

# Harold Witt

## Selected Poems



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February 6, 1923 [Orange, California] –

April 14, 1995 [Orinda, California]

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*Family in the Forest.* San Francisco: Porpoise Bookshop, 1956.

*Superman Unbound.* New Orleans: New Orleans Poetry Journal, 1956.

*The Death of Venus.* Francistown: Golden Quill Press, 1958.

*Beasts in Clothes.* New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961.

*Poems.* The Best Cellar Press, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1971.

*Pop. By 1940: 40,000.* Lincoln: Best Cellar Press, 1971.

*Now, Swim.* Ashland: The Ashland Poetry Press, 1974.

*Surprised by Others at Fort Cronkhite.* West Lafayette: Felix & Selma Stefanie, 1975.

*Winesburg by the Sea.* Austin: Thorp Springs Press, 1979.

*The Snow Prince Poems and Collages.* Blue Unicorn, 1982.

*The Light At Newport.* Las Cruces, NM: Daedalus Press, 1992.

*American Lit.* Ashland Poetry Press Ashland University, 1994.

# Superman Unbound

Shut in his room he had an airless answer,  
objected even to spring when hormones warred  
and obscene roses exposed on every bush.  
He knew as his heart unlearned the mountain effort  
and his mind shrank like a killed clam  
in his skull's shell, why the dinosaur died  
too large for his function. Instead of sap  
up to the brain's blossom, the silex bloomed.

Then he arose from his burning bedroom  
mating mid-air with the actual  
like a trite phoenix in a twisted metaphor,  
soaring where even rockets in the fabulous funny paper  
of our red and yellow time cannot ascend :  
beyond the starry bend of space  
where no phosphorous-numbered dial divides  
life into logic.

# In An Eighteenth Century Picture Gallery

A certain static yet ecstatic grace  
flows through silken hand and satin face  
of palest ladies who though stayed in bone  
wear such knowledge as they bear the sun under  
beribboned hats and parasols.  
They lean on parapets where no sun falls  
near urns without dimension like their lives,  
shimmering from shadow where the beetle hides  
useless as they, with similar silken hooves.  
In solemn umber what more Tragic Muse  
than Mrs. Siddons might have masqueraded  
when Pope played Homer and when Reynolds painted?  
And who among such symmetry as this  
could dare distort proportion with a question? -  
where Pinkie poises, more wish than girl,  
her spiccurl dimmed by a dreamworld  
of wicker sunlight in watery countryside  
and flickering wheels along the Roman road.  
How can these curled and perfumed people know  
that lurking behind their landscape with steel maw  
and aluminum wing and belly full of hate  
immense and various monsters crouch, and wait?

# Gospel For Brother Bernard

Moon-eyed Ophelia, neurotic of Elsinore,  
holding discourse only with Hamlet the introvert  
and platitudinous Polonius, might,  
if the thing the play was had been Heartbreak House,  
hearing your wit, have laughed at her despair,  
left for a co-op, learned how to cook,  
made speeches at meetings, and shingled her long hair,  
Bernard Shaw, nonagenarian, untragic  
elderly gentleman, half Puck, half prophet,  
up the steep asphalt slope of evolution  
bicycling cloudward, there to keep  
utopian appointment with Henri Bergson  
in some comfortless vortex, who have been  
among our tired words, the active verb.

# Metaphor For Christ's Birthday

Apropos, a misfit dragonfly  
late hatched, diaphanous freak  
from mossy festering sink  
under the torn pondlily,  
home of lewd toads, arose -'gauze-  
winged eccentric  
on December air almost  
flawed it was so cold.  
Trees turned sapphire, and birds  
froze, booming like stones.  
This one, however, daring hoar,  
adventured everywhere  
flimsily soaring  
through solid atmosphere  
until crucified on web  
like any fly  
and never heard the news  
of abnormality.

# Sunset Psychoanalyzed

We come to these hills to see the obvious city  
subtilized by sunset, made original by distance  
as a plain man may be a poet in his sleep -  
from the mainland of his life  
to the lower almost-islanded peninsula  
spin a spidery bridge.

The miracle progresses like analysis  
from the average to the unique ;  
where the daily blue bay curved into watery cove  
shorelines are winedark, and even as we watch  
red transfigures into rose.  
Meanings are not monstrous: into womanly hills  
a phallic zeppelin rides.

# Cinema Matinee

Sprockets turning in the projection booth  
wind and unwind a gray grotesquerie  
of the bad and the beautiful : the blameless wife,  
the lover's giveaway mouth, his chin  
called weak in every popular fiction.

Though the figures in the tapestry can move  
by optical illusion, the brain's trick  
stays static, flicks like the machine  
and men are merely calamitous or cute.

If Mrs. Donahue hurrying home to potroast,  
to the low blue flame under aluminum,  
opened a different door and found instead  
Apollo the grocery boy naked on her bed  
like an obvious meaning in a foreign release  
would she run redfaced indignant down the hall,  
clutching her corset and phoning the police -  
or would she see him lying there at all?

# Hymenoptera

Think drones swarming after the quaint queenbee;  
twisting tails up and with furry paws  
treading her terrible beauty ;  
after their fatal function, starved  
while workers pollinate flowers  
like hypnotized cottonpickers.

In her dark cave servants attend the unborn queen,  
the one chosen by chance to be fed differently  
from the like eggs. She rises to reign  
over the murdered carcass of the empress  
like an instinctive Borgia.

Though their business is sweet :  
humid syrup oozing from cells  
as from autumn barndoors amber hay,  
no sentiment prevents  
the precise success of this society.

# Ode In Late Winter

Clouds are breaking. Boys on bikes  
wheel toward treasure where the rainbow ends  
at the rifle range. Hearts like targets flap  
in this greening weather ; any stray stimulus  
might quiver them like quail. It is a time  
of vulnerability, the buttercup field wounded  
where hunters walked, who flung sensitive rabbits  
into quicklime.

Poets who suffer singly lie vis-a-vis  
like slim corpses in little magazines.  
The Decline of the West, a new sonata,  
will not be heard ne'lt Sunday. We'll lurch  
over illiterate hills among stitching  
music of streams sewn into small ravines  
where awkward scrub oaks look like trees  
in an old sampler.

Listen, you can hear at houses' corners  
and cornices the whirl of come back birds -  
winter-stilted branches nude as we were  
(though snug in warm bed beyond the blast) fur  
with buds, and sap runs like warm blood.  
Somewhere a meadowlark sings, drowned under  
lakes of sunset, turquoise and lavender.  
It is a time

of bay as if breathed onto, smeared, done  
without mirrors, nature's stage effects -  
gray tintyped hills and etchings of sun  
gave way to later periods, violent wrecks  
on rocks of color, heartburst of red in clouds.  
Boys come back for jt is storm again  
and birds ruffling to keep warm chirrup  
under the eaves

in this not yet spring, this still January -  
season like a corpuscular war of toxin  
and antitoxin under skin through looped !Ubes  
and vessels - veined earth's fever - and in ourselves  
the same, creatures who out of slime came  
to this contrast place, fire and ice,  
too near and not near enough the sun  
and will return.

# A Mathematician's Answer

Matter being divided into infinite atoms  
we've isolated one and worked our wonder -  
damn, in my youth I played with poetry~  
Keats was my favorite and my tongue gets twisted  
into alliterative nonsense sometimes  
when I'm not thinking as I wasn't then.  
You asked an explanation of the bomb,  
a moral question. Who is to blame? My job  
was purely mathematical but I'm  
a thinking man. You understand that honors  
mean nothing to me. I was brought up  
in a house of culture - fin de siecle,  
loaded with Victorian bricabrac.  
My mother squeezed herself to death with corsets,  
or rather, fashion killed her. But I digress.  
There is no formula for morals yet,  
and my department, though I'm a thinking man,  
does not specialize in implication.  
We have a problem set and by fixed laws  
come to our inevitable conclusion,  
in this case Hiroshima, in another -  
new worlds. The logic of murder is not  
one-sided, neither can the impulse be held  
responsible. The boy beating a dog,  
the cool-brained bomber pilot, who, with sure grasp,  
his marvelous hand evolved from the handleless ·slime,  
unclutching death, makes earth our laboratory,  
are different in kind as in degree.  
Human life you say? There's more of that  
in lad's loins, joined in mindless ecstasy  
with the corresponding pelvic angle.  
My wife who goes in for orientai art  
sentimentalizes what she calls  
this catastrophe, but the serious tears  
of many humanitarians won't change  
nature, not that I say the Japanese

or for that matter any race, is more  
barbaric (one of my finest co-workers  
was named Yamamoto). The sensitive lines  
of Hokusai's series representing Fuji  
as unifying principle are proof enough.  
You've seen them, have you? Rainy fields of rice,  
a few swift strokes that speak symmetry to the ages,  
simple, eggshell delicate, yet soundly  
traditional as teacups. But I digress.  
Philosophically speaking, to blame anyone  
is to blame all. The nuclear physicist,  
the men who poured concrete for the cyclotron's floor  
by this conception share equally. But say  
it was the atom for being extant, the first  
amoeba that dared divide, the primate  
who, during the dawn of intellect, picked up  
a stone and threw it. The sperm that was Einstein,  
wasn't it one of innumerable polywogs  
up an endless river, out of which wetness  
came Mrs. O'Flaherty who didn't dust this desk?  
Conscience, a charwoman who'd rather leave  
the immediate mess half-done than be late for mass,  
has turned the corner of this time to find  
the stones that were absolute made relative.  
Take cancer, a disease once limited to aristocrats,  
now sprouting death in anybody's guts,  
and even democrats can have these days  
those fine intangible mental sicknesses  
like a nest of white slug's eggs in the brain.  
So war, the former game of knights in armor,  
now the unborn child's business. Well,  
who made it so? Myself, once follower of Euclidian  
geometry, which by the fourth dimension concept  
suffered atomic changes, can't conceal  
some anxiety - to see circles so uncircular,  
parallel lines meeting, material more mental  
it would seem than any Aristotle dreamed,  
and no katharsis for this tragedy -

Damn, the sound destroys the sense again ;  
perhaps I talk in circles, and my wife's  
influence shows. I don't know. There may be  
no answer, only generations of ridiculous genes  
making a slow curve backward to the earth.  
Then, after the lights go out, along some shore  
on Venus, another moist amoeba will divide,  
the impractical joke man repeat his slow telling.  
It's safer among figures, though they lie ;  
and after nightly bromide I sleep well.  
But I have bad dreams.

# Aunt

Terribly, time is an aunt whose liver leaks,  
arthritic also, wrinkling in a chair.  
Against the insisted queer crochet  
she sits and does not speak, her dyed black hair  
curled tight against her scalp unspeakably white.

But tries at times, her mangled words are only  
small talk of television and the sun  
“It cracks the varnish so, slanting that way - “

Though June, the Christmas candy, the cut glass cologne  
stale and still stoppered stand on the table there ;  
packs of flyspecked cards called “ Bicycle “  
and Peter’s rack of pipes, also displayed.

And painted plates - bluebirds pecking apricots -  
cups and curled dishes behind the bulging glass.  
This was a life, this and the owned lots,  
the stocks, the bank account, the permanent pass -  
“ Air conditioning chills me so we never go.”

Remote red cliffs are hers, the very polkadots  
on Mexicans’ bandanas who wipe sweat and swear  
between her round well-kept rows of orange trees.  
“When Papa was alive - “ The freckled claw  
tugs at the cameo ; a girl carved  
in pale chalcedony smiles, as if at her. Tapestry  
She moved in crosstitch shadows under trees,  
a lively princess trapped in tapestry ;  
each day, like an arras, seemed the same -  
against an embroidered castle of ennui  
the threadlike king, the queen in jewelry  
played croquet but mallets never moved.

To her it seemed that nothing ever moved,  
no wind whizzed apples from the woven trees,

apples that glowed like garnet jewelry  
set in silver leaves, a hopeless tapestry  
where butterflies spread forever like ennui  
above thread roses always silken and the same.

And the same far, hardly figure on the same  
foreshortened horse though no hooves moved  
apparently approached, and might have changed ennui -  
a pulsing prince beneath the threadbare trees .  
to save the gay girl from boring tapestry.  
Instead, the man and horse remained a distant jewelry,

the high-wigged queen amber and blue with jewelry,  
the fading king, inclining slightly, played the same  
dim game along a grass of tapestry.  
In that stopped opera only the princess moved,  
her slow skirt tolling under trees,  
moved and moved back, weary with ennui.

Perh~ps she was meant to be a figure of ennui  
although she raged beneath her quiet jewelry,  
an ornament in shadows as the trees  
decorated slenderly what would not have been the same  
boredom of wall without them. If one twig moved  
turrets might have toppled in that tapestry,

where butterflies suspend depending in a tapestry  
not only on red roses repeated like ennui.  
Or, if shrieking from shadows, the pinned-down princess moved  
incongruous into sun that blazed her haze of jewelry,  
hooves might rise and drop, nothing stay the same,  
apples of gravity plop from sappy trees.

But deciduous trees can't happen in II tncpNlry :  
it would not be the same dim pattern of ennui  
if a princess in dull jewelry more than slightly moved.

## Dans L'atelier Du Peintre

The chimney pots, lamposts, gold VINS on green  
courtyards of cats and cages, the blue street,  
this gothic grillwork tritest ivy twines  
further framed by views and then by sky -  
did you expect my Paris window to reflect  
the artist's woman and anemones?  
No, your friend in the States was mistaken, quite,  
to send you here thinking I don't know what -  
pink cathedrals perhaps, turnips of Sacre Coeur  
from Utrillo's corner with Boulangerie.  
You may have misunderstood, his words been blurred  
by nightclub noise or seawaves while you gilded.  
Who now would try a tower however leaved,  
stipple La Grande Jatte again in blues and greens?  
It has all been done before, Tahiti, too,  
possibilities of yellow exhausted by Van Gogh -  
guitars, armchairs, Greeks and Gertrude Stein,  
amorous birds drawn twice to mean they move,  
Picasso performed them-champagne is all I have,  
which I was saving for some dim departure ;  
however, if you don't mind it warm - the way  
smiling at that tumbler in a light like this  
you look almost madonna I might be moved  
to noon interiors with accurate flies,  
reweave the goldwork of your stole in oil.  
Vermeer or Van Eyck - that green again - Jan  
Arnolfini and His Wife, you may have seen it -  
marvelous, marvelous. Why should I try for fact  
when those old masters mentioned with a brush  
more than cameras can, even more than eyes.  
No, it's too late for magis, much too late  
for realistic red down blue Sebastian's side.  
Any good artist must now be more abstract  
than every predecessor - otherwise -  
but you're far too beautiful and the day too bright  
for boring tirades on the state of art.

You came to buy a picture. I fear my blobs  
and blurs aren't quite the bedroom piece you're  
looking for - still lives and chrysanthemums -  
I haven't done them since my student days,  
nude after nude in the style of Manet.  
Picasso taught us how to paint a girl  
two times at once remembered after absinthes.  
This is my woman on the Eiffel Tower  
entirely unrecognizable except an eyebrow -  
no tower, no woman, as if a camera clicked  
held by someone with St. Vitus' dance,  
a blur of her and girder spiderwebs,  
some sky, a Seine too misty to be seen,  
a sign about postcards in four different languages ;  
but what is most important is the fonn,  
everything angular converging to a point.  
However, one can't eat the critics. I still paint  
saccharine portraits of society ladies,  
those also abstract, my formal brush performing  
plastic surgery on their warts and wattles.  
Pardon, j'ai oublie, vous etes riche aussi.  
And really want my Cautious Cat in Space Time?  
Soundlessness is what I tried for, a hush like fur,  
a canvas quiet as a whisker twitch, plush paws  
on velvet grass (emerald as Van Eyck),  
the worm-tugging bird about to be  
pitilessly pounced on and a sense of God  
or death or end of loveliness and grace  
waiting, time told by buzzing twigs  
that green then redden then are witches' sticks,  
the four at once - but I see you like it  
only because the cat is orange, the bird a bird ...  
I often think how green Wisconsin was  
twenty seven summers ago, Amolfini green  
I call it because that fifteenth century silk  
endures like lawns and elms those old slow Sundays,  
occasional hatted Catholics coming home  
from church - along a sidewalk toward infinity -

and no one saw blue roofs as red as I did  
or light as almost yellow but not quite.  
It's why I say here. New York would do as well  
or California or the Antipodes,  
anywhere away from boyhood where boyhood's colors  
can blaze more truly than they ever blazed  
being among them. Sometime I'll paint that tree  
we played St. Peter at the Pearly Gates in -  
a made-up game - and do Van Eyck one better  
than his green. I think the pears must be magenta,  
the hazy house where someone's mother irons  
far as a frigate on a sea of hills,  
the whole picture obscured but not entirely  
by a huge butterfly's Chartres window wings -  
the way best moments are obscured by other things.  
Come, now you've chosen, if you've chosen -  
this one, too? - well, you have good taste  
even if your reasons may not be right -  
though art is priceless, shall we discuss the price?

# Veil Of Perfume

His black dog asleep by the emery wheel,  
my ninety-year-old grandfather sits  
sectioning an orange, juice trickling  
into his stubborn goatee as he eats,

saying "Schmeckt's gut," his straw-hatted  
sons at lunch ( like a Bruegel) before  
the broad red door slid back that reveals  
chicken feed spilled on a dirt floor.

Out of the barn's blue depths a Leghorn  
crosses the dazzling gravel, idiotically,  
red comb awobble pecking at rocks;  
the sons doze under the umbrella tree.

My grandfather gets off the old Buick's fender;-  
The dog shakes himself licking my grandfather's  
affectionately freckled hand. They go to look--walking  
the elliptic ditches of the orchard ---

at God's work, specking the leaves here with aphids,  
stripping this branch bare, and there  
hanging a whole tree with a veil of perfume  
and bees and oranges, in the certain air .

# Briefly Of Love

Briefly of love, the marble goddess' thigh  
amazes us by such fluidity; the way  
her falling chi ton carved to a curve  
falls no farther, O maddening statuary,  
stops at the hip like iron drapery.

The marvelous eyes seem staring but are stone  
at dead Adonis turned to an anemone  
blood red then gone into the windy noon;  
for which she became this ideal \_lady  
of rocky breast, no arms, stone belly,

her swans still gliding in a game of grace  
on mirror ponds and the grass as dove's down  
in Groves of the Academy where Socrates  
and homosexuals wear her myrtle crown.

# Drug Store Opening

Insight arced me like the x of lights  
on the night of a drug store opening--then  
moths, insane, veined and white,  
ruby-eyed rattled on x:-ray wings--

the delicate, the weird bent of me was streaming  
like Dore's falling angels out of grace  
down clouds through that electric beaming  
attracting crowds to the cross of commerce;

orchids at the glass door of that hell of glass,  
unguents and gloss to cure despair---  
no turning sword Eve could not pass  
to tint innocent once more her hair,

and the lying labels seemed to be trying  
with tigers and riboflavin promises  
to smile while my moths were dying,  
sizzled outside hope's premises.

I wished the bright crisscross would stop,  
the dazzling druggist count up his coin for  
it was over, that successful shop  
had sold me death's dark magazine .

# The Death Of Venus, And Others

He on his terraces of terror, his patios;  
surrounded by calendulae in pots and chorus  
girls in tights, pretends, lifting among  
the ruined r~dios, red wine, and reciting  
an ode of Horace, he is having a good time,  
the television king, cultured of course.

His wife in seals waits like a necessary evil,  
a cold draft under his brocaded doors  
and when she speaks speaks in Brooklynese.

They are like lookers at The Dying Faun  
except, old Italys ago, with wild goat's feet  
he might not have lived to die so long  
though such nymphs danced round his defeat:  
art gushing from its marble breast and eyes  
stone blood, stone tears; the end of Rome.

Suddenly she shrieks---imaginary Niobe-it  
queerly seemed ( a quirk of the issueless)  
something she said made them· statuesque;  
she gazes at their mass morbidity,  
at him whom she might still have lively loved.  
He too is stone; the giggling daughters only  
remain but are rapidly departing  
into an unfortunate rigidity---  
at Cyprus, Venus sighs among her dying swans .

# Brown Towhee

Hope was a brown towhee that lit and looked at me,  
warily flicking wings, a bundle of feathered breath  
flown down from twigged simplicities;  
flitted, nervous of cats, a small truth  
at grey porch edge in platitudinous rain  
dripping undiamonded from waning vine and hedge;  
he viewed with. timid eyes the human thing,  
life brief as his beak, older than bird adage.  
I was about to think Wordsworthian words  
but the moment, anthropomorphic; minimized.  
Turning with feet like spiders on porch boards  
he tipped his tawny head, as if surprised,  
and ruffling, defecated, then quickly went  
back to survival's nest, chirping like sentiment .

# One More Time

Farewell, philosophical affair, life's  
meaning eked from a whiskey stare--the  
apartment of sterility and strife---  
“And Nietzsche?” ---co~bing your complex hair--”  
What would he think if I were wife?”

And always, Aristotle there, turning  
the oblong light into a treatise,  
tying one testicle for the sake of learning,  
no kiss but suggested Greece,  
a love allusive, a learned burning,

the major premise of despair---  
“If I had been beautiful, a real beauty--Helen  
or a movie star---”  
Yes, all would have gone differently,  
no fatal scholar stooping on the stair

have stopped you, but some stupid fellow  
shouldered like Hercules, or a fat  
millionaire drooling on your pillow,  
rubied as Solomon. Instead of that  
a man who marks aging yellow

pages with a great lover's care,  
at love's syntaxes bungles like a boy.  
“Shall we have more whiskey or a beer?”  
It will not bring back adolescent joy,  
it cannot paint our figures in the air,

ruddy as Rubens peasants, ready  
as Decameron men and women for sweet  
pornography. Satyr in the shady •  
glades of Arcady, stroking the teat  
of a caught nymph---! grow unsteady-

Perhaps then it is not goodbye.  
One more time. It can go \_  
on and on this way like history  
but turn the light off-so this  
is more medieval than it is Greek.

# The Lover

Twenty years later he is seen to sympathize  
with spinsters and all the sparsely loved,  
to rainwet kittens, of milk the hot purveyor,  
and dreams inrtocently of descending doves  
nesting in his armpits, roosting on neck and crotch,  
the Prince Mishkin, the Christ of cruel modernity.

Goes, after work, out of his weary way  
with well meant marigolds for the tumored woman;  
children with slingshots stone him nevertheless.  
It is too late for kindness, the autopsy will show  
like Whitman's, big as an egg, sonie cancerous gland  
that hurt him into gentleness. It is too late

for saints after such explanations. (We understand  
you, pear-smearred Augustine, insane St. Francis,  
lesbian Joan). The arrangement of these atoms  
is green mirage over tarantula traps. And yet,  
0 before we are unsocketed and charred,  
forgive his love, however he deceived.

# Memoirs

## I

Remembered awkwardly at first, an early island  
( in later dreams telescoped toward shore,  
kelp-swinging waves in which I gasping swam)  
approached on a gum manufacturer's white boat--arri  
ved at, an island only, with fringed palms,  
chimes I couldn't climb to, and as at home,  
sobbed until sleep montaged releasing dreams.  
In spite of next day's popcorn, doll's parasol,  
never again the boy before that time;  
not swearing parrots, orange and bright green  
or palepink topknot spreading cockatoos  
at the zoo they took me to untragicked me.  
I had been islanded, and the unclimbed-to chimes  
remotely rang over the toothed, \_the shark-dark sea .

## II

Sea swung a rhythm I hardly listened to;  
Catalina on the horiwn on clear days  
was blue, the water, bottle-glassy; crabs bubbled  
among ocean-broken shells in damp sand.  
Later waves, as they had before, uncurled  
snowflake lace alongshore; but at night I heard  
a thing like a chained monster bellowing,  
gulls crying beyond the decaying door.  
Now the manypainted porch, the splintered chair,  
Aunt Olive's wallpaper and my grandfather  
are gone as if dissolved in that salt air.  
Sliverless feet walk quiet along concrete,  
the new house looks solid in uncertain weather,  
yet every summer several swimmers drown

### III

Still mid-May the Cecil Brunners bloom\_  
reminding me of childhood without charm  
in a fenced backyard young years ago, and gloom  
like a tent of guano sacks aspread the warm  
blue irrevocable day, a grass blaze time  
of sprinklers ticking, testides descentshuts  
out the linnet song and sun,  
the street a heat above which walnuts bend.  
Coiled in the blood, the sleeping cobra, sex,  
fluted-to arouses, the garden's innocence  
is ominous with apples and the sense  
of heavy presences alighting on the rocks  
around the fish pond and on stepping stones--aged  
angels smiting the new blooms .

### IV

Striped cat returns me to a temps perdu,  
a waterlily time; his tail atwitch,  
a gold-eyed cat entranced by dragonflyblue  
twig with wings· that might be god or witch  
( as I was sometimes Crusoe cast away)  
above a pool in whose blue mirrored sky  
among the marble clouds of summer day  
goldfish swam in slow tranquility.  
I learned the pool teemed invisibly,  
monsters inhabited the hair-soft moss,  
worlds within worlds, more than a milky way  
of microbes warring in that pleasant place--but  
hurting insights later. Then it seemed  
the perfect pond toward which Narcissus lqned .

### V

Backflipping in like a circus team,  
my brother does not bother with amenities;

wearing his muscles and a bulging jockstrap,  
he belches like a bottle while I butterfly  
in the Mozartian gardens of the mind  
and statue him among the phlox and stocks,  
a marble admirable discobolus.

As art he cannot hurt but only poise  
forever frozen like a photographan  
egregious god of bodily grace,  
a symmetry of sinew, but whose face,  
blank as a snowbank or an executioner's,  
stares neither cruel nor kind, indifferent  
to when cannas bled, where swallows went .

## VI

I learned the bookless lesson, loneliness,  
from frosty formats, a text of ice,  
and therefore lack a later tenderness--slow  
sentences of family with nice  
aunts in whose immaculate embrace  
also cold cousins were quietly conceived;  
strangely strangled by that gracious lace  
of lies and intricate formalities,  
stifled in tombs of rooms were radios  
droned boredom to the clocks and flowers of wax;  
my mother's sweatless father, ancient author  
of that precisest prose kept killing flies  
buzzing obscenely on the Bible's cover---  
his house a tome that never mentioned sex.

## VII

I try to testify it was not ornate  
but the love seat no one loved on at m.y grandfather's  
prints like a William Morris book mahogany curlicues  
on the present's page---or simply state  
I was never out in those medieval weathers,

skating home with Poe's appropriate news  
of bugs and killed cats and hearts that would not stop--to  
say though the ceiling reddened there was no drop  
small as a bead of blood I watched while it spread,  
no rat,lively with maggots,in the triangular  
attic of webs and memories like a mind,  
only a house around which pink and red  
round leaved gerani urns grew and when clouds cleared,  
deeper blue on blue, the hills, the endless wind.

## VIII

Now for a small forever we are framed  
• twenty one years ago, mother and sons  
under grey apricots and leaves of grey,  
the tortoise poisoning at the cantaloupe  
at feet beyond some blurred calendulae  
and Mom is mentioning, mouth open, what?  
We are not ready yet for immortality? .  
or telling Dad to stop· the sprinkler? Click  
reckless photographer we are preserved,  
wings of waterdrops, turtle, just as we were,  
gophers below our grass, inadvertent birds  
dipping above the leaves of this naivete.  
Aslant, Dad's shadow, like a crucifix,  
darkens a corner of our glossy day.

## IX

My father, five feet six, was kind as Christ,  
children and kittens slept in his thick lap,  
a gentle elder, eyes. as blue as frost,  
if I have maligned it is my own relapse  
co present bitterness from the better past,  
a wrong perspective on his humanness.  
He is the kind of man the seas outlast  
but stays like pelicans in remembered skies.

Along the beaches of my late despair  
I did not wait, a tall Telemachus,  
hear her incessant weaving in my ear.  
He burned no Troys. Hamlet or Oedipus,  
I only briefly wished his classic death,  
learned sadists later few such fathers breathe.

## X

When tortoises turned, Junes ago this grass,  
across a yard, mowing with pink tongues,  
inexorable across flagstones over less  
likely, pink instinctive angleworms,  
when, in their queer armor, ringed like redwoods,  
they turned and passed me, chopping their blunt feet  
into the green blaze, swaying their snakelike heads,  
mouths leaking apricot, I was too young as yet  
to more than merely think: pet tortoises  
as if, viewing tiger, I had thought pet cat.  
Often, mangling dandelions, such small dinosaurs  
hissing their heads in like a frightful thought  
still move across a garden of regret,  
fossils like furthermores that I can't forget .

## XI

What was wrong with the depressing doilies  
on the bloated couch, color of toad's throat,  
or that there should be a mirror whispering  
pimples of puberty like Narcissus' pool?  
Windows, suddenly sensuous, replied  
with velvet apricots on a hurting sky;  
Keats said, "Beauty that must die--"  
and then the house was ugly as an ulcer.  
The waterfall's picture would never spray me,  
alas, lovesick, with mother-of-pearl mist.  
Dull as history, relatives arrived

and sat like albums of the seldom kissed.  
Nevertheless I sensed a tragedy---  
. heard groan the ironic ghost ·of Oedipus.

## XII

When I was short those winters of surmise,  
a chided child whom no mirrors loved,  
of hairless hands and half grown ecstasies,  
I thought of women but all theorems.proved  
my a wk ward angles a geometry  
adjusted to square moms in which to cry  
on square chairs where clocks ticked to the eye  
dripping small tears a large eternity.  
Then leaflight tented that euclidian lie,  
my atoms shifted out of parallels  
and streets escaped from strict infinity.  
Tall, I walked to the sound of oval bells,  
my orbit bonging to a different time  
of Einstein sky, birds my singing axiom .

# Yes, It Was The Era Of New Erewhon

Several saviors later, improving pumpkins,  
orange and plump, pleased our botanists--approving  
scientists disguised as aunts exclaimed,  
meanwhile administering a clinic kiss:  
“One would never know he was once maimed,  
that stainless hand had ever been plain bone.”

There were saving substitutes for everything,  
those fashionable fake fabrics often better,  
unnoticeably rained-on, as pressed if slept in,  
new breeds replacing the red and simple setter,  
machines to mimic the secrets of the sun,  
almost emotion almost spun from water.

Soon, that poets' plaything, the romantic moon,  
its silver deserts and Sable ranges named,  
would be an airbase in infinity  
and otherworlds revealed, as Lucretius claimed,  
a plethora of men, and sparse divinity,  
hazards more drastic than our experts dreamed.

Yes, it was the era of New Erewhon,  
of Brave New World, nearly nineteen-eighty-four--we  
sat air-cooled at bluish television,  
pretending laughter though clowns only bored  
and censored drama lacked a certain vision.  
We whored and warred and hated as before .





































































































































