in the cases of most other writers. And this is especially true regarding his passage from poet to novelist.

As he relates in *Hand to Mouth*, Auster was already trying to write fiction as a teenager, but much of his literary effort during what we would usually consider a writer’s formative years, his twenties, went into what we now have before us as his *Collected Poems*. Between 1974 and 1980 he published six collections and chapbooks, a substantial and highly original

body of work. Influenced by a select group of precursors, both American (Dickinson, Reznikoff, Oppen, Olson) and continental (Celan, Mandelstam, the French Surrealists), it is a poetry that develops rapidly, following a trajectory from taut and furious to open and reconciled, from the reduced minimis of world and language to generous valediction.

But it ends, it definitively ends. As he reports in an extraordinary interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory (in *The Art of Hunger*), by 1978, with a failing marriage, a young child, and desperate money problems, Auster had virtually stopped writing. Then, in December, Auster chanced to attend the rehearsal of a dance piece choreographed by a friend of a friend. The piece so inspired him that he began to write *White Spaces*, “a little work,” as he puts it, “of no identifiable genre—which was an attempt on my part to translate the experience of that dance performance into words. It was a liberation for me, a tremendous letting go, and I look back on it now as the bridge between writing poetry and writing prose.” But that’s not all. *White Spaces* was finished late on the night of January 14th 1979. (“A few scraps of paper. A last cigarette before turning in. The snow falling endlessly in the winter night. To remain in the realm of the naked eye, as happy as I am at this moment.”) Early the next morning, Auster learned of his father’s sudden death the night before. The inheritance he received temporarily freed him from financial concerns and gave him the time he needed to work on the prose he believed he had permanently abandoned. He turned to writing *The Invention of Solitude*—a monument, as he told me, to his first life—and from there went on to *The New York Trilogy*, sections of which, along with parts of *In the Country of Last Things* and *Moon Palace*, had actually been germinating for many years.

Was it chance or fate that led Auster to that dance rehearsal, from which came the uncanny liberation of *White Spaces*? Was it coincidence that the work should be finished even as his father died? And in the light of these events, this

classic Auster story of a strange shift from one phase of a life to the next, how are we to read his poems? "I remain very attached to the poetry I wrote," says Auster in the same interview. "I still stand by it. In the final analysis, it could even be the best work I've ever done." Indeed, these are haunting, challenging poems, to which I for one have returned continually, even as I have anticipated and devoured each of Auster's novels in turn. Auster fans (yes, this is a writer not only with readers but with fans) will have at least read the poetry in *Disappearances*; they will be pleased to see all the poems now gathered here, along with a selection of Auster's revealing translations. Those who are just beginning to enter his world, having perhaps read a novel or two, are urged to pause and consider his world through his poems, for as Auster says, "poetry is like taking still photographs, whereas prose is like filming with a movie camera." And the serious readers of poetry—the audience that I continually seek, as both poet and critic—should pay particular attention to this book, should read it thoughtfully, read it with pleasure, and contemplate it in relation to the larger poetic landscape of our time.

## II

"The world is in my head. My body is in the world."

—*Notes From A Composition Book* (1967)

THE TWENTY YEAR OLD who writes this proposition, immersed in Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty, and the prose of Charles Olson, will soon go on to produce what might at first appear to be a dauntingly abstract poetry. But like Olson (as in "In Cold Hell, In Thicket" and "As the Dead Prey Upon Us"), and in a related key, like the Objectivists, Auster struggles toward the real, and his poetry enacts that process. He reaches from the world in his head to the world that he knows his body inhabits, with language, as he realizes, as his only "means of organizing experience." "The eye sees the world in flux," writes this stu-

dent of perception; "The word is an attempt to arrest the flow, to stabilize it. And yet we persist in trying to translate experience into language. Hence poetry, hence the utterances of daily life. This is the faith that prevents universal despair—and also causes it." As Auster already recognizes (and I think this is a key to both his poetry and his fiction), there is a fundamental kinship between poetic and mundane utterance, which leads me to question our initial sense of the poetry's abstract intensities.

Item: the Auster home in New Jersey where Paul spent his teenage years—and where his parents' marriage gradually collapsed—was located so close to a quarry that he could regularly hear the blasts ("Picks jot the quarry—eroded marks / That could not cipher the message. / The quarrel unleashed its alphabet, / And the stones, girded by abuse / Have memorized the defeat"). Item: many of the poems were written among the rocky landscapes of the south of France, where, as he relates in *The Red Notebook*, Auster and his companion nearly starved, working as caretakers of a farmhouse owned by an American couple in Paris ("Night-light: the bone and the breath / transparent"). Item: Auster attends Columbia University during the chaotic upheavals of the late sixties. The suspicion of authority, the politics of rage, produce what Auster tells me is the "radical anarchist subtext" of *Unearth* ("with imbecilic hands, they dragged you / into the city, bound you in / this knot of slang, and gave you / nothing. Your ink has learned / the violence of the wall"). Item: a few years later, with the storm of Watergate gathering just ahead, he watches the election results with other Americans in our embassy in Paris as Nixon is reelected in the biggest landslide in U. S. history. Appalled, Auster writes "Lies. Decrees. 1972." ("Imagine: / even now / he does not repent of / his oath, even / now, he stammers back, unwitnessed, to his / resurrected throne").

So the stony interior world is surprisingly congruent with the equally stony exterior world. The strange meetings with an other which inspire poem after poem are less encounters with

Romantic doppelgängers and femmes fatales than they are the accounts of a restless young man, formidably intelligent, who is determined to make lasting contact with the world outside his own head. Sometimes the "you" is a lover; sometimes it may be himself. Sometimes it is a literary relation, as in the address to Celan in "White" or to Mandelstam in "Siberian." But in every instance, the urgency of the communication, combined with an innate respect (honor *and* fear) of language, is such that he finds himself, as he declares at the end of "Lapsarian," "standing in the place / where the eye most terribly holds / its ground." Indeed, as the poetry nears its end, in a piece called, appropriately, "Quarry," it is "The world / that walks inside me" that has become "a world beyond reach." As Auster seeks the embrace of the outside world, maintaining lyric interiority increasingly becomes the problem. The poems, as he tells McCaffery and Gregory, "were a quest for what I would call a uni-vocal expression. . . . They were concerned with bedrock beliefs, and their aim was to achieve a purity and consistency of language. Prose, on the other hand, gives me a chance to articulate my conflicts and contradictions." Thus, one of our most "French" of recent poets, with his Mallarméan designs on linguistic purity, gives way to the novelist's dialogic imagination. And as Auster confirms, "Of all the theories of the novel, Bakhtin's strikes me as the most brilliant, the one that comes closest to understanding the complexity and the magic of the form."

In hindsight, this may provide a clue to the title of Auster's last collection, *Facing the Music*. Something is shutting down, something is opening up in these memorable poems; the sense of change is palpable. The first lines of "Narrative" read like the beginning of one of the early novels ("Because what happens will never happen, / and because what has happened / endlessly happens again . . ."). The father is mourned with the utmost self-consciousness ("As if the first word / comes only after the last . . ."); a few pages later comes a Beckett-like elegy to the self ("Simply to have stopped"). Or

perhaps it is the *poetic* self. In "Search for a Definition," the speaker declares that it

will never become  
a question  
of trying to simplify  
the world, but a way of looking for a place  
to enter the world, a way of being  
present  
among the things  
that do not want us . . .

As these lines indicate, by this point Auster has learned the lessons of the Objectivists, especially those of George Oppen, very well indeed. But rather than attempt a genuinely dialogic lyric sequence like *Of Being Numerous*, he moves instead toward the "elsewhere" of narrative prose. Hence what I feel to be the tremendous pathos of "Facing the Music," a valediction to poetry rarely found in modern letters:

Impossible  
to hear it anymore. The tongue  
is forever taking us away  
from where we are, and nowhere  
can we be at rest  
in the things we are given  
to see, for each word  
is an elsewhere, a thing that moves more  
quickly than the eye . . .

### III

IT IS DIFFICULT FOR ME to separate my reading of these poems with my own start as a poet. I first encountered Auster's work in 1976, in a little magazine called *The Mysterious Barricades*, edited by Henry Weinfield, the poet, critic, and translator who was my first creative writing teacher. Henry had



accepted three of my poems for publication. It was the first appearance of my work outside of a student magazine, and I read the issue from cover to cover, including Auster's five poems from *Wall Writing*, which would appear that same year. Auster's poems were among the most compelling, along with the eight poems of William Bronk, to whose work I had already been exposed, and those of Weinfield himself. I remember looking up the word "viaticum" and learning of its specific Catholic sense ("the Eucharist, as given to a dying person or one in danger of death") as well as its more general meaning ("supplies for a journey"). Auster had used it as the title of a poem that I found perfectly balanced between terror and compassion. I was equally moved by "White," which I would only later understand was in memory of Celan, and by "Ascendant," with its powerfully confident appropriations of Jewish tradition ("The sabbath candle / torn from your throat"). Here was a poet, I thought, with both an unusual reach and a sharply focused style. I got hold of as many of his books as I could find.

It took me until 1979 to write to Auster. By then, I was soliciting work for *Daimon*, a magazine I co-edited with other members of a shortlived but energetic group of young writers that called itself the Atlanta Poetry Collective. He graciously sent me what remains one of my favorites among his poems, the electrifying midrash on the biblical figure of Jacob called "Between the Lines." Ironically, *Daimon* folded before we could publish the poem, but the condensed, incantatory lines stayed with me, and nearly twenty years later, I would borrow three of them ("to the seventh year / beyond the seventh year / of the seventh year") for a long movement of my serial poem *Track*, a movement in seven sections of seven lyrics each, each lyric consisting of seven lines—a movement, of course, about luck and chance.

In the interim, Paul and I continued to correspond; we met in New York on several occasions; and in 1986, he came to Cincinnati to read at Xavier. When *Disappearances* was

published, I wrote an essay on the poetry, one of the only sustained examinations of this crucial part of the Auster oeuvre. (It can be found in *Beyond the Red Notebook: Essays on Paul Auster*, edited by Dennis Barone.) Years went by, and we lost touch. One day in April of this year, a book arrived in the mail: *Paul Auster entdeckt Charles Reznikoff*, a volume of Reznikoff's poetry selected by Auster and translated into German ("Wie Saloman / habe ich die Sprache von Fremden geheiratet und geheiratet; / keine ist wie du, Sulamit"). I opened the book and found this note:

Norman—

Years and years . . . In a lovely twist, it was Michael Palmer who sent me your current address.

Reznikoff in German. I thought you might like to have a copy—and send it to you with all good and happy memories of those days we spent together long ago.

Yrs. ever—

Paul A.

It was yet another coincidence, as my own book on Jewish American poetry, including a number of chapters on Reznikoff, had appeared less than a year before. My initial interest in Reznikoff had been prompted by "The Decisive Moment," Auster's early essay on his poetry, and I had returned to it as I thought through my own position on that deceptively simple work. And so, brought together by old affections, our friendship resumed.

That Auster, among the many perceptive writers of his generation, should have been one of the earliest and keenest readers of Reznikoff and the other Objectivists, does not surprise me. Likewise his appreciation for Laura Riding, for William Bronk, for Celan, for Jabès, and of course, for Beckett. Thinking now about Auster's poetry in the light of his essays in *The Art of Hunger*, and in the light of this poetry's own unique history, I understand that it is constituted of a solitary voice speaking to the silence. It is a silence that itself has a complex history, often connected to some of the most terri-

ble episodes in modern times. In the end, it takes up residence within the poet and demands to be acknowledged. I believe we hear Auster addressing the silence in "Testimony," when he speaks of

. . . how I might acquit you  
of this hiddenness, and prove to you  
that I am  
no longer alone,  
that I am not  
even near myself  
anymore.

As he draws his readers to him, he is indeed no longer alone. And however isolated the voice in these poems may sound, we too are no longer alone when we are near them.

—NORMAN FINKELSTEIN  
*Cincinnati, Ohio 2003*



S P O K E S

1970



Roots writhe with the worm—the sift  
Of the clock cohabits the sparrow's heart.  
Between branch and spire—the word  
Belittles its nest, and the seed, rocked  
By simpler confines, will not confess.  
Only the egg gravitates.

In water—my absence in aridity. A flower.

A flower that defines the air.

In the deepest well, your body is fuse.



The bark is not enough. It furls  
Redundant shards, will barter  
Rock for sap, blood for veering sluice,  
While the leaf is pecked, brindled  
With air, and how much more, furrowed  
Or wrapped, between dog and wolf,  
How much longer will it stake  
The axe to its gloating advantage?

Nothing waters the bole, the stone wastes nothing.  
Speech could not cobble the swamp,  
And so you dance for a brighter silence.  
Light severs wave, sinks, camouflages—  
The wind clacks, is bolt.  
I name you desert.

Picks jot the quarry—eroded marks  
That could not cipher the message.  
The quarrel unleashed its alphabet,  
And the stones, girded by abuse,  
Have memorized the defeat.

Drunk, whiteness hoards its strength,  
When you sleep, sun drunk, like a seed  
That holds its breath  
Beneath the soil. To dream in heat  
All heat  
That infests the equilibrium  
Of a hand, that germinates  
The miracle of dryness. . .  
In each place you have left  
Wolves are maddened  
By the leaves that will not speak.  
To die. To welcome red wolves  
Scratching at the gates: howling  
Page—or you sleep, and the sun  
Will never be finished.  
It is green where black seeds breathe.

The flower is red, is perched  
Where roots split, in the gnarl  
Of a tower, sucking in its meager fast,  
And retracting the spell  
That welds step to word  
And ties the tongue to its faults.  
The flower will be red  
When the first word tears the page,  
Will thrive in the ooze, take color,  
Of a lesioned beak, when the sparrow  
Is bloodied, and flies from one  
Earth into the bell.

Between the sparrow and the bird without name:  
its prey.

Light escapes through the interval.

Each trance pales in the hub, the furtive  
Equinox of names: pawl  
Thwarting ratchet—jarring skies that orb  
This austere commerce with wind.  
Lulls mend. But gales nourish  
Chance: breath, blooming, while the wheel scores  
Its writing into earth. Bound back  
To your feet. Eyes tend soil  
In the cool of dying suns. The song  
Is in the step.

Embering to the lip  
Of nether sky—the undevoured nest-light  
Ebbs to sustenance: from the sparrow  
To the bird without name, the interval  
Is prey—smoke  
That softens coals, unlike the sect  
Of wings, where you beat, smoke wed  
To glow—in the sparrow's memory  
It perfects the sleep of clouds.



To see is this other torture, atoned for  
In the pain of being seen: the spoken,  
The seen, contained in the refusal  
To speak, and the seed of a single voice,  
Buried in a random stone.  
My lies have never belonged to me.

Into the hub the shell implodes,  
Endures as a pun of loam and rock,  
Rising as stick, to invade, to drive  
Out the babble that worded its body  
To emerge, to wait for future  
Blows—city in root, in deed, unsprung, even out  
Of the city. Get out. The wheel  
Was deception. It cannot turn.

The egg limits renunciation, cannot  
Sound in another's ringing, the least  
Hammering, before the wail slits  
Its course, and the eye squanders  
The subterfuge of a longer lamp.  
Lifted into speech, it carries  
Its own birth, and if it shatters  
Acclaim its fall and contradiction.  
Your earth will always be far.



U N E A R T H

1970-1972



Along with your ashes, the barely  
written ones, obliterating  
the ode, the incited roots, the alien  
eye—with imbecilic hands, they dragged you  
into the city, bound you in  
this knot of slang, and gave you  
nothing. Your ink has learned  
the violence of the wall. Banished,  
but always to the heart  
of brothering quiet, you cant the stones  
of unseen earth, and smooth your place  
among the wolves. Each syllable  
is the work of sabotage.

Flails, the whiteness, the flowers  
of the promised land: and all  
you hoard, crumbling at the brink  
of breath. For a single word  
in air we have not breathed, for one  
stone, splitting with the famine  
inside us—ire,  
out of bone's havoc, by which we kin  
the worm. The wall  
is your only witness. Barred  
from me, but squandering nothing,  
you sprawl over each unwritten page,  
as though your voice had crawled  
from you: and entered the whiteness  
of the wail.



The blind way is etched  
in your palm: it leads to the voice  
you had bartered, and will bleed, once again  
on the prongs of this sleep-hewn  
braille. A breath  
scales the wick of my stammering,  
and lights the air that will never  
recant. Your body is your own  
measured burden. And walks with the weight  
of fire.

Vatic lips, weaned  
of image. The mute one  
here, who waits, urn-wise,  
in wonder. Curse overbrims  
prediction: the glacial rose  
bequeaths its thorns to the breath  
that labors toward eye  
and oblivion.

We have only to ready ourselves.  
From the first step, our voice  
is in league  
with the stones of the field.

Night, as though tasted  
within. And of us, each lie  
the tongue would know  
when it draws back and sinks  
into its poison.

We would sleep, side by side  
with such hunger, and from the fruit  
we war with, become the name  
of what we name. As though a crime, dreamed  
by us, could ripen in cold—and fell  
these black, roweling trees  
that drain the history of stars.

Unquelled  
in this flood of earth—  
where seeds end  
and augur nearness—you will sound  
the choral rant  
of memory, and go the way  
that eyes go. There is no longer  
path for you: from the moment  
you slit your veins, roots will begin  
to recite the massacre  
of stones. You will live. You will build  
your house here—you will forget  
your name. Earth  
is the only exile.

Thistle, drenched by heat,  
and the barren word  
that prods you—shouted  
down to the lodes.  
Light would spill here.  
It would seep through  
the scrawled branch that wrote  
such cowering above us.  
As if, far from you,  
I could feel it breaking  
through me, as I walked  
north into my body.

Scanned by no one  
but the loved, the margins  
rehearse your death,  
playing out the travesty  
of nakedness, and the hands  
of all the others  
who will see you, as if, one day,  
you would sing to them, and in the longer  
silence of the anvil, name them  
as you would this sun: a stone,  
scourged by sky.

Between these spasms  
of light, in brittle fern, in dark  
thickets: waiting  
in your labyrinthine ear  
for the thunder  
to crack: for the Babel-roar,  
for the silence. It will not  
be what you wandered to  
that is heard. But the step,  
burrowing under  
this parted sky, that keeps its distance  
whole. And that widens in you  
at the mouth  
of cloven earth, where you watch  
these fallen stars  
struggle to crawl back to you,  
bearing the gifts of hell.

Ice—means nothing  
is miracle, if it must  
be what will—you are the means  
and the wound—opening  
out of ice, and the cadence through  
blunt earth, when crows  
come to maraud. Wherever you walk, green  
speaks into you, and holds. Silence  
stands the winter eye to eye  
with spring.



Scrolls of your second earth, unraveled  
by my slow, incendiary hands.  
The sky in your name—sliding down  
scarps of blueness: the sky  
overroaring wheat.  
Do not ask—for what. Say nothing—  
watch. Parades of the beaten,  
for whom I tore apart  
the drum. Your other life, glowing in the fuse  
of this one. The unbaked loaves: the retina's lack  
of solace.

Wind-spewn, from the radiant  
no, and grafted on  
the brown-green scar of this  
moment. You ask  
what place this is, and I, along the seams  
of your dismembering,  
have told you: the forest  
is the memory  
of itself, this frail  
splinter, streaming through  
my navigable blood and driven  
aground in heart-rubble. You ask  
words of me, and I  
will speak them—from the moment  
I have learned  
to give you nothing.

Other of I: or sibling  
axe of shadow, born bright  
where fear is darkest—I breathe  
to become your whetstone.  
Rasping, as of sparks  
that keen, as from mire, waves  
of sedge that bristle upward  
in the hot morning—we would grow  
to become part  
of such things. Invisible  
at last, as this blood is, buried  
under loss that knit  
to scars. As the unaborted  
who will breathe with us,  
standing in the glare  
of this lewd and figment sun.

From one stone touched  
to the next stone  
named: earth-hood: the inaccessible  
ember. You  
will sleep here, a voice  
moored to stone, moving through  
this empty house that listens  
to the fire that destroyed it. You  
will begin. To drag your body  
from the ashes. To carry the burden  
of eyes.

River-noises, cool. A remnant  
grief, merging  
with the not yet nameable.  
Barge wake, silt, and autumn. Head-  
waters churn, a strand  
of kelp  
wheels over the rank  
whey of foam—as one, nail-pierced  
shard, twice, floats past you, salvaging  
asylum  
in eyes washed clean  
of bliss.

Prayer-grown—  
in the ghost-written tract  
of your somewhere,  
in the landscape  
where you will not stand—whorl-bits  
of ammonite  
reinvent you.  
They roll you along  
with earth's mock caroling  
underfoot, scattering  
the hundred-faced lie  
that makes you visible. And from each  
daylight blow, your hardness turns  
to weapon, another slum  
flowers within. (Prayer-grown—  
the clandestine word, as though cutting  
through the hand  
that groped along these cave walls): wherever  
I do not find you, the silent  
mob that drifted mouthward—throngs  
loudly into time.

Mirrored by the tent-speech  
of our forty-dark, alodial-hued  
next year—  
the images,  
ground in the afterlight  
of eyes, the wandered  
images absolve you: (dunes  
that whirled free,—scree-words  
shuttled  
by the grate of sand,—the other  
glass-round hours, redoubling  
in remembrance). And in  
my hand—(as, after the night,—the night)—  
I hold what you have taken  
to give: this path  
of tallied cries, and grain  
after grain, the never-done-with  
desert, burning on your lips  
that jell in violence.

Frail dawn: the boundary  
of your darkened lamp: air  
without word: a rose-round, folding  
corolla of ash. From the smallest  
of your suns, you clench  
the scald: husk  
of relented light: the true seed  
in your fallow palm, deepening  
into dumbness. Beyond this hour, the eye  
will teach you. The eye will learn  
to long.



Notched out  
on this crust of field—in the day  
that comes after us,  
where you saw the earth  
almost happen again: the echoing  
furrows have closed,  
and for this one-more-life have ransomed you  
against the avid murmur  
of scythes. Count me along, then,  
with your words. Nothing,  
even on this day, will change.  
Shoulder to shoulder with dust, before  
the blade and beyond  
the tall dry grass  
that veers with me, I am the air's  
stammered relic.

Evening, at half-mast  
through mulberry-glow and lichen: the banner  
of the unpronounceable  
future. The skull's  
rabble  
crept out from you—doubling  
across the threshold—and became  
your knell  
among the many: you  
never heard it  
again. Anti-stars  
above the city you expel  
from language, turning, at odds,  
even with you, repeal the arson-  
eye's quiet  
testimony.

Rats wake in your sleep  
and mime the progress  
of want. My voice turns back  
to the hunger it gives birth to,  
coupling with stones  
that jut from red walls: the heart  
gnaws, but cannot know  
its plunder; the flayed tongue  
rasps. We lie  
in earth's deepest marrow, and listen  
to the breath of angels.  
Our bones have been drained.  
Wherever night has spoken,  
unborn sons prowl the void  
between stars.

The dead still die: and in them  
the living. All space,  
and the eyes, hunted  
by brittle tools, confined  
to their habits.

To breathe is to accept  
this lack of air, the only breath,  
sought in the fissures  
of memory, in the lapse that sunders  
this language of feuds, without which earth  
would have granted a stronger omen  
to level the orchards  
of stone. Not even  
the silence pursues me.

Immune to the craving  
gray of fog, hate, uttered  
in the eaves, day-  
long, kept you near. We  
knew that sun  
had wormed through the shuttered panes  
in drunkenness  
only. We knew a deeper void  
was being  
built by the gulls who scavenged  
their own cries. We knew that they  
knew the landfall  
was mirage.  
And was waiting,  
from the first hour  
I had come to you. My skin,  
shuddering in the light.  
The light, shattering at my touch.

No one's voice, alien  
to fall, and once  
gathered in the eye that bled  
such brightness. Your sinew  
does not mend, it is  
another rope, braided  
by ink, and aching through  
this raw hand—that hauls the images  
back to us: the clairvoyant  
corpse, singing  
from his gallows-mirror; a glance,  
heavier than stone, hurled  
down to April  
ice, ringing the bottom  
of your breath-well; an eye,  
and then  
one more. Till vulture  
is the word  
that gluts this offal, night  
will be your prey.

Nomad—  
till nowhere, blooming  
in the prison of your mouth, becomes  
wherever you are: you  
read the fable  
that was written in the eyes  
of dice: (it was  
the meteor-word, scrawled by light  
between us, yet we, in the end,  
had no evidence, we  
could not produce  
the stone). The die-and-the-die  
now own your name. As if to say,  
wherever you are  
the desert is with you. As if,  
wherever you move, the desert  
is new,  
is moving with you.





# W A L L   W R I T I N G

1971-1975



# *White Nights*

No one here,  
and the body says: whatever is said  
is not to be said. But no one  
is a body as well, and what the body says  
is heard by no one  
but you.

Snowfall and night. The repetition  
of a murder  
among the trees. The pen  
moves across the earth: it no longer knows  
what will happen, and the hand that holds it  
has disappeared.

Nevertheless, it writes.  
It writes: in the beginning,  
among the trees, a body came walking  
from the night. It writes:  
the body's whiteness  
is the color of earth. It is earth,  
and the earth writes: everything  
is the color of silence.

I am no longer here. I have never said  
what you say  
I have said. And yet, the body is a place  
where nothing dies. And each night,  
from the silence of the trees, you know  
that my voice  
comes walking toward you.

## *Matrix and Dream*

Inaudible things, chipped  
nightly away:  
breath, underground  
through winter: well-words  
down the quarried light  
of lullaby rill  
and chasm.

You pass.  
Between fear and memory,  
the agate  
of your footfall turns  
crimson  
in the dust of childhood.

Thirst: and coma: and leaf—  
from the gaps  
of the no longer known: the unsigned message,  
buried in my body.

The white linen  
hanging on the line. The wormwood  
crushed  
in the field.

The smell of mint  
from the ruin.

# *Interior*

Grappled flesh  
of the fully other and one.  
And each thing here, as if it were the last thing  
to be said: the sound of a word  
married to death, and the life  
that is this force in me  
to disappear.

Shutters closed. The dust  
of a former self, emptying the space  
I do not fill. This light  
that grows in the corner of the room,  
where the whole of the room  
has moved.

Night repeats. A voice that speaks to me  
only of smallest things.  
Not even things—but their names.  
And where no names are—  
of stones. The clatter of goats  
climbing through the villages  
of noon. A scarab  
devoured in the sphere  
of its own dung. And the violet swarm  
of butterflies beyond.

In the impossibility of words,  
in the unspoken word  
that asphyxiates,  
I find myself.

## *Pulse*

This that recedes  
will come near to us  
on the other side of day.

Autumn: a single leaf  
eaten by light: and the green  
gaze of green upon us.  
Where earth does not stop,  
we, too, will become this light,  
even as the light  
dies  
in the shape of a leaf.

Gaping eye  
in the hunger of day.  
Where we have not been  
we will be. A tree  
will take root in us  
and rise in the light  
of our mouths.

The day will stand before us.  
The day will follow us  
into the day.

# *Scribe*

The name  
never left his lips: he talked himself  
into another body: he found his room again  
in Babel.

It was written.  
A flower  
falls from his eye  
and blooms in a stranger's mouth.  
A swallow  
rhymes with hunger  
and cannot leave its egg.

He invents  
the orphan in tatters,

he will hold  
a small black flag  
riddled with winter.

It is spring,  
and below his window  
he hears a hundred white stones  
turn to raging phlox.

## *Choral*

Whinnied by flint,  
in the dream-gait that cantered you across  
the clover-swarmed  
militant field:

this bit  
of earth that inches up  
to us again, shattered  
by the shrill, fife-sharp tone  
that jousts you open, million-fold,  
in your utmost  
heretic word.

Slowly,  
you dip your finger into the wound  
from which my voice  
escapes.



## *Meridian*

All summer long,  
by the gradient rasp-light  
of our dark, dune-begetting hands: your stones,  
crumbling back to life  
around you.

Behind my sheer, raven lid,  
one early star,  
flushed from a hell of briars,  
rears you up, innocent,  
towards morning, and peoples your shadow  
with names.

Night-rhymed. Harrow-deep.  
Near.

# *Lackawanna*

Scree-rails, rust,  
remembrance: the no longer bearable, again,  
shunting across  
your gun-metal earth. The eye  
does not will  
what enters it: it must always refuse  
to refuse.

In the burgeoning frost  
of equinox: you will have your name,  
and nothing more. Dwarfed  
to the reddening seed-space  
in which every act  
rebutts you, your hot, image-bright pore  
again  
will force its way  
  
open.

## *Lies. Decrees. 1972.*

Imagine:

the conscripting word  
that camped in the squalor  
of his fathom-moaned, unapproachable  
heaven  
goes on warring  
in time.

Imagine:

even now  
he does not repent of  
his oath, even  
now, he stammers back, unwitnessed, to his  
resurrected throne.

Imagine:

the murdered ones,  
cursed and radiant below him,  
usher the knives  
of their humbled, birth-marked silence, deep  
into the alleyways  
of his mouth.

Imagine:

I speak this to you,  
from the evening of the first day,  
undyingly,  
along the short, human fuse  
of resistance.

## *Ecliptic. Les Halles.*

You were my absence.  
Wherever I breathed, you found me  
lying in the word  
that spoke its way back  
to this place.

Silence  
was  
in the prowled shambles  
and marrow  
of a cunning, harlot haste—a hunger  
that became  
a bed for me,

as though the random  
Ezekial-wrath  
I discovered, the “Live,” and the  
“yes, he said to us,  
when we were in our blood,  
Live,” had merely been your way  
of coming near—

as though somewhere,  
visible, an arctic stone, as pale  
as semen, had been  
dripping, fire-phrase by fire-phrase,  
from your lips.

## *Dictum: After Great Distances*

Oleander and rose. The rubble  
of earth's other air—where the hummingbird  
flies in the shadow  
of the hawk. And through each wall, the opening  
earth of August,  
like a stone that cracks  
this wall of sun.

Mountains. And then the lights  
of the town  
beyond the mountain. The town that lies  
on the other side  
of light.

We dream  
that we do not dream. We wake  
in the hours of sleep  
and sleep through the silence  
that stands over us. Summer  
keeps its promise  
by breaking it.

## *Viaticum*

You will not blame the stones,  
or look to yourself  
beyond the stones, and say  
you did not long for them  
before your face  
had turned to stone.

In front of you  
and behind you, in the darkness  
that moves with day, you almost  
will have breathed. And your eyes,  
as though your life were nothing more  
than a bitter pilgrimage  
to this country of want, will open  
on the walls  
that shut you in your voice,  
your other voice, leading you  
to the distances of love,  
where you lie, closer  
to the second  
and brighter terror  
of living in your death, and speaking  
the stone  
you will become.

## *Still Life*

Snowfall. And in the nethermost  
lode of whiteness,  
a memory  
that adds your steps  
to the lost.

Endlessly,  
I would have walked with you.

## *Fore-Shadows*

I breathe you.  
I becalm you out of me.  
I numb you in the reach  
of brethren light.  
I suckle you  
to the dregs of disaster.

The sky pins a vagrant star  
on my chest. I see the wind  
as witness, the towering night  
that lapsed  
in a maze of oaks,  
the distance.

I haunt you  
to the brink of sorrow.  
I milk you of strength.  
I defy you,  
I deify you  
to nothing and  
to no one,

I become  
your necessary and most violent  
heir.



## *Ireland*

Turf-spent, moor-abandoned you,  
you, the more naked one, bathed in the dark  
of the greenly overrun  
deep-glen, of the gray bed  
my ghost  
pilfered from the mouths  
of stones—bestow on me the silence  
to shoulder the wings of rooks, allow me  
to pass through here again  
and breathe the rankly dealt-with air  
that still traffics in your shame,  
give me the right to destroy you  
on the tongue that impales  
our harvest, the merciless  
acres of cold.

## *Prism*

Earth-time, the stones  
tick  
in hollows of dust, the arable air  
wanders far from home, barbed  
wire and road  
are erased. Spat  
out by the burning  
fever in our lungs, the Ur-seed  
blooms from crystal, our vermilion breath  
refracts us  
into many. We will not  
ever know ourselves  
again. Like the light  
that moves between the bars  
of light  
we sometimes called death,  
we, too, will have flowered,  
even with such  
unquenchable flames  
as these.

# *Wall Writing*

Nothing less than nothing.

In the night that comes  
from nothing,  
for no one in the night  
that does not come.

And what stands at the edge of whiteness,  
invisible  
in the eye of the one who speaks.

Or a word.

Come from nowhere  
in the night  
of the one who does not come.

Or the whiteness of a word,  
scratched  
into the wall.

## *Description of October*

The axed, delusion oaks  
of our stone warm, celestial north, standing  
in the blood-  
debted air that grows  
around the ripening vineyard. Farther,  
even than the drunkenness  
we will have breathed,  
a magpie wing will turn  
and pinion through our shadow.

Come  
for the grief pennies  
I hold out to you.

# *Covenant*

Throng of eyes,  
myriad, at sunken retina depth: the image  
of the great, imageless one,  
moored within.

Mantis-lunged, we,  
the hirelings, alive in juniper and rubble,  
broke the flat bread  
that went with us, we  
were steps, wandered  
into blindness, we knew by then  
how to breathe ourselves along  
to nothing.

Something lost  
became  
something to be found.

A name,  
followed through the dust  
of all that veering, did not ever  
divulge its sound. The mountain  
was the spoor  
by which an animal pain  
hunted itself home.

All night  
I read the braille wounds  
on the inner wall  
of your cry, and at the brink  
of the thick, millennial morning, climbed up  
into you again, where all  
my bones began  
beating and  
beating the heart-drum  
to shreds.

## *Shadow to Shadow*

Against the facade of evening:  
shadows, fire, and silence.

Not even silence, but its fire—  
the shadow  
cast by a breath.

To enter the silence of this wall,  
I must leave myself behind.

## *Provence: Equinox*

Night-light: the bone and the breath  
transparent. This journey  
of proffered sky  
to the core of the sky  
we inhabit—a mountain  
in the air that crumbles.

You alone  
sleep down to the bottom  
of this place,  
stillborn earth, as though you could dream  
far enough  
to tell me of the dense, mud-reckoned seed  
that burns in us,  
and calm the slow, vernal agony  
that labors  
through the long uprooting  
of stars.

# *Hieroglyph*

The language of walls.  
Or one last word—  
cut  
from the visible.

May Day. The metamorphosis  
of Solomon's-seal  
into stone. The just  
doom of the uttered  
road, unraveled in the swirl  
of pollen-memory  
and seed. Do not  
emerge, Eden. Stay  
in the mouths of the lost  
who dream you.

Upon thunder and thorn: the furtive air  
arms  
the lightning-gorse and silence  
of each fallow sky  
below. Blood Hebrew. Or what  
translates  
my body's turning back  
to an image of earth.

This knife  
I hold against your throat.



# *White*

For one who drowned:  
this page, as if  
thrown out to sea  
in a bottle.

So that  
even as the sky embarks  
into the seeing of earth, an echo  
of the earth  
might sail toward him,  
filled with a memory of rain,  
and the sound of the rain  
falling on the water.

So that  
he will have learned,  
in spite of the wave  
now sinking from the crest  
of mountains, that forty days  
and forty nights  
have brought no dove  
back to us.

# *Horizon*

You vow yourself away,  
you burn yourself  
into thaw, you  
yellow the cliffs with broom.

My breath  
shatters into you. I am  
particle  
in what heaps you whole,  
ash—hovering

in your second sky, in the blue  
I hollowed from the blue  
of morning.

And the half-said holds  
in our frantic lungs, uniting  
fire's more with want,  
and the word that will carry us  
beyond ourselves—

here, where the hard earth  
storms toward us, shot through  
by wind's reaving awl.

## *Ascendant*

Spun from the hither-word's  
most hoarded space of longing,  
on the hour and the eve  
that evolve  
in the web-nonce and never-lattice  
of elsewhere-  
upon-elsewhere,

you, who groped out  
from the ghetto-taut mouth, mother  
of mother, through spring's dark  
spider havoc  
and the first, brute  
knowing of ice,

over the bay, and the barges, and the coal  
borne outward: diamond  
and Jew, and dew-drenched blade  
of grass, sundered  
by the sharp, heathen sun  
in ascent, in sense-  
lost Cyrillic—unknowable—  
but yours, yes,  
and mine,

down to the mica-sheer  
parchments, tallying  
the living into death again  
and life, below, beyond the below, and before,  
breath-paved, there, a direction,  
yes, and nowhere,  
into the real  
that was won, and lost, and  
re-invented:

The sabbath candle  
torn from your throat, burns  
through the cold  
that would have freed us—I have not  
put my weapons aside:

Tundra,  
dissolving in the white light  
of sleeplessness:

For every pick that breached the quarry,  
for each stone  
cleft from earth, a star now grows  
dim.

## *South*

Hewn till white— : the bronze  
heart and heaven-shape  
of our gradual  
winter.

Do not forget,  
my dreamless one, I , too,  
came to this world before  
the snow.

## *Pastoral*

In the hinterland of moss and waiting,  
so little like the word  
that was a waiting as well,  
all has been other  
than it is, the moss  
still waits for you, the word  
is a lantern  
you carry to the depths  
of green, for even the roots  
have carried light, and even now  
your voice  
still travels through the roots, so that  
wherever an axe may fall  
you, too, shall know that you live.

# *Incendiary*

Flint hours. The dumb sprawl  
of stones around us, heart  
against heart, we, in the straw  
hulk  
that festers through the damp  
lapse of night.

Nothing left. The cold eye  
opens on cold,  
as an image of fire  
eats  
through the word  
that struggles in your mouth. The world  
is  
whatever you leave to it, is only  
you  
in the world my body  
enters: this place  
where all is lacking.

# *Song of Degrees*

In the vacant lots  
of solstice. In the light  
you wagered for the rubble  
of awe. Sand heaps:  
retched into prayer—the distance  
bought  
in your name.

You. And then  
you again. A footstep  
gives ground: what is more  
is not more: nothing  
has ever been  
enough. Tents,  
pitched and struck: a ladder  
propped  
on a pillow of stone: the sheer  
aureole rungs  
of fire. You,  
and then we. The earth  
does not ask  
for anyone.

So  
be it. So much  
the better—so many  
words,  
raked and murmured along  
by your bedouin knees, will not  
conjure you home. Even  
if you crawled from the skin  
of your brother,



you would not go beyond  
what you breathe: no  
angel can cure you  
of your name.

Minima. Memory  
and mirage. In each place  
you stop for air,  
we will build a city around you. Through the star-  
mortared wall  
that rises in our night, your soul  
will not pass  
again.

## *Fire Speech*

You veer out. You crumble in.  
You stand.

Cradled  
by the hour-gong  
that beat through the holly  
twelve times  
more silent than you, something, let  
loose by someone,  
rescues your name from coal.

You stand  
there again, breathing  
in the phantom sun  
between ice and reverie.

I have come so far for you,  
the voice  
that echoes back to me  
is no longer my own.

# *Lapsarian*

This bit-open earth.

Arbor: in the neigh of branches.

The shallow night, merging  
with noon.

I speak to you  
of the word that mires in the smell  
of here-after.

I speak to you of the fruit  
I shoveled up  
from below.

I speak to you of speech.

Humus colors. Buried in the rift  
till human. The day's prismatic blessing—divisible  
by breath. Starling paths,  
snake furrows, seeds. The quick  
skewers of flame. What burns  
is banished.

Is taken with you.

Is yours.

A man  
walks out from the voice  
that became me.

He has vanished.

He has eaten  
the ripening word  
that killed you and  
killed you.

He has found himself,  
standing in the place  
where the eye most terribly holds  
its ground.

## *Late Summer*

Borealis flood, and all of night, unleashed  
at the eye's diluvian hour. Our bone-  
broken will, countering the flow  
of stones within our blood: vertigo  
from the helium heights  
of language.

Tomorrow: a mountain road  
lined with gorse. Sunlight  
in the fissures of rock. Lessness.  
As if we could hold a single breath  
to the limit breath.

There is no promised land.

## *Heraclitian*

All earth, accountable  
to greenness, the air's ballast  
coal, and the winter  
that ignites  
the fire of earth, as all air moves  
unbrokenly  
into the green  
moment of ourselves. We know that we are  
spoken for. And we know that earth  
will never yield  
a word  
small enough to hold us. For the just word  
is only of air, and in the green  
ember  
of our nether sameness, it brings no fear  
but that of life. We therefore  
will be named  
by all that we are not. And whoever  
sees himself  
in what is not yet  
spoken,  
will know what it is  
to fear  
earth  
to the just  
measure of himself.

# *Braille*

Legibility of earth. Bone's  
clear pelt,  
and the swerve of plume-and-weal clouds  
in victim air—no longer  
to be read.

“When you stop on this road,  
the road, from that moment on,  
will vanish.”

And you knew, then,  
that there were two of us: you knew  
that from all this flesh of air, I  
had found the place  
where one word  
was growing wild.

Nine months darker, my mouth bores through  
the bright ways  
that cross with yours. Nine lives  
deeper, the cry is still  
the same.

# *Salvage*

Reunion of ash men  
and ash women. Sky's wan hub  
grown full till anther-round  
on the peat slope from which  
I saw them. May-green: what was said,  
audible in the eye. The words,  
mingled with snow, did not  
indict the mouth. I drank  
the wine they begrudged me. I stood, perhaps,  
beside where you  
might have been. I dragged  
everything  
home to the other world.

# *Autobiography of the Eye*

Invisible things, rooted in cold,  
and growing toward this light  
that vanishes  
into each thing  
it illumines. Nothing ends. The hour  
returns to the beginning  
of the hour in which we breathed: as if  
there were nothing. As if I could see  
nothing  
that is not what it is.

At the limit of summer  
and its warmth: blue sky, purple hill.  
The distance that survives.  
A house, built of air, and the flux  
of the air in the air.

Like these stones  
that crumble back into earth.  
Like the sound of my voice  
in your mouth.



## *All Souls*

Anonymity and flee: November  
by its only name, death-  
danced  
through the broken speech  
of hoe and furrow  
down  
from the eaves of overwhelming—these  
hammer-worshipped  
spew-things  
cast  
into the zones of blood.

A transfusion of darkness,  
the generate peace, encroaching  
on slaughter.

Life equal to life.



# DISAPPEARANCES

1975



Out of solitude, he begins again—

as if it were the last time  
that he would breathe,

and therefore it is now

that he breathes for the first time  
beyond the grasp  
of the singular.

He is alive, and therefore he is nothing  
but what drowns in the fathomless hole  
of his eye,

and what he sees  
is all that he is not: a city

of the undeciphered  
event,

and therefore a language of stones,  
since he knows that for the whole of life  
a stone  
will give way to another stone

to make a wall

and that all these stones  
will form the monstrous sum

of particulars.

It is a wall. And the wall is death.

Illegible  
scrawl of discontent, in the image

and after-image of life—

and the many who are here  
though never born,  
and those who would speak

to give birth to themselves.

He will learn the speech of this place.  
And he will learn to hold his tongue.

For this is his nostalgia: a man.

To hear the silence  
that follows the word of oneself. Murmur

of the least stone

shaped in the image  
of earth, and those who would speak  
to be nothing

but the voice that speaks them  
to the air.

And he will tell  
of each thing he sees in this space,  
and he will tell it to the very wall  
that grows before him:

and for this, too, there will be a voice,  
although it will not be his.

Even though he speaks.

And because he speaks.

There are the many—and they are here:

and for each stone he counts among them  
he excludes himself,

as if he, too, might begin to breathe  
for the first time

in the space that separates him  
from himself.

For the wall is a word. And there is no word  
he does not count  
as a stone in the wall.

Therefore, he begins again,  
and at each moment he begins to breathe

he feels there has never been another  
time—as if for the time that he lived  
he might find himself

in each thing he is not.

What he breathes, therefore,  
is time, and he knows now  
that if he lives

it is only in what lives

and will continue to live  
without him.



In the face of the wall—

he divines the monstrous  
sum of particulars.

It is nothing.

And it is all that he is.

And if he would be nothing, then let him begin  
where he finds himself, and like any other man  
learn the speech of this place.

For he, too, lives in the silence  
that comes before the word  
of himself.

And of each thing he has seen  
he will speak—

the blinding  
enumeration of stones,  
even to the moment of death—

as if for no other reason  
than that he speaks.

Therefore, he says I,  
and counts himself  
in all that he excludes,

which is nothing,

and because he is nothing  
he can speak, which is to say  
there is no escape

from the word that is born  
in the eye. And whether or not  
he would say it,

there is no escape.

He is alone. And from the moment he begins to breathe,

he is nowhere. Plural death, born

in the jaws of the singular,

and the word that would build a wall

from the innermost stone

of life.

For each thing that he speaks of

he is not—

and in spite of himself

he says I, as if he, too, would begin

to live in all the others

who are not. For the city is monstrous,

and its mouth suffers

no issue

that does not devour the word

of oneself.

Therefore, there are the many,

and all these many lives

shaped into the stones

of a wall,

and he who would begin to breathe

will learn there is nowhere to go

but here.

Therefore, he begins again,

as if it were the last time  
he would breathe.

For there is no more time. And it is the end of time  
that begins.

E F F I G I E S

1976



Eucalyptus roads: a remnant of the pale sky  
shuddering in my throat. Through the ballast  
drone of summer

the weeds that silence  
even your step.

The myriad haunts of light.  
And each lost thing—a memory

of what has never been. The hills. The impossible  
hills

lost in the brilliance of memory.



As if it were all

still to be born. Deathless in the eye,  
where the eye now opens on the noise

of heat: a wasp, a thistle swaying on the prongs

of barbed wire.

You who remain. And you  
who are not there. Northernmost word, scattered  
in the white

hours of the imageless world—

like a single word

the wind utters and destroys.

Alba. The immense, alluvial light. The carillon  
of clouds at dawn. And the boats  
moored in the jetty fog

are invisible. And if they are there

they are invisible.



FRAGMENTS  
FROM COLD  
1976–1977



# *Northern Lights*

These are the words  
that do not survive the world. And to speak them  
is to vanish

into the world. Unapproachable  
light  
that heaves above the earth, kindling  
the brief miracle

of the open eye—

and the day that will spread  
like a fire of leaves  
through the first chill wind  
of October

consuming the world

in the plain speech  
of desire.

# *Reminiscence of Home*

True north. Vincent's north.

The glimpsed

unland of light. And through each fissure  
of earth, the indigo  
fields that burn  
in a seething wind of stars.

What is locked

in the eye that possessed you  
still serves

as an image of home: the barricade  
of an empty chair, and the father, absent,  
still blooming in his urn  
of honesty.

You will close your eyes.

In the eye of the crow who flies before you,  
you will watch yourself  
leave yourself behind.



## *Riding Eastward*

A word, unearthed  
for Knut Hamsun:

kneaded  
on the blood trail back  
from America, where the sun-  
stoked locomotive roof  
baked the consumption  
out of him:

with so much distance  
to be delved by what is  
purely godless, the written  
does not damn you  
to any fate  
worse than self.

You hunger  
up the vast bread slopes of feeling,  
and begin, breaking once again, your fathomless  
alphabet of stones.

# *Gnomon*

September sun, illusionless. The purple  
field awash  
in the hours of the first breath. You will not  
submit to this light, or close your eyes  
to the vigilant  
crumbling of light in your eyes.

Firmament of fact. And you,  
like everything else  
that moves. Parsed seed  
and thimble of air. Fissured  
cloud and worm: the open-  
ended sentence that engulfs you  
at the moment I begin  
to be silent.

Perhaps, then, a world  
that secretes its harvest  
in the lungs, a means  
of survival by breath  
alone. And if nothing,  
then let nothing be  
the shadow  
that walks inside your shadow, the body  
that will cast  
the first stone, so that even as you walk  
away from yourself, you might feel it  
hunger toward you, hourly,  
across the enormous  
vineyards of the living.

## *Fragment from Cold*

Because we go blind  
in the day that goes out with us,  
and because we have seen our breath  
cloud  
the mirror of air,  
the eye of the air will open  
on nothing but the word  
we renounce: winter  
will have been a place  
of ripeness.

We who become the dead  
of another life than ours.

## *Aubade*

Not even the sky.  
But a memory of sky,  
and the blue of the earth  
in your lungs.

Earth  
less earth: to watch  
how the sky will enclose you, grow vast  
with the words  
you leave unsaid—and nothing  
will be lost.

I am your distress, the seam  
in the wall  
that opens to the wind  
and its stammering, storm  
in the plural—this other name  
you give your world: exile  
in the rooms of home.

Dawn folds, fathers  
witness,  
the aspen and the ash  
that fall. I come back to you  
through this fire, a remnant  
of the season to come,  
and will be to you  
as dust, as air,  
as nothing  
that will not haunt you.

In the place before breath  
we feel our shadows cross.

## *Testimony*

In the high winter wheat  
that blew us across  
this no man's land,  
in the couplings of our anger  
below these nameless white weeds,  
and because I lodged, everlastingly,  
a flower in hell, I tell you  
of the opening of my eye  
beyond being,  
of my being beyond being  
only one,  
and how I might acquit you  
of this hiddenness, and prove to you  
that I am  
no longer alone,  
that I am not  
even near myself  
anymore.

## *Visible*

Spools of lightning, spun outward  
in the split, winter night: thunder  
hauled by star—as if

your ghost had passed, burning,  
into the needle's eye, and worked itself  
sheer though the silk  
of nothingness.

## *Meteor*

The light, receding from us once again,  
in this furtive, unappeasable  
birth  
of mineral-memory  
and home, as though here,  
even our names, anchored  
to the glacial prow  
of silences, could furrow the land  
with longing, and scatter, over the life  
that lies between us, the dust  
of the smallest stone  
that falls from the eaves  
of Babel.

# *Transfusion*

Oven's glow. Or vast  
hemoglobin  
leap—

the blasphemy  
of their death-devoted word, lying  
in the self-same blood  
your open heart  
still squanders.

Pulse—  
and then what—(then  
what?)—erupts in the skull  
of the ghetto sphinx—that plumbs  
the filth  
and fever of the ones  
who gave up. (Like you,  
they still hover, still  
hunger, immured in the bread  
of no one's flesh, still make themselves  
felt):

as if, in the distance between  
sundown and sunrise,  
a hand  
had gathered up your soul  
and worked it with the stones  
into the leaven  
of earth.



## *Siberian*

Shadow, carted off by wolves  
and quartered, half a life beyond  
each barb of the wire, now I see you,  
magnetic  
polar felon, now I begin  
to speak to you  
of the wild boar  
of southern woods, of scrub  
oak and thicket spruce, of thyme-reek  
and lavender, even  
down to lava, spewn, through each  
chink in the wall, so that you, counter-voice, lost  
in the cold  
of farthest murder, might come  
floating back  
on your barge of ice, bearing  
the untellable  
cargo of forgiveness.

## *Looking Glass*

Laid bare  
by your rabid, obsidian eye,  
by the white  
ire and barking  
of the mirror-dog who stared you  
into blindness:

Spinoza's god,  
cast from the borders of speech, geometric,  
journeying through the curve  
of exile,  
hazards another world.

# *Clandestine*

Remember with me today—the word  
and counter-word  
of witness: the tactile dawn, emerging  
from my clenched hand: sun's  
ciliary grasp: the stretch of darkness  
I wrote  
on the table of sleep.

Now  
is the time to come.  
All you have come  
to take from me, take  
away from me now. Do not  
forget  
to forget. Fill  
your pockets with earth,  
and seal up the mouth  
of my cave.

It was there  
I dreamed my life  
into a dream  
of fire.

# Quarry

No more than the song of it. As if  
the singing alone  
had led us back to this place.

We have been here, and we have never been here.  
We have been on the way to where we began,  
and we have been lost.

There are no boundaries  
in the light. And the earth  
leaves no word for us  
to sing. For the crumbling of the earth  
underfoot

is a music in itself, and to walk among these stones  
is to hear nothing  
but ourselves.

I sing, therefore, of nothing,

as if it were the place  
I do not return to—

and if I should return, then count out my life  
in these stones: forget  
I was ever here. The world  
that walks inside me

is a world beyond reach.

FACING THE  
MUSIC  
1978–1979



# *Credo*

The infinite

tiny things. For once merely to breathe  
in the light of the infinite

tiny things  
that surround us. Or nothing  
can escape

the lure of this darkness, the eye  
will discover that we are  
only what has made us less  
than we are. To say nothing. To say:  
our very lives

depend on it.

## *Obituary in the Present Tense*

It is all one to him—  
where he begins

and where he ends. Egg white, the white  
of his eye: he says  
bird milk, sperm

sliding from the word  
of himself. For the eye  
is evanescent,  
clings only to what is, no more here

or less there, but everywhere, every

thing. He memorizes  
none of it. Nor does he write

anything down. He abstains  
from the heart

of living things. He waits.

And if he begins, he will end,  
as if his eye had opened in the mouth

of a bird, as if he had never begun

to be anywhere. He speaks

from distances  
no less far than these.



## *Narrative*

Because what happens will never happen,  
and because what has happened  
endlessly happens again,

we are as we were, everything  
has changed in us, if we speak  
of the world  
it is only to leave the world

unsaid. Early winter: the yellow apples still  
unfallen  
in a naked tree, the tracks  
of invisible deer

in the first snow, and then the snow  
that does not stop. We repent  
of nothing. As if we could stand  
in this light. As if we could stand in the silence  
of this single moment

of light.

## *S. A. 1911-1979*

From loss. And from such loss  
that marauds the mind—even to the loss

of mind. To begin with this thought: without rhyme

or reason. And then simply to wait. As if the first word  
comes only after the last, after a life  
of waiting for the word

that was lost. To say no more  
than the truth of it: men die, the world fails, the words

have no meaning. And therefore to ask  
only for words.

Stone wall. Stone heart. Flesh and blood.

As much as all this.

More.

# *Search for a Definition*

*(On Seeing a Painting by Bradley Walker Tomlin)*

Always the smallest act

possible

in this time of acts

larger than life, a gesture

toward the thing that passes

almost unseen. A small wind

disturbing a bonfire, for example,

which I found the other day

by accident

on a museum wall. Almost nothing

is there: a few wisps

of white

thrown idly against the pure black

background, no more

than a small gesture

trying to be nothing

more than itself. And yet

it is not here

and to my eyes will never become

a question

of trying to simplify

the world, but a way of looking for a place

to enter the world, a way of being

present

among the things

that do not want us—but which we need

to the same measure that we need

ourselves. Only a moment before

the beautiful

woman  
who stood beside me  
had been saying how much she wanted  
a child  
and how time was beginning  
to run out on her. We said  
we must each write a poem  
using the words “a small  
wind  
disturbing a bonfire.” Since that time  
nothing  
has meant more than the small  
act  
present in these words, the act  
of trying to speak  
words  
that mean almost nothing. To the very end  
I want to be equal  
to whatever it is  
my eye will bring me, as if  
I might finally see myself  
let go  
in the nearly invisible  
things  
that carry us along with ourselves and all  
the unborn children  
into the world.

## *Between the Lines*

Stone-pillowed, the ways  
of remoteness. And written in your palm,  
the road.

Home, then, is not home  
but the distance between  
blessed  
and unblessed. And whoever puts himself  
into the skin  
of his brother, will know  
what sorrow is  
to the seventh year  
beyond the seventh year  
of the seventh year.

And divide his children in half.

And wrestle in darkness  
with an angel.

# *In Memory of Myself*

Simply to have stopped.

As if I could begin  
where my voice has stopped, myself  
the sound of a word

I cannot speak.

So much silence  
to be brought to life  
in this pensive flesh, the beating  
drum of words  
within, so many words

lost in the wide world  
within me, and thereby to have known  
that in spite of myself

I am here.

As if this were the world.

# *Bedrock*

Dawn as an image  
of dawn, and the very sky collapsing  
into itself. Irreducible

image  
of pure water, the pores of earth  
exuding light: such yield

as only light will bring, and the very stones  
undead

in the image of themselves.

The consolation of color.

## *Facing the Music*

Blue. And within that blue a feeling  
of green, the gray blocks of clouds  
buttressed against air, as if  
in the idea of rain  
the eye  
could master the speech  
of any given moment

on earth. Call it the sky. And so  
to describe  
whatever it is  
we see, as if it were nothing  
but the idea  
of something we had lost  
within. For we can begin  
to remember

the hard earth, the flint  
reflecting stars, the undulating  
oaks set loose  
by the heaving of air, and so down  
to the least seed, revealing what grows  
above us, as if  
because of this blue there could be  
this green

that spreads, myriad  
and miraculous  
in this, the most silent  
moment of summer. Seeds  
speak of this juncture, define  
where the air and the earth erupt  
in this profusion of chance, the random



forces of our own lack  
of knowing what it is  
we see, and merely to speak of it  
is to see  
how words fail us, how nothing comes right  
in the saying of it, not even these words  
I am moved to speak  
in the name of this blue  
and green  
that vanish into the air  
of summer.

Impossible  
to hear it anymore. The tongue  
is forever taking us away  
from where we are, and nowhere  
can we be at rest  
in the things we are given  
to see, for each word  
is an elsewhere, a thing that moves  
more quickly than the eye, even  
as this sparrow moves, veering  
into the air  
in which it has no home. I believe, then,  
in nothing

these words might give you, and still  
I can feel them  
speaking through me, as if  
this alone  
is what I desire, this blue  
and this green, and to say  
how this blue  
has become for me the essence  
of this green, and more than the pure  
seeing of it, I want you to feel

this word  
that has lived inside me  
all day long, this  
desire for nothing

but the day itself, and how it has grown  
inside my eyes, stronger  
than the word it is made of, as if  
there could never be another word

that would hold me  
without breaking.

# W H I T E   S P A C E S

1979



Something happens, and from the moment it begins to happen, nothing can ever be the same again.

Something happens. Or else, something does not happen. A body moves. Or else, it does not move. And if it moves, something begins to happen. And even if it does not move, something begins to happen.

It comes from my voice. But that does not mean these words will ever be what happens. It comes and goes. If I happen to be speaking at this moment, it is only because I hope to find a way of going along, of running parallel to everything else that is going along, and so begin to find a way of filling the silence without breaking it.

I ask whoever is listening to this voice to forget the words it is speaking. It is important that no one listen too carefully. I want these words to vanish, so to speak, into the silence they came from, and for nothing to remain but a memory of their presence, a token of the fact that they were once here and are here no longer and that during their brief life they seemed not so much to be saying any particular thing as to be the thing that was happening at the same time a certain body was moving in a certain space, that they moved along with everything else that moved.

Something begins, and already it is no longer the beginning, but something else, propelling us into the heart of the thing that is happening. If we were suddenly to stop and ask ourselves, "Where are we going?", or "Where are we now?", we would be lost, for at each moment we are no longer where we were, but have left ourselves behind, irrevocably, in a past that has no memory, a past endlessly obliterated by a motion that carries us into the present.

It will not do, then, to ask questions. For this is a landscape of random impulse, of knowledge for its own sake—which is to say, a knowledge that exists, that comes into being beyond any possibility of putting it into words. And if just this once we were to abandon ourselves to the supreme indifference of simply being wherever we happen to be, then perhaps we would not be deluding ourselves into thinking that we, too, had at last become a part of it all.

To think of motion not merely as a function of the body but as an extension of the mind. In the same way, to think of speech not as an extension of the mind but as a function of the body. Sounds emerge from the voice to enter the air and surround and bounce off and enter the body that occupies that air, and though they cannot be seen, these sounds are no less a gesture than a hand is when outstretched in the air towards another hand, and in this gesture can be read the entire alphabet of desire, the body's need to be taken beyond itself, even as it dwells in the sphere of its own motion.

On the surface, this motion seems to be random. But such randomness does not, in itself, preclude a meaning. Or if meaning is not quite the word for it, then say the drift, or a consistent sense of what is happening, even as it changes, moment by moment. To describe it in all its details is probably not impossible. But so many words would be needed, so many streams of syllables, sentences, and subordinate clauses, that the words would always lag behind what was happening, and long after all motion had stopped and each of its witnesses had dispersed, the voice describing that motion would still be speaking, alone, heard by no one, deep into the silence and darkness of these four walls. And yet something is happening, and in spite of myself I want to be present inside the space of this moment, of these moments, and to say something, even though it will be forgotten, that will form a part of this journey for the length of the time it endures.

In the realm of the naked eye nothing happens that does not have its beginning and its end. And yet nowhere can we find the place or the moment at which we can say, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that this is where it begins, or this is where it ends. For some of us, it has begun before the beginning, and for others of us it will go on happening after the end. Where to find it? Don't look. Either it is here or it is not here. And whoever tries to find refuge in any one place, in any one moment, will never be where he thinks he is. In other words, say your good-byes. It is never too late. It is always too late.

To say the simplest thing possible. To go no farther than whatever it is I happen to find before me. To begin with this landscape, for example. Or even to note the things that are most near, as if in the tiny world before my eyes I might find an image of the life that exists beyond me, as if in a way I do not fully understand each thing in my life were connected to every other thing, which in turn connected me to the world at large, the endless world that looms up in the mind, as lethal and unknowable as desire itself.

To put it another way. It is sometimes necessary not to name the thing we are talking about. The invisible God of the Hebrews, for example, had an unpronounceable name, and each of the ninety-nine names tradition ascribes to this God was in fact nothing more than a way of acknowledging that-which-cannot-be-spoken, that-which-cannot-be-seen, and that-which-cannot-be-understood. But even on a less exalted plane, in the realm of the visible itself, we often hold back from divulging the thing we are talking about. Consider the word "it." "It" is raining, we say, or how is "it" going? We feel we know what we are saying, and what we mean to say is that it, the word "it," stands for something that need not be said, or something that cannot be said. But if the thing we say is something that eludes us, something we do not understand, how can we persist in saying that we understand what we are saying? And yet it goes without saying that we do.

The "it," for example, in the preceding sentence, "it goes without saying," is in fact nothing less than whatever it is that propels us into the act of speech itself. And if it, the word "it," is what continually recurs in any effort to define it, then it must be accepted as the given, the precondition of the saying of it. It has been said, for example, that words falsify the thing they attempt to say, but even to say "they falsify" is to admit that "they falsify" is true, thus betraying an implicit faith in the power of words to say what they mean to say. And yet, when we speak, we often do not mean to say anything, as in the present case, in which I find these words falling from my mouth and vanishing into the silence they came from. In other words, it says itself, and our mouths are merely the instruments of the saying of it. How does it happen? But never do we ask what "it" happens to be. We know, even if we cannot put it into words. And the feeling that remains within us, the discretion of a knowledge so fully in tune with the world, has no need of whatever it is that might fall from our mouths. Our hearts know what is in them, even if our mouths remain silent. And the world will know what it is, even when nothing remains in our hearts.

A man sets out on a journey to a place he has never been before. Another man comes back. A man comes to a place that has no name, that has no landmarks to tell him where he is. Another man decides to come back. A man writes letters from nowhere, from the white space that has opened up in his mind. The letters are never received. The letters are never sent. Another man sets out on a journey in search of the first man. This second man becomes more and more like the first man, until he, too, is swallowed up by the whiteness. A third man sets out on a journey with no hope of ever getting anywhere. He wanders. He continues to wander. For as long as he remains in the realm of the naked eye, he continues to wander.

I remain in the room in which I am writing this. I put one foot in front of the other. I put one word in front of the other, and for each step I take I add another word, as if for each word to be spoken there



were another space to be crossed, a distance to be filled by my body as it moves through this space. It is a journey through space, even if I get nowhere, even if I end up in the same place I started. It is a journey through space, as if into many cities and out of them, as if across deserts, as if to the edge of some imaginary ocean, where each thought drowns in the relentless waves of the real.

I put one foot in front of the other, and then I put the other foot in front of the first, which has now become the other and which will again become the first. I walk within these four walls, and for as long as I am here I can go anywhere I like. I can go from one end of the room to the other and touch any of the four walls, or even all the walls, one after the other, exactly as I like. If the spirit moves me, I can stand in the center of the room. If the spirit moves me in another direction, I can stand in any one of the four corners. Sometimes I touch one of the four corners and in this way bring myself into contact with two walls at the same time. Now and then I let my eyes roam up to the ceiling, and when I am particularly exhausted by my efforts there is always the floor to welcome my body. The light, streaming through the windows, never casts the same shadow twice, and at any given moment I feel myself on the brink of discovering some terrible, unimagined truth. These are moments of great happiness for me.

Somewhere, as if unseen, and yet closer to us than we realize (down the street, for example, or in the next neighborhood), someone is being born. Somewhere else, a car is speeding along an empty highway in the middle of the night. In that same night, a man is hammering a nail into a board. We know nothing about any of this. A seed stirs invisibly in the earth, and we know nothing about it. Flowers wilt, buildings go up, children cry. And yet, for all that, we know nothing.

It happens, and as it continues to happen, we forget where we were when we began. Later, when we have traveled from this moment as far as we have traveled from the beginning, we will

forget where we are now. Eventually, we will all go home, and if there are those among us who do not have a home, it is certain, nevertheless, that they will leave this place to go wherever it is they must. If nothing else, life has taught us all this one thing: whoever is here now will not be here later.

I dedicate these words to the things in life I do not understand, to each thing passing away before my eyes. I dedicate these words to the impossibility of finding a word equal to the silence inside me.

In the beginning, I wanted to speak of arms and legs, of jumping up and down, of bodies tumbling and spinning, of enormous journeys through space, of cities, of deserts, of mountain ranges stretching farther than the eye can see. Little by little, however, as these words began to impose themselves on me, the things I wanted to do seemed finally to be of no importance. Reluctantly, I abandoned all my witty stories, all my adventures of far-away places, and began, slowly and painfully, to empty my mind. Now emptiness is all that remains: a space, no matter how small, in which whatever is happening can be allowed to happen.

And no matter how small, each and every possibility remains. Even a motion reduced to an apparent absence of motion. A motion, for example, as minimal as breathing itself, the motion the body makes when inhaling and exhaling air. In a book I once read by Peter Freuchen, the famous Arctic explorer describes being trapped by a blizzard in northern Greenland. Alone, his supplies dwindling, he decided to build an igloo and wait out the storm. Many days passed. Afraid, above all, that he would be attacked by wolves—for he heard them prowling hungrily on the roof of his igloo—he would periodically step outside and sing at the top of his lungs in order to frighten them away. But the wind was blowing fiercely, and no matter how hard he sang, the only thing he could hear was the wind. If this was a serious problem, however, the problem of the igloo itself was much greater. For Freuchen began to notice

that the walls of his little shelter were gradually closing in on him. Because of the particular weather conditions outside, his breath was literally freezing to the walls, and with each breath the walls became that much thicker, the igloo became that much smaller, until eventually there was almost no room left for his body. It is surely a frightening thing, to imagine breathing yourself into a coffin of ice, and to my mind considerably more compelling than, say, *The Pit and the Pendulum* by Poe. For in this case it is the man himself who is the agent of his own destruction, and further, the instrument of that destruction is the very thing he needs to keep himself alive. For surely a man cannot live if he does not breathe. But at the same time, he will not live if he does breathe. Curiously, I do not remember how Freuchen managed to escape his predicament. But needless to say, he did escape. The title of the book, if I recall, is *Arctic Adventure*. It has been out of print for many years.

Nothing happens. And still, it is not nothing. To invoke things that have never happened is noble, but how much sweeter to remain in the realm of the naked eye.

It comes down to this: that everything should count, that everything should be a part of it, even the things I do not or cannot understand. The desire, for example, to destroy everything I have written so far. Not from any revulsion at the inadequacy of these words (although that remains a distinct possibility), but rather from the need to remind myself, at each moment, that things do not have to happen this way, that there is always another way, neither better nor worse, in which things might take shape. I realize in the end that I am probably powerless to affect the outcome of even the least thing that happens, but nevertheless, and in spite of myself, as if in an act of blind faith, I want to assume full responsibility. And therefore this desire, this overwhelming need, to take these papers and scatter them across the room. Or else, to go on. Or else, to begin again. Or else, to go on, as if each moment were the beginning, as if each word were the beginning of another silence, another word more silent than the last.

A few scraps of paper. A last cigarette before turning in. The snow falling endlessly in the winter night. To remain in the realm of the naked eye, as happy as I am at this moment. And if this is too much to ask, then to be granted the memory of it, a way of returning to it in the darkness of the night that will surely engulf me again. Never to be anywhere but here. And the immense journey through space that continues. Everywhere, as if each place were here. And the snow falling endlessly in the winter night.

# TRANSLATIONS

1967-1969



PAUL ÉLUARD

## *The Lover*

She is standing on my lids  
And her hair is in mine  
She is the form of my hands  
And the color of my eyes,  
She is swallowed in my shadow  
Like a stone against the sky

Her eyes are always open  
And she does not let me sleep  
In the light of day her dreams  
Make suns evaporate,  
Make me laugh, cry and laugh,  
And speak when I have nothing to say.

## *Second Nature*

In honor of the dumb the blind the deaf  
To the great black stone upon the shoulders  
The world passing away without mystery

But also for the others who know things by their name  
The burning of each metamorphosis  
The unbroken chain of dawns in the skull  
The persistent cries that shatter words

Furrowing the mouth furrowing the eyes  
Where maddened colors diffuse the mists of waiting  
Propping love against the life the dead dream of  
The low-living share the others are slaves  
Of love as some are slaves of freedom.



## *Equality of the Sexes*

Your eyes have returned from an arbitrary land  
Where nothing ever knew the meaning of eyes  
Nor the beauty of eyes, or stones,  
Or drops of water, or pearls painted on signs,

Naked stones reft of skeleton, o my statue,  
The blinding sun has stolen your place in the mirror  
And if it seems to obey the forces of evening  
It is because your head is sealed, o my statue, beaten

By my love and savage tricks.  
My motionless desire, your last support  
Carried off without struggle, o my image,  
Broken by my weakness and taken in my chains.

## *The Deaf and the Blind*

Do we reach the sea with clocks  
In our pockets, with the noise of the sea  
In the sea, or are we the carriers  
Of a purer and more silent water?

The water rubbing against our hands sharpens knives.  
The warriors have found their weapons in the waves  
And the sound of their blows is like  
The rocks that smash the boats at night.

It is the storm and the thunder. Why not the silence  
Of the flood, for we have dreamt within us  
Space for the greatest silence and we breathe  
Like the wind over terrible seas, like the wind

That creeps slowly over every horizon.

ANDRÉ BRETON

## *All Paradise Is Not Lost*

The stone cocks turn to crystal  
They defend the dew with battering crests  
And then the charming flash of lightning  
Strikes the banner of ruins  
The sand is no more than a phosphorescent clock  
Murmuring midnight  
Through the arms of a forgotten woman  
No shelter revolving in the fields  
Is prepared for Heaven's attacks and retreats  
It is here  
The house and its hard blue temples bathe in the night  
                        that draws my images  
Heads of hair, heads of hair  
Evil gathers its strength quite near  
But will it want us?

## *No Grounds for Prosecution*

Art of days art of nights

The scale of wounds called Pardon

Red scale that quivers under the weight of a wing

When the snow-collared horsewomen with empty hands

Push their vaporous chariots across the meadows

I see this scale jumping madly up and down

I see the graceful ibis

Returning from the pool laced within my heart

The wheels of the charming dream and its splendid ruts

Mounting high upon the shells of their dresses

And surprise bounding wildly over the sea

Depart my darling dawn forget nothing of my life

Take these roses creeping in the mirror-well

Take every beating of every lid

Take everything down to the threads that hold the steps  
of rope and waterdrop dancers

Art of days art of nights

I stand before a distant window in a city filled with horror

Outside men with stovepipe hats follow one another at  
regular intervals

Like the rains I loved

When the weather was fine

"The Wrath of God" was the name of the cabaret I entered  
last night

It was written on the white façade in even whiter letters

But the lady sailors gliding behind the windows

Are too happy to be afraid

Never a body here always the murder without proof

Never the sky always the silence

Never freedom but for freedom

## *Approximate Man (I)*

sunday heavy lid on the boiling of blood  
 weekly weight squatting on its muscles  
 fallen within itself and found again  
 the bells chime for no reason and we too  
 chime bells for no reason and we too  
 will rejoice in the noise of chains  
 that will chime within us with the bells

what is this language that whips us as we tumble into the light  
 our nerves are whips in the hands of time  
 and doubt comes with a single colorless wing  
 twisting tightening shriveling inside us  
 like the crumpled paper of an unpacked box  
 gift from another age to the slithering fish of bitterness

the bells chime for no reason and we too  
 the eyes of fruits closely watching us  
 all our actions are controlled nothing is hidden  
 the river water has washed its bed so bare  
 it bears away the sweet threads of glances that have dragged  
 at the foot of walls licking up lives in bars  
 tempting the weak increasing temptation drying up ecstasies  
 digging to the depths of old possibilities  
 and unblocking the ducts of imprisoned tears  
 ducts enslaved by daily suffocations  
 glances that clutch with withered hands  
 the bright yield of day or the shadowy apparition  
 offering the anxious riches of a smile  
 screwed on like a flower in the buttonhole of morning  
 those asking for calm or lust  
 electric shocks vibrations jolts  
 adventures fires certainty or slavery

glances that have edged along discreet torments  
worn the city paths paid back so many degradations with charity  
following in bunches round the ribbons of water  
flowing toward the seas bearing  
human filth and all its mirages

the river water has washed its bed so bare  
that even the light slides on the smooth wave  
and falls to the bottom with the heavy shattering of stones

the bells chime for no reason and we too  
cares carried with us  
the inner clothes  
we put on each morning  
unbuttoned by night's dreaming hands  
adorned with useless metal puzzles  
purified in the bath of circular landscapes  
in cities prepared for carnage and sacrifice  
near vast expansive seas  
on mountains of troubled severities  
in villages of painful swagger  
the hand weighing on the head  
the bells chime for no reason and we too  
we leave with those leaving arrive with those arriving  
leave with those arriving arrive when the others leave  
for no reason a bit dry a bit hard severe  
bread food no more bread to accompany  
the tasty song on the scale of the tongue

colors put down their weights thinking  
thinking or crying or staying or eating  
fruits as light as hovering smoke  
thinking of the heat that weaves the word  
around its kernel the dream called us

the bells chime for no reason and we too  
we walk to escape the swarming roads  
with a flask of landscape a single disease  
a single disease sowing our death  
I know I carry the song in me and I am not afraid  
I carry death and if I die it is death  
who will carry me in his unseen arms  
fine and light like the smell of thin grass  
fine and light like departure without cause  
without bitterness without debts without regret without  
the bells chime for no reason and we too  
why seek the end of the chain that links us to the chain  
chime bells for no reason and we too  
we will make the broken glasses chime within us  
silver coins mingling with the counterfeit  
the debris of festivals breaking into laughter and storm  
at whose doors the void might open  
the tombs of air the mills hackling arctic bones  
these festivals bearing our heads to the sky  
spitting molten night upon our muscles

I speak of who speaks who is speaking I'm alone  
I'm nothing but a faint noise I have several noises inside me  
a crumpled noise frozen on the street tossed onto the wet  
sidewalk  
at the feet of rushing men running with their deaths  
round death stretching his arms  
on the dial of the sun's only living hour

the night's dark breath thickens  
and along my veins sailors' flutes are singing  
transposed into octaves from the layers of many existences  
lives are infinitely repeated down to atomic thinness  
and high so high we cannot see

with these lives beside us we cannot see  
the ultraviolet of so many parallel paths  
those we might have taken  
those that might not have led us to the world  
or have led us out of it already long ago so long ago  
we would have forgotten the age and the earth that would have  
    sucked our flesh  
salts and liquid metals limpid at the bottom of wells

I think of the heat weaving the word  
around its kernel the dream called us



## *Servitudes*

Yesterday it was night  
but the posters sang  
the trees stretched themselves  
the barber's wax statue grinned at me  
Do not spit  
Do not smoke  
rays of sunlight in the hand you told me  
there were fourteen

I invent unknown streets  
new and flowering continents  
the newspapers will appear tomorrow  
Beware of wet paint  
I shall walk naked with a cane in my hand

# Georgia

I do not sleep Georgia  
I hurl spears in the night Georgia  
I am waiting Georgia  
I am thinking Georgia  
The fire is like snow Georgia  
The night is my neighbor Georgia  
I hear each and every noise Georgia  
I see the smoke that rises and wisps away Georgia  
I walk like a wolf in the shadows Georgia  
I am running here is a suburban street Georgia  
here is a city that is the same  
and I've never seen it before Georgia  
I hurry on and this is the wind Georgia  
and cold and silence and fear Georgia  
I escape Georgia  
I am running Georgia  
the clouds are low they will fall Georgia  
I open my arms Georgia  
I do not close my eyes Georgia  
I call Georgia  
I cry Georgia  
I am calling Georgia  
I call you Georgia  
Would you come Georgia  
soon Georgia  
Georgia Georgia Georgia  
Georgia  
I do not sleep Georgia  
I am waiting for you  
Georgia

## *The Swimmer*

A thousand bird calls  
the horizon traces a life line  
And lost vague faces whisper  
in gulfs held like open arms  
I am certain at last of being alone  
is this North is this West  
the sun humming with light  
street of sky and earth  
I stop to ponder once more if the summer is red  
in my veins  
and my shadow turns around me  
clock-wise  
Sleep brings me insects and reptiles  
pain a grimace and falsehood  
waking  
I float like a lost face in the midst of an hour  
without help without a word  
without conviction I go down the endless steps  
and go on without regret until bedtime  
in the eyes of mirrors and the laughter of wind  
I recognize a stranger who is me  
I do not move  
I wait  
and shut my eyes like a lock  
We will never know when the night begins  
or where it ends  
but that hardly matters  
the negroes of Kamtchatka  
will sleep beside me this evening  
when fatigue rests upon my head  
like a crown

ROBERT DESNOS

## *At the Edge of the World*

Babbling in the black street, even at the end, where  
the river shudders against the banks.

Tossed from a window—a lone cigarette-butt blooms into a star.

Again, babbling in the black street.

You loud mouths!

Thick night, unbreathable night.

A cry comes near, is almost upon us,

But fades at the moment it arrives.

Somewhere, in the world, at the foot of a slope,

A deserter is talking to sentinels who do not understand  
his language.

## *I Have Dreamed of You So Much*

I have dreamed of you so much that you are no longer real.

Is there still time for me to reach your breathing body, to kiss your mouth and make your dear voice come alive again?

I have dreamed of you so much that my arms, grown used to being crossed on my chest as I hugged your shadow, would perhaps not bend to the shape of your body.

For faced with the real form of what has haunted me and governed me for so many days and years, I would surely become a shadow.

O scales of feeling.

I have dreamed of you so much that surely there is no more time for me to wake up. I sleep on my feet, prey to all the forms of life and love, and you, the only one who counts for me today, I can no more touch your face and lips than touch the lips and face of some passerby.

I have dreamed of you so much, have walked so much, talked so much, slept so much with your phantom, that perhaps the only thing left for me is to become a phantom among phantoms, a shadow a hundred times more shadow than the shadow that moves and goes on moving, brightly, over the sundial of your life.

## *Like a Hand at the Moment of Death*

Like a hand at the moment of death the shipwreck  
looms like rays of drowsing sun; from all directions your  
glances have aged.

There is no longer time, there is no longer time,  
perhaps, to see me.

But the leaf that falls and the wheel that turns  
will tell you that nothing on this earth ever lasts.

Except love.

And I want to convince myself of it.

Life-boats painted red,

Storms that flee,

An old-fashioned waltz that bears wind and weather  
across long spaces of sky.

Countrysides.

I only want the embrace I yearn for,

And the rooster's song is dying.

Like the clenching of a hand at the moment of death,  
my heart contracts.

Since I've known you I have never cried.

I love my love too much to cry.

You will cry at my grave,

Or I at yours.

It will never be too late.

I'll tell a lie. I'll say you were my mistress

For it's all so futile,

You and I, we'll soon be dead.

RENÉ CHAR

*Lacenaire's Hand*

Worlds of eloquence have been lost.

## *The Violent Rose*

Eye in a trance silent mirror  
As I approach I depart  
Buoy in the battlements

Head against head to forget all  
Until the shoulder butts the heart  
The violent rose  
Of ruined and transcendent lovers.



## *Poets*

The sadness of illiterates in the darkness of bottles  
The blind unrest of wheelwrights  
Coins in the sunken vase

In the core of the anvil  
The solitary poet lives  
Vast wheelbarrow of swamps.

## *The Fired Schoolteacher*

Three characters of proven banality accost one another with diverse poetical phrases (got a match, I beg of you, what time is it, how many leagues to the next town?), in an indifferent countryside and engage in a conversation whose echoes will never reach us. Before you is the twenty-acre field: I am its worker, its secret blood, its catastrophic stone. I leave you nothing to think.

## *Chain*

The great pyre of alliances  
Beneath the spiral sky of failure  
In the rotted boat it is winter  
From solid companions to liquid partners  
Deathbeds below the crust  
In the earth's vacant depths  
The arcs forge a new number of wings  
The bright tillage worships the sodden healers  
On the straw of fatalists  
The lighted star-foam flows  
There is no absence that cannot be replaced.

# *Observers and Dreamers*

*to Maurice Blanchard*

Before rejoining the nomads  
The seducers ignite columns of gas  
To dramatize the harvest

Poetic toil will begin tomorrow  
Preceded by the cycle of voluntary death  
The reign of darkness oozing the diamond into the mine

Mothers smitten with patrons of the last sigh  
Excessive mothers  
Endlessly furrowing the massive heart  
Endless prey to the shuddering ferns of embalmed thighs  
You will be won  
You will go to bed

Alone at river-windows  
Great lighted faces  
Dream there is nothing that dies  
In their carnivorous landscape.

ANDRÉ DU BOUCHET

## *The White Motor*

I  
I quickly removed  
this sort of arbitrary bandage

I found myself  
free  
and without hope

like knotted sticks  
or stone

I radiate

with the heat of stone

which resembles the cold  
against the body of the field

but I know the heat and cold

the frame of the fire

the fire

in which I see  
the head

the white limbs.

## II

At several points the fire pierces the sky, the deaf side, which I have never seen.

The sky that heaves a bit above the earth. The black brow. I don't know if I am here or there,

in the air or in a rut. They  
are scraps of air, which I crush like clumps of earth.

My life stops with the wall, or begins to walk where the wall stops, in the shattered sky. I do not stop.

## III

My telling will be the black branch that forms an elbow in the sky.

## IV

Here, its white mouth opens. There, it defends itself along the whole line, with these entrenched trees, these black beings. There again, it takes the hot, heavy form of fatigue, like limbs of earth, scorched by a plow.

I stop at the edge of my breath, as if beside a door, to listen to its cry.

Here, outside, a hand is upon us, a cold, heavy sea, as if, as the stones walk, we were walking with stones.

## V

I go out  
inside the room

as if outside

among the still  
furnishings

in the shuddering heat

alone

outside its fire

there is not yet  
anything

the wind.

## VI

I walk, joined with fire, in the uncertain paper, mingled with  
air, the unprimed earth. I lend my arm to the wind.

I go no farther than my paper. Far before me, it fills a ravine.  
A bit farther, in the field, we are almost level. Half knee-deep  
in stones.

Nearby they speak of wounds, of a tree. I see myself in what  
they speak. That I not be mad. That my eyes not become as  
weak as the earth.

## VII

I am in the field  
like a drop of water  
on a red-hot iron

the field itself  
eclipsed

the stones open

like a stack of plates  
held  
in the arms

when evening breathes

I stay  
with these cold white plates

as if I held the earth  
itself

in my arms.

## VIII

Already the spiders are running over me, on the dismembered  
earth. I rise above the plowing, on the clipped and arid runnels,  
of a finished field, now  
blue, where I walk without ease.



## IX

Nothing satisfies me. I satisfy nothing. The bellowing fire will be the fruit of that day, on the fusing road, reaching whiteness in the battered eyes of stones.

## X

I brake to see the vacant field, the sky above the wall. Between air and stone, I enter an unwallled field. I feel the skin of the air, and yet we remain divided.

Beyond us, there no fire.

## XI

A large white page, palpitating in the ruined light, lasts until we get closer to one another.

## XII

In releasing the warm door, the iron knob, I find myself before a noise that has no end, a tractor. I touch the base of a gnarled bed. I do not begin. I have always lived. I see the stones more clearly. The enclosing shadow, the earth's red shadow on my fingers, in its weakness, beneath its draping, which the heat has not hidden from us.

## XIII

This fire, like a smoother wall, built on top of another, and struck, violently, up to its peak, where it blinds us, like a wall I do not allow to petrify.

The earth lifts its harsh head.

The fire, like an open hand, which I no longer wish to name.  
If reality has come between us, like a wedge, and divided us,  
it was because I was too close to this heat, to this fire.

#### XIV

So, you have seen these burstings of the wind, these great discs  
of broken bread, in this brown country, like a hammer out of  
its matrix that swims against the unrippled current, of which  
nothing can be seen but the gnarled bed, the road.

These keening bursts, these great blades, left by the wind.

The raised stone, the grass on its knees. What I don't know of  
the back and profile, since the moment of soundlessness: you,  
like the night.

You recede.

This unharnessed fire, this unconsumed fire, igniting us, like a  
tree, along the slope.

#### XV

What remains after the fire are disqualified stones, frigid  
stones, the change of ashes in the field.

The carriage of the foam still remains, rattling, as if it had  
rushed forth again from the tree, anchored to the earth with  
broken nails, this head, that emerges and falls into place, and  
the silence that claims us, like a vast field.

JACQUES DUPIN

## *Mineral Kingdom*

In this country lightning quickens stone.

On the peaks that dominate the gorges  
Ruined towers rise up  
Like the nimble torches of the mind  
That revive the nights of high wind  
The instinct of death in the quarryman's blood.

Every granite vein  
Will unravel in his eyes.

The fire that will never be cured of us.  
The fire that speaks our language.

# *Thirst*

I summon the landslide  
(In its clarity you are naked)  
And the dismemberment of the book  
Among the uprooting of stones.

I sleep so the blood your torture lacks  
Will struggle with scents, the gorse, the torrent  
Of my enemy mountain.

I walk endlessly.

I walk to alter something pure,  
This blind bird upon my fist  
Or this too clear face, glimpsed  
At a stone's throw

I write to bury my gold,  
To close your eyes.

My body, you will not fill the ditch  
That I am digging, that I deepen each night.

Like a wild boar caught in the underbrush  
You leap, you struggle.

Does the vine on the rampart remember another body  
Prostrate on the keyboard of the void?

Throw off your clothes, throw away your food,  
Diviner of water, hunter of lowly light.

The sliding of the hill  
Will overflow the false depth,  
The secret excavation underfoot.

Calm wriggles into the night air  
Through disjointed stones and the riddled heart

At the instant you disappear,  
Like a splinter in the sea.

Opened in few words  
as if by an eddy, in some wall,  
an embrasure, not even a window

to hold at arm's length  
this night country where the path is lost

at the limit of strength a naked word

The wave of limestone and the white of wind  
cross the sleeper's chest

whose flooded nerves are shaking below  
propping the gardens in tiers  
parting the thorns and prolonging  
the harmonies of nocturnal instruments  
toward comprehension of the light  
—and its breaking

his forked passion on the anvil  
he breathes  
like thunder  
without food without venom among the junipers  
on the slope, and the ravine makes him breathe  
a dark air  
to compensate for the violence of his chains

Let us salute what delivers us, the flame yellow bulldozer, the giant beetle with fever-shaken thorax, the small of its back twisted for a monstrous arching. It has come to uproot the palace and its ruins, to overturn images and stone, to fold up the domes and dovecots, to rip out the old erectile passions of men, their vertical syntax, and last of all, the prison, all that remains of the city. From now on, a clearing free from all diseased shadow. Bare table. A table adorned for a feast without food, without guests. I salute its enraged candor, preparing to redeem our waiting, to sign our work.

It is then that I see you grow, star. That I see you grow and shine in my tiny hand, a stone, girded against famine.



Gripped by the dread of the untold  
story

the sun  
the meaning  
of giving in

aphasiac hub  
your kingdom  
since the wheel crushed me  
I have denied it

Whatever the putrid smell of new neighborhoods  
the instruments of decline spread out at our feet

we devour the slag  
what is written without us  
downwards

abrasion and aroma  
contiguous and discordant  
what is written obliquely and with cunning  
building calm

like pyramid on its point



NOTES FROM  
A COMPOSITION  
BOOK  
1967



# 1

The world is in my head. My body is in the world.

# 2

The world is my idea. I am the world. The world is your idea. You are the world. My world and your world are not the same.

# 3

There is no world except the human world. (By *human* I mean everything that can be seen, felt, heard, thought, and imagined.)

# 4

The world has no objective existence. It exists only insofar as we are able to perceive it. And our perceptions are necessarily limited. Which means that the world has a limit, that it stops somewhere. But where it stops for me is not necessarily where it stops for you.

# 5

No theory of art (if it is possible) can be divorced from a theory of human perception.

## 6

But not only are our perceptions limited, language (our means of expressing those perceptions) is also limited.

## 7

Language is not experience. It is a means of organizing experience.

## 8

What, then, is the experience of language? It gives us the world and takes it away from us. In the same breath.

## 9

The fall of man is not a question of sin, transgression, or moral turpitude. It is a question of language conquering experience: the fall of the world into the word, experience descending from the eye to the mouth. A distance of about three inches.

## 10

The eye sees the world in flux. The word is an attempt to arrest the flow, to stabilize it. And yet we persist in trying to translate experience into language. Hence poetry, hence the utterances of daily life. This is the faith that prevents universal despair—and also causes it.

## 11

Art is the *mirror of man's wit* (Marlowe). The mirror image is apt—and breakable. Shatter the mirror and rearrange the pieces. The result will still be a reflection of something. Any combination is possible, any number of pieces may be left out. The only requirement is that at least one fragment remain. In *Hamlet*, holding the mirror up to nature amounts to the same thing as Marlowe's formulation—once the above arguments have been understood. For all things in nature are human, even if nature itself is not. (We could not exist if the world were not our idea.) In other words, no matter what the circumstances (ancient or modern, Classical or Romantic), art is a product of the human mind. (The human mimed.)

## 12

Faith in the word is what I call Classical. Doubt in the word is what I call Romantic. The Classicist believes in the future. The Romantic knows that he will be disappointed, that his desires will never be fulfilled. For he believes that the world is ineffable, beyond the grasp of words.

## 13

To feel estranged from language is to lose your own body. When words fail you, you dissolve into an image of nothingness. You disappear.

