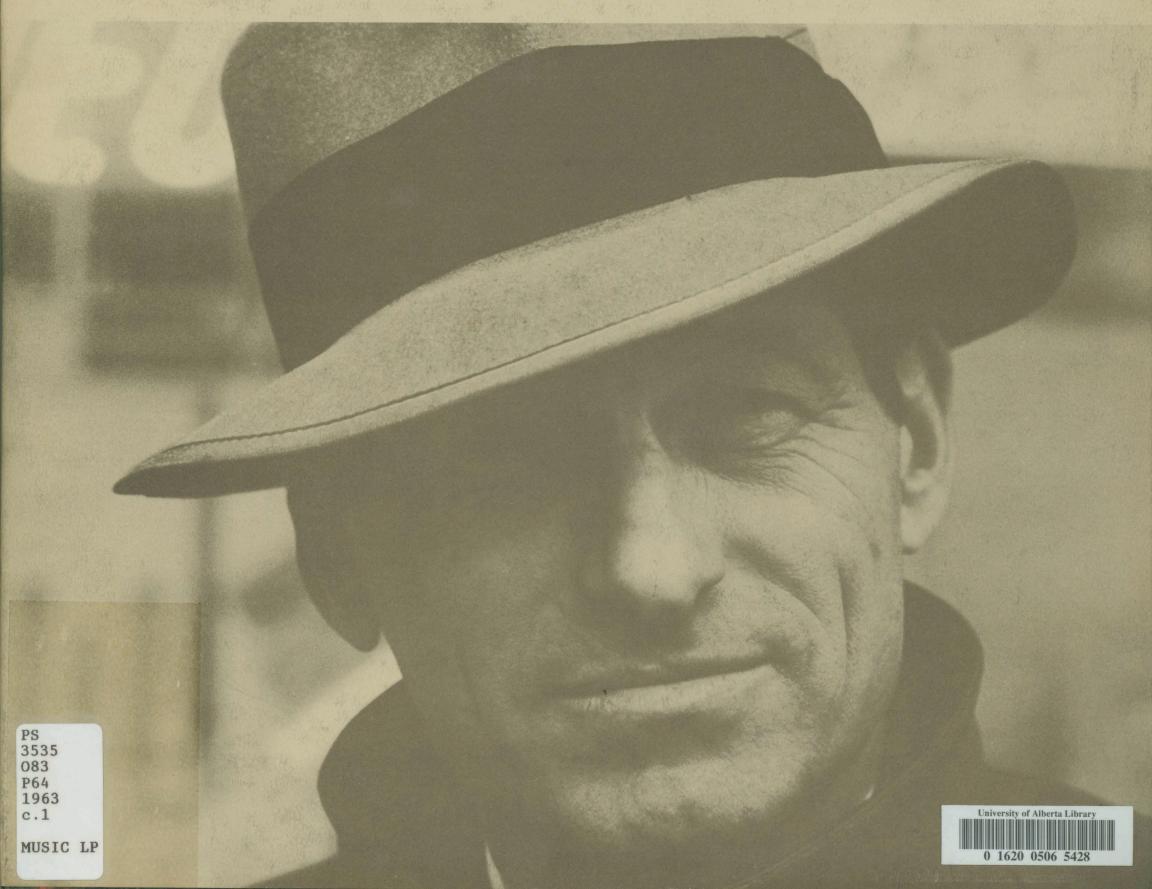
1 text (11 p.)

# IIL I UENS OF NORMAN BOSTEN READ BY THE POET FOLKWAYS RECORDS FL 9704



Identity Song for the Make-up Man The Spider Crazy Ballad

Speech Before the Curtain For Walt Whitman 1929
Depression Blues Landscape with Figure The Ministers of State Spain 1937
Europe 1945
Futurama Love Song Meditation

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET FOLKWAYS RECORDS FL 9704
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THE POEMS OF NORMAN ROSTEN

## The Poems of NORMAN ROSTEN read by the Poet

NORMAN ROSTEN, poet and playwright, won the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award for his first book, Return Again, Traveler. It was followed by The Fourth Decade, written on a Guggenheim Fellowship. His next volume was a long narrative poem, The Big Road. A collection of lyrics, Songs For Patricia, and The Plane and the Shadow, appeared thereafter. A sixth volume is in preparation. This reading is from both his published and unpublished work, and includes material recently recorded for the Library of Congress.

As a playwright, Mr. Rosten has had four works performed on and off Broadway. His most recent, Mister Johnson (based on the novel by Joyce Cary), received high critical acclaim and was produced on Broadway and also in London. He has written a number of original verse plays for radio, as well as documentaries and other film scripts including the screenplay of "A View From The Bridge."

Mr. Rosten's poetry is wide ranging, with "a real feeling for the American idiom" (Atlantic Monthly). It has been characterized as having "undeniable power and fresh impulse" (Book-of-the-Month Club News), and "honesty...sense and taste" (Poetry Magazine). His work has been read over the radio, and has been set to music by Howard Swanson, Alec Wilder, and Elie Siegmeister. It is an intensely personal voice that regards the world with irony, anger, and tenderness. The thread of history weaves through its design: both ivory tower seekers and dogmatists would do best to go elsewhere.

Norman Rosten has also published stories, poems and articles in <u>Holiday</u>, <u>The New Yorker</u>, <u>Poetry Magazine</u>, <u>Paris Review</u>, <u>Antioch Review</u>, and other periodicals. He has received awards from the Poetry Society of America and the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

### by Norman Rosten:

"Robert Frost wrote somewhere that we are all lost in our age, and in that sense the poet may be an accidental historian. Written over a span of two decades, some of these poems reflect a specific time; others exist out of a pure subjective force.

The writer must recognize both fact and feeling. Poems are made of double visions: we look out toward events, we look in upon ourselves. For the poet, the shortest distance between two points is not necessarily a straight line; he may move in strange ellipses and parabolas searching for a musical and intellectual reality. Verbal rhythm can enchant, but we need meaning as well. The artist without a point of view is a court jester. Though kingly (or queenly) courts have become fewer, there seems to be no decline in jesters, who amuse in prose as well as poetry.

Outside the court...have the poets an audience? Here's a question to defy any IBM machine. I say our friends are nowhere, everywhere, asleep, awake, in hiding...but we need them. We need them - whatever the state of their bodies or souls. Whereas in the past, philosophy and the arts have come to the aid of the poets, today Science, too, that presumed enemy, may be of help. Aside from giving us new themes, new glimpses of Venus (the planet), in developing these very nice recordings it is also giving us new listeners. Welcome!"

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These poems are from "The Fourth Decade", "Songs for Patnicia", "The Plane and the Shadow", and from a volume in preparation.

Speech Before the Curtain

Listener, though I may not please, Come along for the grammar's ride.

I'll prove you're asleep
When you think you've wakened,
Or prove you're awake
In a dream (which I supply)
Of my most blue-enraptured sky.
I'll whirl you (in a breath)
Swiftly, safely past death.

Turn off the news.

Don't bring your clothes.

I see money chattering

At your ear - no, no, that won't do,

Leave everything behind!

Angel I conjure
Or a singing tree,
Even love if you'll hurry.
I have hope for you.

Hurry!

For Walt Whitman

In the beginning, we had to deny you. Cities of whores and builders, we had no time For your prophecies. Your light blinded us. We hid our nakedness, pursued money.

Now you seem more alien to us than ever, With your haunted face and rather foolish stance, And those catalogues of names and occupations Growing over your pages like weeds.

Lord, how you exaggerate, your embrace Drowning us in the milk of human virility. Men, women, animals, stones, trees - You anoint all with your seminal bragging.

In a way, you're been destructive, Forever tieing us to objects and geography, Whereas poetry, to survive, must somehow cut free, Blossom in a timeless air.

The truth is, I tell myself, we've outgrown you As an athlete his once powerful stride. The younger men are clever, all turned pro, With an eye not on beauty but getting ahead.

After all is said, and you put publicly in place,
Publicly unsolved, I am moved to a secret reverence.
I see your largeness, our own diminution,
Our people, generals, explorers, poets;
How shall in prophecy, how big in wars And I see you plain, though flickering,
And finally accept you, blowzy and barnacled,
With your one-stringed instrument, our desperate
glory.

1929

steel is down aluminum falling aircraft shaky cotton secretly unloading

corn slumped in a selling attack wheat off 1/8 no chance for a comeback

rails too had a difficult time carbon was critical and refused to climb

Down, down, the tickertape falters. He tried to unload, but not in time; He tried to recoup, but it didn't matter.

He jumps without pause or prayer. He could not face the morning after; Headlines rush toward him in the air.

He did not count on unseen changes. He did not count on panic and love, Nor on trade between Rangoon and London, Nor on the fact that the earth moves.

Down, down, the decade comes. All the king's horses And all the king's men, Will not put it together again.

Depression Blues

The unemployed move along the avenues Of the world with the pallor of waiting, Past buildings where wealth shines In gold letters on its thousand windows.

These are the pitiful seekers
Who have lived innocently, committed no wrong;
Now the famine and the locusts have come
And the winter is seven years long.

The decade of home relief,
The decade of the apple vendor,
The ordeal of the sensitive begins:
We learn the humiliation of hunger.

In the valley of the poor,
Through the night, through the nightmare,
The hum of anger disturbs our sleep,
Sends its tremors through the veins of earth
And the seismograph quivers.

We were born with the crisis on our eyelids And are now called upon to answer questions.

Landscape with Figure

Black boy, the night hides you Heavy as lead; The dark night can't help you And besides, you're dead. They left you softly,
Your red blood comes down;
The white man washes his hands
Back in town.

The night wind around you,
Wind from the hill;
Morning discovers you
So still, so still.

Your own folks come And cut you free; Put you under ground, At last you're free!

Mr. Jesus, stop bleeding now
And come off from your cross.
Come down from the mountain
And be our boss.

White man's got a book,
Says we're all free;
But my brother's neck was broke
On that tree.

Mr. Jesus, Mr. Man, You sit up so high With your holy bread and wine. Come on down. It's time.

### The Ministers of State

Once more they've decided the good and the bad Those voices we remember as having left behind They follow us here with the same instructions The sonorous lies that drove us all mad

O never have the statesmen with all their heads Squeezed out such death disguised as logic It's the old old men even as before And what shall we do with their dangerous heads

Shall we whip them in public parading their buttocks Send them to school but they're over age Give them a pension or feed them on milk Or would hanging be enough of a shock

Over and over whatever the year
Jack and Jill keep going up the hill
To do their sweet forgetting on the grass
Not knowing the darkness their elders prepare

Call your dear children hurry dear mother Hurry and find them and save their blood The games are all over that lived on the page There's a tiger History loosed in the wood

### Spain 1937

In Guernica after the bombs the children
Were laid out in order upon the sidewalk,
In their white starched dresses,
In their pitiful white dresses.

On their foreheads and breasts
Are the little holes where death came in
As thunder, while they were playing
Their important summer games.

Do not weep for them, madre.
They are gone forever, the little ones,
Straight to heaven to the saints,
And God will fill the bullet-holes with candy.

### Europe 1945

Soldier, quietly now on the hillside, Your body still warm among the ferns, The war is over for you at last Under death's final armistice.

The bullet was kind.
It could have brought suffering.
It could have opened a vein of memory
But the darkness was swift and merciful.

If there were sons in your blood
The earth has them now: the earth
Has all your jewelled possessions now:
It has taken the miracle of your heart
And ended it forever.

Soldier, at rest with the hillside,
The harvest is all headstones around you.
And beyond your body drained of light,
Beyond your single death and deed,
Let the rain answer that unleaves the maple,
Wind and rain that thins the stone, slowly
Giving each letter of your name away.
Then the landmark goes, and time is all,
Time that stares into the blind future
And will not promise anything...

## Futurama Love Song

(after Christopher Marlowe)

Come live with me and be my love
Under the fireball we will prove
No fallout can disturb our kiss
Nor radiation touch our bliss

That gorgeous mushroom call our home
White polished cloud our faery dome
What matter if it others harm
Contaminated we'll keep warm

Your arms that numb around me lie
Shall soon resume their amorous play
And I shall stroke your singed hair
We'll live without a single care

We'll berries in abundance find Hidden from radioactive wind And drink from all the melted snow And bless what chaos did bestow

Come live with me, be yet my love Some new mutation we may prove Or show that two can fear as one While we go round the raging sun.

### Meditation

Things used to happen to me more often.
Such as, I'd be sitting in a park
And a hunchback would ask me for a light.
Or a mother would say, Please watch my baby,
As she'd climb a tree to eat a blossom.
More than once I'd hold one end
Of a jumping rope for children.
I'd always be asked directions by foreigners,
Not to mention an occasional prostitute
Pretending to be lost: how did she know
I was as well?

l ve been mistaken
For a Greek, a lawyer, a smiling fool,
Even Will Rogers - and the point is
I'm not only not any of them
But shaky as to what I really am.

Being reflected in the eye of others
Has a certain tenderness: we survive
On the mercy of madmen and strangers.
We should be out on the streets more often,
Where mistakes happen, and lives are saved.

The Well

Clear well, clear water, How long since the day I've wished on water?

Spider and moss, a wall of stone,
O how I feared I'd drop darkly down,
O how I feared that eye below My mother would call me safely home.

Clear well, clear water,
I'm now a man with an only daughter.

Wish for a man who's lost many wishes, Touched them as fire, they turned to ashes. O how I feared that wet damp stone -My father would call me safely home.

I'm long weaned now from father and mother, Have left those arms, and taken others. Still that forbidding eye below -I drop a pebble, time to go.

Clear well, deep water....

Songs for Patricia

1

From the month of love
To the month of the moon
To the month of knowing
To the month of soon
To the month of bigness
To the month of stirring
To the time of patience
To the end of waiting

To the moment of pain To the shriek of a stone In the white room Now that you're born And I spell the word out

To be alive
Is much more than your weight

Or the balance of blood So new in your veins

To be born is Mostly musical

Like a hymnody After the utter dark

From a sleep is seen The growing light

And I sit and wait Listening to clocks

While a shadow is thrown Beyond my death.

3.

Darling Those are birds

Little bells That live in the air

Tinkle with leaves
Fly away somewhere far

O you'll never Catch them in your white hand

Their lifting light Inside your very own heart

It's exactly the same
Thought you cannot leave the earth

But may meet them With a wish by going to sleep

Your breathing
The hush of their wings becomes

They won't hurt you

4.

Your single tear Of diamond and salt I tried to hold As it fell to my hand I kiss your tear (O that taste of pity!) What shall we do With such brief beauty

And was this pain
Or tremble of water
Soon banished away
By the slightest laughter

And where has it gone And whose was the faul That vanished so quick The diamond and salt

dy eye caught idsaes, a breast of fire You being Languageless, only with eyes

You can hourly follow my delight

Foolishly I am A dancing bear on a chain and property but here

Wishing to be Graceful but I turn and fall

That you may laugh And set the air to music

Your laugh Is a secret in a cave of violets

And this earth Seems young with its trillion years The circle widens to let ine in.
The circle closes to hold me tight to

Before you went down The longest stairs

You turned to me
With a sudden smile

To make you safe While going down

And I stand above Counting each step

So you needn't fear What comes after five

Only the years
That have such quick numbers

Only your life That moves farther away

Have you a question In your small closed hand? Bring it to me breathing And where was it found?

Bring it to me quickly We'll open and we'll see It must have been a bird That's flown away

Even as I hold you Darling it must change For love will ever grow And make the parent strange

And like a hand will open Almost as yours does now
And will you remember Who was first to let you go? Prelude

I met my brother who asked where I had been. I met my sister who said, Are you coming home? I met, that same day, a stranger who smiled, Saying, I remember you, are you coming home?

I left, I recall, without saying goodbye, My mother at the oven in the heat of the day, My father asleep: the pulse at his throat Held me with pity, yet I could not stay.

Out to the world with my stretching bones, I passed through love with hardly a shudder. Kisses were given, and lightning seen: It was later I heard the thunder.

Words I had known, words I had lost, In the midst of silence, my name spoken. I was being warned of my sins to come: It was too early to listen.

Along I spun, a leaf, a fool, My ears received amazing sounds. I bled, I suppose, internally: My skin showed no sign of wounds.

The days narrowed. My ebbing youth Shivered in the cold. Would I ever arrive? Was my darkening journey straight or round? Were the ghosts who called alive?

Away may be toward - that paradox Proved India east by sailing west. Move we must, though soon we learn The prevailing wind is death.

Home, I saw, was a point in flight, A destination never to be won. And always, for those who wait or leave, The dread of the returning son.

Ahead, the house of memory ablaze! Light that draws us, even as the moth, Hunger of beginning, end, all. Round and round my hovering heart...

Lab not know when in suffering began.
But the kieses and breasts of my mother fail
Yet she was always there, and of the some All things start from the unseen. We begin as a sigh, a touch in darkness, And then, endlessly, the locking of arms. Out of this spasm, an invisible cell which had Begins us and guides us to that burst of day.

My mother sleeps, fed by this mystery. Fecundity weighs upon her: from those kisses Which touched her as bees in an orchard, Her branches sing. Love, undefined, Is blinder than all. And the dark thrives.

I learned an odd dance h

Unseen, from the farthest origins, Wind moves us into lanes of destiny. I think of a powerful single scent, As lilacs overwhelm the mastery of winter, Uprooting memory, sorrow's castle -And I sort out coins and hats and lips, I separate child from street, from day, The moment-to-moment flickering film. Names, nights, forgotten demands,
Song, poverty, some balancing luck,
Weeds, the entanglements of a dimming year.
I've lost all track of youth or age.
Time has been my juggling act,
Watches and calendars thrown into the breach.
Hopeless. Like color running into water,
Where water, widening, must win.

The word itself, in a sheath of flame,
I throw like a brand on the dead ground,
And all the meadows crackle with Spring!
The word as the soaring dove, created saviour,
The life eternal, that earthbound bread.
The word is the leap the shutter snares,
Revealed in a print: is that us?
Sitting there stripped to our pain?
You cry again, But I wasn't ready!
You were ready enough for that wink of light,
That image where the blindness spoke.

3.

Open the closet - out falls
The smiling and familiar skeleton!
Bones of us all, sisters, father, mother,
Most conspicuously me. Which is who?
We never can tell, but taken together
We're indigenously one.

Cram it all back No luck, a finger comes through the crack,
A rattle of memory at the lock, a sigh
Let me out, and scattered upon the floor
Like nibs of a puzzle saying Figure me out.

My mother (to begin almost at the end),
Exquisitely mad, garrulous as a cage of birds,
Taught me to trust my head in the lion's mouth:
He won't hurt you, he's a man in lion's clothes,
Her dictum ran, and so ran I, adoring
All beggars. She may have been right. Ignorant
Of sin, she married far out of her innocence.

I do not know when my suffering began, But the kisses and breasts of my mother faded, Yet she was always there, ambiguous as music, Her broom like a wand, her apron imperial, Undaunted by weather or kings tumbling down. (Foolproof, really, until I grew older) And she said with a laugh on many a day: Never be afraid! (I wondered, of what?)

Not a clue, not one, from my sulking father. He shielded his eyes from his growing daughters, He whipped them for their nakedness. Perhaps from his silence, and her pure laughter, I took from each a tentative step. I learned an odd dance her limbs inspired, From my father's fear I dropped a ladder down To a thrilling escape.

O purity of time, the purest water,
As I skipped over fruit-rind and rotting fish,
Roaming the beach as a boy, full of wishes,
Racing the surf and my swift shadow.

The crowds of summer sprawled in the sand. My eye caught kisses, a breast of fire, And all the while the white clouds Leaped like a skyful of dolphins.

Wake up, sighed my mother, her face in tears. Wake up, roared my father, shaking a fist. What's to become of him? a wild uncle shouted. Grandfather moaned, And what of his God? And the money, the money, what will he earn? O their anguish, their sweet ignorance!

Already in me forming was my own Quixote.
Secretly I set up my thumb show.
Already, even then, I was seeking a mask.
For the weathervane spun, the lightning called,
And the wind blew with a scent of knives.
I ran searching in all directions.

4.

The circle widens to let me in, The circle closes to hold me tight. There is some debt which must be paid.

Source of my blood, farewell, as I hear you Chatter in your age.

"Come and visit my grave,"
Mother says without a care in her head.
"I'm ready to sleep, I believe I'll enjoy it."
She stirs a broth in continual surprise.
"Amen," says Father, slicing an apple.
Are they turning cold before my eyes?
I say goodbye and hide my tears.

Night flows within me as I stand
Within that night, prepared by them.
There is no victory. I bear that pain
Of a singular son, never to be redeemed.

Love that is lost in the vapors of the world,
Love that was given in all its disguises,
Stands clear at last as a face at dusk.
They are fading. No mercy is asked.
The horizon takes them hand in hand.
And I, left behind, how well I know
My life to them, my death, is bound.

### SIDE II

The Portable Electric Chair

(For Willie McGee)

As he dies,
The watchers think he is leaving them.
It is they who are leaving him.
He is immovable.
He is now at the center;
Around him whirls honor, earth,
And a heaviness of the blood.

Must I write of death?
It is Spring. Children and birds
Intoxicate the air.
Lovers grope and touch.
The leaf renews its green contour.

Not today, I do not want to write of death!

Yet everything reminds of the man.
A tree lives, but not the man.
A dog is alive, but not he.
He is dead and under ground.
(The air has closed over the crime)
He is lifeless and ended.
(The air is silent over the crime)

Now let me tell you now he died
It was in a portable electric chair
Came straight to his door
He sat down and died.

He didn't say much
He said I am ready
Then a flash of sleep
Raced through his body

Then away went the chair
Through the dark night
Searching for someone else
Black or white

Easiest thing
To make up the crime
That portable chair
Is moving all the time

You there

Better watch out

For that portable chair

Willie in his bedroom slippers.
He walks up and down in his cell,
Feeling himself lost, feeling himself saved.

Hours of the month, hours of the week,
To the hours of the days all edged with black,
To the hour of the clock, becomes the hour
Of the hoarded water, the wish, the dread,
Becomes the hour of the falling star,
Becomes the light, the last morning.

There is a washing of souls over the land,. The corruption of the heart, and silence.

Willie, it's time to die.
Get up, friend.
We didn't quite make it, friend.
You have to die.
There is a moon, perhaps.
There is a tree, a dog, a stone, watching.
Most of the land is asleep.
Believe me, most of the land knows you not.

Get up, Willie.
The State has you surrounded.

They sat him down in the portable chair And suddenly he wasn't there

Part of his death got away
And they're out hunting it today

Looking in places high and low
Wherever a poor man's death might go

Wherever a black man's life might be Thinking of a greater liberty

Portable chair moves through the night
Looking for someone black or white

You there
Better watch out
For that portable chair!

The brightness of morning following his death,
The sweetness of magnolias deceiving his death,
The day moves slowly, the season thrives.

Who entered his cell, later, alone,
To pick up his bedroom slippers?
Who was it came alone and whispered,
"Willie, you all right, Willie?"

## Identity and of some synth Ha no?

Science, that great ward of graphs,
Has long ordained what we knew to be a fact:
We are by bone and bread defined But still the myth, that opaque architecture,
Clamps its power on the mind.

We live, dear friend, in a single space, Cannot be double, or a continual tourist; There are only certain things that we may do -And so, the boundaries are everywhere, Bringing at last a room into view.

And all that poets plan, the vast
Encouragement to time or space,
Is merely where one lives - the past
Peculiarly dead, the present very thin,
And love, the largest theme, on the head of a pin.

Song for the Make-Up Man

The make-up man
Is full of faces
He comes to you sweetly
With pink for your ears

Lean back and smile

He will change your face

His colors all cover

Your wrinkles your fears

In a time of thunder
And nowhere to turn
He comes to your sleep
His fingers begin

Forehead to chin
Ear across to ear
Shadow for the eyes
You're a different man

But who knows what terror Clings to you then Cringing under Your permanent skin

Did you ever see Such a hiding of possessions Did you ever see Such a washing of sins

The Spider

His charm is not the obvious evil,
But his Fate: he sits and waits
Upon the tensile cunning of his web,
And whoever's trapped may beg
But not be delivered.

His range is a span of fingers.
Those struts of fiber draw like death.
He draws all weight from flies
Who finally fall, light as lint,
While he sits, sleeps, waits.

Conceivably he smiles, For all things come to him. He is simply ready to receive.

I sense his kindness to little spiders.

Crazy Ballad

Woke up one morning
With the dancing air
His brain lighted and laughing
It was one of those days

And along the street Yelling like a jaybird Who'll give me love I want to love

To a man on a truck
To a lady with a hat
To a child who smiled back
(Hey, can you hear the looney?)

Till they picked him up
For observation
And Jesus he swears
The day was pouring into him

Claims he's sane as a saint
And probably is
But what he'll have to prove
To get himself sprung

No living man knows

Not the man on a truck

Or the lady with a hat

Or the child who smiled back

### Inventory

Absorbed with syntax and hope, I write my lines:
O the Grail, godhead of our youth, the flame
That sings and lives upon the dying wood...

While I'm flying round a curve of the day, Behind in rent, behind in love, Boxed in by my demented peers, Hoping to turn an afternoon into gold, Initiate a rainbow, release a dove - Trying for the miracles of the trade. I pull my usual rabbits from the hat, But lately not a single leaf or tear.

Grist of the mill. I pass the time, The time passes me. I drown and recover. Poverty comes and goes.

I sell my watch But keep my desk. O flickering Grail, I live on that reflected light, I live Upon the dying wood...

Who breathes fire, Caught and singed, hanged and burned, Is not easily reconciled to bread.

Paris: St. Germain des Pres

I sit on a bench eating cherries,
Amazed that I wasn't cheated,
For the whole bag is ripe and deep red.
It's been a strange afternoon Me just out of the hospital (in a sense)
Trying to walk again, feeling shaky
After putting that money in a hotel vault.

So...just awhile ago a creature,
Wingless and in purple, came by
On a light breeze, her breasts trembling
And her walk terribly argumentative.
Not long after, a barking sound but no dog;
A whirl of feathers but no birds;
A shadow of clouds, a piano, a man
Frothing at the mouth and raving of God.

Maybe that's how it starts, absolutely innocent, Until the street of shutters closes Against you, and you'd better go home.

### Portrait

We who spread the rainbow under glass And weigh the most elusive sky and air, Of that clan I come to track your heart -But I'm baffled by those loose strands of hair,

You stand, finger at your lips, lost In a long-abandoned heaven. No one within, The angels gone, and all the harps undone. What legend holds you there? O hurry down!

Perhaps your home's with us, and not the gods.
Below your sealed window as you watch,
A river barge goes by, someone waves,
You laugh and throw a kiss for him to catch.

You're not to be rescued wholly in this world. It must be so. As many who are saved, That many drown. I see you clinging To rooms, to phones, forgotten to be loved.

Who killed Norma Jean? I, said the City.
As a civic duty As a civic duty I killed Norma Jean.

Who saw her die? I, said the Night, And a bedroom light, We saw her die.

Who caught her blood? I, said the Fan, With my little pan, I caught her blood.

Who'll make her shroud? I, said the Lover, My guilt to cover, I'll make her shroud.

Who'll dig her grave? The Tourist will come To join in the fun. He'll dig her grave.

Who'll be chief mourners? We who represent, And lose our ten percent, We'll be chief mourners.

Who'll bear the pall? We, said the Press, In pain and distress, We'll bear the pall.

Who'll toll the bell? I, screamed the Mother, Locked in her tower, I'll pull the bell.

Who'll soon forget? I, said the Page, Beginning to fade, I'm first to forget.

### This life I breathe I bathe in the light Alive in the tree The delight of the day That runs like a sieve

This day I re-live Over and over Tumbling like thistle

In the blue air

Each hour a kiss Springs from a leaf And how the trees shake Autumn bereaves me Giving love to the wind

And darkness brings on The singing of arms This life we all breathe That runs like a sieve

### Cycle

How the green lures me Sweet earth and sky Are my dazzlement

> How evening astounds With her silences And dawn the befriender Follows with sound

> I awake with the Spring Do a Summer dance During Winter I grow

Hope's what I have That querulous food Green as the hope Alive in the tree

### Philosophy

Bird on the bough (The wavering now) Leaps to his lake Of aerial blue

We study the wind Attempting his kind But never can each His life rescind

Round we run Pursued by a sin With love on the outside Looking in

Weighted in bed By heart and head Time is our anguish Height our dread

From ground to tree To the pure sky Who has knowledge Will never fly

### Short Lament

From getting up and lying down I rust away, I rust away; From all the errors on my brow I've gone, dear love, astray.

From running toward and stumbling back, My senses dull, my fingers find A world made smooth by other men. I long to grip the wind.

As I dream, my destiny beckons. I rouse myself and shake off sleep. I do what's assigned: O but the choices My poor heart keeps!

### Ballad of the Visiting Firemen

The visiting firemen Come from all counties

Wearing their helmets Belted and boldly

Strut through the thoroughfares Looking for fires

But will they find them The question of the hour

### Ho for a flame Phone if you see one

The trucks are in trim The brass brightly shining

And the firemen ready With all their credentials Come to consider
The speeches and tactics

For the hour is heavy With smoke and with portent

Who ever heard Of the city failing

With all its fireboxes Wired and alert

The citizens baffled But in accord

Ready to report The slightest spark

Where will it come From the high or the low

Are the firemen themselves Totally trusted

The hose and the pumps Fully inspected

Heads must be clear In the panic around us

Hey for incendiary comes in all sizes

And how shall we tell
The flames from the furore

With the firemen finally Looting the buildings

And where is the flame And what will come after

Will water be late
Will nothing be saved

Hey and ho and ha ha ha with everyone finally dying of laughter

Credo

Today you must buy and sell
Today you come to the square
To wrestle with commerce
Your fatal mother

Today you buy and sell Will meet at the board And bid all day long With the sweating breed

Today you will sell out
Today you will take the bribe
It's the way of the world
And you'll stay alive

And did you know they came to Christ's misery With his blood running out and numb on the nails

And they said We'll buy you what do you say
We'll buy what you stand for and set you free
We buy and sell we'll buy you
Or break your goddam bones
You tall stringy bastard Jew
Will you sign this paper and say you were mad?

How long do you espect to live, anyway?

To Ariake Kambara (1876-1952)

(who published four books of poems, the last at the age of 32, and spent the next forty-four years in revising them)

Ariake, Japanese friend, I regard
Your ghost, your fine print, in amazement!
How could you do it, brother?
The sheer courage, the humor,
The intensity of your pen!

And what, after all, is the poem
But the constant threading of a needle?
You have used the same thread
Over and over, sewing clouds, sewing
A damaged heart, perfecting the things
You knew well.

It is quite possible,
Dear Ariake, we are old at thirty,
And would be wiser to close our doors
After one last swift year of the senses.
Seen once, felt once, the world should persist
As the image of a breast,
As the hand's perfection, as flame,
As love is recalled to us, once
Having been so blinded.

On Reading Catullus

It's quite disturbing, Catullus, Knowing all we know of your time, To see you staring like a boy at Clodia's eyes.

You are alive, a poet, With Rome beginning its long disease, And you hungry and haunted by Clodia's eyes.

It's childish. You're too clever.
Can't you see there's more to fire
Than what you've found so wild and trembling?

Is it possible, wise as you were, Not to have seen beyond her white arms, Yourself embittered, old, and all the horizon burning

Introduction For Beginners

I rise at last from my darkened room.
Is it morning? The light's unclear.
I may have been ill. I recall a shock
Where I fell from the grace of the Multitude
Into the terror of the One. O Lord
Of the One, my unnecessary soul, my self,
How have I survived? I have watched a candle

Burn away with the night, while I survived. I have witnessed murder, and I survived. I have eaten gold, and dung, and lived. I have outstared the madness of the State, Its spokesmen, soothsayers, witchdoctors.

All my predictions went wrong.

I vowed my song of peace would silence war,
But war had a song usurping my own.

I wrote my verses to supplant God,
And still I face His awesome metaphor.

I raised my sword against injustice,
But they made me a stockholder by mail.
And when I roused a truth from the dead,
They easily got me declared insane.

I have never been at home with tragedy. It's been a mistake, I ask to be excused. The rise and fall of a single life, Not the universe, was more my boundary. It's true, your Honor, I was found in bed With every known color and skin, But fear, not love, made me kiss the leper. I pitched my tent of incantation To their glory: but the backward beggars Bit my thumb, picked my wallet, Knocked me down in the rush for bread.

- -Were you in any way motivated by personal gain?
- -No. Absolutely not, your Honor.
- -But you were endeared to them, is that true?
- -Oh yes, I was ready to die for them.
- -Did you ever acquaint them as to the nature of your mission?
- -No, sir. I thought they knew me. I thought
- -they would be waiting for me.
- -You were, at that moment, unknown to one another, is that correct?
- -That's right. But I was hoping they'd recognize me.
- How?
- By the nature of my work.
- Would you explain that, please?
- -I had hoped to be recognized as a spokesman,
- a remnant of eloquence, reminder of a possible brotherhood-
- -Yes, yes. Would you sum up?
- -Living in an age of social upheaval, I felt it my duty to exhort the people -
- -Without a license? Are you aware that a license is required to make a public speech?
- -I thought, your Honor, we have free speech.
- -We have licensed free speech.
- -I am accustomed, by tradition, to be unlicensed.
- -Tradition be damned!
- -Laws be damned!
- -I hold the defendant in contempt, and hereby dismiss him.
- -You can't dismiss me! I demand to be indicted!
- -My good man, this case is preposterous, absolutely unrelated to modern jurisprudence. We have a jammed calendar how did you ever get on it? We have important cases of murder, rape, fraud, dope addiction, and simple theft. We have no time for this problem. You're free to go. Don't get into any further mischief. The state is studying the leper situation. Have you thought of science? There's your new frontier, my boy, let it be the glory of

your pen! The court will give you a letter of recommendation if necessary. Go. No loitering in the halls. Next case!

So I gathered together my works of heart,
Presented myself to the new advisers.
They teamed me up with some jazz musicians,
Gave me an audience. It was laughable.
A guy with a cello kept throwing me off,
The piano was drunk, the drummer was on junk,
While the audience cheered at the wrong places.
Listen, I shouted, I'm a man with a message!
But I wasn't Hip and I broke with Zen,
My Marx was outmoded, I laughed at Freud,
So they fired me up in a three-stage rocket,
Bounced off the moon, damn near got killed,
Trying their best to make me useful.

As we were weaned, so we went. We learned That we have no heirs, our house of ants Everywhere crumbling. Though lights burn late In government buildings, nothing is solved. All our mentors left us exiled still.

Who are we, scattered artisans of the word? Our first mistake was to imagine ourselves As timeless. We were fashioned for a year Of fire, then burned away with the wars. The love we coined, our brightest handiwork, Was never meant to save a city. Salvation's a particular nightmare Absolutely not to be duplicated. We may all be saved, but not by edict.

Farewell, then, to the known contours,
The simple walls of houses, the breath of heroes,
Slogans that break apart like smoke
Or turn into knives.
I return to wind, to water,
To the dance of fate and circumstance,
Knowing all things to their opposites change,
As I must change from a clown to a man.

Light I possess, and language, but O How my repetitious day cries out For a new redemption!

I must go past bread to seek my hunger.
I must go past God to question the darkness.
I must go past mankind to seek out men.
I search a brother of equal heart,
A sister of beauty, a father of patience,
A mother of hope, that I may be wise
And be changed from a clown to a man.

There lies, far into the years, a compassion Without a name, awaiting my arms.
Come, lullaby, elegy, Ariel once released, Redeem my life as I've given you yours. I ask again for those forgotten miracles Wrought out of insubstantial air.
I would be king along with Caliban, Doomed upon that island, and free.

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