

# Bert Meyers

## Selected Poems



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Meyers was the son of Sephardic Jewish parents who emigrated from Spain to Brooklyn and then settled in Los Angeles. He grew up in East Hollywood and attended John Marshall High (where he was a gymnast) but left high school to become a master picture framer and gilder. Though he did not attend college, Meyers was admitted to the Claremont Graduate School based on the strength of his poetry and earned a PhD (or did he?). He taught at Pitzer College. His collected poems, *In a Dybbuk's Raincoat*, which he edited and arranged before he died, appeared in 2007 from the University of New Mexico Press.

*In a Dybbuk's Raincoat*. University of New Mexico Press, 2007.

# In Those Mountains

In those mountains, time filled  
one bush with castor beans,  
another with wild roses . . .  
Death was something distant  
that made a buzzard stir  
its whirlpool in the sky.

By a tree, I found the deer  
hunters lost—a flower  
of ants in the bullet hole  
and a root held its leap.

There sunlight came down  
a trail and green nature  
reddened at the tip.  
Yucca struck at the wind,  
turned dull and rusted  
in the fall. Lizards  
split the rocks, then ran;  
snakes passed and left their clothes.

Below, a little town,  
like a tumor, began to spread.

# The Cougar Has Been Shot

Something of the mountains,  
something that wrinkled,  
muscle of sunlight in the trees,  
crept like a slope at evening  
to a stream, washed its paws,  
sticky with sunset, death . . .

    something of the mountains:  
    the cougar has been shot.  
    Good! the weekend hunters say.

When night hunched anonymous,  
snarling in the leaves,  
who could divide those eyes  
from stars that trailed us  
branch to branch overhead?  
And once, I heard the gullies  
raging, underbrush grow furious,  
roots, rock, the air, rise up  
to join a giant mating . . .

    Brought to life by their guns,  
    the weekend hunters worry:  
    such mountain breaking, making passion,  
    in a living thing is dangerous.

# Picture Framing

My fingers graze in the fields of wood.

I sand pine, walnut, bass,  
and sweat to raise their grain.

Paints, powder and brush,  
are the seasons of my trade.

At the end of the day  
I drive home  
the proud cattle of my hands.

# Now It's Friday

I came for coffee  
to water my deep heart

Now it's Friday  
and my hands still hurt  
from Monday Tuesday

But a cup of coffee  
is a big brown eye  
that looks at anyone

Where is the door  
that opens like a hug

When you're always alone  
at night there are the stars  
The sky's a plate of salt

And you wait growing hard  
like a loaf of bread

# Gulls Have Come Again

Gulls have come again  
to consider another beautiful death of the sun.

People were flowers that grew by the shore;  
twilight takes them home,  
they fade together at their tables.

In the tall green shops the pulleys of birds  
lower the last light,  
the eyelid of a shadow shuts the hills,  
the sound of the ocean walks over the land.

Nobody wants to die.

# A Tree Stump at Noon

The light drips like oil  
from an old machine;  
a crow, big as a boot,  
flies over the roofs  
and begins to scream  
at the men who build.  
The huge root lies like a head  
on a vacant field.

# Cigarette

Often you light a fuse  
to prove you won't explode.  
All the smoke shows  
the power that dies in you.

You sigh as you tap  
your way to the end.  
The hand is the blind child  
called to the blackboard.

# Now I Sleep in the Afternoon

We gaze at the beautiful forms,  
at the dark hair of delicate dials—  
we want to hold and move the world.

Often as we extend our hands,  
nothing happens: loose wires hang  
from the plaster of our sleeves.

I have dreams in the afternoon  
of khaki-colored leaves, and men  
who fall, of cities like rain coming down.

# The Drive

Because their bed was calm  
and they'd never done  
what they read about,  
they drove to the hills,  
left the car, and climbed  
high over the shale  
and spread her dress in the dirt.

Soft ceramic quail,  
the natives there,  
stared from the chaparral  
while they groaned  
and hurt themselves.  
The heat made ants  
bubble out of the ground.

The hill was a flower  
that evening closed.  
They were naked  
and very small,  
and they put on their clothes.  
The car would give them back  
their power.

## In the Yard

The grasshopper goes for a ride,  
its little sprocket spins  
over the earth.

The lizard, five inches of stream,  
flows under a board.

The leaf runs from the cat.

A moth's a pharaoh in search  
of a tomb full of light,  
and a bumblebee explains  
to the morning-glories  
the joy of being a telephone.

Only the woman knows  
what the man's for.

## L.A.

The world's largest ash-tray,  
the latest in concrete,  
capital of the absurd;  
one huge studio  
where people drive  
from set to set and everyone's  
from a different planet.

For miles, the palm trees,  
exotic janitors,  
sweep out the sky at dusk.  
The gray air molds.  
Geraniums heat the alleys.  
Jasmine and gasoline  
undress the night.

This is the desert  
that lost its mind,  
the place that boredom built.  
Freeways, condominiums, malls,  
where cartons of trash and diamonds  
and ideologies  
are opened, used, dumped near the sea.

# O'Keeffe

One morning, Georgia O'Keeffe  
cobblestoned the infinite with clouds.  
She stared at space. It blushed.  
She smiled. Fire and sword,  
mountain range and stream—  
the vulva's green silk rippled—  
everything burned to its bone  
and a black cross grew  
from the radiant grave of forms.

# Some Definitions at Work

The hammer lowered its horns  
and the rusty nail shrieked  
pulled from the place where it lived

The table-saw whined  
like a virtuous bee  
that knows it will die  
in a meadow of dust

The sandpaper sighed  
as it killed itself  
caressing the sugar pine the ash

The housepainter's brush  
hermaphrodite  
with a long stem a vaginal voice  
and a spring in its bristle  
swayed satisfied with itself on the wall

Glue the woodworker's sperm  
began to boil in the pot

The rags their breath  
full of turpentine  
demanded their rights  
and threatened to burst like the sun

Then the woman  
who turned into a mop  
disheveled gray  
worn out by the floor

and the man  
who'd become a broom  
his broad shoulder  
lost in the dirt

noticed how even a motor  
bleeds when it breaks  
drops of oil stare from its skin  
like the eyes of frightened fish

# Homecoming

1

My father was a tender man  
whose blue eyes would overcast  
by noon. Every dusk  
he floated home  
in the soiled wind of his clothes.

I flew to the ceiling in his arms.  
The silverware sang  
as he came to the table  
and the bright room rolled  
like a train that climbs  
its ladder through the dark.

2

His hands are cobwebs full of flies,  
trembling in his lap.  
They've locked him up with strangers,  
because he drools too much;  
and I imagine freeing him.

We'd go to a town that isn't there,  
where everyone he cries for now  
(wrapped in the bed's thick bandage)  
would come to shake his hand.  
He laughs. He lifts a child and grows.  
He drinks and drinks the meadowlark,  
he smooths a stone's gray hair . . .

But he stinks, he's a huge bib;  
a loose scab, a rotten cornflake,  
clings to his lip.

3

There are mouths so cold  
the salmon-colored tongue  
leaps without a sound;  
lonely ditches where a broken dove  
mourns in the rubble of a face.

Men, at the mercy of their parts:  
grime in the skull, despair  
corroding the rainbows in their wires.

4

My home was a watercolor  
I left in the rain . . .

Tonight, the crickets ring and ring,  
nobody answers;  
the shadows of men are looking for blood.

Someone has stepped  
on the classical face of the moon.

Dawn comes, a gradual  
mountain range of ashes.

5

The mockingbirds, those joyful books  
that opened in the sky,  
then closed their pages on a branch,  
awake and go mad,  
chewing the bones of their old songs;  
and the flies, such tiny fenders,  
batter themselves in the air.

# In Saigon

*In our own image we created them*

In Saigon, teen-age men  
wear red bandanas  
and ten-gallon hats.  
Knives, lean mercenaries  
glare from their waists.

They spur old half-breed  
Hondas through the town.  
When a right hand roars  
on its handlebar,  
people shiver like jewels.

The boys carry cleavers  
and, whooping it up,  
swing them around their heads.  
One's an American chopper  
gliding close to the ground.

If he sees a woman  
wearing a bracelet,  
or a man with a wristwatch,  
he swoops, cuts off an arm,  
wipes the gore from his blade  
like grease from his chrome,  
then ambles on . . .

Their smiles are gun belts,  
their brains, nuclear clouds;  
and they speak a dialect  
that sounds like money,  
or the language left on the moon.

Around them, the landscape's  
a flag that fell from the sky;

red roads, bloody stripes;  
whitened by bones  
and stars that explode;  
blue, like genocide's queer smoke.

# The Poets

There he sat among them  
(his old friends) a walking ash  
that knows how to smile.  
And he still dreamed of a style  
so clear it could wash a face,  
or make a dry mouth sing.  
But they laughed, having found  
themselves more astonishing.

They would drive their minds  
prismatic, strange, each wrapped  
in his own ecstatic wires,  
over a cliff for language,  
while he remained to raise  
a few birds from a blank page.

To \_\_\_\_\_

We smile and sit down far apart;  
we, who once had a single heart.  
And you, married now, look at me  
as if looking were adultery—  
fearing this new love's only true  
if all that other love is through.  
Memory might dull the polished plans  
of matrimony's pots and pans.

But dear, what could one give, or be,  
except a piece of property,  
with such a love? Now, if instead,  
you can bring to your board and bed  
all of the love that's filled your life,  
couldn't you love me and be his wife?





























































































































































