

Curtis Zahn

Selected Poems



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Zahn published only one volume of poetry, *One Extraordinary A.M.*, in 1964. *The Plight of the Lesser Sawyer's Cricket: Plays, Prose, and Poems* appeared in 1987. Zahn himself worked mostly as a newspaper editor and writer, as well as a seaman, poetry reading organizer for Pacifica Radio in Los Angeles. He was a conscientious objector in World War II.

The Plight of the Lesser Sawyer's Cricket. Santa Barbara Press: Capra Press, 1987.

Tijuana

In all that thin, squalid, exploited valley
there exists no security, only the stoic
freedom of the economically damned, and
everywhere hangs listlessly the olive-eyed
color of greasewood's smoke. Here, crab-grass
rebounds under the lifted hooves of melancholy
cattle, but it's crew-cut, it's sparse, dry
and creamed with dust. And manzanita thinks
adolescent thoughts about willow, knowing, too
the peculiarized smell of corrugated tin
roofs that defend from rare rain, the radios
which talk all day long of things
nobody will be able to buy.

Here they grow soft, small, men with musical hearts
and wives gone fat with poverty's diet, and absurd
dogs that caricature a civilization
ground thin between two restless nations, and
slowly pulverized by shock of opposed ideologies.
A wire fence makes it Mexico, but God
has never been asked. And the vegetation
does not change its citizenship overnight, nor do
the Animals, and even the river
in its winter plumage, traffics casually
across the International Line, bringing home
the raw sewage deposited there when
Good Neighbors built the fence
and created an incident, and
caused a City, a roadside beggar whose hat had
better stay away from his head.

But no, the birds need no passports
and coyotes can cross and re-cross; the
tourists too. Only the residents are immobilized;
frozen to the north by
the sprawling verbiage of passport wordage
and turned back south and east by centuries
of sterile desert, and held to the western

beaches by the Pacific's relentless combers.
Tijuana? One can get into but not out of it
and into it from the whole world
have come seekers, drifters, escapes;
wanted men and unwanted women, come here
for the final stalemate. Their shoes—
their city shoes frozen by dust, and
stomachs bleached by begged Tacos shot with horsemeat.
Here to dry up while drinking and stealing
and waiting. Converting their German, French,
English, Chinese into the oiled, grey
pidgin Spanish of bordertown; to wait
beside the flagrant streets for new faces
come to be horrified by sin, and to
grovel in the spectacle
of abortion and absorption. And to hear
lame, warped, U.S. made guitars, chord-wreaked
by Indians too poor to fatten
their dogs for the eating.

Later Than There Is No Never No

Later,
When you no longer wanted it;
Later, they said, save it
For later.
Soon,
But it could never be too soon.
Nor too early, only
Too late.

Too,
They said,
Too easy is too early for two; later
Will be soon enough.
Later
Is for non-profit ideas but now
Is for now,
Now is for things you
Need to need. Later is non-realistic
Now; later
Is for later, they said.

Homage to a Girl Named Cupcake

First remembered as the imagined mistress
They dreamed that you stayed awake nights
To earn your livelihood by sleeping.

And you were born too late to be
Absolutely apropos, Baby,
Squeezed from the cooling Twenties
Until they could no longer lie about your age;
Leftover from something out of F. Scott Fitzgerald
Long after the last copy
Was called back.

Yet, I never saw your name among the uninvited then.
The face is gone; your crazy dialogue is something come to us
Just off the boat, wildly wet, and orchestrated
With laughs, screams, squeals too soprano for contemporary sex.
Now, only your classified smile holds solvent
Among the debits; and that, even,
Stripped of its built-in hysteria,
No longer's piped indiscriminately to collective mankind.

Who, how, retains the embarrassed hearts
Of the long, unlicensed line to the right?
The weary eyes that came to rest upon your hot slopes
Are merely migratory game,
Quacking flatly
In functional drawing-rooms
Over the state of the union;
And the promise once fraudulently drawn down
Deep inside your ermine—
The squish of your voice that made every wife old and tough
With protective invention—
Are the sounds of some cupie-doll, come unwound.

The wives? They're small and older now,
Saved by the belle
Finally tolled. It was they who hazarded

That your popularized bosoms
Were mere pincushions
For the underprivileged—
Dismissed as an architectural exaggeration
Or disallowed
As objects for the fumbling-of; promising
That any man willing to be unsprung against you
Was undeserving of rebuke.

You were nobody but Cupcake,
The woman with a thousand moving parts,
High heels, poodles, roadsters and a phone number.
And while our anxiety greyed into apathy
Some other world moved past your shaded afternoons
With a honk and a wave.

Success Story from an Economic Engineer

I took my ABC
1 2 3 for advanced aberrendophilia
At M.L.T.
Specializing in
Compressed Expanders, with 4-way pulsifiers
(Dynaformed on the logical principle
That torque was tantamount) and
As for belt-driven universals in cancelling phases
Everything already had gone over to
Rotogenetics; now
Employing the theory of cellular disintegration
I was ready
For a theoretical centrifigation
Of opposed exemplifiers—
Whereas
Old B.F. had never taken his M.S. and
Though a good man
Around instantaneous decibles
He'd never really gone beyond
Shock-insulated spacifiers, being willing
To coast among the Suspension People
With their low-hung sibernetics
And latent octograms, thus
When they asked me, had I had
Exploded harmonics with refurberating exemplification
I was able to say Yes
And moved up
From there
Into hypothetical X-23's with perpetuating
Detonations; I was ready, at last
For eradication.

