

WORDS FOR THE WIND
Selections from the
Poetry of Theodore Roethke
Read by Theodore Roethke
Folkways Records FL 9736

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1962
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MUSIC LP

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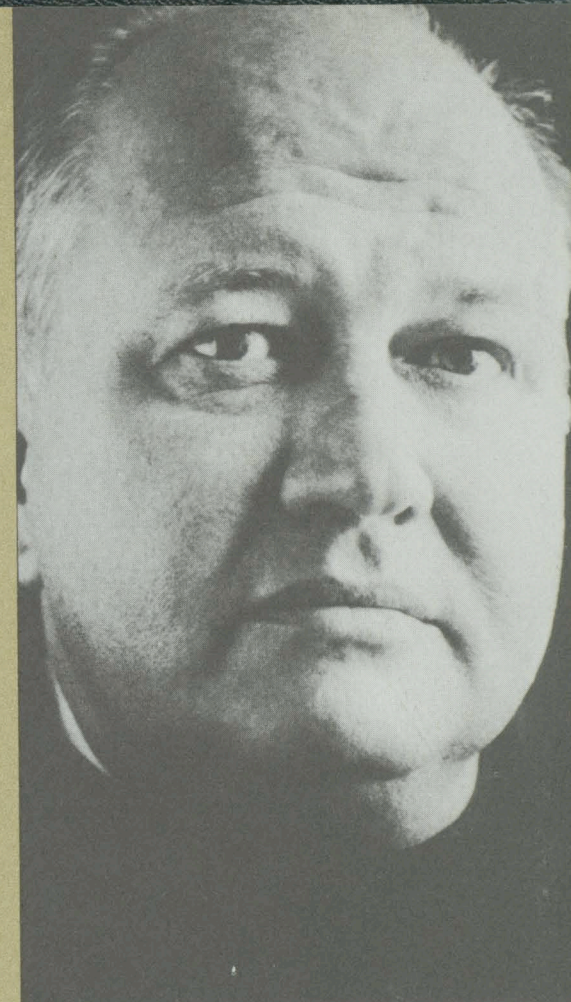


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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

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WORDS FOR THE WIND

POEMS OF

THEODORE ROETHKE

READ BY

THEODORE ROETHKE

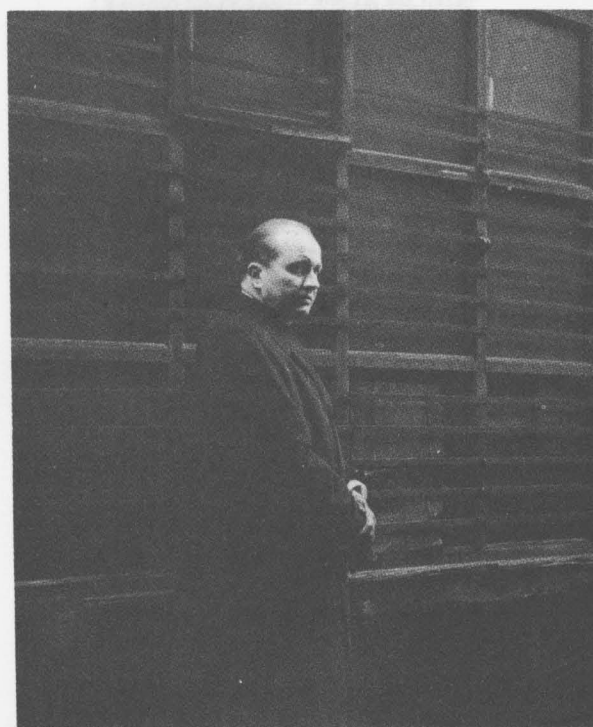


Photo by Frank Murphy

for Children AN INTERLUDE

A Rouse for Stevens

Wallace Stevens, what's he done?
He can play the flitter-flad;
He can see the second sun
Spinning through the lordly cloud.

He's imagination's prince:
He can plink the scitter-bum;
How he rolls the vocables,
Brings the secret--right in Here'

Wallace, Wallace, wo ist er?
Never met him, Dutchman dear;
If I ate and drank like him,
I would be a chanticleer.

Speak it from the face our clearly:
Here's a mensch that sings but dandy.
Er ist nimals ausgepoopen,
Altes wunder-kind.

Roar 'em, whore 'em, cockalorum,
The Muses they must all adore him,
Wallace Stevens--are we for him?
Brother, he's our father.

SONG FOR THE SQUEEZE-BOX

It wasn't Ernest; it wasn't Scott—
The boys I knew when I went to pot;
They didn't boast; they didn't snivel,
But stepped right up and swung at the Devil;
And after exchanging a punch or two,
They all sat down like me and you
—And began to drink up the money.

It wasn't the Colony; it wasn't the Stork;
It wasn't the joints in New York, New York;
But me and a girl friend learned a lot
In Ecorse, Toledo, and Wyandotte
—About getting rid of our money.

It was jump-in-the-hedge; it was wait-in-the-hall;
It was "Would you believe it—*fawther's* tall!"
(It turned out she hadn't a father at all)
—But how she could burn up the money!

A place I surely did like to go
Was the underbelly of Cicero;
And East St. Louis and Monongahela
Had the red-hot spots where you feel a
—Lot like losing some money.

Oh, the Synco Septet played for us then,
And even the boys turned out to be men
As we sat there drinking that bathtub gin
—And loosened up with our money.

It was Samoots Matuna and Bugs Moran;
It was Fade me another and Stick out your can;
It was Place and Show and Also Ran
—For you never won with that money.

Oh, it wasn't a crime, it wasn't a sin,
And nobody slipped me a Mickey Finn,
For whenever I could, I dealt them all in
—On that chunk of Grandpa's money.

It was Dead Man's Corner, it was Kelly's Stable;
It was Stand on your feet as long as you're able,
But many a man rolled under the table
—When he tried to drink up the money.

To some it may seem a sad thing to relate,
The dough I spent on Chippewa Kate,
For she finally left town on the Bay City freight
—When she thought I'd run out of money.

The doctors, the lawyers, the cops are all paid—
So I've got to get me a rich ugly old maid
Who isn't unwilling, who isn't afraid
—To help me eat up her money.

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REPLY TO A LADY EDITOR

If the Poem (beginning "I knew a woman, lovely in her bones") in *The London Times Literary Supplement* has not appeared here, we offer you \$75 for it. Could you wire us collect your answer?

Sincerely yours,
Alice S. Morris
Literary Editor, *Harper's Bazaar*

Sweet Alice S. Morris, I am pleased, of course,
You take the *Times Supplement*, and read its verse,
And know that True Love is more than a Life-Force
—And so like my poem called *Poem*.

Dan Cupid, I tell you's a braw laddie-buck;
A visit from him is a piece of pure luck,
And should he arrive, why just lean yourself back
—And recite him my poem called *Poem*.

O print it, my dear, do publish it, yes,
That ladies their true natures never suppress,
When they come, dazedly, to the pretty pass
—Of acting my poem called *Poem*.

My darling, my dearest, most-honest-alive,
Just send me along that sweet seventy-five;
I'll continue to think on the nature of love,
—As I dance to my poem called *Poem*.

DINKY

O what's the weather in a Beard?
It's windy there, and rather weird,
And when you think the sky has cleared
—Why, there is Dirty Dinky.

Suppose you walk out in a Storm,
With nothing on to keep you warm,
And then step barefoot on a Worm
—Of course, it's Dirty Dinky.

As I was crossing a hot hot Plain,
I saw a sight that caused me pain,
You asked me before, I'll tell you again:
—It looked like Dirty Dinky.

Last night you lay a-sleeping? Nol
The room was thirty-five below;
The sheets and blankets turned to snow.
—He'd got in: Dirty Dinky.

You'd better watch the things you do,
You'd better watch the things you do.
You're part of him; he's part of you
—You may be Dirty Dinky.

THE SLOTH

In moving-slow he has no Peer.
You ask him something in his Ear,
He thinks about it for a Year;

And, then, before he says a Word
There, upside down (unlike a Bird),
He will assume that you have Heard—

A most Ex-as-per-at-ing Lug.
But should you call his manner Smug,
He'll sigh and give his Branch a Hug;

Then off again to Sleep he goes,
Still swaying gently by his Toes,
And you just *know* he knows he knows.

THE LADY AND THE BEAR

A Lady came to a Bear by a Stream.
"O why are you fishing that way?
Tell me, dear Bear there by the Stream,
Why are you fishing that way?"

"I am what is known as a Biddly Bear,—
That's why I'm fishing this way.
We Biddly's are Pee-culiar Bears.
And so,—I'm fishing this way.

"And besides, it seems there's a Law:
A most, most exactious Law
Says a Bear
Doesn't dare
Doesn't dare
Doesn't DARE
Use a Hook or a Line,
Or an old piece of Twine,
Not even the end of his Claw, Claw, Claw,
Not even the end of his Claw.
Yes, a Bear has to fish with his Paw, Paw, Paw.
A Bear has to fish with his Paw."

"O it's Wonderful how with a flick of your Wrist,
You can fish out a fish, out a fish, out a fish,
If I were a fish I just couldn't resist
You, when you are fishing that way, that way,
When you are fishing that way."

And at that the Lady slipped from the Bank
And fell in the Stream still clutching a Plank,

LOVE POEMS

THE DREAM

1
I met her as a blossom on a stem
Before she ever breathed, and in that dream
The mind remembers from a deeper sleep:
Eye learned from eye, cold lip from sensual lip.
My dream divided on a point of fire;
Light hardened on the water where we were;
A bird sang low; the moonlight sifted in;
The water rippled, and she rippled on.

2
She came toward me in the flowing air,
A shape of change, encircled by its fire.
I watched her there, between me and the moon;
The bushes and the stones danced on and on;
I touched her shadow when the light delayed;
I turned my face away, and yet she stayed.
A bird sang from the center of a tree;
She loved the wind because the wind loved me.

3

Love is not love until love's vulnerable.
She slowed to sigh, in that long interval.
A small bird flew in circles where we stood;
The deer came down, out of the dappled wood.
All who remember, doubt. Who calls that strange?
I tossed a stone, and listened to its plunge.
She knew the grammar of least motion, she
Lent me one virtue, and I live thereby.

4

She held her body steady in the wind;
Our shadows met, and slowly swung around;
She turned the field into a glittering sea;
I played in flame and water like a boy
And I swayed out beyond the white seafoam;
Like a wet log, I sang within a flame.
In that last while, eternity's confine,
I came to love, I came into my own.

ALL THE EARTH, ALL THE AIR

1

I stand with standing stones.
The stones stay where they are.
The twiny winders wind;
The little fishes move.
A ripple wakes the pond.

2

This joy's my fall. I am!—
A man rich as a cat,
A cat in the fork of a tree,
When she shakes out her hair.
I think of that, and laugh.

3

All innocence and wit,
She keeps my wishes warm;
When, easy as a beast,
She steps along the street,
I start to leave myself.

4

The truly beautiful,
Their bodies cannot lie:
The blossom stings the bee.
The ground needs the abyss,
Say the stones, say the fish.

5

A field recedes in sleep.
Where are the dead? Before me
Floats a single star.
A tree glides with the moon.
The field is mine! Is mine!

6

In a lurking-place I lurk,
One with the sullen dark.
What's hell but a cold heart?
But who, faced with her face,
Would not rejoice?

WORDS FOR THE WIND

1

Love, love, a lily's my care,
She's sweeter than a tree.
Loving, I use the air
Most lovingly: I breathe;
Mad in the wind I wear
Myself as I should be,
All's even with the odd,
My brother the vine is glad.

Are flower and seed the same?
What do the great dead say?
Sweet Phoebe, she's my theme:
She sways whenever I sway.
"O love me while I am,
You green thing in my way!"
I cried, and the birds came down
And made my song their own.

Motion can keep me still:
She kissed me out of thought
As a lovely substance will;
She wandered; I did not:
I stayed, and light fell
Across her pulsing throat;
I stared, and a garden stone
Slowly became the moon.

The shallow stream runs slack;
The wind creaks slowly by;
Out of a nestling's beak
Comes a tremulous cry
I cannot answer back;
A shape from deep in the eye—
That woman I saw in a stone—
Keeps pace when I walk alone.

2
The sun declares the earth;
The stones leap in the stream;
On a wide plain, beyond
The far stretch of a dream,
A field breaks like the sea;
The wind's white with her name,
And I walk with the wind.

The dove's my will today.
She sways, half in the sun:
Rose, easy on a stem,
One with the sighing vine,
One to be merry with,
And pleased to meet the moon.
She likes wherever I am.

Passion's enough to give
Shape to a random joy:
I cry delight: I know
The root, the core of a cry.
Swan-heart, arbutus-calm,
She moves when time is shy:
Love has a thing to do.

A fair thing grows more fair;
The green, the springing green
Makes an intenser day
Under the rising moon;
I smile, no mineral man;
I bear, but not alone,
The burden of this joy.

3
Under a southern wind,
The birds and fishes move
North, in a single stream;
The sharp stars swing around;
I get a step beyond
The wind, and there I am,
I'm odd and full of love.

Wisdom, where is it found?—
Those who embrace, believe.
Whatever was, still is,
Says a song tied to a tree.
Below, on the ferny ground,
In rivery air, at ease,
I walk with my true love.

What time's my heart? I care.
I cherish what I have
Had of the temporal:
I am no longer young
But the winds and waters are;
What falls away will fall;
All things bring me to love.

4
The breath of a long root,
The shy perimenter
Of the unfolding rose,
The green, the altered leaf,
The oyster's weeping foot,
And the incipient star—
Are part of what she is.
She wakes the ends of life.

Being myself, I sing
The soul's immediate joy.
Light, light, where's my repose?
A wind wreathes round a tree.
A thing is done: a thing
Body and spirit know
When I do what she does:
Creaturely creature, she!—

I kiss her moving mouth,
Her swart hilarious skin;
She breaks my breath in half;
She frolics like a beast;
And I dance round and round,
A fond and foolish man,
And see and suffer myself
In another being, at last.

I KNEW A WOMAN

I knew a woman, lovely in her bones,
When small birds sighed, she would sigh back at them;
Ah, when she moved, she moved more ways than one:
The shapes a bright container can contain!
Of her choice virtues only gods should speak,
Or English poets who grew up on Greek
(I'd have them sing in chorus, cheek to cheek).

How well her wishes went! She stroked my chin,
She taught me Turn, and Counter-turn, and Stand;
She taught me Touch, that undulant white skin;
I nibbled meekly from her proffered hand;
She was the sickle; I, poor I, the rake,
Coming behind her for her pretty sake
(But what prodigious mowing we did make).

Love likes a gander, and adores a goose:
Her full lips pursed, the errant note to seize;
She played it quick, she played it light and loose;
My eyes, they dazzled at her flowing knees;
Her several parts could keep a pure repose,
Or one hip quiver with a mobile nose
(She moved in circles, and those circles moved).

Let seed be grass, and grass turn into hay:
I'm martyr to a motion not my own;
What's freedom for? To know eternity.
I swear she cast a shadow white as stone.
But who would count eternity in days?
These old bones live to learn her wanton ways:
(I measure time by how a body sways).

THE VOICE

One feather is a bird,
I claim; one tree, a wood;
In her low voice I heard
More than a mortal should;
And so I stood apart,
Hidden in my own heart.

And yet I roamed out where
Those notes went, like the bird,
Whose thin song hung in air,
Diminished, yet still heard:
I lived with open sound,
Aloft, and on the ground.

That ghost was my own choice,
The shy cerulean bird;
It sang with her true voice,
And it was I who heard
A slight voice reply;
I heard; and only I.

Desire exults the ear:
Bird, girl, and ghostly tree,
The earth, the solid air—
Their slow song sang in me;
The long noon pulsed away,
Like any summer day.

SHE

I think the dead are tender. Shall we kiss?—
My lady laughs, delighting in what is.
If she but sighs, a bird puts out its tongue.
She makes space lonely with a lovely song.
She lilt a low soft language, and I hear
Down long sea-chambers of the inner ear.

We sing together; we sing mouth to mouth.
The garden is a river flowing south.
She cries out loud the soul's own secret joy;
She dances, and the ground bears her away.
She knows the speech of light, and makes it plain
A lively thing can come to life again.

I feel her presence in the common day,
In that slow dark that widens every eye.
She moves as water moves, and comes to me,
Stayed by what was, and pulled by what would be.

THE OTHER

What is she, while I live?—
Who plagues me with her Shape,
Lifting a nether Lip
Lightly: so buds unleave;
But if I move too close,
Who busks me on the Nose?

Is she what I become?
Is this my final Face?
I find her every place;
She happens, time on time—
My Nose feels for my Toe;
Nature's too much to know.

Who can surprise a thing
Or come to love alone?
A lazy natural man,
I loll, I loll, all Tongue.
She moves, and I adore:
Motion can do no more.

A child stares past a fire
With the same absent gaze:
I know her careless ways!—
Desire hides from desire.
Aging, I sometimes weep,
Yet still laugh in my sleep.

THE PURE FURY

1
Stupor of knowledge lacking inwardness—
What book, O learned man, will set me right?
Once I read nothing through a fearful night,
For every meaning had grown meaningless.
Morning, I saw the world with second sight,
As if all things had died, and rose again.
I touched the stones, and they had my own skin.

2
The pure admire the pure, and live alone;
I love a woman with an empty face.
Parmenides put Nothingness in place;
She tries to think, and it flies loose again.
How slow the changes of a golden mean:
Great Boehme rooted all in Yes and No;
At times my darling squeaks in pure Plato.

How terrible the need for solitude:
That appetite for life so ravenous
A man's a beast prowling in his own house,
A beast with fangs, and out for his own blood
Until he finds the thing he almost was
When the pure fury first raged in his head
And trees came closer with a denser shade.

4

Dream of a woman, and a dream of death:
The light air takes my being's breath away;
I look on white, and it turns into gray—
When will that creature give me back my breath?
I live near the abyss. I hope to stay
Until my eyes look at a brighter sun
As the thick shade of the long night comes on.

THE RENEWAL

1

What glories would we? Motions of the soul?
The centaur and the sybil romp and sing
Within the reach of my imagining:
Such affirmations are perpetual.
I teach my sighs to lengthen into songs,
Yet, like a tree, endure the shift of things.

2

The night wind rises. Does my father live?
Dark hangs upon the waters of the soul;
My flesh is breathing slower than a wall.
Love alters all. Unblood my instinct, love.
These waters drowse me into sleep so kind
I walk as if my face would kiss the wind.

3

Sudden renewal of the self—from where?
A raw ghost drinks the fluid in my spine;
I know I love, yet know not where I am;
I paw the dark, the shifting midnight air.
Will the self, lost, be found again? In form?
I walk the night to keep my five wits warm.

4

Dry bones! Dry bones! I find my loving heart,
Illumination brought to such a pitch
I see the rubblestones begin to stretch
As if reality had split apart
And the whole motion of the soul lay bare:
I find that love, and I am everywhere.

THE SENSUALISTS

"There is no place to turn," she said,
"You have me pinned so close;
My hair's all tangled on your head,
My back is just one bruise;
I feel we're breathing with the dead;
O angel, let me loose!"

And she was right, for there beside
The gin and cigarettes,
A woman stood, pure as a bride,
Affrighted from her wits,
And breathing hard, as that man rode
Between those lovely tits.

"My shoulder's bitten from your teeth;
What's that peculiar smell?
No matter which one is beneath,
Each is an animal,"—
The ghostly figure sucked its breath,
And shuddered toward the wall;
Wrapped in the tattered robe of death,
It tiptoed down the hall.

"The bed itself begins to quake,
I hate this sensual pen;
My neck, if not my heart, will break
If we do this again,"—
Then each fell back, limp as a sack,
Into the world of men.

LOVE'S PROGRESS

1

The possibles we dare!
O rare propinquity!—
I have considered and found
A mouth I cannot leave.
The great gods arch my bones.

2

The long veins of the vine
Journey around a tree;
Light strides the rose;
A woman's naked in water,
And I know where she is.

3

True, she can think a bird
Until it broods in her eyes.
Love me, my violence,
Light of my spirit, light
Beyond the look of love.

4

It's midnight on the mouse,
The rabbit, and the wren;
A log sings in its flame.
Father, I'm far from home,
And I have gone nowhere.

5

The close dark hugs me hard,
And all the birds are stone.
I fear for my own joy;
I fear myself in the field,
For I would drown in fire.

4

THE SURLY ONE

1

When true love broke my heart in half,
I took the whiskey from the shelf,
And told my neighbors when to laugh.
I keep a dog, and bark myself.

2

Ghost cries out to ghost—
But who's afraid of that?
I fear those shadows most
That start from my own feet.

THE SWAN

1

I study out a dark similitude:
Her image fades, yet does not disappear—
Must I stay tangled in that lively hair?
Is there no way out of that coursing blood?
A dry soul's wisest. O, I am not dry!
My darling does what I could never do:
She sighs me white, a Socrates of snow.

We think too long in terms of what to be;
I live, alive and certain as a bull;
A casual man, I keep my casual word,
Yet whistle back at every whistling bird.
A man alive, from all light I must fall.
I am my father's son, I am John Donne
Whenever I see her with nothing on.

2

*The moon draws back its waters from the shore.
By the lake's edge, I see a silver swan,
And she is what I would. In this light air,
Lost opposites bend down—
Sing of that nothing of which all is made,
Or listen into silence, like a god.*

MEMORY

1

In the slow world of dream,
We breathe in unison.
The outside dies within,
And she knows all I am.

2

She turns, as if to go,
Half-bird, half-animal.
The wind dies on the hill.
Love's all. Love's all I know.

3

A doe drinks by a stream,
A doe and its fawn.
When I follow after them,
The grass changes to stone.

from PRAISE TO THE END

I NEED, I NEED

1

A deep dish. Lumps in it.
I can't taste my mother.
Hoo. I know the spoon.
Sit in my mouth.

A sneeze can't sleep.
Diddle we care
Couldly.

Went down cellar,
Talked to a faucet;
The drippy water
Had nothing to say.

Whisper me over,
Why don't you, begonia,
There's no alas
Where I live.

Scratched the wind with a stick
The leaves liked it.
Do the dead bite?
Mamma, she's a sad fat.

A dove said dove all day.
A hat is a house.
I hid in his.

2

Even steven all is less:
I haven't time for sugar,
Put your finger in your face,
And there will be a booger.

A one is a two is
I know what you is:
You're not very nice,—
So touch my toes twice.

I know you are my nemesis
So bibble where the pebble is.
The Trouble is with No and Yes
As you can see I guess I guess.

I wish I was a pifflebob
I wish I was a funny
I wish I had ten thousand hats,
And made a lot of money.

Open a hole and see the sky:
A duck knows something
You and I don't.
Tomorrow is Friday.

Not you I need.
Go play with your nose.
Stay in the sun,
Snake-eyes.

3

Stop the larks. Can I have my heart back?
Today I saw a beard in a cloud.
The ground cried my name:
Good-bye for being wrong.
Love helps the sun.
But not enough.

4

When you plant, spit in the pot.
A pick likes to hit ice.
Hooray for me and the mice!—
The oats are all right.

Hear me, soft ears and roundy stones!
It's a dear life I can touch.
Who's ready for pink and frisk?
My hoe eats like a goat.

Her feet said yes.
It was all hay.
I said to the gate,
Who else knows
What water does?
Dew ate the fire.

I know another fire.
Has roots.

The green grasses,—would they?
The green grasses?—
She asked her skin
To let me in:
The far leaves were for it.

Forever is easy, she said.
How many angels do you know?—
And over by Algy's
Something came by me,
It wasn't a goose,
It wasn't a poodle.

Everything's closer. Is this a cage?
The chill's gone from the moon.
Only the woods are alive.
I can't marry the dirt.

I'm a biscuit. I'm melted already.
The white weather hates me.
Why is how I like it.
I can't catch a bush.

2

The herrings are awake.
What's all the singing between?—
Is it with whispers and kissing?—
I've listened into the least waves.
The grass says what the wind says:
Begin with the rock;
End with water.

When I stand, I'm almost a tree.
Leaves, do you like me any?
A swan needs a pond.
The worm and the rose
Both love
Rain.

3

O small bird wakening,
Light as a hand among blossoms,
Hardly any old angels are around any more.
The air's quiet under the small leaves.
The dust, the long dust, stays.
The spiders sail into summer.
It's time to begin!
To begin!

GIVE WAY, YE GATES

1

Believe me, knot of gristle, I bleed like a tree;
I dream of nothing but boards;
I could love a duck.

5

Such music in a skin!
A bird sings in the bush of your bones.
Tufty, the water's loose.
Bring me a finger. This dirt's lonesome for grass.
Are the rats dancing? The cats are.
And you, cat after great milk and vasty fishes,
A moon loosened from a stag's eye,
Twiced me nicely,—
In the green of my sleep,
In the green.

2

Mother of blue and the many changes of hay,
This tail hates a flat path.
I've let my nose out;
I could melt down a stone,—
How is it with the long birds?
May I look too, loved eye?
It's a wink beyond the world.
In the slow rain, who's afraid?
We're king and queen of the right ground.
I'll risk the winter for you.

You tree beginning to know,
You whisper of kidneys,
We'll swinge the instant!—
With jots and jogs and cinders on the floor:
The sea will be there, the great squashy shadows,
Biting themselves perhaps;
The shrillest frogs;
And the ghost of some great howl
Dead in a wall.
In the high-noon of thighs,
In the springtime of stones,
We'll stretch with the great stems.
We'll be at the business of what might be
Looking toward what we are.

3

You child with a beast's heart,
Make me a bird or a bear!
I've played with the fishes
Among the unwrinkling ferns
In the wake of a ship of wind;
But now the instant ages,
And my thought hunts another body.
I'm sad with the little owls.

4

Touch and arouse. Suck and sob. Curse and mourn.
It's a cold scrape in a low place.
The dead crow dries on a pole.
Shapes in the shade
Watch.

The mouth asks. The hand takes.
These wings are from the wrong nest.
Who stands in a hole
Never spills.

BRING THE DAY!

1

Bees and lilies there were,
Bees and lilies there were,
Either to other,—
Which would you rather?
Bees and lilies were there.

I hear the clap of an old wind.
The cold knows when to come.
What beats in me
I still bear.

The deep stream remembers:
Once I was a pond.
What slides away
Provides.

THE LOST SON

1 *The Flight*

At Woodlawn I heard the dead cry:
I was lulled by the slamming of iron,
A slow drip over stones,
Toads brooding in wells.
All the leaves stuck out their tongues;
I shook the softening chalk of my bones,
Saying,
Snail, snail, glister me forward,
Bird, soft-sigh me home.
Worm, be with me.
This is my hard time.

Fished in an old wound,
The soft pond of repose;
Nothing nibbled my line,
Not even the minnows came.

Sat in an empty house
Watching shadows crawl,
Scratching.
There was one fly.

Voice, come out of the silence.
Say something.
Appear in the form of a spider
Or a moth beating the curtain.

Tell me:
Which is the way I take;
Out of what door do I go,
Where and to whom?

Dark hollows said, lee to the wind,
The moon said, back of an eel,
The salt said, look by the sea,
Your tears are not enough praise,
You will find no comfort here,
In the kingdom of bang and blab.

Running lightly over spongy ground,
Past the pasture of flat stones,
The three elms,
The sheep strewn on a field,
Over a rickety bridge
Toward the quick-water, wrinkling and rippling.

Hunting along the river,
Down among the rubbish, the bug-riddled foliage,
By the muddy pond-edge, by the bog-holes,
By the shrunken lake, hunting, in the heat of summer.

The shape of a rat?
It's bigger than that.
It's less than a leg
And more than a nose,
Just under the water
It usually goes.

Is it soft like a mouse?
Can it wrinkle its nose?
Could it come in the house
On the tips of its toes?

Take the skin of a cat
And the back of an eel,
Then roll them in grease,—
That's the way it would feel.

It's sleek as an otter
With wide webby toes
Just under the water
It usually goes.

2 *The Pit*

Where do the roots go?
Look down under the leaves.
Who put the moss there?
These stones have been here too long.
Who stunned the dirt into noise?
Ask the mole, he knows.
I feel the slime of a wet nest.
Beware Mother Mildew.
Nibble again, fish nerves.

3 *The Gibber*

At the wood's mouth,
By the cave's door,
I listened to something
I had heard before.

Dogs of the groin
Barked and howled,
The sun was against me,
The moon would not have me.

The weeds whined,
The snakes cried,
The cows and briars
Said to me: Die.

What a small song. What slow clouds. What dark water.
Hath the rain a father? All the caves are ice. Only the snow's here.
I'm cold. I'm cold all over. Rub me in father and mother.
Fear was my father, Father Fear.
His look drained the stones.

What gliding shape
Beckoning through halls,
Stood poised on the stair,
Fell dreamily down?

From the mouths of jugs
Perched on many shelves,
I saw substance flowing
That cold morning.

Like a slither of eels
That watery cheek
As my own tongue kissed
My lips awake.

Is this the storm's heart? The ground is unstilling itself.
My veins are running nowhere. Do the bones cast out their fire?
Is the seed leaving the old bed? These buds are live as birds.
Where, where are the tears of the world?
Let the kisses resound, flat like a butcher's palm;

Let the gestures freeze; our doom is already decided.
All the windows are burning! What's left of my life?
I want the old rage, the lash of primordial milk!
Good-bye, good-bye, old stones, the time-order is going,
I have married my hands to perpetual agitation,
I run, I run to the whistle of money.

Money money money
Water water water

How cool the grass is.
Has the bird left?
The stalk still sways.
Has the worm a shadow?
What do the clouds say?

These sweeps of light undo me.
Look, look, the ditch is running white!
I've more veins than a tree!
Kiss me, ashes, I'm falling through a dark swirl.

4 *The Return*

The way to the boiler was dark,
Dark all the way,
Over slippery cinders
Through the long greenhouse.

The roses kept breathing in the dark.
They had many mouths to breathe with.
My knees made little winds underneath
Where the weeds slept.

There was always a single light
Swinging by the fire-pit,
Where the fireman pulled out roses,
The big roses, the big bloody clinkers.

Once I stayed all night.
The light in the morning came slowly over the white
Snow.
There were many kinds of cool
Air.
Then came steam.

Pipe-knock.

Scurry of warm over small plants.
Ordnung! Ordnung!
Papa is coming!

A fine haze moved off the leaves;
Frost melted on far panes;
The rose, the chrysanthemum turned toward the light.
Even the hushed forms, the bent yellowy weeds
Moved in a slow up-sway.

5 (*It was beginning winter.*)

It was beginning winter,
An in-between time,
The landscape still partly brown:
The bones of weeds kept swinging in the wind,
Above the blue snow.

It was beginning winter.
The light moved slowly over the frozen field,
Over the dry seed-crowns,
The beautiful surviving bones
Swinging in the wind.

Light traveled over the field;
Stayed.
The weeds stopped swinging.
The mind moved, not alone,
Through the clear air, in the silence.

Was it light?
Was it light within?
Was it light within light?
Stillness becoming alive,
Yet still?

A lively understandable spirit
Once entertained you.
It will come again.
Be still.
Wait.

THE LONG ALLEY

1

A river glides out of the grass. A river or a serpent.
A fish floats belly upward,
Sliding through the white current,
Slowly turning,
Slowly.

The dark flows on itself. A dead mouth sings under an old tree.
The ear hears only in low places.
Remember an old sound.
Remember
Water.

This slag runs slow. What bleeds when metal breaks?
Flesh, you offend this metal. How long need the bones mourn?
Are those horns on top of the hill? Yesterday has a long look.

Loo, loo, said the sulphurous water,
There's no filth on a plateau of cinders.
This smoke's from the glory of God.

Can you name it? I can't name it.
Let's not hurry. The dead don't hurry.
Who else breathes here? What does the grave say?
My gates are all caves.

2

The fiend's far away. Lord, what do you require?
The soul resides in the horse barn.
Believe me, there's no one else, kitten-limp sister.
Kiss the trough, swine-on-Friday.
Come to me, milk-nose. I need a loan of the quick.
There's no joy in soft bones.
For whom were you made, sweetness I cannot touch?
Look what the larks do.
Luminous one, shall we meet on the bosom of God?
Return the gaze of a pond.

3

Stay close. Must I kill something else?
Can feathers eat me? There's no clue in the silt.
This wind gives me scales. Have mercy, gristle:
It's my last waltz with an old itch.

A waiting ghost warms up the dead
Until they creak their knees:
So up and away and what do we do
But barley-break and squeeze.

Trickery comes and tricky goes
Bold in fear therefore;
The hay hops in the horse's mouth,
The chin jumps to the nose.

Rich me cherries a fondling's kiss,
The summer bumps of ha:
Hand me a feather, I'll fan you warm,
I'm happy with my paws.

Gilliflower ha,
Gilliflower ho,
My love's locked in
The old silo.
She cries to the hen,
She waves to the goose,
But they don't come
To let her loose.

If we detach
The head of a match
What do we do
To the cat's wish?
Do we rout the fish?
Will the goat's mouth
Have the last laugh?

4

That was a close knock. See what the will wants.
This air could flesh a dead stick. Sweet Jesus, make me sweat.
Are the flowers here? The birds are.
Shall I call the flowers?

Come littlest, come tenderest,
Come whispering over the small waters,
Reach me rose, sweet one, still moist in the loam,
Come, come out of the shade, the cool ways,
The long alleys of string and stem;
Bend down, small breathers, creepers and winders;
Lean from the tiers and benches,
Cyclamen dripping and lilies.
What fish-ways you have, littlest flowers,
Swaying over the walks, in the watery air,
Drowsing in soft light, petals pulsing.

Light airs! Light airs! A pierce of angels!
The leaves, the leaves become me!
The tendrils have me!

5

Bricks flake before my face. Master of water, that's trees away.
Reach me a peach, fondling, the hills are there.
Nuts are money: wherefore and what else?
Send down a rush of air, O torrential,
Make the sea flash in the dust.

Call off the dogs, my paws are gone.
This wind brings many fish;
The lakes will be happy:
Give me my hands:
I'll take the fire.

SHORTER POEMS

ELEGY FOR JANE

My Student, Thrown by a Horse

I remember the neckcurls, limp and damp as tendrils;
And her quick look, a sidelong pickerel smile;
And how, once startled into talk, the light syllables leaped for her,
And she balanced in the delight of her thought,
A wren, happy, tail into the wind,
Her song trembling the twigs and small branches.
The shade sang with her;
The leaves, their whispers turned to kissing;
And the mold sang in the bleached valleys under the rose.

Oh, when she was sad, she cast herself down into such a pure depth,
Even a father could not find her:
Scraping her cheek against straw;
Stirring the clearest water.

My sparrow, you are not here,
Waiting like a fern, making a spiny shadow.
The sides of wet stones cannot console me,
Nor the moss, wound with the last light.

If only I could nudge you from this sleep,
My maimed darling, my skittery pigeon.
Over this damp grave I speak the words of my love:
I, with no rights in this matter,
Neither father nor lover.

MY PAPA'S WALTZ

The whiskey on your breath
Could make a small boy dizzy;
But I hung on like death:
Such waltzing was not easy.
We romped until the pans
Slid from the kitchen shelf;
My mother's countenance
Could not unfrown itself.
The hand that held my wrist
Was battered on one knuckle;
At every step you missed
My right ear scraped a buckle.
You beat time on my head
With a palm caked hard by dirt,
Then waltzed me off to bed
Still clinging to your shirt.
Could not unfrown itself.

FOUR FOR SIR JOHN DAVIES

1 The Dance

Is that dance slowing in the mind of man
That made him think the universe could hum?
The great wheel turns its axle when it can;
I need a place to sing, and dancing-room,
And I have made a promise to my ears
I'll sing and whistle romping with the bears.
For they are all my friends: I saw one slide
Down a steep hillside on a cake of ice,—
Or was that in a book? I think with pride:
A caged bear rarely does the same thing twice
In the same way: O watch his body sway!—
This animal remembering to be gay.

I tried to fling my shadow at the moon,
The while my blood leaped with a wordless song.
Though dancing needs a master, I had none
To teach my toes to listen to my tongue.
But what I learned there, dancing all alone,
Was not the joyless motion of a stone.

I take this cadence from a man named Yeats;
I take it, and I give it back again:
For other tunes and other wanton beats
Have tossed my heart and fiddled through my brain.
Yes, I was dancing-mad, and how
That came to be the bears and Yeats would know.

2 The Partner

Between such animal and human heat
I find myself perplexed. What is desire?—
The impulse to make someone else complete?
That woman would set sodden straw on fire.
Was I the servant of a sovereign wish,
Or ladle rattling in an empty dish?
We played a measure with commingled feet:
The lively dead had taught us to be fond.
Who can embrace the body of his fate?
Light altered light along the living ground.
She kissed me close, and then did something else.
My marrow beat as wildly as my pulse.
I'd say it to my horse: we live beyond
Our outer skin. Who's whistling up my sleeve?
I see a heron prancing in his pond;

3 The Wrath

I know a dance the elephants believe.
The living all assemble! What's the cue?—
Do what the clumsy partner wants to do!
Things loll and loiter. Who condones the lost?
This joy outleaps the dog. Who cares? Who cares?
I gave her kisses back, and woke a ghost.
O what lewd music crept into our ears!
The body and the soul know how to play
In that dark world where gods have lost their way.

Incomprehensible gaiety and dread
Attended what we did. Behind, before,
Lay all the lonely pastures of the dead;
The spirit and the flesh cried out for more.
We two, together, on a darkening day
Took arms against our own obscurity.

Did each become the other in that play?
She laughed me out, and then she laughed me in;
In the deep middle of ourselves we lay;
When glory failed, we danced upon a pin.
The valley rocked beneath the granite hill;
Our souls looked forth, and the great day stood still.

There was a body, and it cast a spell,—
God pity those but wanton to the knees,—
The flesh can make the spirit visible;
We woke to find the moonlight on our toes.
In the rich weather of a dappled wood
We played with dark and light as children should.

What shape leaped forward at the sensual cry?—
Sea-beast or bird flung toward the ravaged shore?
Did space shake off an angel with a sigh?
We rose to meet the moon, and saw no more.
It was and was not she, a shape alone,
Impaled on light, and whirling slowly down.

4 The Vigil

Dante attained the purgatorial hill,
Trembled at hidden virtue without flaw,
Shook with a mighty power beyond his will,—
Did Beatrice deny what Dante saw?
All lovers live by longing, and endure:
Summon a vision and declare it pure.

Though everything's astonishment at last,
Who leaps to heaven at a single bound?
The links were soft between us, still, we kissed,
We undid chaos to a curious sound:
The waves broke easy, cried to me in white;
Her look was morning in the dying light.

The visible obscures. But who knows when?
Things have their thought: they are the shards of me;
I thought that once, and thought comes round again;
Rapt, we leaned forth with what we could not see.
We danced to shining; mocked before the black
And shapeless night that made no answer back.

THE WAKING

The world is for the living. Who are they?
We dared the dark to reach the white and warm.
She was the wind when wind was in my way;
Alive at noon, I perished in her form.
Who rise from flesh to spirit know the fall:
The word outleaps the world, and light is all.

I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I feel my fate in what I cannot fear.
I learn by going where I have to go.
We think by feeling. What is there to know?
I hear my being dance from ear to ear.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
Of those so close beside me, which are you?
God bless the Ground! I shall walk softly there,
And learn by going where I have to go.
Light takes the Tree; but who can tell us how?
The lowly worm climbs up a winding stair;
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
Great Nature has another thing to do
To you and me; so take the lively air,
And, lovely, learn by going where to go.
This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.
What falls away is always. And is near.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I learn by going where I have to go.

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