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Charles Bukowski

You Get So Alone at Times That It Just Makes Sense

HarperCollins e-books



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```
I'll take it...
supposedly famous
the last shot
whorehouse
starting fast:
the crazy truth
drive through hell
for the concerned:
a funny guy
shoes
coffee
together
the finest of the breed
close to greatness
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final story
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oh yes
O tempora! O mores!
the passing of a great one
the wine of forever
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```

```
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invasion
hard times
longshot
concrete
Gay Paree?
I thought the stuff tasted worse than usual
the blade
the boil
not listed
I'm not a misogynist
the lady in the castle
relentless as the tarantula
their night
huh?
it's funny, isn't it? #1
it's funny, isn't it? #2
the beautiful lady editor
about the PEN conference
everybody talks too much
me and my buddy
song
practice
```

love poem to a stripper my buddy Jon Edgar Webb thank you the magic curse party's over no nonsense <u>escape</u> wearing the collar a cat is a cat is a cat is a cat marching through Georgia gone I meet the famous poet seize the day the shrinking island magic machine those girls we followed home fractional note a following a tragic meeting an ordinary poem from an old dog in his cups... <u>let 'em go</u> trying to make it

```
the death of a splendid neighborhood
you get so alone at times that it just makes sense
a good gang, after all
this
hot
late late poem
3 a.m. games:
someday I'm going to write a primer for crippled saints but meanwhile
help wanted
sticks and stones...
working
over done
our laughter is muted by their agony
murder
what am I doing?
nervous people
working out
how is your heart?
forget it
quiet
it's ours
About the Author
Other Books by Charles Bukowski
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About the Publisher

1813-1883

listening to Wagner

as outside in the dark the wind blows a cold rain the trees wave and shake lights go
off and on the walls creak and the cats run under the bed...

Wagner battles the agonies, he's emotional but solid, he's the supreme fighter, a giant in a world of pygmies, he takes it straight on through, he breaks barriers

an

astonishing FORCE of sound as

everything here shakes

shivers

bends

blasts

in fierce gamble

yes, Wagner and the storm intermix with the wine as

nights like this run up my wrists and up into my head and back down into the gut
some men never
die
and some men never
live
but we're all alive
tonight.

red Mercedes

naturally, we are all caught in downmoods, it's a matter of chemical imbalance and an existence which, at times, seems to forbid any real chance at happiness.

I was in a downmood when this rich pig along with his blank inamorata

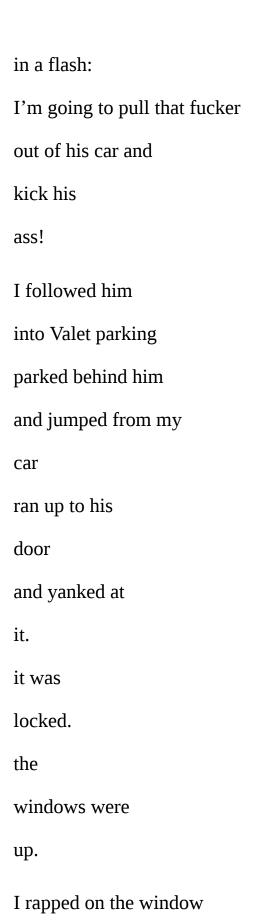
in this red Mercedes

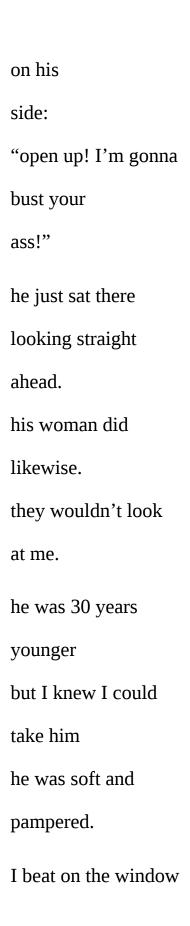
cut

in front of me

at racetrack parking.

it clicked inside of me





```
with my
fist:
"come on out, shithead,
or I'm going to start
breaking
glass!"
he gave a small nod
to his
woman.
I saw her reach
into the glove
compartment
open it
and slip him the
.32
I saw him hold it
down low
and snap off the
safety.
```

I walked off
toward the
clubhouse, it looked
like a damned good
card
that
day.
all I had to do
was
be there.

retired

pork chops, said my father, I love pork chops!

and I watched him slide the grease into his mouth.

pancakes, he said, pancakes with syrup, butter and bacon!

I watched his lips heavy wetted with all that.

coffee, he said, I like coffee so hot it burns my throat!

sometimes it was too hot and he spit it out across the table.

mashed potatoes and gravy, he said, I love mashed potatoes and gravy!

he jowled that in, his cheeks puffed as if he had the mumps.

chili and beans, he said, I love chili and beans!

and he gulped it down and farted for hours loudly, grinning after each fart.

strawberry shortcake, he said, with vanilla ice cream, that's the way to end a meal! he always talked about retirement, about what he was going to do when he retired.

when he wasn't talking about food he talked on and on about retirement.

he never made it to retirement, he died one day while standing at the sink

filling a glass of water.

he straightened like he'd been

shot.

the glass fell from his hand and he dropped backwards

```
landing flat
his necktie slipping to the
left.
afterwards
people said they couldn't believe
it.
he looked
great.
distinguished white
sideburns, pack of smokes in his
shirt pocket, always cracking
jokes, maybe a little
loud and maybe with a bit of bad
temper
but all in all
a seemingly sound
individual
never missing a day
of work.
```

working it out

in this steamy a.m. Hades claps its Herpes hands and a woman sings through my radio, her voice comes clambering through the smoke, and the wine fumes...

it's a lonely time, she sings, and you're not mine and it makes me feel so bad, this thing of being me...

I can hear cars on the freeway, it's like a distant sea sludged with people

while over my other shoulder, far over on 7th street near Western

is the hospital, that house of agony—sheets and bedpans and arms and heads and

expirations;

everything is so sweetly awful, so continuously and sweetly awful: the art of consummation: life eating life...

once in a dream I saw a snake swallowing its own

tail, it swallowed and swallowed until
it got halfway round, and there it stopped and
there it stayed, it was stuffed with its own
self. some fix, that.

we only have ourselves to go on, and it's enough...

I go downstairs for another bottle, switch on the cable and there's Greg Peck pretending he's

F. Scott and he's very excited and he's reading his manuscript to his lady.

I turn the set

off.

what kind of writer is that? reading his pages to a lady? this is a violation...

I return upstairs and my two cats follow me, they are fine fellows, we have no discontent, we have no arguments, we listen to the same music, never vote for a president.

one of my cats, the big one, leaps on the back of my chair, rubs against my shoulders and

neck.

"no good," I tell him, "I'm not going to read you this poem."

he leaps to the floor and walks out to the balcony and his buddy follows.

they sit and watch the night; we've got the power of sanity here.

these early a.m. mornings when almost everybody is asleep, small night bugs, winged things enter, and circle and whirl.

the machine hums its electric hum, and having opened and tasted the new bottle I type the next line. you

can read it to your lady and she'll probably tell you it's nonsense. she'll be reading *Tender Is the*

Night.

beasts bounding through time—

Van Gogh writing his brother for paints

Hemingway testing his shotgun

Celine going broke as a doctor of medicine

the impossibility of being human

Villon expelled from Paris for being a thief

Faulkner drunk in the gutters of his town

the impossibility of being human

Burroughs killing his wife with a gun

Mailer stabbing his

the impossibility of being human

Maupassant going mad in a rowboat

Dostoevsky lined up against a wall to be shot

Crane off the back of a boat into the propeller

the impossibility

Sylvia with her head in the oven like a baked potato

Harry Crosby leaping into that Black Sun

Lorca murdered in the road by the Spanish troops

the impossibility Artaud sitting on a madhouse bench Shakespeare a plagiarist

Chatterton drinking rat poison

Beethoven with a horn stuck into his head against deafness

the impossibility the impossibility

Nietzsche gone totally mad

the impossibility of being human

all too human

this breathing

in and out

out and in

these punks

these cowards

these champions

these mad dogs of glory

moving this little bit of light toward

us

impossibly.

trashcan lives

the wind blows hard tonight and it's a cold wind and I think about the boys on the row. I hope some of them have a bottle of red. it's when you're on the row that you notice that everything is owned and that there are locks on everything. this is the way a democracy works: you get what you can, try to keep that and add to it

if possible. this is the way a dictatorship works too only they either enslave or destroy their derelicts. we just forget ours. in either case it's a hard cold wind.

the lost generation

have been reading a book about a rich literary lady of the twenties and her husband who drank, ate and partied their way through Europe meeting Pound, Picasso, A. Huxley, Lawrence, Joyce, F. Scott, Hemingway, many others; the famous were like precious toys to them, and the way it reads the famous allowed themselves to become precious toys. all through the book I waited for just *one* of the famous to tell this rich literary lady and her rich literary husband to

get off and out

but, apparently, none of them ever

did.

Instead they were photographed with the lady

and her husband

at various seasides

looking intelligent

as if all this was part of the act

of Art.

perhaps because the wife and husband

fronted a lush press that

had something to do

with it.

and they were all photographed together

at parties

or outside of Sylvia Beach's bookshop.

it's true that many of them were

great and/or original artists,

but it all seems such a snobby precious

affair,

and the husband finally committed his

threatened suicide

and the lady published one of my first

short stories in the

40's and is now

dead, yet

I can't forgive either of them

for their rich dumb lives

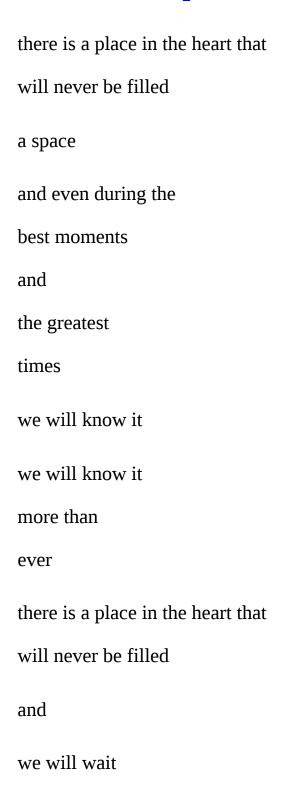
and I can't forgive their precious toys

either

for being

that.

no help for that



and

wait

in that

space.

my non-ambitious ambition

```
my father had little sayings which he mostly shared
during dinner sessions; food made him think of
survival:
"succeed or suck eggs..."
"the early bird gets the worm..."
"early to bed and early to rise makes a man (etc.)..."
"anybody who wants to can make it in America..."
"God takes care of those who (etc.)..."
I had no particular idea who he was talking
to, and personally I thought him a
crazed and stupid brute
but my mother always interspersed these
sessions with: "Henry, listen to your
father."
at that age I didn't have any other
choice
```

but as the food went down with the

```
sayings
```

the appetite and the digestion went along with them.

it seemed to me that I had never met another person on earth as discouraging to my happiness as my father.

and it appeared that I had the same effect upon

him.

"You are a *bum*," he told me, "and you'll always be a *bum*!"

and I thought, if being a bum is to be the opposite of what this son-of-a-bitch is, then that's what I'm going to be.

and it's too bad he's been dead so long

for now he can't see

how beautifully I've succeeded

at

that.

education

```
at that small inkwell desk
I had trouble with the words
"sing" and "sign."
I don't know why
but
"sing" and "sign":
it bothered
me.
the others went on and learned
new things
but I just sat there
thinking about
"sing" and "sign."
there was something there
I couldn't
overcome.
what it gave me was a
```

```
bellyache as
I looked at the backs of all those
heads.
the lady teacher had a
very fierce face
it ran sharply to a
point
and was heavy with white
powder.
one afternoon
she asked my mother to come
see her
and I sat with them
in the classroom
as they
talked.
"he's not learning
anything," the teacher
told my
```

```
mother.
"please give him a
chance, Mrs. Sims!"
"he's not trying, Mrs.
Chinaski!"
my mother began to
cry.
Mrs. Sims sat there
and watched
her.
it went on for some
minutes.
then Mrs. Sims said,
"well, we'll see what we
can do..."
then I was walking with
my mother
we were walking in
```

```
front of the school,
there was much green grass
and then the
sidewalk.
"oh, Henry," my mother said,
"your father is so disappointed in
you, I don't know what we are
going to do!"
father, my mind said,
father and father and
father.
words like that.
I decided not to learn anything
in that
school.
my mother walked along
beside me.
she wasn't anything at
all.
```

and I had a bellyache

and even the trees we walked

under

seemed less than

trees

and more like everything

else.

downtown L.A.

throwing your shoe at 3 a.m. and smashing the window, then sticking your head through the shards of glass and laughing as the phone rings with authoritative threats as you curse back through the receiver, slam it down as the woman screeches: "WHAT THE FUCK YA DOIN', YA ASSHOLE!"

you smirk, look at her (what's this?), you're cut somewhere, love it, the dripping of red onto your dirty torn undershirt, the whiskey roaring through your invincibility: you're young, you're big, and the world stinks from centuries of Humanity while

you're on course

and there's something left to drink—

it's good, it's a dramatic farce and you can handle it with

verve, style, grace and elite

mysticism.

another hotel drunk—thank god for hotels and whiskey and ladies of the street!

you turn to her: "you chippy hunk of shit, don't bad mouth me! I'm

the toughest guy in town, you don't know who the hell you're in this room with!"

she just looks, half-believing...a cigarette dangling, she's halfinsane, looking for an out; she's hard, she's scared, she's been fooled, taken, abused, used, overused...

but, under all that, to me she's the *flower*, I see her as she was before she was ruined by the lies: theirs and hers.

to me, she's new again as I am new: we have a chance together.

I walk over and fill her drink: "you got class, doll, you're not like the others..."

she likes that and I like it too because to make a thing true all you've got to do is believe.

I sit across from her as she tells me about her life, I give her refills, light her cigarettes, I listen and the City of the Angels listens: she's had a hard row.

I get sentimental and decide not to fuck her: one more man for her

won't help and one more woman for me won't matter—besides, she doesn't look that good.

actually, her life is boring and rather common but most are—mine is too except when lifted by

whiskey

she gets into a crying-jag, she's cute, really, and pitiful, all she wants is what she always wanted, only it's getting further and further away.

then she stops crying, we just drink and smoke, it's peaceful—I won't bother her that night...

I have trouble trying to yank the pull-down bed from the wall, she comes up to help, we pull together—suddenly, it releases—flings itelf upon us, a hard death-like mindless object, it knocks us upon our asses beneath it as

first in fear we scream

then begin laughing, laughing like

crazy.

she gets the bathroom first, then I use it, then we stretch out and sleep.

I am awakened in the early morning...she is down at my center, she has me in her mouth and is working furiously.

"it's all right," I say, "you don't have to do that."

she continues, finishes...

in the morning we pass the desk clerk, he has on thick-rimmed dark glasses, seems to sit in the shade of some tarantula dream: he was there when we entered, he is there now: some eternal darkness, we are almost to the door when he says:

"don't come back."

we walk 2 blocks up, turn left, walk one block, then one block south, enter Willie's at the middle of the

block, place ourselves at bar

center.

we order beer for starters, we sit there as she searches her purse for cigarettes, then I get up, move toward the juke box, put a coin within, come back, sit down, she lifts her glass, "the first one's best,"

and I lift my drink, "and the last..."

outside, the traffic runs up and down, down and

up,

going

nowhere.

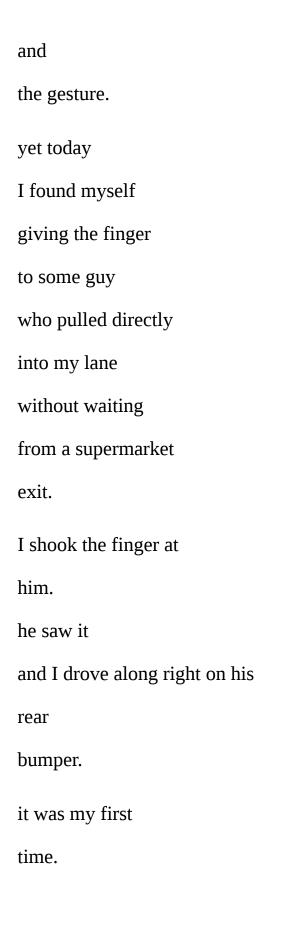
another casualty

cat got run over
now silver screw holding together a broken
femur
right leg
bound in bright red
bandage
got cat home from vet's
took my eye off
him for
a moment
he ran across floor
dragging his red
leg
chasing the female
cat
worst thing the
fucker could

life.

<u>driving test</u>

drivers
in defense and anger
often give the
finger
to those
who become involved in their
driving problems.
I am aware what the
signal of the finger
implies
yet when it is directed
at me
sometimes
I can't help laughing at
the florid
twisted
faces



I was a member of the

club

and I felt like a

fucking

fool.

that's why funerals are so sad

he's got all the tools but he's lazy, has no

fire, the ladies drain his senses, his

emotions, he just wants to drive his

flashy car

he gets a wax job once a month

throws away his shoes when they get

scuffed

but

he's got the best right hand in the

business

and his left hook can cave in a man's ribs

if I can get him to do it

but

he has no god damned imagination

he's in the top ten

but the music is missing.

he makes the money

```
but it's all going to get away from
him.
some day he's not going to be able to do
even the little
he's doing now.
his idea of victory is to pull down as
many women's panties as he
can.
he's
champ at that.
and when you see me screaming at him
in his corner between
rounds
I'm trying to awaken him to the fact that
the TIME is
NOW.
he just grins at me:
"hell, you fight him, he's a
bitch..."
you have no idea, cousin, how many
```

men

can do it

but

won't.

cornered

```
well, they said it would come to
this: old. talent gone. fumbling for
the word
hearing the dark
footsteps, I turn
look behind me...
not yet, old dog...
soon enough.
now
they sit talking about
me: "yes, it's happened, he's
finished...it's
sad..."
"he never had a great deal, did
he?"
"well, no, but now..."
```

```
now
they are celebrating my demise
in taverns I no longer
frequent.
now
I drink alone
at this malfunctioning
machine
as the shadows assume
shapes
I fight the slow
retreat
now
my once-promise
dwindling
dwindling
now
lighting new cigarettes
pouring more
```

drinks

it has been a beautiful

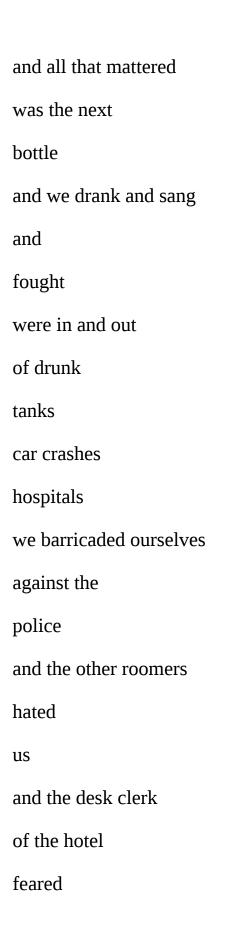
fight

still

is.

bumming with Jane

there wasn't a stove and we put cans of beans in hot water in the sink to heat them up and we read the Sunday papers on Monday after digging them out of the trash cans but somehow we managed money for wine and the rent and the money came off the streets out of hock shops out of nowhere



and it went on

and

on

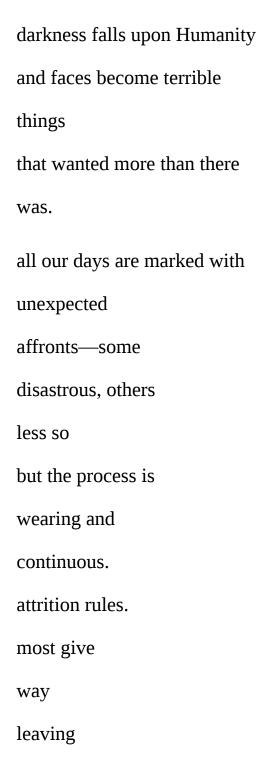
and it was one of the

most wonderful times

of my

life.

darkness



empty spaces where people should be. our progenitors, our educational systems, the land, the media, the way have deluded and misled the masses: they have been defeated by the aridity of the *actual* dream. they were unaware that achievement or victory or luck or whatever the hell you want to call

must have

its defeats.

it's only the re-gathering and

going on

which lends substance

to whatever magic

might possibly

evolve.

and now

as we ready to self-destruct

there is very little left to

kill

which makes the tragedy

less and more

much much

more.

termites of the page

the problem that I've found with most poets that I have known is that they've never had an 8 hour job and there is nothing that will put a person more in touch with the realities than an 8 hour job. most of these poets that I have known have seemingly existed on air alone but it hasn't been truly so:

behind them has been a family member usually a wife or mother supporting these souls and so it's no wonder they have written so poorly: they have been protected against the actualities from the beginning and they understand nothing but the ends of their fingernails and their delicate hairlines

```
and
their lymph
nodes.
their words are
unlived, unfurnished, un-
true, and worse—so
fashionably\\
dull.
soft and safe
they gather together to
plot, hate,
gossip, most of these
American poets
pushing and hustling their
talents
playing at
greatness.
poet (?):
that word needs re-
```

defining. when I hear that word I get a rising in the gut as if I were about to puke. let them have the stage so long as I need not be in the audience.

a good time

now look, she said, stretched out on the bed, I don't want anything personal, let's just do it, I don't want to get involved, got it?

she kicked off her high-heeled shoes...

sure, he said, standing there, let's just pretend that we've already done it, there's nothing less involved than that, is there?

what the hell do you mean? she asked.

I mean, he said, I'd rather drink anyhow.

and he poured himself one.

it was a lousy night in Vegas and he walked to the window and looked out at the dumb lights.

you a fag? she asked, you a god damned fag?

no, he said.

you don't have to get shitty, she said, just because you lost at the tables—we drove all the way here to have a good time and now look at you: sucking at that booze, you could done that in L.A.!

right, he said, one thing I do like to get involved with is the fucking bottle.

I want you to take me home, she said.

my pleasure, he said, let's

go.

it was one of those times where nothing was lost because nothing had ever been found and as she got dressed it was sad for him

not because of him and the lady but because of all the millions like him and the lady

as the lights blinked out there, everything so effortlessly false.

she was ready, fast: let's get the hell out of here, she said.

right, he said, and they walked out the door together.

the still trapeze

Saroyan told his wife, "I've got to gamble in order to write." she told him to go ahead. he lost \$350,000.00 mostly at the racetrack but still couldn't write *or* pay his taxes. he ran from the govt. and exiled himself in Paris. he later came back, sweated it out in hock up to his ass royalties dropping off.

he still couldn't write or

what he wrote didn't

work

because that tremendous

brave optimism

that buoyed everybody up

so well

during the depression

just turned to

sugar water

during

good times.

he died

a dwindling legend

with a huge handlebar

mustache

just like his father

used to have

in the old Fresno

Armenian way

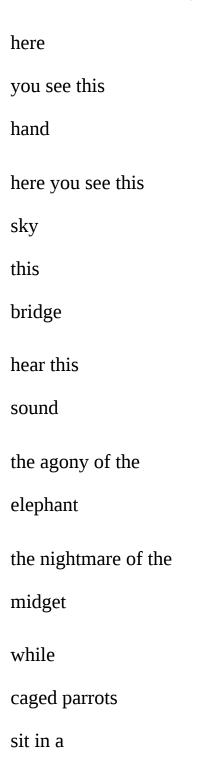
in a world that

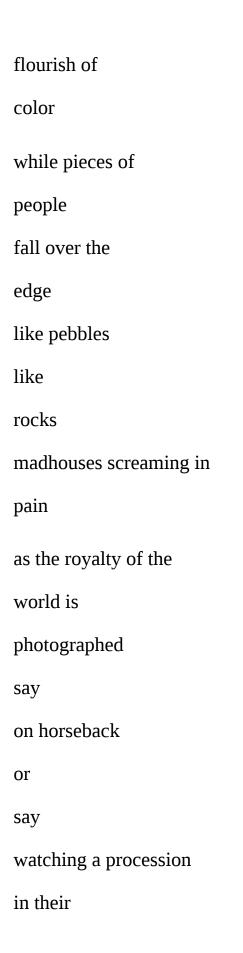
could no longer

use

William.

January





honor

as

the junkies junk

as the alkies drink

as the whores whore

as the killers kill

the albatross blinks its

eyes

the weather stays

mostly

the same.

sunny side down

NOTHING. sitting in a cafe having breakfast. NOTHING. the waitress, and the people eating. the traffic runs by. doesn't matter what

Napoleon did, what Plato said. Turgenev could have been a fly. we are worn-

down, hope stamped out. we reach for coffee cups like the robots about to replace us. courage at Salerno, bloodbaths on the Eastern front didn't matter. we know that we are beaten. NOTHING. now it's just a matter of continuing

anyhow—

chew the food and read the paper. we

read about ourselves. the news is

bad. something about

NOTHING.

Joe Louis long dead as the medfly invades Beverly Hills.

well, at least we can sit and

eat. it's been some rough

trip. it could be

worse. it could be worse than

NOTHING.

let's get more coffee from the

waitress.

that bitch! she knows we are trying to get her

attention.

she just stands there doing

NOTHING.

it doesn't matter if Prince Charles falls off his horse

or that the hummingbird is so seldom

seen

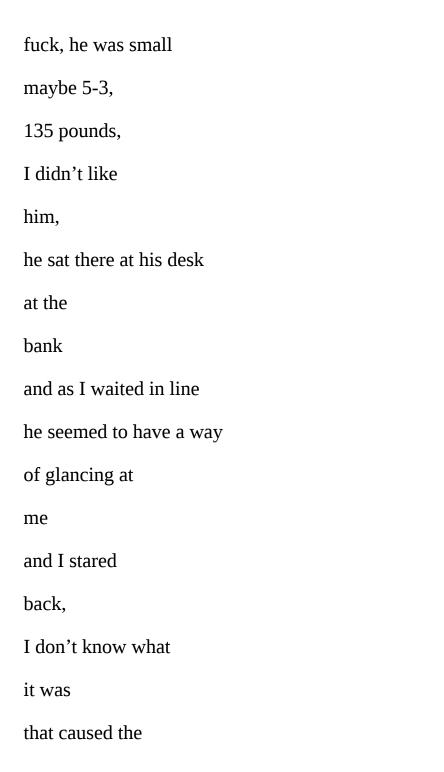
or that we are too senseless to go

insane.

coffee. give us more of that NOTHING

coffee.

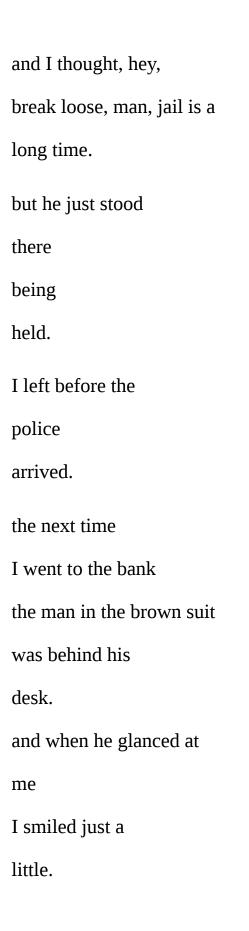
the man in the brown suit



```
animosity.
he had this little mustache
that drooped
at the ends,
he was in his mid-forties
and like most people who worked
in banks
he had a non-committal
yet self-important
personality.
one day I almost went
over the railing
to ask him
what the hell
was he looking
at?
today I went in
and stood in line
and saw him leave his
desk.
```

one of the lady tellers was having a problem with a man at her window and the man in the brown suit began to hold counsel with both of them. suddenly the man in the brown suit vaulted the railing got behind the other man wrapped his arms about him then dragged him along to a latch

```
entrance
along the railing
reached over
unhooked the latch
while still managing to
hold the
man.
then he dragged him
in there
latched the
gate
and while holding the
man
he told one of the
girls,
"Phone the
police."
the man he was holding was
about 20, black, a good 6-2,
maybe 190 pounds,
```



a magician, gone...

they go one by one and as they do it gets closer

to me and

I don't mind that so much, it's

just that I can't be practical about the

mathematics that take others

to the vanishing point.

last Saturday

one of racing's greatest harness drivers

died—little Joe O'Brien.

I had seen him win many a

race. he

had a peculiar rocking motion

he flicked the reins

and rocked his body back and

forth. he

applied this motion

during the stretch run and

it was quite dramatic and effective...

he was so small that he couldn't lay the whip on as hard as the others

SO

he rocked and rocked

in the sulky

and the horse felt the lightning

of his excitement

that rhythmic crazy rocking was

transferred from man to

beast...

the whole thing had the feel of a

crapshooter calling to the

gods, and the gods

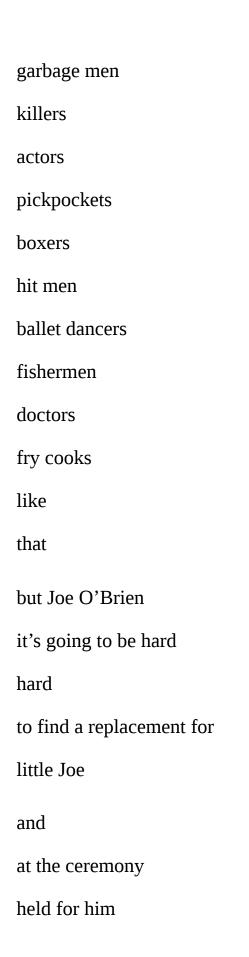
so often answered...

I saw Joe O'Brien win

endless photo finishes

many by a

```
nose.
he'd take a horse
another driver couldn't get a
run out of
and Joe would put his touch
to it
and the animal would
most often respond with
a flurry of wild energy.
Joe O'Brien was the finest harness driver
I had ever seen
and I'd seen many over the
decades.
nobody could nurse and cajole
a trotter or a pacer
like little Joe
nobody could make the magic work
like Joe.
they go one by one
presidents
```



at the track tonight

(Los Alamitos 10-1-84)

as the drivers gathered in a

circle

in their silks

at the finish line

I had to turn my back

to the crowd

and climb the upper grandstand

steps

to the wall

so the people wouldn't

see me

cry.

well, that's just the way it is...

sometimes when everything seems at

its worst

when all conspires

and gnaws

and the hours, days, weeks

years

seem wasted—

stretched there upon my bed

in the dark

looking upward at the ceiling

I get what many will consider an

obnoxious thought:

it's still nice to be

Bukowski.

the chemistry of things

I always thought Mary Lou was skinny and not much to look at while almost all the other guys thought she was a hot number. maybe that's why she hung around me in Jr. High. my indifference must have attracted her. I was cool and mean in those days and when the guys asked me,

"you banged Mary Lou yet?"

I answered them with the

truth: "she

bores me."

there was this guy

he taught chemistry.

Mr. Humm. Humm wore a little bow

tie and a black coat, a

cheap wrinkled job, he was

supposed to have

brains

and one day Mary Lou came to

me

and said Humm kept her

after class

and had taken her into the

closet and

kissed her and

fondled her

panties.

she was crying, "what will I

do?"

"forget it," I told her,

"those chemicals have scrambled

his brain. we have an English teacher

who hikes her skirt up around her

hips every day and wants to go to bed with every guy in class. we enjoy her but ignore her."

"why don't you beat Mr. Humm up?" she asked me.

"I could but they'd transfer me to Stuart Hall."

in Stuart Hall they beat the shit
out of you
and they ignored math, English,
music, they just stuck you into auto
shop

where you fixed up old cars
which they resold at big
profits.

"I thought you cared for me," said Mary
Lou, "don't you realize he
kissed me, stuck his tongue down my
throat and had his hand up my

```
behind?"
"well," I said, "we saw Mrs. Lattimore's
pussy the other day, in English."
Mary Lou walked off
crying...
well, she told her
mother and Humm got his, he
had to
resign, poor son of a
bitch.
after that the guys asked me,
"hey, what do you think of Humm
sticking his hand up your girl's
ass?"
"just another guy with no
taste," I answered.
I was cool and mean
in those days and I went on to
```

high school, the same one

Mary Lou attended where she secretly got married during her senior year to a guy I knew, a guy I outdrank and beat the shit out of a couple of times. the guy thought he had something. he wanted me to be best man. I told him, no thanks and lots of luck. I never could see what they saw in Mary Lou. and poor Humm: what a

lonely sick old

fart.

anyhow, then I went on to city college
where the only molesting I could see going on
was what they did to your mind.

<u>rift</u>

```
"I can't live with you anymore,"
she said,
"look at you!"
"uuh?" I
asked.
"look at you!
sitting in that god
damned
chair!
your belly is sticking out
of your
underwear,
you've burnt cigarette
holes in all your
shirts!
all you do is suck
on that god damned
```

```
beer,
bottle after bottle,
what do you get out of
that?"
"the damage has been
done," I told
her.
"what're you talking
about?"
"nothing matters and
we know nothing matters
and that
matters..."
"you're drunk!"
"come on, baby, let's get
along, it's
easy..."
"not for me!" she screamed,
"not for
```

```
me!"
she ran into the bathroom to
put on her
makeup.
I got up for another
beer.
I sat back down
just had the new bottle
to my mouth
when she came out of the
bathroom.
"holy shit!" she screamed,
"you're
disgusting!"
I laughed right into the
bottle, gagged, spit a mouthful of
beer across my
undershirt.
"my god!" she
```

said.

she slammed the door and

was gone.

I looked at the closed door

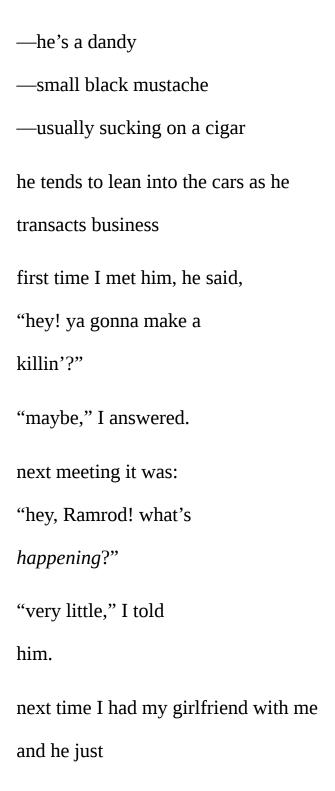
and at the doorknob

and strangely

I didn't feel

alone.

my friend, the parking lot attendant



```
grinned.
next time I was
alone.
"hey," he asked, "where's the young
chick?"
"I left her at home..."
"Bullshit! I'll bet she dumped
you!"
and the next time
he really leaned into the car:
"what's a guy like you doing driving a
BMW? I'll bet you inherited your
money, you didn't get this car with your
brains!"
"how'd you guess?" I
answered.
that was some weeks ago.
I haven't seen him lately.
```

fellow like that, chances are he just moved on to better things.

miracle

I have just listened to this
symphony which Mozart dashed off
in one day
and it had enough wild and crazy
joy to last
forever,
whatever forever
is
Mozart came as close as
possible to
that.

a non-urgent poem

I had this fellow write me that he felt there wasn't the "urgency" in my poems of the present as compared to my poems of the past. now, if this is true why did he write me about it? have I made his days more incomplete? it's possible. well, I too have felt let down by writers

I once thought were powerful or at least very damned good but I never considered writing them to inform them that I sensed their demise. I found the best thing I could do was just to type away at my own work and let the dying die as they always have.

my first affair with that older woman

when I look back now at the abuse I took from her I feel shame that I was so innocent, but I must say she did match me drink for drink, and I realized that her life her feelings for things had been ruined along the way and that I was no more than a temporary companion; she was ten years older and mortally hurt by the past

```
and the present;
she treated me badly:
desertion, other
men;
she brought me immense
pain,
continually;
she lied, stole;
there was desertion,
other men,
yet we had our moments; and
our little soap opera ended
with her in a coma
in the hospital,
and I sat at her bed
for hours
talking to her,
and then she opened her eyes
and saw me:
"I knew it would be you,"
```

she said.

then she closed her

eyes.

the next day she was

dead.

I drank alone

for two years

after that.

the freeway life

some fool kept blocking me and I finally got around him, and in the elation of freedom I ran it up to 85 (naturally, first checking the rear view for our blue suited protectors); then I felt and heard the SMASH of a hard

object upon the bottom of my car, but wanting to make the track I willed myself to ignore it (as if that would make it vanish) even though I began to smell gasoline.

I checked the gas gauge and it *seemed* to be holding...

it had been a terrible week already

but, you know, defeat can strengthen just as victory can weaken, and if you have the proper luck and the holy endurance the gods just *might* deliver the proper admixture...

then

traffic backed up and stopped, and then I really smelled gas and I saw my gas gauge dipping rapidly, then my radio told me that a man 3 miles up

on the Vernon overpass had one leg over the side and was threatening suicide,

and there I was threatened with being blown to hell

as people yelled at me that my tank was broken and pouring gasoline;

yes, I nodded back, I know, I know...

meanwhile, waving cars off and working my way over to the outer lane thinking, they are more terrorized than I am:

if I go, those nearby might go also.

there was no motion in the traffic—the suicide was still trying to make

up his mind and my gas gauge dipped into the red

and then the necessity of being a proper citizen and waiting for opportunity

vanished and I made my move

up and over a cement abutment

bending my right front wheel

I made it to the freeway exit which was totally

clear

then worked on down to a gas station on Imperial Highway

parked it

still dripping gas, got out, made it to the phone, got in a call

for the tow truck, not a long wait at all, nice drive back in with a black

fellow who told me strange stories about stranded motorists...

(like one woman, her hands were frozen to the wheel, took 15 minutes of

talking and prying to make her let go.)

had the car back in a couple of days, was driving back from the track, hit the brake and it wouldn't go down, luckily I wasn't on the freeway yet, cut the ignition, glided to the curb, noted that the steering column cover had ripped loose and blocked the brake, ripped that away, then

ripped some more to make sure, then a whole mass of wires spilled out, s h i t...

I turned the key, hit the gas but the car STARTED and I drove off with the dangling wires against my leg thinking

do these things happen to other

people or am

I just the chosen one?

I decided it was the latter and got onto the freeway where some guy in a volks swung over and blocked my

lane

whereupon I swung around the son-of-a-bitch and hit 75, 80, 85...

thinking, the courage it took to get out of bed each

morning

to face the same things

over and over

was

enormous.

the player

I had 40 win on the 6 horse he had 2 lengths in the stretch was running along the rail when the jock whipped him right-handed and the horse hit the wood spilled threw the jock and there went the race for me. that was the 7th race and I considered that the horse might have lost anyhow and then I considered leaving but I decided to play the 8th,

hit 20 win on a 5 to one

shot.

in the 9th I went 40 win

on the second favorite

and when the bell rang to start them

the horse reared and

left my jock

in the stall.

I took the escalator down

and walked out the

gate

where a young man asked me

for a dollar so he could

take the bus

home.

I gave him the buck and

told him,

"you ought to stay away from this

place."

"yeah," he said, "I

know."

then I walked toward parking

searching my coat for

cigarettes.

nothing.

p.o. box 11946, Fresno, Calif. 93776

drove in from the track after losing \$50.

a hot day out there

they pack them in on a Saturday;

my feet hurt and I had pains in the neck

and about the shoulders—

nerves: large crowds of people more than

unsettle me.

pulled into the driveway and got the

mail

moved up and parked it

went in and opened the IRS letter

form 525 (SC) (Rev. 9-83)

read it

and was informed that I owed

TWELVE THOUSAND SIXHUNDREDFOUR DOLLARS AND

SEVENTY EIGHT CENTS

on my 1981 income tax plus

TWO THOUSAND EIGHTHUNDREDEIGHTYTHREE DOLLARS

AND TWELVE CENTS interest

and that further interest was being

compounded

DAILY.

I went into the kitchen and poured a

drink.

life in America was a curious

thing.

well, I *could* let the interest

build

that's what the government

did

but after a while they would

come for me

or whatever I had

left.

at least that \$50 loss at the

track didn't look so

bad anymore.

I'd have to go tomorrow and

win \$15,487.90 plus

daily compounded

interest.

I drank to that,

wishing I had purchased a

Racing Form

on the way

out.

poor Al

I don't know how he does it but every woman he meets is crazy. he will get rid of one crazy woman but he never gets any relief another crazy moves right in with him. it's only after they move in and begin acting more than strange that they admit to him that they've done madhouse time or that their families have a long history of mental

```
illness.
his last one
he sent to a shrink
once a week:
$75 for 45 minutes.
after 7 months
she walked out on the
shrink
and said to Al,
"that god damned fag doesn't know
anything."
I don't know how they all find
Al.
he says you can't tell at the first
meeting
they have their guard up
but after 2 or 3 months the
guard comes down
and there's Al with
another one.
```

It got so bad that Al thought maybe it was him so he went to a shrink and asked and the shrink said, "you're one of the sanest men I've ever met." poor Al. that made him feel worse than ever.

for my ivy league friends:

many of those I met on the reading circuit or heard about on the reading circuit in the old days are now either teaching or poets-in-residence and have garnered Guggenheims and N.E.A.'s and sundry other grants. well, I tried for a Gugg once myself, even got an N.E.A. so I can't knock the act

but

you should have seen them back then: raggedy-ass, wild-eyed, raving against the order

now

they have been ingested, digested, rested

they write reviews for the journals

they write well-worked, quiet, inoffensive poesy

they edit so many of the magazines that I have no idea where I should send this

poem

since they attack my work with alarming regularity

and

I can't read theirs

```
yet their attacks upon me have been effective in this country
and
if it weren't for Europe I'd probably still be a starving writer
or down at the row
or diggin weeds out of your garden
or...?
well
you know the old saying: it's all a matter of
taste
and
either they're right and I'm wrong or I'm right and they're all
wrong
or
maybe it's some place in between.
most of the people in the world could care less
and
I often feel the same
way.
```

helping the old

I was standing in line at the bank today when the old fellow in front of me dropped his glasses (luckily, within the case) and as he bent over I saw how difficult it was for him and I said, "wait, let me get them..." but as I picked them up he dropped his cane a beautiful, black polished cane and I got the glasses back to him then went for the cane steadying the old boy as I handed him his cane.

he didn't speak,

he just smiled at me.

then he turned

forward.

I stood behind him waiting

my turn.

bad times at the 3rd and Vermont hotel

Alabam was a sneak and a thief and he came to my room when I was drunk and each time I got up he shoved me back down. you prick, I told him, you know I can take you! he just shoved me down again. when I sober up, I said, I'm going to kick you all the way to hell! he just kept pushing me around. I finally caught him a good one, right over the temple and he backed off and left.

it was a couple of days later I got even: I fucked his girl. then I went down and knocked on his door. well, Alabam, I fucked your woman and now I'm going to kick you all the way to hell! the poor guy started crying, he put his hands over his face and just cried I stood there and watched him. I said, I'm sorry, Alabam. then I left him there, I went back to my room. we were all alkies and none of us had jobs, all we had was each other.

even then, my so-called woman was in some bar or somewhere, I hadn't seen her in a couple of days.

I had a bottle of port

left.

I uncorked it and took it down to Alabam's room.

said, how about a drink,

Rebel?

he looked up, stood up, went for two glasses.

the Master Plan

starving in a Philadelphia winter trying to be a writer I wrote and wrote and drank and drank and drank and then stopped writing and concentrated on the drinking. it was another art-form. if you can't have any luck with one thing you try another. of course, I had been practicing on the drinking-form since the age of 15. and there was much competition

in that field

also.

it was a world full of drunks and writers and drunk writers.

and so

I became a starving drunk instead of a starving writer.

the best thing was the instant

result.

and I soon became the biggest and

best drunk in the neighborhood and

maybe the whole

city.

it sure as hell beat sitting around waiting for those rejection slips from *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic Monthly*.

of course, I never really considered quitting the writing game, I just wanted to give it a ten year rest

figuring if I got famous too early

I wouldn't have anything left for the stretch run

like I have now, thank

you,

with the drinking still thrown

in.

<u>garbage</u>

I had taken a tremendous beating, I had chosen a real bull, and because of the girls and for himself and just because of his brutal escaping energy he had almost murdered me: I learned later that even after I was out he had kicked my head again and again and then had emptied several garbage cans over me and then they had left me there in that alley. I was the guy from out of town. it was around 6 a.m. on a Sunday morning when I came

around.

my face was a mass of

bruises, scabs, clots, bumps, lumps, my lips

thick and numb, my eyes almost swollen

shut

but I got to my feet and began

walking;

I could see traces of the sun, houses, the shaking

sidewalk as I

moved toward my room

then I heard shuffling sounds from the

center of the street

and I forced my eyes to

focus and saw this

man staggering

his clothing ripped and bloody

he smelled of death and darkness

but he kept moving forward

down the middle of the street

as if he had been walking for

miles

from some event so ugly that

the mind itself might refuse to accept it

as part of life.

my impulse was to help him

and I stepped off the

curbing

and moved toward him.

he couldn't see me, he moved forward

looking for somewhere to go,

anywhere, and

I saw one of his eyes hanging

out of the socket,

dangling.

I backed away.

he was like a creature not of the

earth.

I let him go

by.

I heard him moving away

behind me

those blind steps lurching, in agony, senselessly alone. I got back on the sidewalk. I got back to my room. I got myself to the bed. fell face up the ceiling up there above me, I waited.

my vanishing act

when I got sick of the bar

and I sometimes did

I had a place to go:

it was a tall field of grass

an abandoned

graveyard.

I didn't consider this to be a

morbid pastime.

it just seemed to be the best

place to be.

it offered a generous cure to

the vicious hangover.

through the grass I could see

the stones,

many were tilted

at strange angles

against gravity

```
as though they must
fall
but I never saw one
fall
although there were many of those
in the yard.
it was cool and dark
with a breeze
and I often slept
there.
I was never
bothered.
each time I returned to the bar
after an absence
it was always the same with
them:
"where the hell you
been? we thought you
died!"
I was their bar freak, they needed me
```

to make themselves feel

better.

just like, at times, I needed that

graveyard.

let's make a deal

in conjunction with these rivers of shit that keep rolling through my brain, Captain Walrus, I can only say that I hardly understand it and would say any number of HAIL MARYS to put a stop to it— I'd even go back to living with that whore with the heart of brass just to keep these rivers of shit from rolling through my brain, Captain Walrus, but of course I would never stop playing the horses or drinking but Captain to keep these rivers from flowing

```
I'd promise to never
```

eat eggs again and

I'd shave my head and my balls, I'd live in

the state of Delaware and I'd even

force myself to sit through any movie acted in by

any member of the Fonda

family.

think about it, Captain Walrus, the

plum is in the pudding and the parasol bends to

the West wind

I've got to do something about all

this...

it seems like it never

stops.

each man's hell is in a different

place: mine is just up and

behind

my ruined

face.

16-bit Intel 8088 chip

with an Apple Macintosh

you can't run Radio Shack programs

in its disc drive.

nor can a Commodore 64

drive read a file

you have created on an

IBM Personal Computer.

both Kaypro and Osborne computers use

the CP/M operating system

but can't read each other's

handwriting

for they format (write

on) discs in different

ways.

the Tandy 2000 runs MS-DOS but

can't use most programs produced for

the IBM Personal Computer

unless certain

bits and bytes are

altered

but the wind still blows over

Savannah

and in the Spring

the turkey buzzard struts and

flounces before his

hens.

zero

sitting here watching the second hand on the TIMEX go around and around...

this will hardly be a night to remember

sitting here searching for blackheads on the back of my neck

as other men enter the sheets with dolls of flame

I look into myself and find perfect emptiness.

I am out of cigarettes and don't even have a gun to point.

this writer's block is my only possession.

the second hand on the TIMEX still goes around and

around...

I always wanted to be a writer

now I'm one who can't.

might as well go downstairs and watch late night tv with the wife

she'll ask me how it went

I'll wave a hand nonchalantly

settle down next to her

and watch the glass people fail

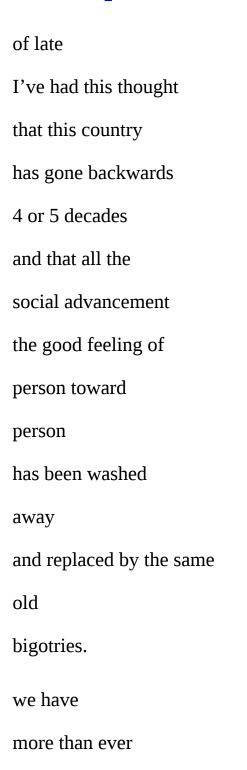
as I have failed.

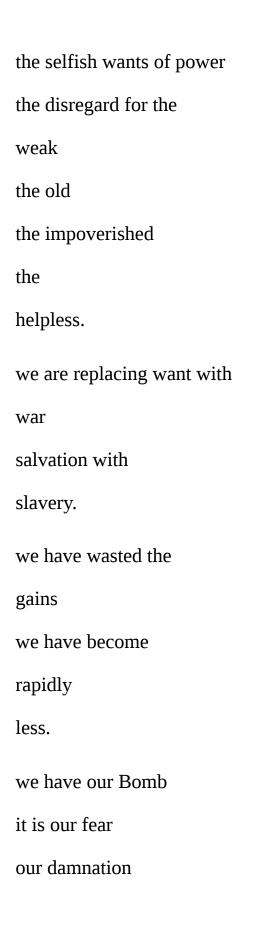
I'm going to walk down the stairway now

what a sight:

an empty man being careful not to trip and bang his empty head.

putrefaction





and our
shame.
now
something so sad
has hold of us
that
the breath
leaves
and we can't even
cry.

I'll take it...

maybe I'm going crazy, that's all right but these poems keep rising to the top of my head with more and more force. now after the oceans of booze that I have consumed it would only seem that attrition would be my rightful reward as I continue to consume—while the madhouses, skidrows and graveyards are filled with the likes of me yet each night as I sit down to this machine with my bottle the poems flare and jump out, on and on—roaring in the glee of easy power: 65 years

```
dancing—my mouth curling into a
tiny grin
as these keys keep meting out a
substantial energy of cock-
eyed miracle.
the gods have been kind to me through this
life-style that would have killed
an ox of a man
and I'm no ox of a
man.
I sensed from the beginning, of
course, that there was a strange gnawing
inside of me
but I never dreamed this
luck
this absolute shot of
grace
my death will at most seem
```

an

afterthought.

supposedly famous

not much to hang onto in this early morning growling, my wife, poor dear, downstairs, I am at the racetrack all day and up here all night with the bottle and this machine. my wife, poor dear, may she find her place in heaven. then too the few people that I have known, the people I thought had that little extra flare that inventive humanity, well, they dissolved but being a natural loner I am not overdistraught—

there are still my 5 cats: Ting, Ding, Beeker, Bleeker and Blob. not much to hang on to in this early morning growling. I am now a supposedly famous writer influencing hordes of typists. would that I could laugh at all this. Fame is the last whore, all the others are gone. well, the competition ain't been much but that's no hair off my wrists: I realized all that

```
long ago while
starving and
pissing out the
window
while smashing waterglasses of
booze against the behind-in-the-
rent
walls.
Ting, Ding, Beeker, Bleeker and
Blob.
now Death is a plant growing in my
mind
not much to hang on to in this early morning growling.
I am sad for the dead and I am sad for the living
but not for my 5 cats or
for my wife, my wife who will
find her place in
heaven.
and as for the people
```

```
dissolved
I didn't dissolve them, they dissolved
themselves.
and that the sidewalks are empty while
full of feet
passing—
this is the working of the
way.
not much to hang on to
as
a man plays a piano
through my radio and
the walls
stand up and
down
as the courage of everything
even the fleas
the lice
the tarantula
astounds me
```

in this early morning growling.

the last shot

here we are, once again, the last drink, the last poem—decades of this splendid luck—another drunken a.m., and not on the drunktank floor tonight waiting for the black pimp to get off the phone so I can put through my one allowed call (so many of those a.m.s too) it took me a long time to find the most interesting person to drink with: myself, like this, now reaching to my left for the last glass of the Blood of the Lamb.

whorehouse

my first experience in a whorehouse was in Tijuana. it was a large place on the edge of the city. I was 17, with two friends. we got drunk to get our guts up then went on in. the place was packed with servicemen mostly sailors. the sailors stood in long lines hollering, and beating on the doors.

Lance got in a short

line (the lines indicated the

age of the whore: the shorter the

line the older the

whore)

and got it over

with, came out bold and

grinning: "well, what you guys

waiting for?"

the other guy, Jack, he passed me

the tequila bottle and I took a

hit and passed it back and he

took a hit.

Lance looked at us: "I'll be

in the car, sleeping it

off."

Jack and I waited until he was

gone

then started walking toward the

exit.

```
Jack was wearing this big
sombrero
and right at the exit was an
old whore sitting in a
chair.
she stuck out her leg
barring our
way: "come on, boys, I'll make
it good for you and
cheap!"
somehow that scared the
shit out of Jack and he
said, "my god, I'm going to
PUKE!"
"NOT ON THE FLOOR!" screamed
the whore
and with that
Jack ripped off his
sombrero
and holding it
```

```
before him
he must have puked a
gallon.
then he just stood there
staring down
at it
and the whore
said, "get out of
here!"
Jack ran out the door with
his sombrero
and then the whore
got a very kind look upon her
face and said to me:
"cheap!" and I walked
into a room with her
and there was a big fat man
sitting in a chair and
I asked her, "who's
that?"
```

```
and she said, "he's here to
see that I don't get
hurt."
and I walked over to the
man and said, "hey, how ya
doin'?"
and he said, "fine,
señor..."
and I said,
"you live around
here?"
and he said, "give
her the
money."
"how much?"
"two dollars."
I gave the lady the two
dollars
then walked back to the
```

```
man.
```

"I might come and live

in Mexico some day," I

told him.

"get the hell out of

here," he said,

"NOW!"

as I walked through the

exit

Jack was waiting out there

without his

sombrero

but he was still

wavering

drunk.

"Christ," I said, "she was

great, she actually got my

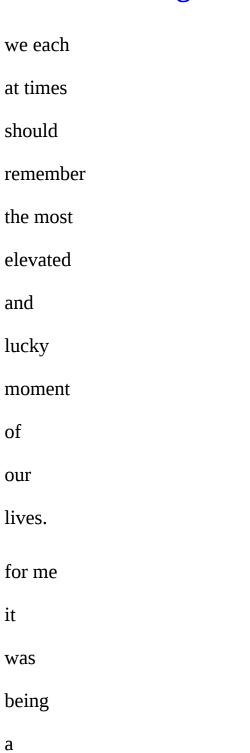
balls into her

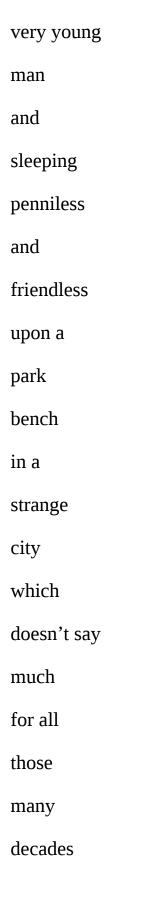
mouth!"

we walked back to the car. Lance was passed out, we awakened him and he drove us out of there somehow we got through the border crossing and all the way driving back to L.A. we rode Jack for being a chickenshit virgin. Lance did it in a gentle manner but I was loud demeaning Jack for his lack of guts and I kept at it

until Jack passed out near San Clemente. I sat up there next to Lance as we passed the last tequila bottle back and forth. as Los Angeles rushed toward us Jack asked, "how was it?" and I answered in a worldly tone: "I've had better."

<u>starting fast</u>





which

followed.

the crazy truth

the nut in the red outfit

came walking down the street

talking to himself

when a hotshot in a sports car

cut into an alley

in front of the nut

who hollered, "HEY, DOG DRIP!

SWINE SHIT! YOU GOT PEANUTS FOR

BRAINS?"

the hotshot braked his sports

car, backed toward the nut,

stopped,

said: "WHAT'S THAT YOU SAID,

BUDDY?"

"I said, YOU BETTER

DRIVE OFF WHILE YOU CAN,

ASSHOLE!"

the hotshot had his girl in the car with him and started to open the door.

"YOU BETTER NOT GET OUT OF THAT

CAR, PEANUT BRAIN!"

the door closed and the sports car

roared

off.

the nut in the red outfit then

continued to walk down the

street.

"THERE AIN'T NOTHIN' NOWHERE,"

he said, "AND IT'S GETTING TO BE

LESS THAN NOTHING ALL THE

TIME!"

it was a great day

there on 7th Street just off

Weymouth

Drive.

drive through hell

the people are weary, unhappy and frustrated, the people are bitter and vengeful, the people are deluded and fearful, the people are angry and uninventive and I drive among them on the freeway and they project what is left of themselves in their manner of driving—some more hateful, more thwarted than others—some don't like to be passed, some attempt to keep others from passing

- —some attempt to block lane changes
- —some hate cars of a newer, more expensive model
- —others in these cars hate the older cars.

the freeway is a circus of cheap and petty emotions, it's humanity on the move, most of them coming from some place they hated and going to another they hate just as much or more.

the freeways are a lesson in what we have become and most of the crashes and deaths are the collision

of incomplete beings, of pitiful and demented lives.

when I drive the freeways I see the soul of humanity of my city and it's ugly, ugly, ugly: the living have choked the

away.

heart

for the concerned:

if you get married they think you're finished and if you are without a woman they think you're incomplete. a large portion of my readers want me to keep writing about bedding down with madwomen and streetwalkers also, about being in jails and hospitals, or starving or puking my guts out. I agree that complacency hardly engenders an immortal literature but neither does repetition. for those readers now sick at heart

believing that I'm a contented
man—
please have some
cheer: agony sometimes changes
form
but
it never ceases for

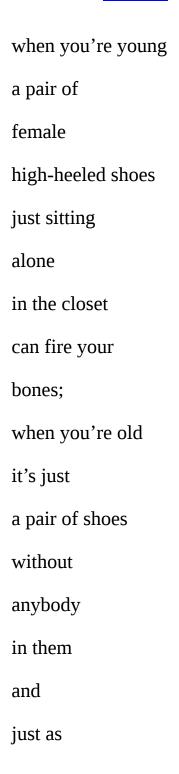
anybody.

<u>a funny guy</u>

```
Schopenhauer couldn't abide the masses,
they drove him mad
but he was able to say,
"at least, I am not them."
and this consoled him to some
extent
and I think one of his most humorous writings
was when he expostulated against some man who
uselessly cracked his whip
over his horse
completely destroying a thought process
Arthur was involved
in.
but the man with the whip was a part of the
whole
no matter how seemingly useless and
stupid
```

and once great thoughts often with time become useless and stupid. but Schopenhauer's rage was so beautiful so well placed that I laughed out loud then put him down next to Nietzsche who was also all too human.

shoes



well.

coffee

I was having a coffee at the counter when a man 3 or 4 stools down asked me, "listen, weren't you the guy who was hanging from his heels from that 4th floor hotel room the other night?" "yes," I answered, "that was me." "what made you do that?" he asked.

```
"well, it's pretty
involved."
he looked away
then.
the waitress
who had been
standing there
asked me,
"he was joking,
wasn't
he?"
"no," I
said.
I paid, got up, walked
to the door, opened
it.
I heard the man
say, "that guy's
nuts."
```

out on the street I

walked north

feeling

curiously

honored.

together

HEY, I hollered across the

room to her,

DRINK SOME WINE OUT OF

YOUR SHOE!

WHY? she

screamed.

BECAUSE THIS USELESSNESS

NEEDS SOME

GAMBLE!

I yelled

back.

HEY, the guy in the next

apartment beat on the

wall, I'VE GOT TO GET UP

IN THE MORNING AND GO

TO WORK SO FOR CHRIST'S

SAKE, SHUT

he damn near broke the wall

down and had a most

powerful

voice.

I walked over to

her, said, listen, let's

be quiet, he's got some

rights.

FUCK YOU, YOU ASSHOLE!

she screamed

at me.

the guy began pounding

on the wall

again.

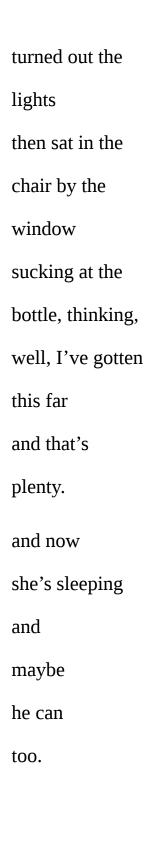
she was right and he was

right.

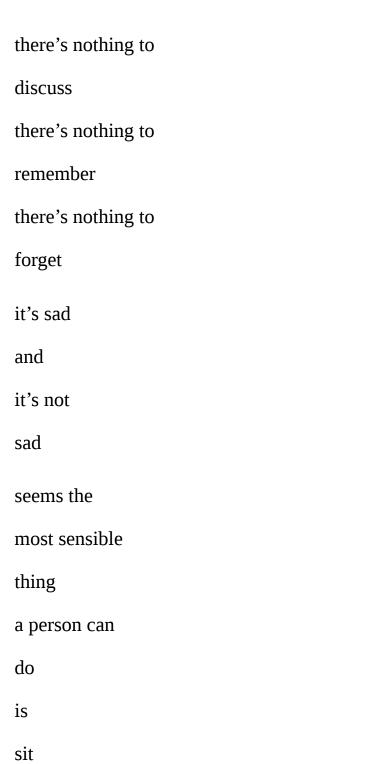
I walked the bottle over

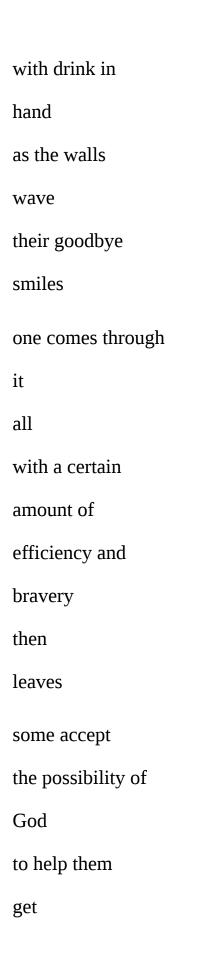
to the window and

```
looked out into the
night.
then I had a good roaring
drink
and I thought, we are all
doomed
together, that's all there is
to
it. (that's all there was
to that particular drink, just
like all the
others.)
then I walked
back to her and
she was asleep in
her
chair.
I carried her to
the bed
```



the finest of the breed





through
others
take it
straight on
and to these
I drink

tonight.

close to greatness

at one stage in my life I met a man who claimed to have visited Pound at St. Elizabeths. then I met a woman who not only claimed to have visited E.P. but also to have made love to him—she even showed me certain sections in the **Cantos** where Ezra was supposed to have mentioned her. so there was this man and this woman and the woman told me

that Pound had never

mentioned a visit from this

man

and the man claimed that the

lady had had nothing to do

with the

master

that she was a

charlatan.

and since I wasn't a

Poundian scholar

I didn't know who to

believe

but

one thing I do

know: when a man is

living

many claim relationships

that are hardly

and after he dies, well, then it's everybody's

party.

my guess is that Pound

knew neither the lady or the

gentleman

or if he knew

one

or if he knew

both

it was a shameful waste of

madhouse

time.

the stride

walks with giant strides like we do!"

Norman and I, both 19, striding the streets of night...feeling big, young young, big and young

Norman said, "Jesus Christ, I bet nobody

1939

after having listened to

Stravinsky

not long

after,

the war got

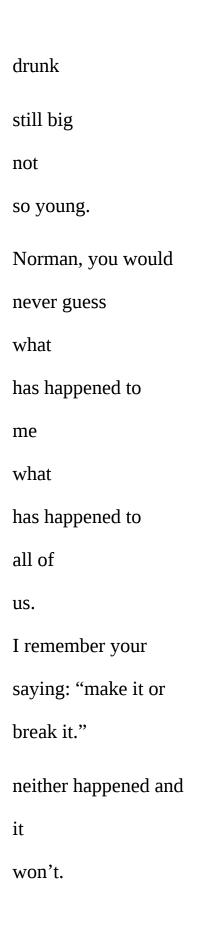
Norman.

I sit here now

46 years later

on the second floor of a hot

one a.m. morning



final story

god, there he is drunk again telling the same old stories over and over again as they push him for more—some with nothing else to do, others secretly snickering at this great writer babbling drooling in his little white rat whiskers talking about war talking about the

```
wars
talking about the brave
fish
the bullfights
even about his wives.
the people
come into the
bar
night after night
for the same old
show
which he will one day
end
alone
blowing his brains to
the walls.
the price of creation
is never
too high.
```

the price of living with other people always

is.

friends within the darkness

I can remember starving in a

small room in a strange city

shades pulled down, listening to

classical music

I was young I was so young it hurt like a knife

inside

because there was no alternative except to hide as long

as possible—

not in self-pity but with dismay at my limited chance:

trying to connect.

the old composers—Mozart, Bach, Beethoven,

Brahms were the only ones who spoke to me and

they were dead.

finally, starved and beaten, I had to go into

the streets to be interviewed for low-paying and

monotonous

jobs

by strange men behind desks

men without eyes men without faces

who would take my hours

break them

piss on them.

now I work for the editors the readers the

critics

but still hang around and drink with

Mozart, Bach, Brahms and the

Bee

some buddies

some men

sometimes all we need to be able to continue alone

are the dead

rattling the walls

that close us in.

death sat on my knee and cracked with laughter

I was writing three short stories a week

and sending them to the Atlantic Monthly

they would all come back.

my money went for stamps and envelopes

and paper and wine

and I got so thin I used to

suck my cheeks

together

and they'd meet over the top of my

tongue (that's when I thought about

Hamsun's *Hunger*—where he ate his own

flesh; I once took a bite of my wrist

but it was very salty).

anyhow, one night in Miami Beach (I

have no idea what I was doing in that

city) I had not eaten in 60 hours

and I took the last of my starving

pennies

went down to the corner grocery and

bought a loaf of bread.

I planned to chew each slice slowly—

as if each were a slice of turkey

or a luscious

steak

and I got back to my room and

opened the wrapper and the

slices of bread were green

and mouldy.

my party was not to be.

I just dumped the bread upon the

floor

and I sat on that bed wondering about

the green mould, the

decay.

my rent money was used up and

I listened to all the sounds

of all the people in that

roominghouse

and down on the floor were

the dozens of stories with the

dozens of *Atlantic Monthly*

rejection slips.

it was early evening and I

turned out the light and

went to bed and

it wasn't long before I

heard the mice coming out,

I heard them creeping over my

immortal stories and

eating the

green mouldy bread.

and in the morning

when I awakened

I saw that

all that was left of the

bread was the green mould. they had eaten right to the edge of the mould leaving chunks of it among the stories and rejection slips as I heard the sound of my landlady's vacuum cleaner bumping down the hall slowly approaching my door.

<u>oh yes</u>

I've been so
down in the mouth
lately
that sometimes when I
bend over to
lace my shoes
there are
three

tongues.

O tempora! O mores!

I get these girly magazines in the mail because I'm writing short stories for them again and here in these pages are these ladies exposing their jewel boxes it looks more like a gynecologist's journal everything boldly and clinically exposed beneath bland and bored physiognomies. it's a turn-off of gigantic proportions: the secret is in the imagination take that away and you have dead meat. a century back a man could be driven mad

by a well-turned ankle, and why not? one could imagine that the rest would be magical indeed! now they shove it at us like a McDonald's hamburger on a platter. there is hardly anything as beautiful as a woman in a long dress not even the sunrise not even the geese flying south in the long V formation in the bright freshness of early morning.

the passing of a great one

he was the only living writer I ever met who I truly admired and he was dying when I met him. (we in this game are shy on praise even toward those who do it very well, but I never had this problem with J.F.) I visited him several times at the hospital (there was never anybody else about) and upon entering his room I was never sure if he was asleep or? "John?" he was stretched there on that bed, blind and amputated: advanced diabetes. "John it's

```
Hank..."
```

he would answer and then we would talk for a short bit (mostly he would talk and I would listen; after all, he was our mentor, our god):

Ask the Dust

Wait Until Spring, Bandini

Dago Red

all the others.

to end up in Hollywood writing

movie scripts

that's what killed

him.

"the worst thing," he told me,

"is bitterness, people end up so

bitter."

he wasn't bitter, although he had

every right to

be...

at the funeral I

met several of his script-writing

buddies.

"let's write something about

John," one of them

suggested.

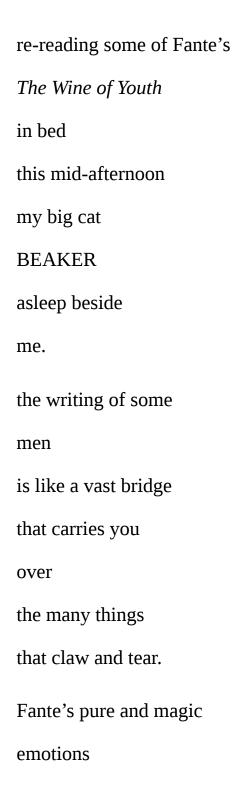
"I don't think I can," I

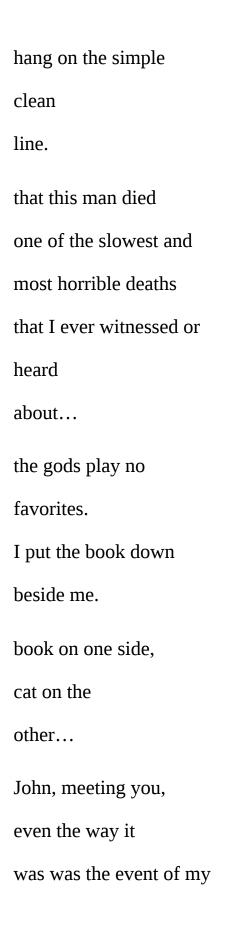
told them.

and, of course, they never

did.

the wine of forever





life. I can't say

I would have died for

you, I couldn't have handled

it that well.

but it was good to see you

again

this

afternoon.

true

```
one of Lorca's best lines
is,
"agony, always
agony..."
think of this when you
kill a
cockroach or
pick up a razor to
shave
or awaken in the morning
to
face the
sun.
```

Glenn Miller

long ago across from the campus in the malt shop the juke box going the young girls perfectly in tune dancing with the football players and the college bright boys Glenn Miller was the big thing then and everybody stepped almost everybody I sat with a couple of disciples we were supposed to be outlaws the explorers of Truth but I liked the music and the laziness of waiting as the world rushed toward war as Hitler speechified

the girls whirled

graceful

showing leg

that last bright sunshine

we warmed ourselves in it

shutting away everything else

while the universe opened its mouth

in an attempt to

swallow us all.

Emily Bukowski

my grandmother always attended the sunrise Easter service and the Rose Bowl parade. she also liked to go to the beach, sit on those benches facing the sea. she thought movies were sinful. she ate enormous platefuls of food. she prayed for me constantly. "poor boy: the devil is inside of you."

she said the devil was

inside her husband too. though not divorced they lived separately and had not seen each other for 15 years. she said that hospitals were nonsense she never used them or the doctors. at 87 she died one evening while feeding her canary. she liked to drop the seed

into the cage

while making these

little

bird sounds.

she wasn't very

interesting

but few people

are.

some suggestions

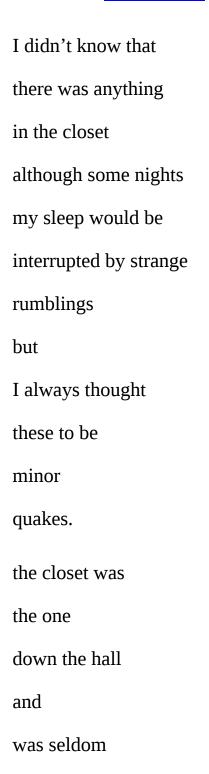
in addition to the envy and the rancor of some of my peers there is the other thing, it comes by telephone and letter: "you are the world's greatest living writer." this doesn't please me either because somehow I believe that to be the world's greatest living writer there must be something terribly wrong with you. I don't even want to be the world's greatest dead writer. just being dead would be fair enough.

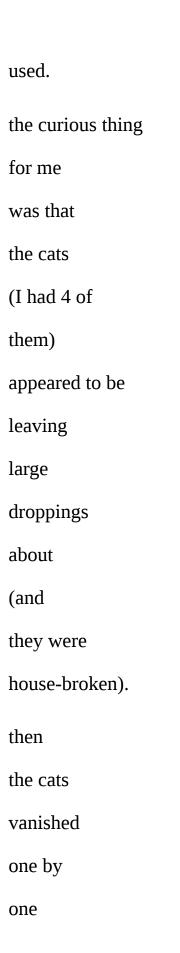
also, the word "writer" is a very tiresome

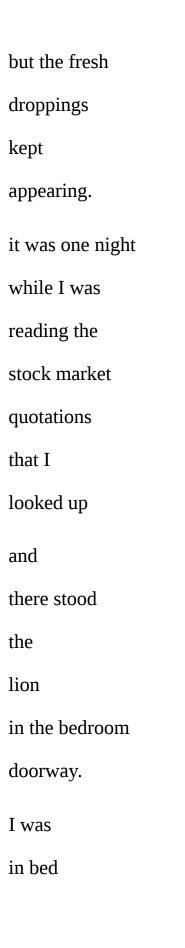
word.

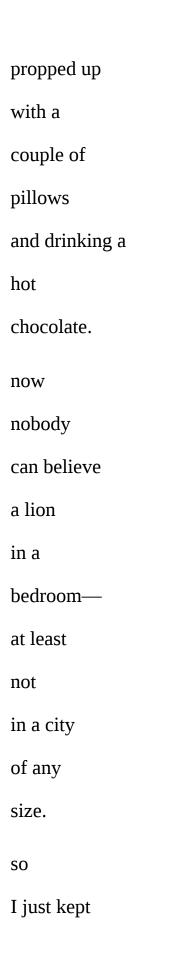
just think how much more pleasing it would be
to hear:
you are the world's greatest pool
player
or
you are the world's greatest
fucker
or
you are the world's greatest
horseplayer.
now
that
would really make
a man feel
good.

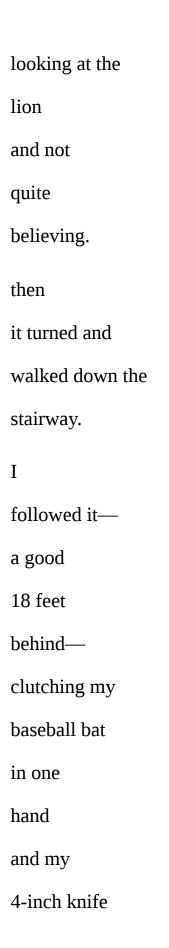
invasion

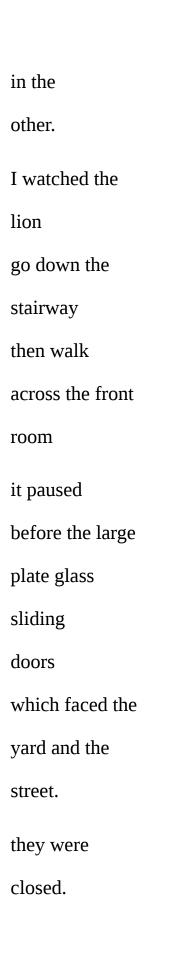


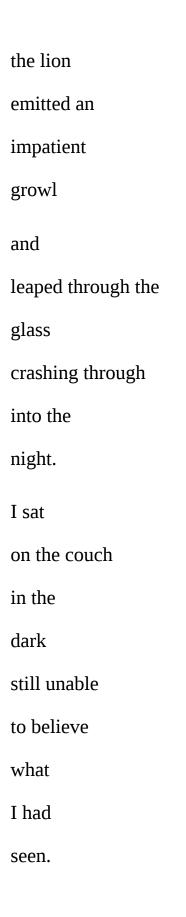


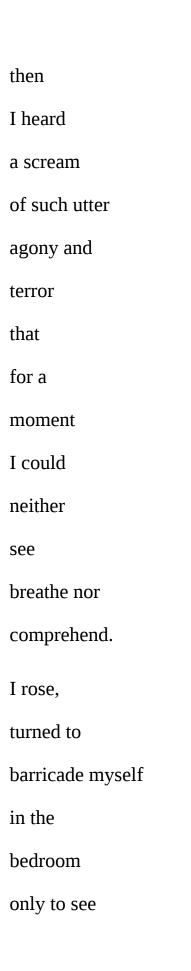


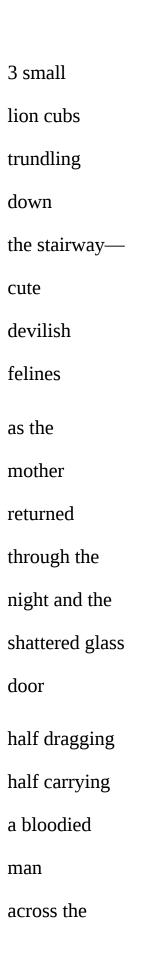












rug
leaving a
red
trail
the cubs
rushed
forward
and the
moon
came through
to light
the
whirling
feast.

hard times

```
as I got out of my car down at the docks
two men started walking toward
me.
one looked old and mean and the other was
big and smiling.
they were both wearing
caps.
they kept walking toward me.
I got ready.
"something bothering you guys?"
"no," said the old
guy.
they both stopped.
"don't you remember us?"
"I'm not sure..."
"we painted your house."
```

```
"oh, yeah...come on, I'll buy you a
beer..."
we walked toward a cafe.
"you were one of the nicest guys we ever
worked for..."
"yeah?"
"yeah, you kept bringing us beer..."
we sat at one of those rough tables
overlooking the harbor. we
sucked at our
beers.
"you still live with that young
woman?" asked the old
guy.
"yeah. how you guys doing?"
"there's no work now..."
I took out a ten and handed it to the old
one.
```

```
"listen, I forgot to tip you guys..."
"thanks."
we sat with our beer.
the canneries had shut down.
Todd Shipyard had failed
and was
phasing them
out.
San Pedro was back in the
30's.
I finished my beer.
"well, you guys, I gotta go."
"where ya gonna go?"
"gonna buy some fish..."
I walked off toward the fish market,
turned halfway there
gave them
thumb-up
right hand.
```

they both took their caps off and

waved them.

I laughed, turned, walked

off.

sometimes it's hard to know

what to

do.

<u>longshot</u>

of course, I had lost much blood maybe it was a different kind of dying but I still had enough left to wonder about the absence of fear. it was going to be easy: they had put me in a special ward they had in that place for the poor who were dying. —the doors were a little thicker —the windows a little smaller and there was much wheeling in and out of bodies plus

```
the presence of the priest
giving last
rites.
you saw the priest all the time
but you seldom saw a
doctor.
it was always nice to see a
nurse—
they rather took the place of
angels
for those who
believed in that sort of
thing.
the priest kept bugging me.
"no offense, Father, but I'd
rather die without
it," I whispered.
"but on your entrance application you
stated 'Catholic.'"
```

```
"that was just to be
social..."
"my son, once a Catholic, always a
Catholic!"
"Father," I whispered, "that's not
true..."
the nicest thing about the place were
the Mexican girls who came in to
change the sheets, they giggled, they
joked with the dying and
they were
beautiful.
and the worst thing was
the Salvation Army Band who
came around at
5:30 a.m.
Easter Morning
and gave us the old
religious feeling—horns and drums
```

and all, much

brass and

pounding, tremendous volume

there were 40 or so

in that room

and that band

stiffened a good

10 or 15 of us by

6 a.m.

and they rolled them right out

to the morgue elevator

over to the west, a very

busy elevator.

I stayed in Death's waiting room for

3 days.

I watched them roll out close to

fifty.

they finally got tired of waiting

for me

```
and rolled me
out of there.
a nice black homosexual fellow
pushed me
along.
"you want to know the odds of
coming out of that ward?"
he asked.
"yeah."
"50 to one."
"hell,
got any
smokes?"
"no, but I can get you
some."
we rolled along
as the sun managed to come through the
wire-webbed windows
and I began to think of
```

that first drink when

I got

out.

concrete

he had set up the reading he was one of the foremost practitioners of concrete poetry and after I read I went up there to where he lived his place was high in the mountains and we drank and looked out the large window at very large birds flying about gliding mostly he said they were eagles (he might have been putting me

```
on)
and his wife played the
piano
a bit of
Brahms
he didn't talk
much
he was a concrete
man
his wife was very
beautiful
and the way the eagles
glided
that was very beautiful
also
then it was twilight
then it was night
and you couldn't see the eagles
```

```
anymore
it had been an afternoon
reading
we drank until one
a.m.
then I got into my car
and drove the winding
narrow road
d
0
\mathbf{W}
n
I was too drunk to fear the
danger
when I got to my place I
drank two bottles of
beer and went to
bed.
```

```
then the phone
rang
it was my
girlfriend
she had been calling all
night
she was angry
she accused me of fornicating with
another
I told her about the beautiful
eagles
how they glided
and that I had been with a concrete
man
bullshit
she said
and hung
up
```

```
I stretched out there
looked at the ceiling and
wondered what the eagles
ate
then the phone rang
again
and she asked
did the concrete man have a
concrete wife and did you stick you
dick in her?
no
I answered
I fucked an
eagle
she hung up
again
concrete poetry
I thought
what the hell is
```

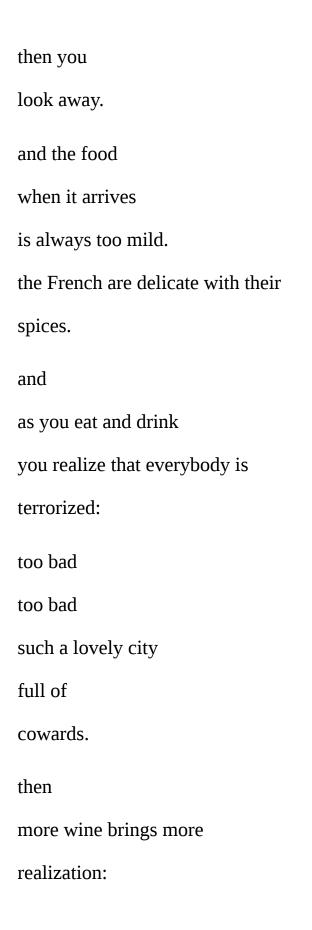
then I went to sleep and I

slept and I

slept.

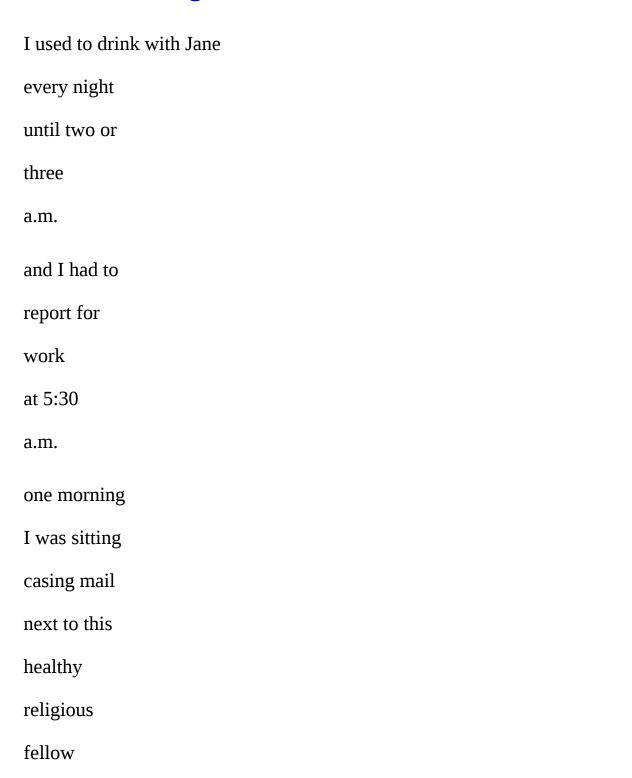
Gay Paree

the cafes in Paris are just like you imagine they are: very well-dressed people, snobs, and the snob-waiter comes up and takes your order as if you were a leper. but after you get your wine you feel better you begin to feel like a snob yourself and you give the guy at the next table a sidelong glance he catches you and you twitch your nose a bit as if you had just smelled dogshit



Paris is the world and the world
is
Paris.
drink to it
and
because of
it.

I thought the stuff tasted worse than usual



```
and he said,
```

"hey, I smell

something, don't

you?"

I answered in the

negative.

"actually," he said,

"it smells something

like

gasoline."

"well," I told

him, "don't light a

match or

I might

explode."

the blade

there was no parking near the post office where I worked at night so I found this splendid spot (nobody seemed to care to park there) on a dirt road behind a slaughterhouse and as I sat in my car just before work smoking a last cigarette I was treated to the same scene as each evening tailed off into night the pigs were herded out of the yard pens and onto runways

by a man making pig sounds and

```
flapping a large canvas
and the pigs ran wildly
up the runway
toward the waiting
blade,
and many evenings
after watching that
after finishing my
smoke
I just started the car
backed out of there and
drove away from my
job.
my absenteeism reached such astonishing
proportions
that I had to finally
park
at some expense
behind a Chinese bar
where all I could see were tiny shuttered
```

windows
with neon signs advertising some
oriental
libation.
it seemed less real, and that was
what was

needed.

the boil

```
I was making good with the girls on the assembly line at
Nabisco, I had recently beaten up the company
bully
on my lunch hour,
things were going well, I was from out of
town, the stranger who seldom spoke to
anybody, I was the mystery man, I was the
cool number,
almost all those fillies had an interest
in me
and the guys didn't know
what the hell.
then one morning I awakened in my
room
with a huge boil on the side of
my head (right cheek)
and
```

it was damn near the size of a golf ball. I should have phoned in sick but I didn't have the sense and went on in anyhow. it made a difference: the women's eyes fell away from mine, and the guys no longer acted fearful and I felt defeated by fate. the boil remained for 2 days 3 days 4 days. on the 5th day the foreman handed me my papers: "we're cutting back, you're

```
finished."
this was one hour before
lunch.
I walked to my locker, opened it,
took off my apron and cap
threw them in there
along with the
key
and walked
out
a truly horrible walk
to the street
where I turned around
and looked back at the building
feeling as if they had
discovered
something
hideously indecent
about me.
```

not listed

my horse was the grey a 4 to one shot with early lick and he had a length and a half 3/4's of the way down the stretch when his left front leg snapped and he tumbled tossing the jock over his neck and head. luckily the field avoided both the horse and the jock—who

got up and limped away from the kicking animal. accident potential: that's something that's not listed in the Racing Form. in the clubhouse I saw Harry standing in a faroff corner. he was an x-jock's agent now working as a trainer but not having too many mounts to train. he was behind his

```
dark shades
looking
awful.
"you have the grey?"
I asked.
"yeah," he said,
"heavy..."
"you need a transfusion,
it's not much but..."
I slipped
3 folded 20's
into his coat
pocket.
"thanks," he
said.
"put it on a good one."
Harry had done me some
nice things
```

and anyhow he was one of the best working for an edge in one of the bloodiest rackets around: we are trying to beat the percentages and each day some must fall so that others can go on. (the track is just like anyplace else only there it usually happens more quickly.) I walked over and got a coffee.

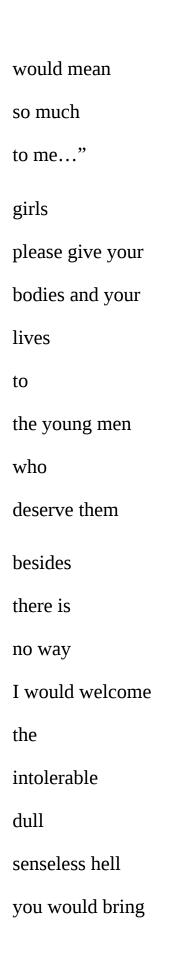
I liked the next race a six furlong affair for non-winners of two. one good hit would put the gods in place and cure everything in a flash of glory...

I'm not a misogynist

more and more I get letters from young ladies: "I'm a well-built 19 am between jobs and your writing turns me on I'm a good housekeeper and secretary and would never get in your way and would send a photo but that's so tacky..." "I'm 21 tall and attractive

have read your books I work for a lawyer and if you're ever in town please call me." "I met you after your reading at the Troubadour we had a night together do you remember? I married that man you told me had a mean voice when you phoned and he answered we're divorced now I have a little

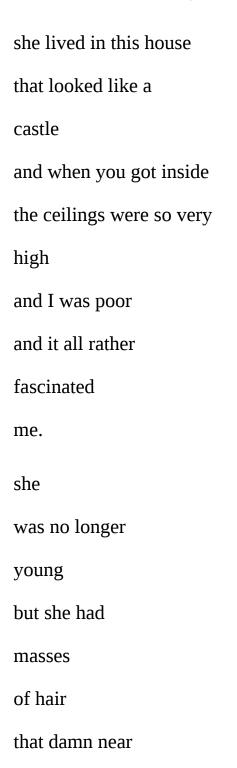
```
girl
age 2
I am no longer in
the music
business but
miss it
would like to
see you
again..."
"I've read
all your books
I'm 23
not much
breast
but have great
legs
and
just a few
words
from you
```

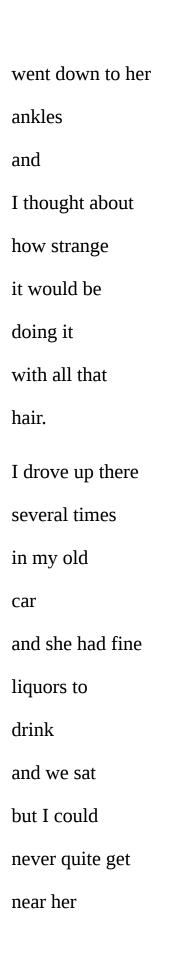


and
I wish you
luck
in bed
and
out
but not
in
mine
thank
you.

me

the lady in the castle





```
and though I didn't
push at
it
something about
not
connecting
did offend my
ego
for ugly as I was
I had always been
lucky with the
ladies.
it confused me
and I suppose
I needed
that.
she liked to
talk about
the arts and
about
```

film making and listening to all that only made me drink more. Ι finally just gave her up and a good year or so went by when one night the phone rang: it was the lady. "I want to come see

```
you," she said.
```

"I'm writing now, I'm

hot...I can't see

anybody..."

"I just want to come

by, I won't bother you,

I'll just sit on the couch,

I'll sleep on the couch, I

won't bother you..."

"NO! JESUS CHRIST, I

CAN'T SEE ANYBODY!"

I hung up.

the lady who was actually

on the couch

said, "oh, you're all

SOFT now!"

"yeah."

"come here..."

```
she took my penis
in her hand
flicked out her
tongue
then
stopped.
"what are you writing?"
"nothing...I've got writer's
block..."
"sure you have...your pipes are
clogged...you need to get
cleaned out..."
then she had me in her
mouth
and then the phone rang
again...
in a fury
I ran over to the
phone
```

```
picked it
up.
it was the lady in the
castle:
"listen, I won't bother you,
you won't even know I'm
there..."
"YOU WHORE, I'M GETTING A
BLOW JOB!"
I hung up and
turned back.
the other lady was walking
toward the
door.
"what'sa matter?" I
asked.
"I can't STAND that
term!"
```

```
"what term?"
"BLOW JOB!" she
screamed.
she slammed the door and
was gone...
I walked to where the
typewriter sat
put a new piece of paper
in there.
it was one
a.m.
I sat there and
drank scotch and
beer chasers
smoked cheap
cigars.
3:15 a.m.
I was still sitting
there
```

```
re-lighting old
cigar stubs and
drinking ale.
the new
piece of paper was still
unused.
I switched out the
lights
worked my way toward
the bedroom
got myself on the
bed
clothes still
on
I could hear the toilet
running
but couldn't get up
to tap the handle
to end that
```

sound

my god damned pipes were

clogged.

relentless as the tarantula

they're not going to let you sit at a front table at some cafe in Europe in the mid-afternoon sun. if you do, somebody's going to drive by and spray your guts with a submachine gun. they're not going to let you feel good for very long anywhere. the forces aren't going to let you sit around fucking-off and relaxing. you've got to do it

```
their way.
the unhappy, the bitter and
the vengeful
need their
fix—which is
you or somebody
anybody
in agony, or
better yet
dead, dropped into some
hole.
as long as there are
human beings about
there is never going to be
any peace
for any individual
upon this earth (or
anywhere else
they might
escape to).
```

all you can do

is maybe grab

ten lucky minutes

here

or maybe an hour

there.

something

is working toward you

right now, and

I mean you

and nobody but

you.

their night

never could read Tender Is the

Night

but they've made a

tv adaptation of the

book

and it's been running

for several

nights

and I have spent

ten minutes

here and there

watching the troubles of

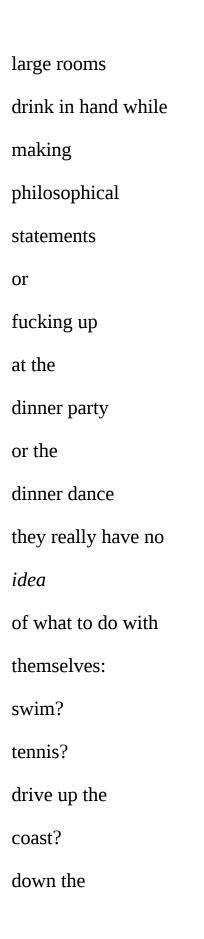
the rich

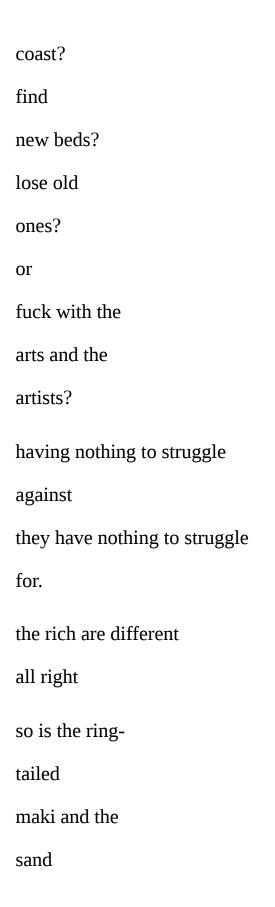
while they are leaning

against their beach chairs

in Nice

or walking about their





flea.

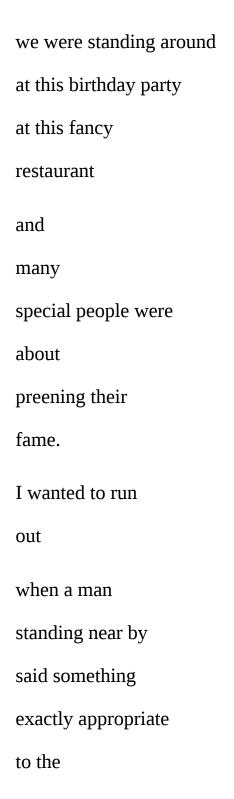
huh?

in
Germany France Italy
I can walk down the streets and be
followed by
young men laughing
young ladies
giggling and
old
ladies turning their noses
up
while
in America
I am just another
tired
old man
doing whatever
tired old men

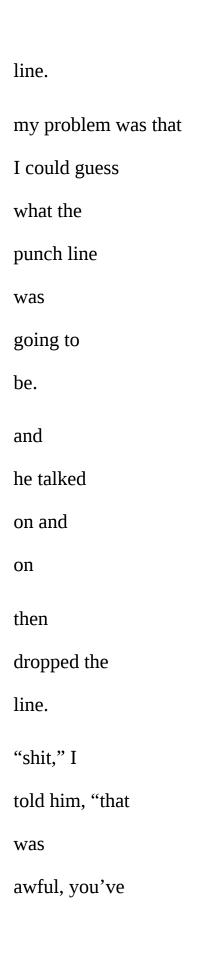
```
do.
oh, this has its
compensations:
I can take my pants
to the cleaners or
stand in a
supermarket line
without any
hubbub at
all:
the gods have allowed me
a gentle
anonymity.
yet
at times
I do consider my
overseas fame
and
the only thing
I can come up with is
```

that
I must have some
great motherfucking
translators.
I must
owe them
the hair on my
balls
or
possibly
my balls
themselves.

it's funny, isn't it? #1



```
occasion.
"hey," I said to
my wife, "this
guy's got
something. when we are
seated
let's try to
sit next to
him."
we did and as
the drinks were
poured
the man began
talking
he began on a
long story
which was
building toward a
punch
```



```
really
disappointed
me..."
he
only began
on another
story.
I walked over to
another table
and stood behind
the now
great
movie star.
"listen,
when I first met
you
you were just a nice
German boy.
now
you've turned into
```

conceited

prick. you've

really

disappointed

me."

the great movie

star (who was a

man

mighty of

muscle) growled

and

shook his

shoulders.

then I walked over to

the table

where the birthday lady

sat

surrounded by

all these

```
media
folk.
"looking at you
people," I said, "makes
me feel like
vomiting
all over
your
inept
plausibilities!"
"oh," said the lady
to her
guests, "he
always talks
that
way!"
and she gave a
laugh, poor
dear.
```

I said, "Happy birthday, but I warned you never to invite me to these things." then I walked back to my table motioned the waiter for another drink. the man was telling

another

story

but

it was not

nearly

as good

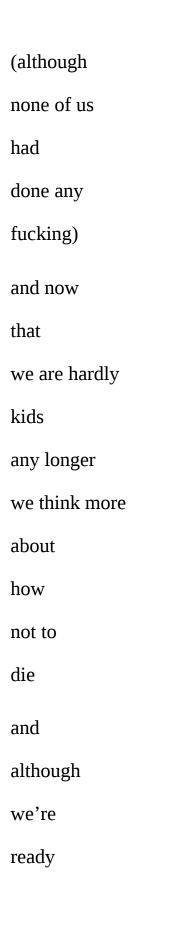
as

this

one.

it's funny, isn't it? #2

when we were kids
laying around the lawn
on our
bellies
we often talked
about
how
we'd like to
die
and
we all
agreed on the
same
thing:
we'd all
like to die
fucking



most of
us
would
prefer to
do it
alone
under the
sheets
now
that
most of
us
have fucked
our lives
away.

the beautiful lady editor

she was a beautiful woman, I used to see photographs of her in the literary magazines of that day.

I was young but always alone—I felt that I needed the time to get something done and the only way I could buy time was with poverty.

I worked not so much with craft but more with getting down what was edging me toward madness—and I had flashes of luck, but it was hardly a pleasurable existence.

I think I showed a fine endurance but slowly then health and courage began to leak away.

and the night arrived when everything fell apart—and fear, doubt, humiliation entered...

and I wrote a number of letters using my last stamps

telling a few select people that I had made a mistake, that I was starving and trapped in a small freezing shack of darkness in a strange city in a strange

state.

I mailed the letters and then I waited long wild days and nights, hoping, yearning at last for a decent response.

only two letters ever arrived—on the same day—and I opened the pages and shook the pages looking for money but there was none.

one letter was from my father, a six-pager telling me that I deserved what was happening, that I should have become an engineer like he told me, and that nobody would ever read the kind of stuff I wrote, and on and on, like that.

the other letter was from the beautiful lady editor, neatly typed on expensive stationery, and she said that she was no longer publishing her literary magazine, that she had found God and was living in a castle on a hill in Italy and helping the poor, and she signed her famous name, with a "God Bless you," and that was that.

ah, you have no idea, in that dark freezing shack, how much I wanted to be poor in Italy instead of Atlanta, to be a poor peasant, yes, or even a dog on her bedspread, or even a flea on that dog on that

bedspread: how much I wanted the tiniest

warmth.

the lady had published me along with Henry Miller, Sartre, Celine, others.

I should never have asked for money in a world where millions of peasants were crawling the starving

streets

and even some years later when the lady editor

died

I still thought her

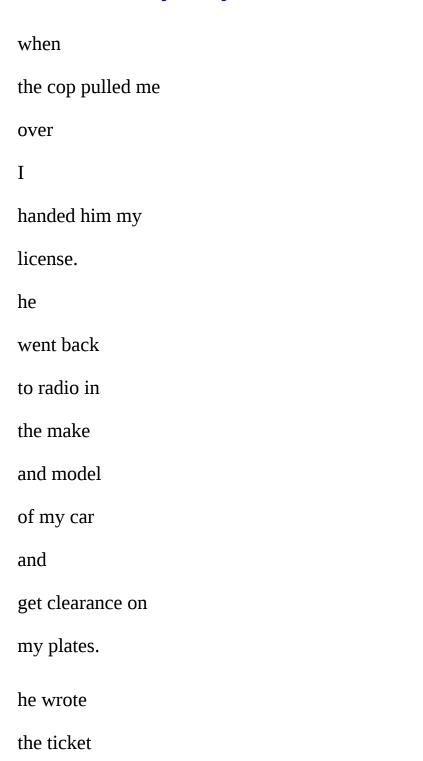
beautiful.

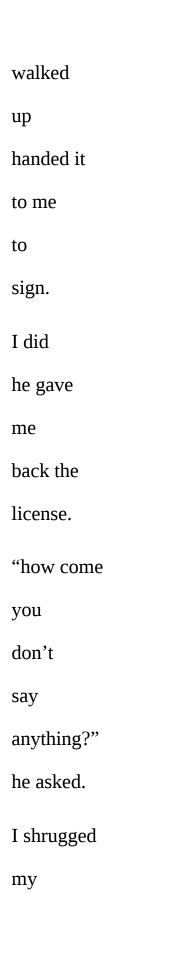
about the PEN conference

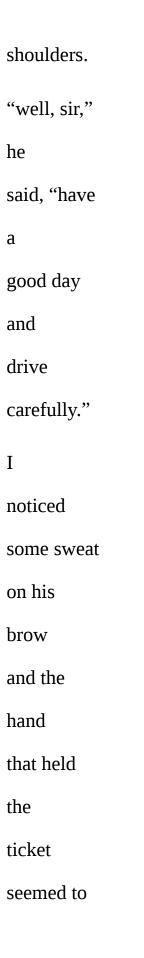
take a writer away from his typewriter
and all you have left
is
the sickness
which started him
typing
in the

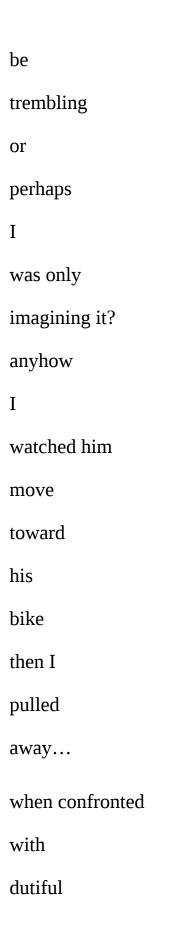
beginning.

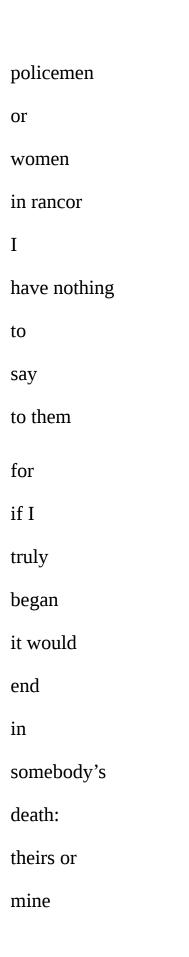
<u>everybody talks too much</u>











I

let them

have

their

little

victories

which

they need

far

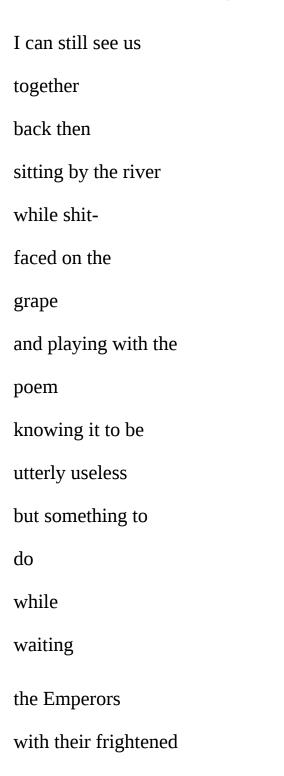
more

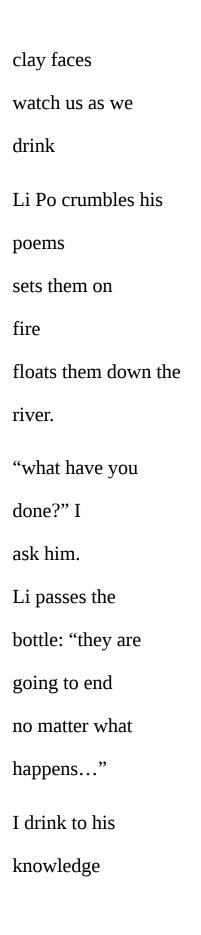
than

I

do.

me and my buddy





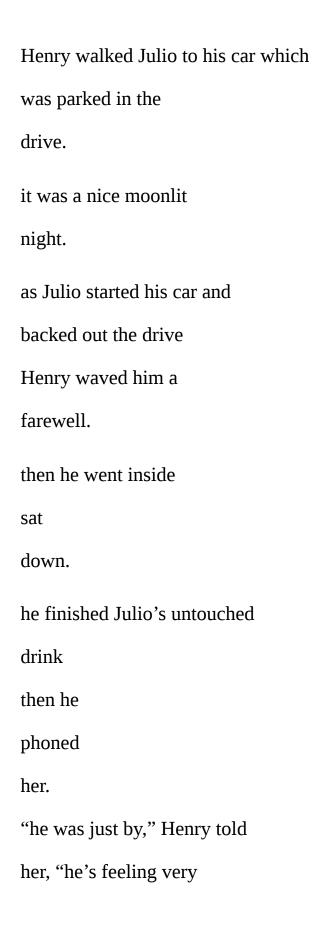
pass the bottle back sit tightly upon my poems which I have jammed halfway up my crotch I help him burn some more of his poesy they float well down the river lighting up the night as good words should.

song

```
Julio came by with his guitar and sang his
latest song.
Julio was famous, he wrote songs and also
published books of little drawings and
poems.
they were very
good.
Julio sang a song about his latest love
affair.
he sang that
it began so well
then it went to
hell.
those were not the words exactly
but that was the meaning of the
words.
```

Julio finished

```
singing.
then he said, "I still care for
her, I can't get her off my
mind."
"what will I do?" Julio
asked.
"drink," Henry said,
pouring.
Julio just looked at his
glass:
"I wonder what she's doing
now?"
"probably engaging in oral
copulation," Henry
suggested.
Julio put his guitar back in
the case and
walked to the
door.
```



```
"you'll have to excuse me,"
she said, "but I'm busy right
now."
she hung
up.
and Henry poured one of his
own
as outside the crickets sang
their own
song.
```

practice

in that depression neighborhood I had two buddies

Eugene and Frank

and I had wild fist fights with each of

them

once or twice a week.

the fights lasted 3 or 4 hours and we came out

with

smashed noses, fattened lips, black eyes, sprained

wrists, bruised knuckles, purple

welts.

our parents said nothing, let us fight on and

on

watching disinterestedly and

finally going back to their newspapers

or their radios or their thwarted sex lives,

they only became angry if we tore or ruined our

clothing, and for that and only for that.

but Eugene and Frank and I

we had some good work-outs

we rumbled through the evenings, crashing through

hedges, fighting along the asphalt, over the

curbings and into strange front and backyards of

unknown homes, the dogs barking, the people screaming at

us.

we were

maniacal, we never quit until the call for supper

which none of us could afford to

miss.

anyhow, Eugene became a Commander in the

Navy and Frank became a Supreme Court Justice, State of

California and I fiddled with the

poem.

love poem to a stripper

50 years ago I watched the girls

shake it and strip

at The Burbank and The Follies

and it was very sad

and very dramatic

as the light turned from green to

purple to pink

and the music was loud and

vibrant,

now I sit here tonight

smoking and

listening to classical

music

but I still remember some of

their names: Darlene, Candy, Jeanette

and Rosalie.

Rosalie was the

```
best, she knew how,
and we twisted in our seats and
made sounds
as Rosalie brought magic
to the lonely
so long ago.
now Rosalie
either so very old or
so quiet under the
earth,
this is the pimple-faced
kid
who lied about his
age
just to watch
you.
you were good, Rosalie
in 1935,
good enough to remember
now
```

when the light is yellow and the nights are slow.

my buddy

for a 21-year-old boy in New Orleans I wasn't worth much: I had a dark small room that smelled of piss and death yet I just wanted to stay in there, and there were two lively girls down at the end of the hall who kept knocking on my door and yelling, "Get up! There are good things out here!"

"Go away," I told them, but that only goaded them on, they left notes under my door and scotch-taped flowers to the doorknob.

I was on cheap wine and green beer and dementia...

I got to know the old guy in the next room, somehow I felt old like him; his feet and ankles were swollen and he couldn't lace his shoes.

```
each day about one p.m. we went for a walk
together and it was a very slow
walk: each step was painful for
him.
as we came to the curbing I helped him
up and down
gripping him by an elbow
and the back of his
belt, we made it.
I liked him: he never questioned me about
what I was or wasn't
doing.
he should have been my father, and I liked
best what he said over and
over: "Nothing is worth
it."
he was a
sage.
```

those young girls should have

left him the

notes and the

flowers.

Jon Edgar Webb

I had a lyric poem period down in New Orleans, pounding out these fat rolling lines and drinking gallons of beer. it felt good like screaming in a madhouse, the madhouse of my world as the mice scattered among the empties. at times I went into the bars but I couldn't work it out with those people who sat on the stools: men evaded me and the women were terrified of me. bartenders asked that I leave. I did, struggling back with wondrous six-packs to the room and the mice and those fat rolling

lines.

that lyric poem period was a raving bitch of a time and there was an editor right around the corner who fed each page into a waiting press, rejecting nothing even though I was unknown he printed me upon ravenous paper manufactured to last 2,000 years. this editor who was also the publisher and the printer kept a straight face as I handed him the ten to twenty pages each morning: "is that all?" that crazy son of a bitch, he was a lyric poem himself.

thank you

some want me to go on writing about whores and puking.

others say that type of thing disgusts them.

well, I don't miss the

whores

although now and then one or another makes an attempt to locate

me.

I don't know if they miss all the booze and the bit of money I gave them

or if they are enthralled at the way

I've immortalized them in

literature.

anyhow, they must now make do with

whatever men

they are able to scrounge
up.
—those poor darlings had no
idea...
and neither did I
that those ugly roaring nights
would be fodder
such as even
Dostoevski
would not shy away
from.

the magic curse

I never liked skid-row and so I stayed away from the soup kitchens, the bloodbanks and all the so-called hand-outs.

I got so god damned thin that if

I turned sidewise it was hard to see my shadow under a hard noon sun.

it didn't matter to me so long as I stayed away from the crowd

and even down there it was a successful and an unsuccessful crowd.

I don't think I was insane

but many of the

insane think

that

but I think

```
now
if anything saved me
it was the avoidance of the
crowd
it was my
food
still
is.
get me in a room with more than
3 people
I tend to act
ill
odd.
I once
even asked my wife: look, I must be
sick...perhaps I ought to see a
shrink?
Christ, I said, he might cure me
and then what would I
```

do?

she just looked at me

and we forgot the

whole

thing.

party's over

after you've pulled off the tablecloth with the full plates of food and broken the windows and rung the bells of idiots and have spoken true and terrible words and have chased the mob through the doorway then comes the great and peaceful moment: sitting alone and pouring that quiet drink. the world is better without them.

only the plants and the animals are true comrades.

I drink to them and with

them.

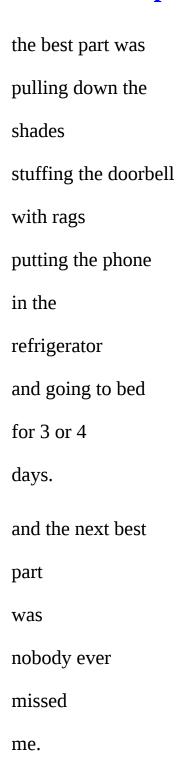
they wait as I fill their

glasses.

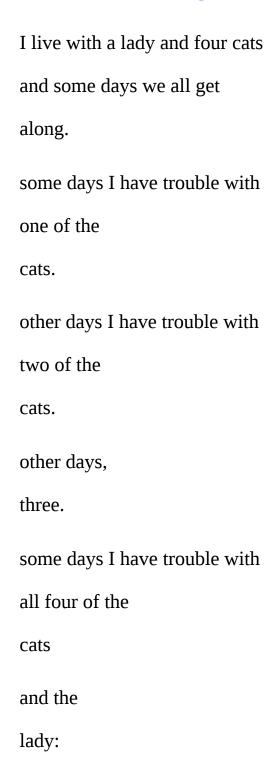
no nonsense

Faulkner loved his whiskey
and along with the
writing
he didn't have
time
for much
else.
he didn't open
most of his
mail
just held it up
to the light
and if it didn't
contain a
check
he trashed

<u>escape</u>

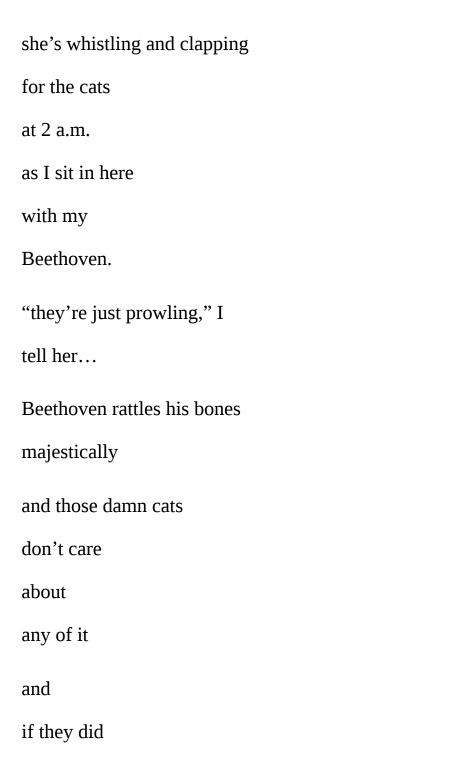


wearing the collar



ten eyes looking at me as if I was a dog.

a cat is a cat is a cat is a cat



I wouldn't like them
as
well:
things begin to lose their
natural value
when they approach
human
endeavor.
nothing against
Beethoven:
he did fine
for what he
was
but I wouldn't want
him
on my rug
with one leg
over his head
while

he was

licking

his balls.

marching through Georgia

we are burning like a chicken wing left on the grill of an outdoor barbecue we are unwanted and burning we are burning and unwanted we are an unwanted burning as we sizzle and fry to the bone the coals of Dante's Inferno spit and sputter beneath us and above the sky is an open hand and the words of wise men are useless it's not a nice world, a nice world it's not... come on, try this nice burnt chicken-wing poem it's hot it's tough not much meat

but 'tis sadly sensible and one or two bites ends it thus

gone

it left like the ladies of old as I opened the door to the room bed pillows walls I lost it I lost it somewhere while walking down the street or while lifting weights or while watching a parade I lost it while watching a wrestling match or while waiting at a red light at noon on some smoggy day I lost it while putting a coin into a parking meter

I lost it

as the wild dogs slept.

I meet the famous poet

this poet had long been famous and after some decades of obscurity I got lucky and this poet appeared interested and asked me to his beach apartment. he was homosexual and I was straight, and worse, a lush. I came by, looked about and declaimed (as if I didn't know), "hey, where the fuck are the babes?"

he just smiled and stroked

his mustache.

he had little lettuces and

delicate cheeses and

other dainties

in his refrigerator.

"where you keep your fucking

beer, man?" I

asked.

it didn't matter, I had

brought my own

bottles and I began upon

them.

he began to look

alarmed: "I've heard about

your brutality, please

desist from

that!"

I flopped down on his

```
couch, belched,
```

laughed: "ah, shit, baby, I'm

not gonna hurt ya! ha, ha,

ha!"

"you are a fine writer," he

said, "but as a person you are

utterly

despicable!"

"that's what I like about me

best, baby!" I

continued to pour them

down.

at once

he seemed to vanish behind

some sliding wooden

doors.

"hey, baby, come on

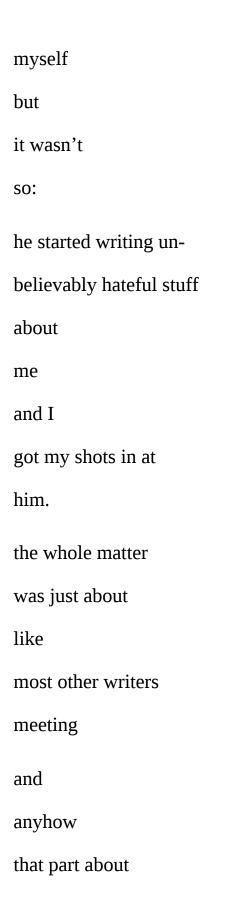
out! I ain't gonna do no

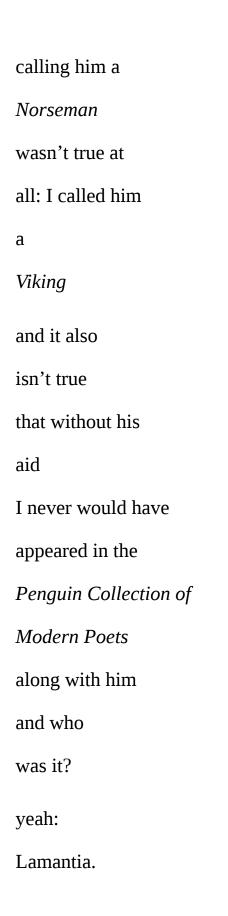
bad! we can sit around and

```
talk that dumb literary
bullshit all night
long! I won't
brutalize you,
shit, I
promise!"
"I don't trust you,"
came the little
voice.
well, there was nothing to
do
but slug it down, I was
too drunk to drive
home.
when I awakened in the
morning he was standing over
me
smiling.
"uh," I said,
```

```
"hi..."
"did you mean what you
said last night?" he
asked.
"uh, what wuz
ut?"
"I slid the doors back and
stood there and you saw
me and you said that
I looked like I was riding the
prow of some great sea
ship...you said that
I looked like a
Norseman! is
that true?"
"oh, yeah, yeah, you
did..."
he fixed me some hot tea
with toast
```

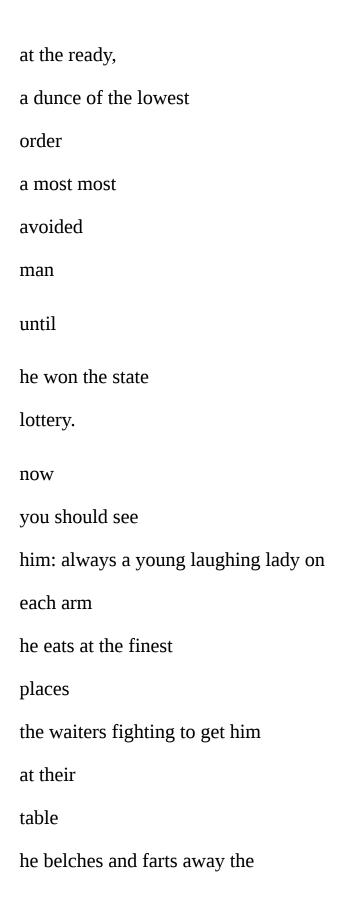
```
and I got that
down.
"well," I said, "good to
have met
you..."
"I'm sure," he
answered.
the door closed behind
me
and I found the elevator
down
and
after some wandering about the
beach front
I found my car, got
in, drove off
on what appeared to be
favorable terms
between the famous poet and
```





seize the day

foul fellow he was always wiping his nose on his sleeve and also farting at regular intervals, he was uncombed uncouth unwanted. his every third word was a crass entrail and he grinned through broken yellow teeth his breath stinking above the wind he continually dug into his crotch lefthanded and he always had a dirty joke



```
night
spilling his wineglass
picking up his steak with his
fingers
while
his ladies call him
"original" and "the funniest
man I ever met."
and what they do to him
in bed
is a damned
shame.
what we have to keep
remembering, though, is that
50% of the state lottery is given to the
Educational System and
that's important
when you realize that
only one person in
nine
```

can properly spell

"emulously."

the shrinking island

```
I'm working on it as
the dawn bends toward me...
I almost had it at 3:34 a.m. but it
slipped away from me
with the wizardry of a
silverfish...
now
as the half-light moves toward me
like motherfucking death
I give up the battle
rise
move toward the bathroom
bang
into a wall
give a pitiful mewking
laugh...
flick on the light and
```

begin to piss, yes, in the proper place and after flushing think: another night gone. well, we gave it a bit of a roar anyhow. we wash our claws... flick off the light move toward the bedroom where the wife awakens enough to say: "don't step on the cat!" which brings us back

matters

real

as we find the bed

slip in

face to ceiling: a

grounded

drunken

fat

old

man.

magic machine

I liked the old records that scratched as the needle slid across grooves well worn you heard the voice coming through the speaker as if there were a person inside that mahogany box but you only listened while your parents were not there. and if you didn't wind the victrola

```
it gradually slowed and
stopped.
it was best in late
afternoons
and the records spoke
of
love.
love, love, love.
some of the records had
beautiful purple
labels,
others were orange, green,
yellow, red, blue.
the victrola had belonged to
my grandfather
and he had listened to those
same
records.
and now I was a boy
and
```

I heard them.

and nothing I could think of

in my life then

seemed better than listening

to that

victrola

when my parents weren't

there.

those girls we followed home

in Jr. High the two prettiest girls were Irene and Louise, they were sisters; Irene was a year older, a little taller but it was difficult to choose between them; they were not only pretty but they were astonishingly beautiful so beautiful that the boys stayed away from them; they were terrified of Irene and Louise who weren't aloof at all, even friendlier than most but who seemed to dress a bit differently than the other

```
girls:
they always wore high heels,
silk stockings,
blouses,
skirts,
new outfits
each day;
and,
one afternoon
my buddy, Baldy, and I followed them
home from school;
you see, we were kind of
the bad guys on the grounds
so it was
more or less
expected,
and
it was something:
walking along ten or twelve feet behind them;
we didn't say anything
```

```
we just followed
watching
their voluptuous swaying,
the balancing of the
haunches.
we liked it so much that we
followed them home from school
every
day.
when they'd go into their house
we'd stand outside on the sidewalk
smoking cigarettes and talking.
"someday," I told Baldy,
"they are going to invite us inside their
house and they are going to
fuck us."
"you really think so?"
"sure."
now
```

50 years later

I can tell you

they never did

—never mind all the stories we

told the guys;

yes, it's the dream that

keeps you going

then and

now.

fractional note

the flowers are burning

the rocks are melting

the door is stuck inside my head

it's one hundred and two degrees in Hollywood

and the messenger stumbles

dropping the last message into a

hole in the earth

400 miles deep.

the movies are worse than ever

and the dead books of dead men read dead.

the white rats run the treadmill.

the bars stink in swampland darkness

as the lonely unfulfill the lonely.

there's no clarity.

there was never meant to be clarity.

the sun is diminishing, they say.

wait and see.

gravy barks like a dog. if I had a grandmother my grandmother could whip your grandmother. free fall. free dirt. shit costs money. check the ads for sales... now everybody is singing at once terrible voices coming from torn throats. hours of practice. it's almost entirely waste. regret is *mostly* caused by not having done anything. the mind barks like a dog. pass the gravy. it is so arranged all the way to oblivion.

next meter reading date:

JUN 20.

and I feel good.

a following

```
the phone rang at 1:30 a.m.
and it was a man from Denver:
"Chinaski, you got a following in
Denver..."
"yeah?"
"yeah, I got a magazine and I want some
poems from you..."
"FUCK YOU, CHINASKI!" I heard a voice
in the background...
"I see you have a friend,"
I said.
"yeah," he answered, "now, I want
six poems..."
"CHINASKI SUCKS! CHINASKI'S A PRICK!"
I heard the other
voice.
```

```
"you fellows been drinking?"
I asked.
"so what?" he answered. "you drink."
"that's true..."
"CHINASKI'S AN ASSHOLE!"
then
the editor of the magazine gave me the
address and I copied it down on the back
of an envelope.
"send us some poems now..."
"I'll see what I can do..."
"CHINASKI WRITES SHIT!"
"goodbye," I said.
"goodbye," said the
editor.
I hung up.
there are certainly any number of lonely
people without much to do with
```

their nights.

a tragic meeting

I was more visible and available then and I had this great weakness: I thought that going to bed with many women meant that a man was clever and good and superior especially if he did it at the age of 55 to any number of bunnies and I lifted weights drank like mad and did that. most of the women were nice and most of them looked good and only one or two were really dumb and dull but JoJo

```
I can't even categorize.
her letters were slight, repeated
the same things:
"I like your books, would like to meet
you..."
I wrote back and told her
it would be
all right.
then along came the instructions
where I was to meet
her: at this college
on this date
at this time
just after her
classes.
the college was up in the
hills and
the day and time
arrived
and with her drawings
```

of twisting streets

plus a road map

I set out.

it was somewhere between the Rose Bowl

and one of the largest graveyards in

Southern California

and I got there early and sat in my

car

nipping at the Cutty Sark

and looking at the

co-eds—there were so many of

them, one simply couldn't have

them *all*.

then the bell rang and I got out of my

car and walked to the front of the

building, there was a long row of

steps and the students walked out of the

building and down the steps

and I stood and

waited, and like with airport

```
arrivals
```

I had no idea

which one

it would be.

"Chinaski," somebody said

and there she was: 18, 19,

neither ugly nor beautiful, of

average body and features,

seeming to be neither vicious,

intelligent, dumb or

insane.

we kissed lightly and then

I asked her if she

had a car

and she said

she had a car

and I said, "fine, I'll drive you

to it, then you follow

me..."

JoJo was a good follower, she followed me all

the way to my beat-up court in east Hollywood.

I poured her a drink and we talked very drab talk and kissed a

bit.

the kisses were neither good nor bad nor interesting or un-

interesting.

much time went by and she drank very

little

and we kissed some more and she said,

"I like your books, they really do things

to me."

"Fuck my books!" I told her.

I was down to my shorts and I had her

skirt up to her ass

and I was working hard

but she just kissed and

talked.

she responded and she didn't

```
respond.
then
I gave up and started drinking
heavily.
she mentioned a few of the other
writers
she liked
but she didn't like any of them
the way she liked
me.
"yeah," I poured a new one, "is that
so?"
"I've got to get going," JoJo said,
"I've got a class in the
morning."
"you can sleep here," I suggested, "and
get an early start, I scramble great
eggs."
"no, thank you, I've got to
```

```
go..."
and she left with
several copies of my books
she had never seen
before,
copies I had given her
much earlier in the
evening.
I had another drink and decided to
sleep it off
as an unexplainable
loss.
I switched off the lights
and threw myself upon the
bed without
washing-up or
brushing my
```

I looked up into the dark

teeth.

and thought, now, here is one

I will never be able to

write about:

she was neither good nor bad,

real or unreal, kind or

unkind, she was just a girl

from a college

somewhere between the Rose Bowl and

the dumping grounds.

then I began to itch, I scratched

myself, I seemed to feel things

on my face, on my belly, I inhaled,

exhaled, tried to sleep but

the itching got worse, then

I felt a bite, then several bites,

things appeared to be

crawling on me...

I rushed to the bathroom

and switched on the light

my god, JoJo had fleas.

I stepped into the shower stood there adjusting the water, thinking, that poor dear girl.

an ordinary poem

since you've always wanted

to know I am going to admit that I never liked Shakespeare, Browning, the Bronte sisters,

Tolstoy, baseball, summers on the shore, arm-

wrestling, hockey, Thomas Mann, Vivaldi, Winston Churchill, Dudley Moore, free verse,

pizza, bowling, the Olympic Games, the Three Stooges, the Marx

Brothers, Ives, Al Jolson, Bob Hope, Frank Sinatra, Mickey

Mouse, basketball,

fathers, mothers, cousins, wives, shack jobs (although preferable to the former),

and I don't like the Nutcracker Suite, the Academy Awards, Hawthorne,

Melville, pumpkin pie, New Year's Eve, Christmas, Labor Day, the

Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Good Friday, The Who,

Bacon, Dr. Spock, Blackstone and Berlioz, Franz

Liszt, pantyhose,

lice, fleas, goldfish, crabs, spiders, war

heroes, space flights, camels (I don't trust camels) or the

Bible,

Updike, Erica Jong, Corso, bartenders, fruit flies, Jane

Fonda,

churches, weddings, birthdays, newscasts, watch

dogs, .22 rifles, Henry

Fonda

and all the women who should have loved me but

didn't and

the first day of Spring and the

last

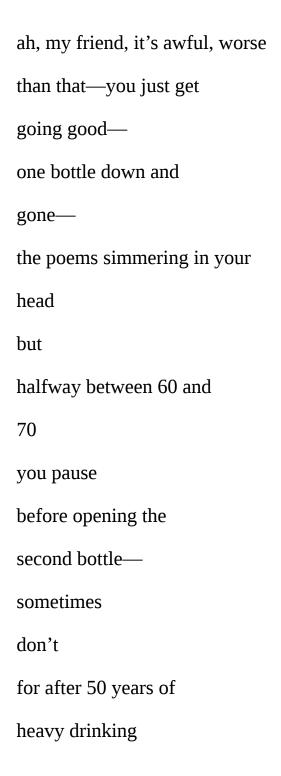
and the first line of this poem

and this one

that you're reading

now.

from an old dog in his cups...



you might assume that extra bottle will set you babbling in some rest home or tender you a stroke alone in your place the cats chewing at your flesh as the morning fog enters the broken screen. one doesn't even *think* of the liver and if the liver doesn't think of us, that's fine.

but it does seem
the more we drink
the better the words
go.
death doesn't matter
but the ultimate inconvenience
of near-death is worse than
galling.
I'll finish the night off
with
beer.

let 'em go

let's let the bombs go

I'm tired of waiting

I've put away my toys

folded the road maps

canceled my subscription to Time

kissed Disneyland goodbye

I've taken the flea collars off my cats

unplugged the tv

I no longer dream of pink flamingoes

I no longer check the market index

let's let 'em go

let's let 'em blow

I'm tired of waiting

I don't like this kind of blackmail

I don't like governments playing cutesy with my life:

either crap or get off the pot

I'm tired of waiting I'm tired of dangling I'm tired of the fix let the bombs blow you cheap sniveling cowardly nations you mindless giants do it do it do it! and escape to your planets and space stations then you can fuck it up there too.

trying to make it

new jock in from Arizona

doesn't know this town

but his agent did get him a mount

in the first race

last Saturday

and the jock took the freeway

in

on the same day as

the U.S.C. vs. U.C.L.A. football

game

and got caught

in one of the two special lanes

which took him to the Rose Bowl

instead of the race

track.

he was forced to drive all the way

to the football game

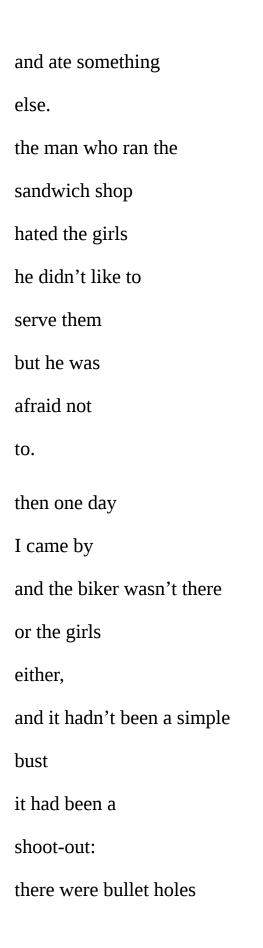
```
parking lot
before he could turn
around.
by the time he got to the track
the first race
was over.
another jock had won with his
mount.
today out there
I noticed on the program that the
new jock from Arizona
had a good mount in the
6th.
then the horse became a late
scratch.
sometimes getting started
in the big time
is tantamount to
trying to raise an erection
in a tornado
```

and even if you do nobody has the time to notice.

the death of a splendid neighborhood

there was a place off Western Ave. where you went up a stairway to get head and there was a big biker sitting there wearing his swastika jacket. he was there to smell you out if you were the heat and to protect the girls if you weren't. it was just above the Philadelphia Hoagie Shop there in L.A. where the girls came down when things got

slow



```
in the door
above the
stairway.
I went into the Hoagie shop
for a sandwich and a
beer
and the proprietor told
me,
"things are better
now."
after that
I had to leave town
for a couple of
days
and when I got back
and walked down
to the Hoagie shop
I saw that the plate glass
window
had been busted
```

out and was covered with boards. inside the walls and the counter had been blackened by fire. about that same time my girlfriend went crazy and started screwing one man after another. almost everything good was gone.

I gave my landlord a month's

notice and moved in

3 weeks.

you get so alone at times that it just makes sense

when I was a starving writer I used to read the major writers in the major magazines (in the library, of course) and it made me feel very bad because—being a student of the word and the way, I realized that they were faking it: I could sense each false emotion, each utter pretense, it made me feel that the editors had their heads up their asses—or were being politicized into publishing in-groups of power

but

I just kept writing and not eating very much—went down from 197 pounds to 137—but—got very much practice typing and reading printed rejection slips.

it was when I reached 137 pounds that I said, to hell with it, quit typing and concentrated on drinking and the streets and the ladies of the streets—at least those people didn't read *Harper's*, *The Atlantic* or *Poetry*, *a magazine of verse*.

and frankly, it was a fair and refreshing ten year lay-off

then I came back and tried it again to find that the editors still had their heads up their asses and/or etc.

but I was up to 225 pounds

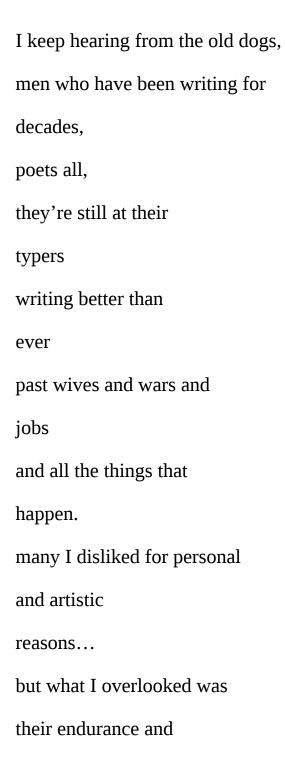
rested

and full of background music—

ready to give it another shot in the

dark.

a good gang, after all



their ability to improve.

these old dogs
living in smoky rooms
pouring the
bottle...

they lash against the
typer ribbons: they came
to
fight.

this

being drunk at the typer beats being with any woman
I've ever seen or known or heard about
like

Joan of Arc, Cleopatra, Garbo, Harlow, M.M. or any of the thousands that come and go on that celluloid screen

or the temporary girls I've seen so lovely
on park benches, on buses, at dances and parties, at
beauty contests, cafes, circuses, parades, department
stores, skeet shoots, balloon flys, auto races, rodeos,
bull fights, mud wrestling, roller derbies, pie bakes,
churches, volleyball games, boat races, county fairs,
rock concerts, jails, laundromats or wherever

being drunk at this typer beats being with any woman

I've ever seen or

known.

hot

there's fire in the fingers and there's fire in the shoes and there's fire in walking across a room there's fire in the cat's eyes and there's fire in the cat's

balls

and the wrist watch crawls like a snake across the back of the

dresser

and the refrigerator contains 9,000 frozen red hot dreams and as I listen to the symphonies of dead composers

I am consumed with a glad sadness

there's fire in the walls

and the snails in the garden only want love

and there's fire in the crabgrass

we are burning burning

there's fire in a glass of water

the tombs of India smile like smitten motherfuckers

the meter maids cry alone at one a.m. on rainy nights

there's fire in the cracks of the sidewalks

and

all during the night as I have been drinking and typing these

eleven or twelve poems

the lights have gone off and on

there is a wild wind outside

and in between times

I have sat in the dark here

electric (haha) typer off lights out radio off

drinking in the dark

lighting cigarettes in the dark

there was fire off the match

we are all burning together

burning brothers and sisters

I like it I like it I like

it.

late late poem

```
you think about the time in
Malibu
after taking the tall girl
to dinner and drinks
you came out to the Volks
and the clutch was
gone
(no Auto Club card)
nothing out there but the
ocean and
25 miles to your
room
(her suitcase there
after an air trip from somewhere
in Texas)
and you say to her, "well,
maybe we'll swim back in," and
```

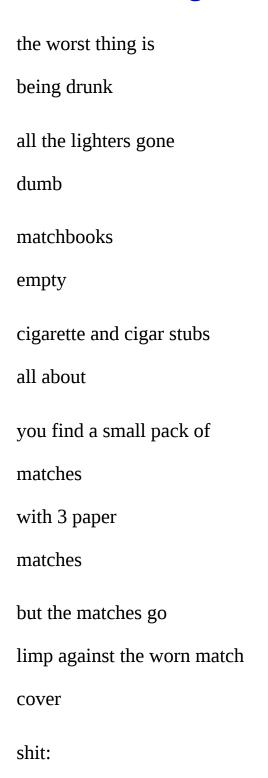
```
she forgets to
smile.
and the problem with
writing these poems
as you get into number 7 or
8 or 9
into the second bottle near
3 a.m.
trying to light your
cigarette with a book of
stamps
after already setting the
wastebasket on fire
once
is
that there is still some
adventure and joy
in typing
as the radio roars its
classical music
```

but the content

begins to get

thin.

3 a.m. games:



drink without smoke is like cock without pussy you drink some more search about find one paper match of happiness carefully scratch it against the least-worn empty match pack it *flares*! you've got your smoke! you light up you flick the match toward a

```
tray
it misses
and
like that...
a flame rises
everything is BURNING
at last!
: an American Express customer
receipt
: some of the empty match
books
: even one of the dead
lighters
the flame whirls and
leaps
then the whole ashtray of
cigarette and cigar stubs
begins to smoke
```

```
as if mouths were inhaling
them
you battle the flames with
various and sundry objects
including your
hands
until finally the flame is
gone and there is nothing but
smoke
as again you get that
re-occurring thought: I must be
crazy.
you hear your wife's
voice:
"Hank, are you all
right?"
she's on the other side of
the wall in the
bedroom
```

```
"oh, I'm fine..."
"I smell smoke...is the house burning
down?"
"just a small fire, Linda...I got
it...go to sleep..."
she is the one who got you
the steel wastebasket
after a similar
occurrence
soon she is asleep
again
and you're searching
for more
```

matches.

someday I'm going to write a primer for crippled saints but meanwhile...

as the Bomb sits out there in the hands of a

diminishing species

all you want

is me sitting next to you

with popcorn and Dr. Pepper

as those dull celluloid teeth

chew away at

my remains.

I don't worry too much about the

Bomb—the madhouses are full

enough

and I always remember

after one of the best pieces of ass

I ever had

I went to the bathroom and

masturbated—hard to kill a man

like that with a Bomb? anyhow, I've finally shaken R. Jeffers and Celine from my belltower and I sit there alone with you and Dostoevsky as the real and the artificial heart continues to falter, famished... I love you but don't know what to do.

help wanted

I was a crazed young man and then found this book written by a crazed older man and I felt better because he was able to write it down and then I found a later book by this same crazed older man only to me he seemed no longer crazed he just appeared to be dull we all hold up well for a while, then inherent with flaws and skips and misses most of us so often deteriorate overnight into a state so near defecation that the end result is almost unbearable to the senses.

luckily, I found a few other crazed men who almost remained that way until they

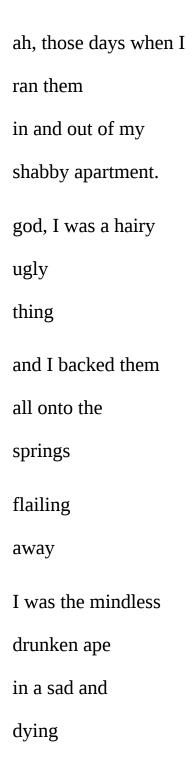
died.
that's more sporting, you know, and lends a bit more to our
lives
as we attend to our—
inumbrate—
tasks.

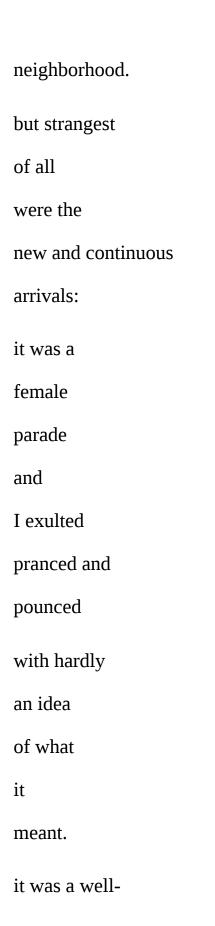
sticks and stones...

```
complaint is often the result of an insufficient
ability
to live within
the obvious restrictions of this
god damned cage.
complaint is a common deficiency
more prevalent than
hemorrhoids
and as these lady writers hurl their spiked shoes
at me
wailing that
their poems will never be
promulgated
all that I can say to them
is
show me more leg
show me more ass—
```

```
that's all you (or I) have
while
it lasts
and for this common and obvious truth
they screech at me:
MOTHERFUCKER SEXIST PIG!
as if that would stop the way fruit trees
drop their fruit
or the ocean brings in the coni and
the dead spores of the Grecian
Empire
but I feel no grief for being called something
which
I am not;
in fact, it's enthralling, somehow, like a good
back rub
on a frozen night
behind the ski lift at
Aspen.
```

working





remembered bedroom painted a strange blue. and most of the ladies left just before noon about the time the mailman arrived. he spoke to me one day, "my god, man, where do you get them all?" "I don't know," I told him. "pardon me," he went

on, "but you don't exactly look like God's gift to women, how do you do it?" "I don't know," I said. and it was true: it just happened and I did it in my blue bedroom with my dead mother's best lace table linen tacked up over the

window.

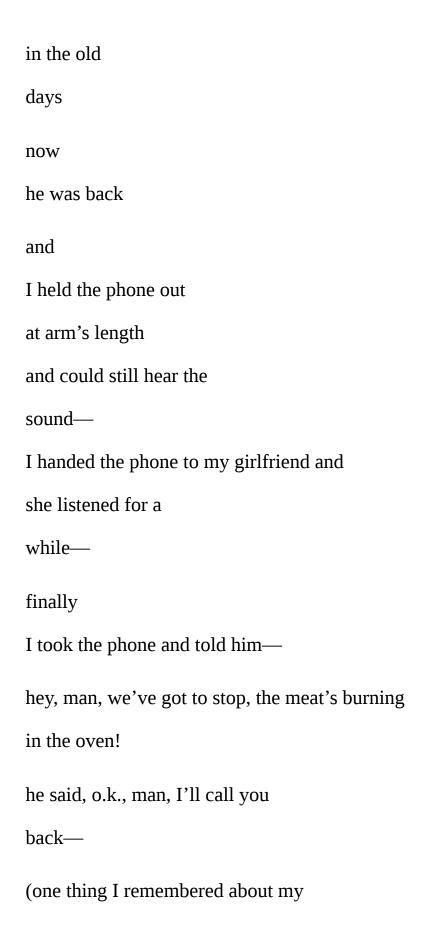
I was a

fucking

fool.

<u>over done</u>

he had somehow located me again—he was on the telephone—talking
about the old days—
wonder whatever happened to Michael or Ken or
Julie Anne?—
and remember?
—then
there were his present problems—
—he was a talker—he had always been a
talker—
and I had been a
listener
I had listened because I hadn't wanted to
hurt him
by telling him to shut up
like the others
did



old buddy: he was good for his word)

I put the phone back on the receiver—
—we don't have any meat in the oven, said my girlfriend—
—yes, we do, I told her, it's me.

our laughter is muted by their agony

as the child crosses the street as deep sea divers dive as the painters paint the good fight against terrible odds is the vindication and the glory as the swallow rises toward the moon it is so dark now with the sadness of people they were tricked, they were taught to expect the ultimate when nothing is promised now young girls weep alone in small rooms old men angrily swing their canes at visions as ladies comb their hair as ants search for survival history surrounds us and our lives

slink away

in

shame.

murder

competition, greed, desire for fame—
after great beginnings they mostly
write when they don't want to write, they write to
order, they write for Cadillacs and younger
girls—and to pay off
old wives.
they appear on talk shows, attend parties

they appear on talk shows, attend parties with their peers.

most go to Hollywood, they become snipers and gossips

and have more and more affairs with younger and younger girls and/or

men.

they write between Hollywood and the parties, it's timeclock writing and in between the panties and/or the jockstraps

```
and the cocaine
many of them manage to screw up with the
IRS.
between old wives, new wives, newer and
newer girls (and/or)
all their royalties and residuals—
the hundreds of thousands of
dollars—
are now suddenly
debts.
the writing becomes a useless
spasm
a jerk-off of a once
mighty
gift.
it happens and happens and
continues to:
the mutilation of talent
the gods seldom
```

give

but so quickly

take.

what am I doing?

got to stop battling these wild speed jocks on the freeway as we roar through hairline openings with stereo blasting through noon and evening and darkness

when actually all we want is to sit in cool green gardens talking quietly over drinks.

what makes us this way?—ingrown toenails?—or that the ladies are not enough?—what foolishness makes us tweak the nose of Death continually?

are we afraid of the slow bedpan?—or slobbering over half-cooked peas brought to us by a bored nurse with thick dumb legs?

what wanton hare-brained impulse makes us floor it with only one hand on the wheel?

don't we realize the peace of aging

gently?

what hell-call is this to war?

we are the sickest of the breed—as fine museums—great art—

generations of knowledge—are all forgotten

as we find profundity in being an

asshole—

we are going to end up as a

photograph—almost life-sized—hanging

as a warning on the

Traffic Court wall

and people will shudder just a bit and

look the other way

knowing that

too much ego is not

enough.

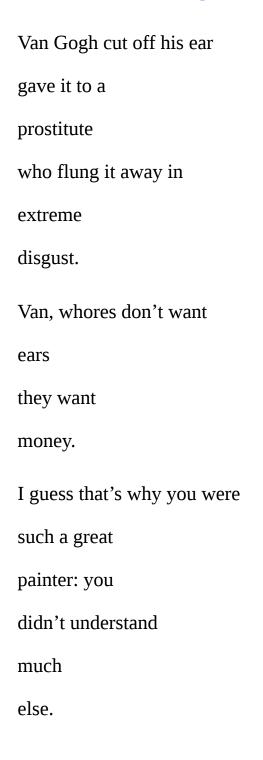
nervous people

you go in for an item—take it to the clerk at the register—he doesn't know the price—begs leave—returns after a long time—stares at the electronic cash register—rings up the sale with some difficulty: \$47,583.64—you don't have it with you—he laughs—calls for help—another clerk arrives—after another long time he finds a new total: \$1.27. I pay—then must ask for a bag—I thank the clerk—walk to parking with the lady I am with—"you make people nervous," she tells me—
we drive home with the item—we put the item to its task—it doesn't work—the item has a factory defect—

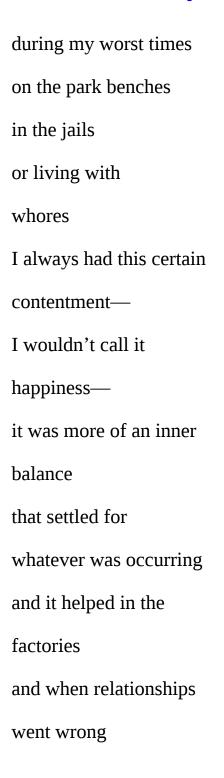
I go to the bathroom and piss squarely in the center of the pot—warfare is just one of the problems which besets everyone during the life of a decent day.

"I'll take it back," she says—

working out



how is your heart?



```
with the
girls.
it helped
through the
wars and the
hangovers
the backalley fights
the
hospitals.
to awaken in a cheap room
in a strange city and
pull up the shade—
this was the craziest kind of
contentment
and to walk across the floor
to an old dresser with a
cracked mirror—
see myself, ugly,
grinning at it all.
```

what matters most is

how well you

walk through the

fire.

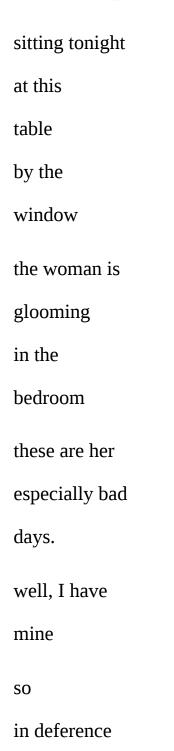
forget it

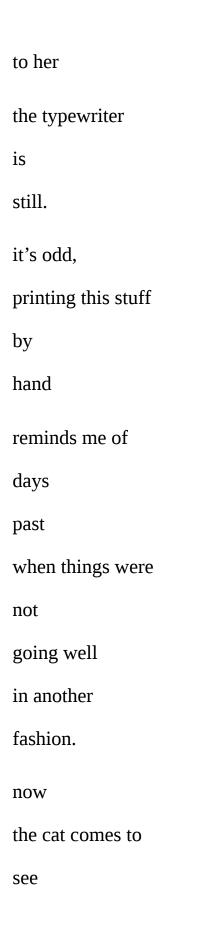
now, listen, when I die I don't want any crying, just get the disposal under way, I've had a full some life, and if anybody has had an edge, I've had it, I've lived 7 or 8 lives in one, enough for anybody.

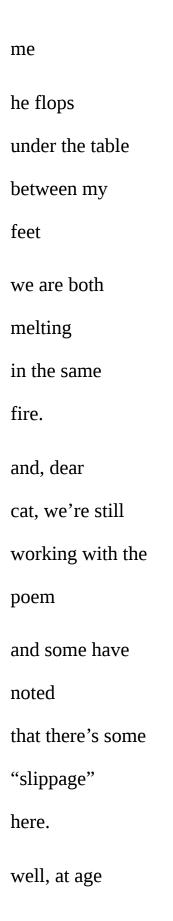
we are all, finally, the same, so no speeches, please, unless you want to say he played the horses and was very good at that.

you're next and I already know something you don't, maybe.

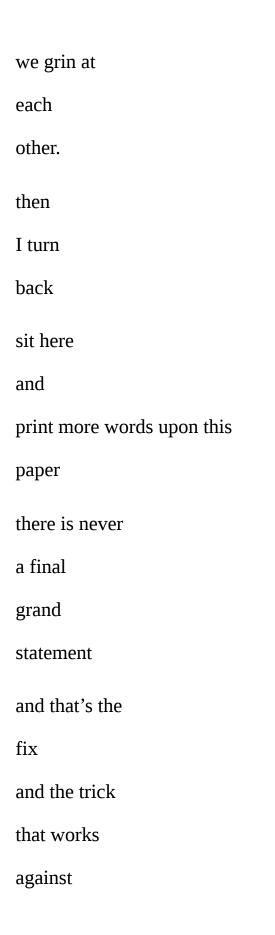
<u>quiet</u>







```
65, I can
"slip"
plenty, yet still
run rings
around
those pamby
critics.
Li Po knew
what to do:
drink another
bottle and
face
the consequences.
I turn to my
right, see this huge
head (reflected in the
window) sucking at
a cigarette
and
```



but

I wish you could see

my

cat

he has a

splash

of white on his

face

against an

orange-yellow

background

and then

as I look up

and into the

kitchen

I see a bright

portion

under the overhead

light

that shades into

darkness

and then into darker

darkness and

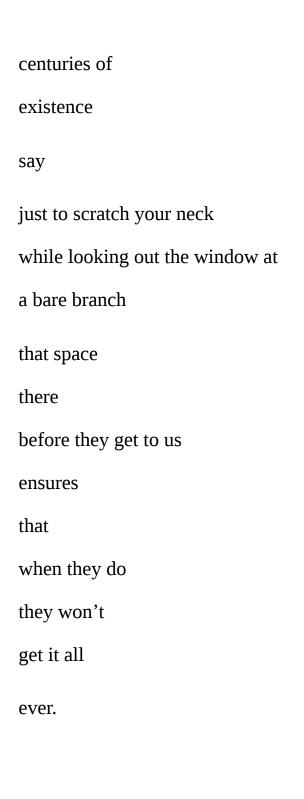
I can't see

beyond

that.

it's ours

there is always that space there just before they get to us that space that fine relaxer the breather while say flopping on a bed thinking of nothing or say pouring a glass of water from the spigot while entranced by nothing that gentle pure space it's worth



About the Author

CHARLES BUKOWSKI is one of America's best-known contemporary writers of poetry and prose, and, many would claim, its most influential and imitated poet. He was born in Andernach, Germany, to an American soldier father and a German mother in 1920, and brought to the United States at the age of three. He was raised in Los Angeles and lived there for fifty years. He published his first story in 1944 when he was twenty-four and began writing poetry at the age of thirty-five. He died in San Pedro, California, on March 9, 1994, at the age of seventy-three, shortly after completing his last novel, *Pulp* (1994).

During his lifetime he published more than forty-five books of poetry and prose, including the novels *Post Office* (1971), *Factotum* (1975), *Women* (1978), *Ham on Rye* (1982), and *Hollywood* (1989). Among his most recent books are the posthumous editions of *What Matters Most Is How Well You Walk Through the Fire* (1999), *Open All Night: New Poems* (2000), *Beerspit Night and Cursing: The Correspondence of Charles Bukowski and Sheri Martinelli*, 1960-1967 (2001), and *The Night Torn Mad with Footsteps: New Poems* (2001).

All of his books have now been published in translation in over a dozen languages and his worldwide popularity remains undiminished. In the years to come, Ecco will publish additional volumes of previously uncollected poetry and letters.

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