THE IKON-MEASURED WALK
- original poems

by

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B. A., The University of British Columbia, 1948

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
in the Department
of
ENGLISH

We accept this thesis as conforming to the
required standard:

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
MARCH, 1966
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The University of British Columbia
Vancouver 8, Canada

Date April 15, 1966
Abstract

That poetry is the fictive music of the imagination and that the imagination is the supreme expression of the human intelligence conferring order on personal chaos, and elegance on social squalor is the thesis of these poems. And that the imagination stands superbly poised, rooted in the paradoxes of the human condition, the sense of mortality co-existent with a consciousness of immortality, the palpable presence of the past constant in and delineating the present, it further seeks to articulate.

The poems then seek to celebrate certain occasions and states of being, moments of pure vision which supply the "Notes toward a supreme fiction" whereby the momentary is transformed, enclosed within that artifice of eternity, the poem.

One artifice of the poem, if not of eternity, is rhetoric. That rhetoric can be a precise instrument of feeling is a conviction of the poet. The poetry is the swift language of the individual intuition; the rhetoric the slower language of the intellect which bears the weight of continuity and tradition.

One moves in these poems from an early style deliberately rich, dense, and evocative to a clearer more austere delineation. Ironic self-awareness, a growing precision and clarity of line and vision replace the former nostalgia for the enchanted trance. The line, however, continues lyrical. Irony is the instrument of intelligence in the service of eloguence, each in love with language.
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JUST TO ---

Just to be allowed
to think a little
Sleep a little
Walk
Not bothered and bossed
Into
Constant lyricism,
Image-crossed
Language tost.

There is something
to be said
For freedom from metaphor
Diction should
leave you alone
Once in a while.

To sun on a rock
a sleeping lizard
blood nicely cool
away from it all

Released from syntax
wordlessly sinful
quietly being,
not seeing symbol.
METAMORPHOSES (A Russian Fairy Tale)

In the forests of Russia
that interior Russia
whose geography stretches
and touches my throat,

In this interior Russia
a lizard sits dreaming,
enchanted by zero
diverted by sloth,
in the deep of the forests
of Russia,
where bears dance
in the snow,
where in the silence
of sunshine,
the rocks bloom
with lizards
asleep in the winter's
spare warmth.

Should you stand
in that silence
and look at that lizard
you will see
on her head a small crown
and the skin of the lizard
will glitter
until the eye transfigures
the copper-green woman
upon a green throne.

But Russia, my Russia of quiet
my Russia of calm cold,
the barbarians have come
for breakfast,
the green throne and the golden woman
have gone and in the forest
the noise of the comfortable rabble
competes with the gabbling of gnomes.
TREE SONG: For Dmitri

Lullabye my little minnow,
In our garden is a willow;
Long ago a lady cried
For a handkerchief and sighed
A song her mother's maid
Sadly sang and sadly died
Maid and lady sang and died.

Lullabye my little minnow
In our garden is a laurel;
Long ago a maiden quarrelled
With a god's divine attention
Into foliage she fled
And her lovely body fed
The green growth of victory.

In the garden you will find
Rosemary and fragrant thyme;
Rosemary's for fond remembering
Once a lady overfond
Witless wandered to a pond.
Lullabye my little minnow
Myth can be a bitter pillow.

Lullabye my little minnow
Just beyond the wordless willow
There's an apple to be had.
Pleasant fruit and pleasing tree
But again the story's sad,
God was simply not inclined
To share fruit of every kind.

Lullabye my little minnow,
What's the riddle you will winnow;
When the magic berry's grown
And in the garden is a rowan?
Bite that fruit and in an eye
Round as childhood you may see
Irish Queens dance soundlessly.
WINTER'S TALE

Beside her bed but out of sight
She kept the fairy stories
    of her native land.
Some day she thought
Some day in Autumn
    When the weather
Is quite right
Ripe but not hot
I'll go.

For in her heart
She wanted to be Queen
Although she kept
    the purpose dark
And to that end
She plotted fierce assassinations
    in her mind,
Murdered common places
One at a foul time.

Occasionally she went to gaol.
Here she read the stories over
Found that in tale after tale
The queens were old or cruel
The princesses honey young
With gems in their eyes
And jewels like plums of pleasure
    on their tongues.

Steadfast she remained
Her desire reaffirmed.
She wanted to be Queen
Albeit she recognized
    The apple in the worm.
Whether cold, or old or mean,
She wanted to be Queen.
Queens were forever
Princesses were not real.
This you see
Was all the shelter
she could seize;
Knowing princesses, no matter
how they please
Princesses, are not forever
Only Queens are real.
LETTER TO BIANCA

Do you remember, Bianca, when we were young, how various wimpled women came, sat on our beds and played counterpoint with the counterpane? Their tongues, their tenderly disarming tongues were witless with wonders yet to come. Most distinctly, I remember how elusive was the hum of hymns murmured but never sung.

Yesterday, Bianca, as it snowed I watched the frost of quiet grow deep in the gulleys and the ruts thinking, how much remains of those muted mutterings whose flakes precariously as snow in a country of long rains heaped certain devious drifts of mind which jar your disposition and mar mine?

What was the cadence of the speech that fell penultimate like a becalming snow the winter's seed of peace slowly, solemnly in the street a nuisance to motorists and the police? What thimbled witchcraft weathered in those coifs?

Bianca, do you remember if they said how, when we crossed our palms with theirs we'd grow marvellous in beauty as the snow's implacable crystal fold; how sorcery would drive our eyes beyond the blanched gardens of the moon into its unfathomable other side?
More, how enchanted there we would not grow cold
but hold at our right divining hand
terrible tenant white with pride
wimpled in light, sheathed in ice,
our fierce icon would light the sky
and starkly sing.

Yesterday, Bianca, when it snowed
 certain hooded birds appeared about the door.
I stooped to feed them
hearing in the bleak cheep
cowled in their throats
an avian hum, that hymn of language
that we in those white yesterdays
once murmured and which now
in this bloom of snow
we sing.
A CHOICE OF TEMPERAMENT

I often speculate on countries where they sleep
Behind green shutters on cool dappled beds
Lullabyed between the sheets
By the gratuitous dronings of the sea
And the gabble of cobbles in the street,

Where even my constant adversary
The harsh centurion sun,
Blazing with Roman purpose in the sky
Becomes a drowsy poppy, soporifically benign,
While I am for a moment tenderly resigned.

It's then the horns of puritan purpose blow,
But what they do not know,
My dear Oblomov, is that you and I
Are cousins and we love to lie
Continuously on sofas,

Making the cracked plaster walls grow wide
As a chasm-startled sky,
Those unfortunate marriages we made
Each with our pale puritan shade
Contributed little to this disease
And only robbed us of our splendid ease.

Neither the cold agitators of that other north
Who never understood our mouths
But urged a constant going forth
Nor the dedicated sensualists of the south
Praying for pleasure on the palazzo floor,

Brought up in mist and mountain snow
Implacable with the passion to define
We lie upon our sofas
Occasionally we sigh
For the clarity of the Mediterranean mind.
In vain as long as we can talk
We live in fortresses of sloth
And make occasion for our Ikon-measured walks,
Princely with words and pleased
While attendant trees

Spread canopies of thought to tease
Our murky skulls to further speech
Oh sofa-saturated cousin mine
What impervious virtue we make of killing time!

Yet dear Kin I love you more
Than any bright-eyed glad seignor
For both of us can look past Rome
Somnolently Byzantine
Bedded and bold
As mimosa blooming in the northern cold.
THE ELEMENT OF WATER IS

1

Blatant and bountiful the damp women sit smiling behind their veils, moistly they raise asparagus-frond lids showing an onion eye whose tail pleased to be seen sprouts leek pale green.

"Here," they murmur vapourishly vain, "Is the vegetable kingdom of long seductive rains, where we its fecund goddesses hum a mist-miasma to the brain while furious fertility drips from our hair.

Our chorus this, water's the element that is."

"This," my winter-weather heart cried feverish, "is what you call alluvial bliss, spittle of generation the only fervour on your lips and passion a muddy river bed's kiss."

"A marsh of climate, mild and benign is the climate," they replied, "where all grow luxiriant, resigned, no vegetable heart is here denied.

We are facets of those causes that have never known except by proxy of gossip the strong enchantment older than stone, the blanched bloom of snow. It is a blossom alien to the marrow of our fluvial bone, not ours that, clear, clean glow.
And winter-heart, no chill contempt can freeze
this frank, rank water growth,
nor icicle this spawning ease,
nor tempt us court
your curt, ungenerous north.

II

The winter-heart in shield of ice
rejoined, "hopeless to probe
these cores of sponge, devices
of a maudlin season's mold.

Polaris, emissary go
pluck the adversary with glacial hand
reveal the harsh, the barren land.
    Show them zero
    at the end of pain
    water an icicle,
    stiff with cocaine.
Tell them of meadows where the hunter roams,
baffled by snowdrifts, bemused by flakes,
wanton and witless in a craze
for the far boundaries of northern lakes
where swans in frozen attitudes of whiteness cry,
"Water is the element that changes when we die."
FOR LOVE AND LANGUAGE

I longed for that love as I longed for language
And must I always remember it silent?
The defeat of the heart in a syllable's quiet
Is like snow falling in a frozen forest
With nowhere, nowhere the sound of water;
While like some shattered cedar
I exclaim, "There must be language!"
There is no other cause for breathing.
Angels and ministers of grace,
How have I fallen
From that consonant virtue
Into this cruel mute discretion?
There is more kindness in brute desire
Than in a tongueless nothing
Where the vowels of health sicken
Not by lust but by love discredited.
THE ASTRONAUTS OF LOSS

"But that was in another country, and besides the wench is dead."

I

Discredited lovers
like cold astronauts
revolve in a dark
of heart to head,
occupy the last
private place
blanching in orbit
cranial waste.

Dead moons
to each other
who once were
star engendering;
not basalt bitter
but lunar empty
redundant as salt
in the desert.

Cosmic condition,
fall-out gratuitous
as fleeting meteorite,
loss their only incandescence.
To speak directly:
it was in another orbit
and besides the planet's dead.

II

It seems in sleep
there is this weeping,
a comet's tail of grief
cold astronaut what's
in your wake,
the heart rotating
upon its axis
from pain to pain?
I know and, "mine eyes dazzle
we died young".
It's not the death
    that I'm lamenting
But your cold ranging
    in my head
Cowards of motion
    both enduring
neither gravity nor levitation;

But crippled steel
    that birdlike plummets
past personal and human grief
    into the disaster area
where automata
    dictate our release.

Where the code word
    that caresses
this formula is terse;
    it is in another country
And besides the species is
    brief.
FOR GOTHIC KINDERGARTENS

They never knew how fate decided on a day that strumpetery was parcel to their love. They walked like children in the densest woods and never understood the witches nor the wolves.

All unaware of presences they wooed the demons of the underbrush with smiles nor did they understand as stepmothers do that innocence is ignorance beguiled.

Thus in the wood they hummed a tune from Gothic Kindergartens blessed by a wanton Hunter's moon which offered them love's pardon.

Unmindful of the other, darker verse they moved past the gingerbread house the clutch of the queen's unuttered smiling curse enthralled by legend and mirror-haunted.

I sing it to my child now to forfeit the harm of hurt and hinder malice in former fatal vows Es waren zwei Konigskinder,

There were two royal children Die hatten einander so lief Who held one another so dear It could not be but brief.

Sie konnten zusammen nicht kommen nor could one another reach Because the water between them Das Wasser, es war zu tief

The water ran so deep.
THE MEMORY OF HONEY

The sun central
in the unavoidable sky,
says, "Take it now
tomorrow is shade."

A memory of poisoned honey
remains a taste on my lips.

As I move about in the garden
phrases from the Greek poets
taunt me.

I shake my head.
It is too late.
I am too Russian
There is so much rain in this country.

Moreover I am familiar
with the fierce landscape
of a meagre pity.

The sun follows me about in the garden
mocking me with his aegean daylight.

He reminds me that my mother's sister
lives on an island in an old house
with Doric pillars.
On the last day of June
I brought you peonies
from my garden
One, absolute crimson
and one white
as new milk.

You said severely,
"the petals will fall
and untidy the room."
Tell me,
Oh Beatific,
Could you among those silver
arpeggios of islands
Check fate?
You, who came from water
and like Christ
Walked on it beneficent.

And did you
among that divine
Theocracy of women
once move so munificent
Even those three bitter sisters
Laid down their instruments
of oppression,
Because the blooming, multiple
rose of the flesh
Smiled at them for an instant?
INTUITION

I have a friend
who keeps in her garden
five enchanted adders.

She likes to watch them
glide among the pink
of fallen roses.

But I, being what I am
Have always preferred
spiders.
The most poisonous of all
is a paradise of trees and grasses
reflected in a calm clutch of water.
Here the harsh demands the senses make
on heart and harmless flesh,
that each must hang,
like apples on a tree,
like apples on a bough,
in apple-ripe repose
before the fall
are evident.

And here
the spoils of enchantment cling
to the golden worm
born in the sepal parts
which passes from bud to bough,
returns to feed upon the fruit
and bruise the carpel core,
the very bone of passion.
TREES IN PARCHED COUNTRY

Trees in a parched country
Are
Positions of leisure.
Watch
How they arch
In a haven of wind
Anchored.
Cosmos of green
Where time might be
Pleasure.
Leaf, a heart-beat
For bird, fruit-lured
To perch, sing, bring
Movement
To the quick of the eye
To the beat
of the heart
Wonder.
ZAGREB

Bougainvillaea-
bougainvillaea breathing in the streets
using up the rancid air
leaving fragrance in its place.

Bougainvillaea
followed by the smell of garlic
like a peasant courtship
clumsy in the side lanes,
sound of kitchen dialects
slurred in the halls
of old Croatian houses
homely palaces, Jelacic,
in the street of Stjepan Radic.

Croatia:
a language and a people
running barefoot in the streets of Zagreb.
Follow!
Follow all the syllables of longing
names and places -
the ZAGREBASKO GORE,
Square of the Victims of Fascism,
the wooden stairs of TOMICEVA Street
GRIC,
again the square, named for the heroes
of the revolution,
square with the tiled church roof
stained in the implacable colours of resistance.
Zagreb, fortress, 
city built for straw-haired, flat-faced stubborn peasants,
I walked there 
bougainvillaea in my nostrils 
on my tongue the dust-mote moths of history 
palpitating like machine gun bullets. 
PREKREZJE, the chestnut trees 
mix their odour with stale urine, spoiled olive oil ubiquitous onion, 
smells communal and private 
co-existant.

Zagreb, 
hill fort 
eminence of the SAVA, 
that hometown river which flows 
through arteries and channels 
empties in my heart 
a silt of iron.
AT SOLIN (For Dalmatia)

"Not just to practise the heart", but because being there engaged the entire experience of love, the moment and the vision fused in the nostalgia of white marble, blue water and the silver heat of August.

Caught in this landscape I balanced on a hill between Dalmatis' cerulean sky and the clean chameleon Adriatic.

Surrounded at Solin by a sibling queenly sea who murmured of the isles of Greece to a shore where trees and rubble root in human dust, dwarf orchards top the gaping graves of Roman citizens and lizards the charioteers of heat leap among funeral shards.

Does marble mute ubiquitous debris? Back from the foam-veined sea further up the hill a Greek temple forms the trellis where Croat peasants train their vines, a fountain for Poseidon trickles lamely stunned by the noon's centurion sun.

In this audible silence only the teasing voices of two Croat boys looking for Diocletian's coins among the tombs their vowels weaving a gentle gauze of syllables into the language of Croatia made an incidental filter for the dry fragmented freight of what time spent and time retained.
Only the children's voices
and a sour perspiring peasant	head slouched in the shade
drinking wine and muttering
plucked at the hypnotic memorabilia
of stone and bone
recalled present flesh to the mind.

Somewhere goats' bells, mules' hoofs
spelled out, not just the practise of the heart
but the entire experience of longing:
for deathless advantage
for bright ghosts alive in the sunlight
Doric trader, slavic tribesman,
for the taste of mortality in the mouth,
a gravel.
REQUIEM FOR A DARK BOY

Go, bitter polaris, go
gleam the green deep.
There a dark brother lies
mute and moist,
where all stars hide.

Go, glint a glow
where phosphorous, pale as snow
flints on that dark boy's brow.
Not skeletal yet;
that flesh is wet.

He lies where coral's sown,
where polyps roam.
Full fathom five
means not alive.

Pole star, bold star,
cold as the dark boy's bones
stare through the smirk of foam.
Tell him through bubbles,
the bauble is broken,
vessel empty,
no body home.
FOR MY FATHER - Requiem 1

An old man
fluttering
wounded
with your time

on a white sheet
in your cage of bones
tremulous pulse
wound down.

Good-bye
dear man.
I should
have brought you
The Sea
in a pail
but instead
I brought you
My grief
it was salt.
FOR MY FATHER - Requiem 2

Personal and private
Is an old man's dying.
He lies spent -
Foam on the sand
Shallow ebb
Where barnacles edge.

Then sea be his element.
Salt the taste he loved
carry bone and blood
To final ocean bed.

Water bless
All of him,
Hands, heart, and head,
Not one drop of dry land,
Beautiful old man
Be in your dying.
OVERHEARD AT THE ORACLE.

NINE POEMS OF CHANCE
BASED ON THE
I CHING
THE CHINESE BOOK OF CHANGES.
Nine Poems of Chance.

1. One for the Hexagrams
2. One for the Triagrams
3. One for the Dark Lines
4. One for the Bright Lines
5. One for the Yielding
6. One for the Unyielding
7. One for the Yin
8. One for the Yang
9. The last for the immutable principle Change, the ruler of the universe.
I

The dragon flies in the heavens
The mare walks upon earth
Heaven and earth do not meet
Except at the extremities.
The moon is nearly at the full
A heron calls in the reeds
I have replenished the goblet
I will share it with you.
The heron calls
Its young answer.
This is the affection of
the inmost heart.
Water over the lake

Things cannot be forever separate:
Heaven and earth have their limitations
Thus the four seasons of the year arise
It furthers one to create number and measure
To set limits even to the waters of the lake.
In the symbolic sequence of the Later Heaven
The earth stands in the southwest.
Thunder and Rain set in:
Heaven and earth deliver themselves
The seed pods of all growing things
Break open
The Image of Deliverance
Spans the sky.
Lakes resting one on the other
The image of the joyous
What is not weighed
Is at peace
What is at peace
Possesses inner truth
Even pigs and fishes
Share in this good fortune.
The escape of the soul
Brings about change.
Return to the beginning
And pursue to the end,
Thus can be known
The condition of the outgoing
And returning spirit
Satisfaction with this knowledge
Leads to the practice of love.
The prince shoots at the hawk
On a high wall
The courtier kills three foxes
In the field
And receives a yellow arrow.
The ablution has been made
But not yet the offering.
The great depart, the small approach
It furthers one to exert those influences
Which lead to the contemplation
Of the light of the kingdom.
A wild goose gradually draws near the shore
A crane calls it to the shade
Ten pairs of tortoises cannot oppose them
They have come to share the generous goblet
Which the woman offers.
The oxen have halted,
The man's hair and nose being cut off
He rolls his eyes,
The wagon wheels are broken
The spokes fly asunder;
Not a good beginning
But at the lake shore
A good end.
This is the perfection of steadfastness,
That its beauty is within
The colour of the earth is yellow.
The blood of the dragon black.
These must not compete.
They are the complements of courage.
Therefore not outward adornment
But dwelling in essentials
Gives freedom to the limbs
Song its expression.
TWO KINDS OF EDEN

You may think it unpleasant
to live in the ghettos of old cities
but I will tell you confidentially
that it is equally unpropitious
in the new Jerusalems of bright shining chrome,
where everyone is endlessly hygienic
and nobody chews bones.

It isn't simply a question
of garlic in gardens
and marble for drains
the synthetic and the fluorescent
opposed to the organic and mineral whole.

Oh it has something
to do with the river,
polluted and useless
except for the loam,

On Sunday
the Jerusalem citizens
germless and jaunty
stroll by the river banks
where nobody bathes;
the talk is as general
as talk is in ghettos
a gossip of gravel and sharp stones.

The old life was fretful
with overpaid devils
pogroms were frequent
most people old;

the new city tidy
as plastic containers,
the policemen as tender
as tinsel at Christmas
direct a traffic of motorists
polite as plaster of paris
toadstools and gnomes.
THE HEART ON ALL FOURS

The heart
walking on all fours
is neither flesh
nor ecstasy.

This
is what you discover
in the suburbs.

Think
about it.

Because neither onions
nor opals
will console
nor control
you entirely.

You may expect
something
Avian.

A hive of hymns
something
nobly mutable
Beethoven's Ninth
Freud,
Töchter aus
Elysium

We live
by any number
of arbitrary equations,
birds-happiness
movement-sound
articulation-freedom;
but the heart
outside
the cavity
of the chest
stumbles
discovers itself
neither Avian
nor mammalian.
A new set of equations
result
mammals — milk —
blubber
are
viviparous
not associated
with cold
or bone
but with
wet-warmth
comfortable stench
of alluvial river bed
dark of ocean depth.
Thus to nest
in the tracheate breast
gather breath
the heart
must walk
over ooze
of water
soar past
flotsam
for muscle
to find
a bridge of bone
ancestral structure.
LETTER TO A FRIENDLY PHARMACIST

or

ONE LIMITATION OF SENSIBILITY

My problem is this:
that I don't have any aphrodisiacs
in the medicine cabinet.
I have any number of other things:
metaphysical soothing syrup,
ethical cough drops,
political expediency pills,
stoic endurance salts,
and noble renunciation tablets,
but aphrodisiacs, no.

Now please don't assume
that I am a narrow sexual prude.
"Chacun à son goût,"
has always been my leit motif.
However, since many of my closest associates
have deviant, however fascinating characteristics,
it really would be a palliative
to have a reliable erotic elixir on hand.

So if you happen to know of one,
approved, of course, by the Food and Drugs people
and Consumer's Guide,
please recommend it.
It will only be used to alleviate
the severest stress.
PARABLE ON NEON LIGHTS

And yet I believe most explicitly in outward adornment. It is no use admonishing me, if neon lights were baubles I would wear them. It is simply a question of taste not cost. After all, even in electronics decorum is everything. Think of moving through the town of Adman's beatific vision! Oh dazzling achievement, to be the multifoliare rose of theatre marguees.

But neon lights are serious embellishments. They spell out entertainment value, diversions from disaster, commercial imagination. Don't sneer. These are the bold mosaics of profit, brave synthetics of a new world Byzantine.

Ah, too bad, on closer inspection one confronts the inevitable personal schizophrenia. To enjoy the precarious accomplishments of darkness one must forgo these pleasant fluorescents. The real felicities of mercantile power don't show on this spangled scene. These are only dime store elegances despised by the haute bourgeoisie.

You end in the usual dilemma; faced with the cruel brevity of candles, the scarcity of gold on the world market, the exorbitant price of diamonds, and finally divorced from even a small share of public ostentation, wear in your hair the most costly tiara, the baroque glitter of private grief.
THE BAMBOOS

This winter the snow
and a bitter wind
almost destroyed
the thin tenacious stalks
of the bamboo plants
in the garden.

I went out to save them.
The wind was blowing
north-north-east.
I could feel the storm's
cutting sleet
clean to the marrow
of my bones.

Fingers numb
face wet with snow,
I struggled with string,
stalk and burlap sacking.

The wind has died
the snow gone
the plant strong but bent
survived.

Yesterday someone unexpected
came; tidied the disorders
of the garden.
The bamboos stand straight
in proud vegetative grace.

Old cruelties reprieved
linger in the green
of its new leaves.
FOR REGRET

There will be occasions for regret.
Empty the heart of hope
Shore up the sandbags
For the shrapnel of remorse
Blow bugle blow,
The echo like the answer denying,

There will be occasions for regret.
The fox runs home
to burrow with its young.
Each predatory animal keeps
Its satiated peace.
The echo in the cave a quiet lying,

There will be occasions for reprieve.
The pulse within the flesh
Must pause before replying,
prolong

The feast
before the fast
the last, the only just

disguising.

Echo, echo answer in the skull,
"Each owl has its mouse
and appetite designs its traps
for dying."
HOMAGE TO MALLARME

"Et le bel aujour'hui," then
Is a swan on ice,
Perishable mobility,
Sibelius on a winter afternoon,
A chill of mist
At the foot of a frozen hill.

Memory the pond
Time the ice
The Swan the only radiant metaphor.

In the hush
Behind the eyes
The blanched virginal aujour'd'hui
Stretches fluctuating wings
Strains a white neck
Drops icicle petals of effort
And sings.

On the ice
An echo pulse beats in the throat of the bird
Breaks through the barrier of blood and feathers,
Dissolves exile and death.
The dead air quivers
With an expanse of breath.
The swans of past time remembered
Let fall fragmented notes
Thick as the snows d'autretemps.