

Don Gordon Selected Poems



Don Gordon

October 19, 1906 [Kokomo, Indiana] –

November 9, 1989 [Santa Rosa, California]

Gordon was born in Indiana. By the mid-30s, he was living in Los Angeles with his wife, Anna. Gordon made his name in the 1930s as a passionate and outspoken political poet. He was called before the Un-American Activities Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives in September, 1951. Due to his openly communist views and his reluctance to give the committee names of fellow radical writers, Gordon was blacklisted from employment in the film industry. His poems appeared in *The American Scholar*, *Saturday Review*, *Harper's*, *New Republic*, *California Quarterly*, *Poetry* and other magazines. He was closely aligned with the Communist movement in Los Angeles. Thomas McGrath wrote a short article, "Poet of the Fifties," about his work in 1957. Gordon's *Collected Poems* appeared from University of Illinois Press in 2004.

Statement. Boston: B. Humphries, Inc, 1943.

Civilian Poems. New York: The Beechhurst Press, 1946.

Displaced Persons. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1958.

One the Ward. Reno, Nevada: West Coast Poetry Review, 1977.

Excavations. Reno, Nevada: West Coast Poetry Review, 1979.

Sea of Tranquility. Chicago: Curbstone Press, 1995.

Collected Poems. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004.

The Have Come for Their Answers

The arts curl in the navel, the seven Brahm ins burden their haunches in self-respect.

The people, the drumbeats of hunger, invest the tower inviolate, whence issue:

The preoccupations; the odor of garlands; the hundred years' decay.

Forsake the sea in its frame, the angels, pastorals, recurrences and genuflexions;

The faun is inert in the thicket, prone the centaur between the four hoofs. Abandon the statue of the statesman, the lovers, the nymph unequal to the bronze.

Quiet the minuet, silence myth; the great waves and the cymbals perish.

The hour deserves the dance in parallel, the Greek will not awaken.

Nor phrase the private darkness nor tend the flower of death.

The empires of the dying summon the sleepers! Cancel all dreams,

Conquests, balances: they have come for their answers.

Nor evade nor charm in the immemorial delicate fashion;

Nor deny . . . in the presence of hunger . . . beauty is the second wound.

To The Pickets

Power slept like a cry in the throats of the people;
In the lush pastures they seemed to lie down together,
The many and the few. Now the teeth of the great herd
Nibble the dust, the many-throated utter in the hemispheres.

The gold and the iron music summon the coverts of the cities.
Upon disputed streets, between the towers and the simple houses,
The artisan history hews the solitary line: who is not with us is against us!

Strike! one by one the holidays of desperation are declared.
The inarticulate speak now in their fashion, they are eloquent before the
gates:
Not one shall enter, nor of the faithless one shall leave!

Gas is blown in the streets, first and the last tears are coldly drawn.
They oppose you with steel and the mercenaries, some will be slain.
(.What manner of serf the dead, how able skeleton with too ls?)
Iron is familiar, taken at the breast, driven year by year.
Can the spine be shaken, whose vertebrae were locked in war?

They will goad you above and below, until the gates are flung and the glass
shivers,
Then cry vandal and enlist new enemies in the rear. Better the flanks
visible,
The armies in their camps: the gates must be thrown before there is
tomorrow.

Occupied Country

Quietly the men maimed and the men dead
are entering the unbroken American houses;
the last march is across the threshold of

these rooms into the abode of the civilian
mind. The tears given briefly upon their
return will not restore them: henceforth

they dwell with us, we are a somber country
occupied by heroes. Arms, legs, eyes and
the contours are obliterated ; in unvisited

wards, torsos will exist for years. Who is brave
enough to bring them flowers or words? They lie
in battalions, honored along the plainly receding

shore; we assume the fallen weight and pleasure
of their lives. The hearing they abandoned is
acutely ours, the least sound may be perceived

as music; the eyes they closed we open on a
wider world than helicopters or the plastic
cars. Take for them in the nostrils the odor

of the rain, walk firmly for them among the most
desolate people: love is not to be separate from
them, love is our total statement in their name.

El Toro

The instant he sped from the dark passage I knew who he was:
Defined by the flags, by the high judge, by the smell of people,
He was received like a child in a world I was beginning again
at four o'clock in Mexico.

I charged the first insult, the deliberate cape: all exits closed:
Bearing something evil appeared the blind horse:
My spine was eaten, my shoulder sown with streaming thorns.

Nothing was there but a voice.

Twenty minutes to find him: was it the wall, the high judge,
The bloodshot eyes, the animal inciting with a point of light?

I remembered the fields of grass, the sun, the rain on the birds.
Nothing prepared me for the great plaza
Or to separate the enemy from his cape, or the friend.

Defined by the wet sand, by cigarette butts, by the plumed mules,
He was taken like a child from a world I was beginning again
at four-twenty o'clock in Mexico.

