

HIS SLEEP AT ELSINORE

by

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The poems included in this thesis pay homage to John Dowland (1562-1626), the Elizabethan lutenist and composer, to whose music the King of Denmark's court once danced. The poems in general address themselves to those moments when people decide to dance and sing and attempt a reconciliation between activity and sleep, allowing the past and the present to swim in one voice. Both the poems and the fiction give expression to that special force which is exerted on the moment by the past.

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HIS SLEEP AT ELSINORE

The Melancholy Galiarde

his sleep
at Elsinore
drifts with the noise

of slippers
on a marble floor, the sting
of blades

as they sever
ribbons in the hall
(it's quiet just now,
the candle shivers

by his open door
and the memento mori
on the table

lacks
a jaw, an inch
of flame

inspects the socket: empty.
it can read
the tablature
of darkness and embrace

each stone
and turret in a wink, so
the mortar of this winter palace crumbles

and the chatter
of a lady leaks
from a fissure in the wall with silk
and the elegance of foils and daggers

breeds compassion
in the footman: a sigh which holds

a touch of rust. So
the court swarms to him
and the ladies all give suck (even
in a sleep as mild as this)

to his mood, his pain,

his power to astonish

The Hun

1

learn how April
limns itself
against a backdrop

of pure snow:
to distinguish
a spring sky

(an aerial thing)
from an autumn
sky (more scent

than blue) through
which the spirits
of dead leaves

rise or tumble
if their spirits
still cling to

that perfect skeleton
as so many sparrows cling

to the stripped tree
in a sudden
gust of wind

II

learn how autumn
ripens apples
and shocks them

with an unexpected fall
into stubble
and reduces them

to cider and
then a stench
at the bottom of a

barrel (a war poster
in that barn
where muskets lay with rakes

and hoes, the locks
frozen solid by the same
rust which works

on the sky not
a sky but a tin roof
above the poster of the Hun,

noisy with the rain
of many seasons, deafening
when a storm rumbles

overhead: so the lesson
tells how autumn
soaks into

unprotected wood
and if, before they fall,
the red and yellow

leaves and apples
of an autumn
could be squeezed, a

thing called age
could be extracted: a
brilliant paste

with which you paint
your face into
a mask,

terrible
to all
but those who wear it

III

the poster Hun
squats behind the lip
of his trench

with his spiked
helmet and his bayonet:
he never ages, yet

he does grow thirsty:
the gas he imagines
on his battlefield

isn't gas
but only fog:
a lethal fog because

it moves
in his imagination
slowly through

a barricade
of fainting soldiers: and so
he climbs

from his poster
as through a window
and out on to

the metal roof
where he can see
far below him

people wearing
bright masks
moving through the fog:

he smiles and reaching up,
sticks his bayonet
through an ulcer in the moon:

this is autumn
says he, recalling
years of propaganda

"just a bitch in the rain"

the bamboo stalks
lie
broken now the sun

wild, so wild that
now (as broken
as they are) i

has risen on
a dreadful
night of cops

remember wreckage
and not
an open car

and whistles
and of a wind
that drove them

with flowers on the hood

I

and the underwing
of a sparrow
is his grief,

his song, so unlike
the slower
human songs i've grown accustomed to:

and with his song
comes winter and i (who can not sleep)
am sick with

foolish notions, telling
myself that i
should go away

and eat nothing
but acorns and bark
and nibble

sweetness
from the birches
or drink sharp

water from a
frozen brook and think of
nothing, but of

the whiteness of the snows
and how the water from
the brook is gin

and how an angel's wings
were severed
by a sudden drop in temperature

and how they fell into the snow
and smothered other angels
who had fallen faint

with hunger from the trees
and how the muffled hills would hide
my voice and how at night

i'd sleep within the snow
and dream of drinking gin
upon a mountain top and how

i would awaken
and never see another drop of blood again

II

all night long
the sea complained
and in its sway
held crabs and fishes, a
sorry moon revived
a dying shark

while others
floating belly up
knew its pull

was useless: waves fell,
a dog
drank water

from a hollow rock: i listened
 for a horn and heard
 what i could never see, sunken islands

where the drowned
 were mothing words in unison,
 i listened for a bell

and found a shattered bottle and a pair of
 shoes

III

"in a town i know the streets
 were made of tar and stone,
 they softened as the sun grew hot

behind a barn where horses slept
 there was a waterfall and on the roof
 a rooster stood whose iron wings

could gauge the force of any wind.
 in this village no one dreamed, unless it be
 of getting laid, beside the waterfall,

within earshot of the horses
 and a farmer pitching hay,
 and as the hay descended from the loft

the lovers fell asleep, to whispering
 and straw. in this village no one dreamed,
 unless it be of snow."

IV

"with the rigor
of an old quote,
his words fell short

of meaning." Todays quiz.
and so i cling
to an arbitrary sentence

as would a person
to his sermon
or the cobwebs

on his face. It doesn't
matter. What does
is that a stutter

grow into a song and that the
song repeat itself
until it seems important. Still,

the rooms groan for
occupants, the beds become cold
and i wander halls

(a bureaucratic moon)
looking to ensnare some
lovers in a lie and loiter

at a bus stop
 (a Hannibal)
 having little pity for my elephants

having sold them
 to a circus for a song
 having watched them

do tricks
 and drag their trunks
 through miles of sawdust

having pinned
 popcorn to the tent
 and called it stars...

i am relieved
 and "at my last remove".
 The Alps

are no more mine
 than my ladies knees.

V

after the show
 i stood
 ankle deep in trash

and lit
 a cigarette. The movie
 had been about

an island and how
 a liner
 had been sunk

by German subs
 leaving six (marooned)
 to sort it out.

It was
 miraculous: they built
 huts and domesticated monkeys

and they were
 happy. Then love began
 to interrupt

their lives, a cliché,
the same old
story and they wiped

themselves out. Even
the monkeys
were sad. The moral was

something like: they licked
hunger, madness and
the ocean, but they couldn't lick

themselves. Years later
someone found
their bones and that's how

the story started, a thoughtful
man upon
a desert island thinking:

to whom do these bones belong?
and while he thought
monkeys leaned from trees holding
oranges. The monkeys smiled.

VI

the more my body moves
away from you,
the more these wires

tremble with
the words
on which these fleas gain succor

and grow fat, for fleas eat
electricity
and inhabit telephones

and your voice
(filtered through fleas and wires)
must contain

what neither you nor i
expected: anxiety and joy,
the absurdity

of discarded tires
stacked behind a filling station,
flues on which children

slide instead of water, toward
a dump
where the plates

and bedsprings of a generation lie
beneath an inch of snow. and if
the moon

became entangled (slim
and frozen as it is) in the
strings of your piano, and if

the notes of Mozart's thing
in F became the ants
and fleas of my confusion, what

music would remain? My body
grows aware of music
in the dark, my body

grows aware of yours
expressing it, a brief recital
in an empty hall, the sound

of people clapping

VII (The Hay-Wain)

the old white horse
is blind. We, too,
have our choices: to lie

by the roadside
chewing daisies or eat
ragweed and become smothered

under a ton of hay, wheezing
praises to an April sun
and the asthmatic brilliancies

of noon. The horse plods
through his blindness
and stops to nibble on some flowers

that have gotten in the way.
 We would give him something for his hunger
 but the pitch and roll of the wagon

makes us doze and never notice
 when he nods or stumbles.
 We are going far and as we go we

tell each other stories
 to wile away the time.
 Sometimes a hero gets it in the end.

VIII

The spoils
 amounted
 to a handful of ashes: "if you

travel far enough
 you'll meet a horse." Peel
 the blinders from this animal. Think

of lampblack and a trap
 taking Fleda
 to the park, not on any damn afternoon

but from a
 rosewater novel in which
 fictitious moons and parasols

are seen through
 parlor windows. Slice my
 uncut pages: "Loin to loin

they were for moments
 as the bed grew faint, fainter..."
 and the blood became

the color of roses in
 the wash
 and finally, having left

the road, i entered fields
 where a horse was grazing
 and you came, the Cassandra

of my spoken blunders...

6's and 7's

autumn touches Willard Street,
a song touches her who walks
past the only penny dropt
by a man with friends to meet

a penny in the grass is
an autumn thing: green and brown
and lost is the autumn song
which sings itself and lives

in the trees of Willard Street
and at the concert where they let
Death play his clarinet
to keep the dancers on their feet.

evening clings to twig and leaf:
autumn touches Willard Street.

The List

I

a fly scribbles
hasty notes
on the windowpane: not, not,

not much
left: all the blossoms
vanish into odors: only

late hours now
blossom: a wind in which
the trees grow shrill

in preparation: through which
people
amble making lists

of things to get: prints,
lamps and tapestries
to compliment the sky: a list

of need to end all lists:
a list
of loneliness and anger

II

no zodiac: the fly spells
not and summer goes
(a puff of smoke) as autumn

cackles in the shack
where Quincy puts a little
sugar in a bottle for the

last elusive fly: it stops:
the moon makes
patterns on the lattice-work

and Quincy whispers
as the winds grow shrill
and the people walking face

another death counting
(as the leaves fall)
minutes when some god

will rouse himself
beneath a black sun
and then decide,

decide to sleep some more

Four Days in April

for Tim and Marilyn

I

where the road
splits in two
going south

to the right
Maine, Vermont,
New Hampshire

to the left,
the sea

after 60 miles
on gales of fog
and sun

here we threw
our hands

and let them hover
in the wind

like white gloves
or hungry gulls
and begged the moon

to draw the tide
closer to our blood

II

i slept
on an oak

floor and fainted
in a
sleeping bag

around one,
a number
of devils

ran about
taking pictures
of my soul: i froze

someone
threw bleach

the room went white
i slept lightly

through morning
then we
snuck out

for a walk
in the cold

(i tasted salt
in my sleep

and heard a phantom
whisper
in a conch

III

portus enclosus
tight walls
too early
for flowers

or a may fly
ephemeron

walls, walls:
i could scale them
with a hook

and see a garden
flush with green

or steal a look
at the stars,
Sirius

a dog
 crouched
 in the dusty clouds
 of a city, tumbling
 as only a dog can
 into perfect darkness
 (Canis Major,
 the big moon dog,
 barks before spring)

IV

orange trolleys
 crawl through snow
 lightning thunder
 rain and snow
 at once
 such foul weather,
 still they
 crawl
 not a soul
 on the street
 only trolleys
 throwing sparks
 and Esso men
 pouring gas
 and a few Angels
 wearing the skins
 and heads
 of animals,
 Dog Angels
 fleshed in darkness

devils taking pictures
of my soul (i froze)

four days in April
in a garden full of snow

four days in April
in a kennel by the sea

2 bits

death is a
careful barber, with
his strop
and his hall of mirrors

i am one who writhes
buckled in
the chair with hopes
(only hopes)

of wringing song
from
appointed bones:

the solid plans
of flesh
or wind
are similar: they outlast

the question will they last
but as some have found,
they don't: the dead

leave us speechless
so we sing instead
and measure notes coming from that
flute, quantify that wind: this

is science
and the question pops: will the sun
outlast this dawn and will
the sky offer

something more than
flight (impossible)
or emptiness? say yes or no
says the barber

with his razor at your throat

The Tabard Bestiary

This April
 in New England
 behind a thin sheen
 of middle day
 Pilgrims thread their way
 between the hills
 and lakes to touch
 the hem or broken tooth
 of St. Thomas
 while the sun
 stuck in a web of stars
 at the foot of the wind
 whispers: "et cum spirito tuo"

and the hooded falcon winks
 and the heraldic buzzard sits
 and the hounds nip at the heels of nuns
 trailing ebony rosary beads.

1

the buzzard
 sniffing carrion
 above Gibraltar
 circling above Antalya
 on the wails of dying Moors
 spirals down
 to eat profane flesh
 in Alexandria

2

another bird
 sang and danced in April
 as if it were May
 and fragile ladies
 lay shattered
 at his feet

3

greensward peacock
 a tail quiver
 of green and yellow feathers:
 hush, arrows slice
 the Crecy dawn
 where the sword and baldric hang
 from a gray birch tree.

4

gray hound,
 bits of broken cheese
 and bread scattered
 on the Tabard bench.
 "Avez-vous le sourire
 sur le cadavre?"
 Stratford at Bowe
 where the hounds run
 nipping at the heels of nuns

5

and the hare
 leaping through the bramble
 chasing elves
 who eat the brains
 of nightingales for lunch
 and sit on mushroom stools.

6

Black Friars,
 hooded robes
 beneath a hidden bell
 a bronze echo
 in the throats
 of hooded Friars
 who touch the face of God with song.

one of them, his cape lined with pins
and knives, embraced a young wyf for she
was a passing fair creature what lived
in Isomongerlane not far from that secret
place where Symon de Wynton's head was
buried...

7

a forked beard
and beaver hat from Flanders.
he dealt
in gold and silver coins
in the Underworld.

"the actual teeth
of Jesus Christ
will be sent postage paid
in a handy isinglass packet"

8

in black and red
the books are bound.
marginal scribbles
like the legs
of ticks and beetles
crawl across an eye
infecting spring clouds
while far below
an astrolabe is laid
on the satin cloth
and plans are made
to seize the stars.

9

Thomas Pynchbek
appointed chief baron
of the Exchequer
on April 24, 1388
lived near Katherine Swynford
and wore parti-colored robes to court
and served a writ of arrest
to a clever man in debt
that same year
the aforementioned
year of Our Lord 1388

10

a white freeman,
 Pynchbek's neighbor,
 trailed a speckled partridge
 and felt slippery fish (luce)
 from his pool
 slide down his muscled gullet:
 Sir John Bussy
 of Lincolnshire,

the eye of day
 blinking at the sun.

II

five men, five brown loaves
 of bread came down
 from Cockayne
 dressed in livery. each
 had a silver handled knife
 and all were so pleased
 and so satisfied
 when the Burgher Chef sang:

The BLACKMANGER SONG:

"have you heard
 wild fish scream
 or naked chickens swimming
 in a thick sweet cream?"

12

a Shipman,
 George Cowntree,
 paid customs
 for the "Magdaleyne" in 1379.
 these men, who went
 down to the sea in ships
 were a hardy breed
 but, in the riggings
 of his skull
 sat a black crow
 that listened to the thud
 of wine casks bumping
 on the wooden hull. thud.

wine,
thirsting for the sea.

at night, George
would stand upon the deck
and take careful heed
of Alioth, Alcor, Polaris
and especially, Vega
because Lyra
made the crow in his skull
go mad and prance and caw
and leave tracks all over his rigging.

13

in the morning he awoke
and felt the black wings
beating the air
behind his eyes
and he knew that he was sick...

14

so the Doctor prescribed
Dogbane and Nightshade
and bid him look
upon his Caduceus
but not upon Lyra
or the Swan
and get plenty of rest
but little did this Doctor know
of the menacing crow
that sat in Cowntree's head
so he advised a pilgrimage
and identified the crow tracks as: *

and ♃

and ♄

and ♅

and ♆
and



15

near London he saw
 a smiling widow
 whose cloth of Ghent
 hid her secret wrinkles.
 between her wide thighs
 strode a huge saddled horse.

16

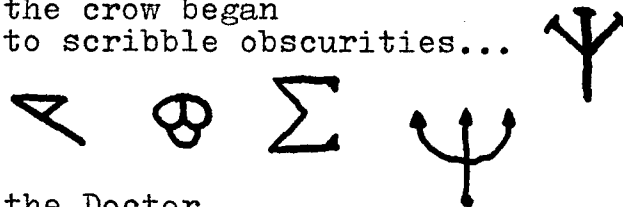
a good man
 dressed in black
 led a string of dancers
 over hills
 and into valleys.

the parson then let his fingers rest on the
 lights of a distant city. He turned back to
 the murmuring congregation and began his
 prayer: each felt his soul sparkle like the
 city lights. They gathered branches and from
 the parson's faggot, they lit their little
 fires. (crackle)



17

...when Cowntree saw
 the man with a wagonload of dung
 he knew he was right well out of his skull.
 the crow began
 to scribble obscurities...



the Doctor
 gave him Tiger Powder
 and told him
 to close his eyes
 "do not stare at Lyra", said the Doctor.

18

an ox
 drew a tumbril
 and scuffled in the dust
 erasing all the bird tracks
 then bellowed loudly remembering
 his lost balls.

the lean driver/overseer
 chuckled
 at the gutta percha sac
 and drew his fingers tight
 about his whip.

19

a sparrow
 perched upon a mare
 trilled to an evening star.

ceruce, quicksilver
 and PbO₂ were advised
 by the Doctor...

but the tiny bird
 had been to Hell
 and back bringing altar relics
 and absolution to his friend
 the goat or mare or gelding...

Cowntree slept
 as a crow sleeps
 hidden from the wind
 entangled in a web of stars.

20

in Southwark, a man
 in a shortsleeve coat saw
 armorial signs curl about his breast
 seasoned boards smolder
 beneath the feet of a dead saint.

the pilgrims, full of guilt and thrill
trickle toward New England
where the animals have come to drink
the spirits of the dead: i.e., the saints
and tales
and ancient words stiff like the feathers
of a crow or, in April when the wind is free,
like the jingle of the falcon's bell
as it tears a bleeding sparrow from the sky
and returns to light upon a wrist.

Watling Street

1

Up. each day wades
 through waist deep snow.
 Up. the street widens
 vaguely into sleep, vision blurs.
 only a few wild cats nestle
 in the forest
 where the wind howls wider
 than the street that leads to them.
 a lone swan dares to draw near,
 so near, the wild cat dreams
 dare to touch his feathers.

2

swans fare well in the snow,
 more will come and their black eyes
 will blink above the slim jets
 of swan mist streaming out
 from carven nostrils. their wings
 will fold on their plump breasts:

black eyes in the snow
 filled with black wine

the swans will sit with their smooth necks
 bent in the ornamental night.

3

a fireman comes to put out the lights.
 the swans hold their breath and the wild cats
 sleep. the fireman has forgotten the key
 to the nozzle of his woven hose
 so he tosses a curse into the snow
 that melts like the ice-cube in his hand.
 the fireman fades back down the narrow street.
 one swan is filled with soundless glee
 and the lights keep burning, about to freeze.

4

stick figures dance among the barren trees
leaping from limb to limb on a stick trapeeze.
the moaning carries with it the crack and sway
of winter sticks and the gray moon scud
floats above the snow.

5

a lantern on the farthest hill screams
across the snow then two then three and four
and soon the night is filled with lantern screams
but the swans are undisturbed
and the wild cat dreams
still linger in the dark resting fur
like the dangerous scent of unseen enemies.

6

one swan opens its wings and climbs into the sky
leaving one white egg in the snow
with one black eye
staring at a cloud of distant stars,
a lidless cone that opens into space.

"Groping for trouts, in a peculiar river..."

a dirt road
runs beside
a river, turns

to a covered bridge.
inside, the echoes
of the river
and the white sky

leak through
between worn boards

loose, as if
the iron feet of horses
had pryed them up

or the constant thunder
of this April morning
had worked

like slow wagon loads
of hay upon them
straining wooden

joints and braces,
even the weeds feel
the storm approach

as it rolls along
the river bed

blinding wide swaths
of field
with the sound of thunder.

a man in a straw hat
stands by the river's edge
whispering to the fish,

come, he says, my tongue
has fins and rainbow colored
scales, the fish see this

and leap up from the water
like slim tongues,
touch him

with quick, muscled fins,
lick his pale skin
with their white spotted bellies,

smother him until his lungs
ache and he sinks into the ground
with eyes as dim as April fog,

he is weak, the wild trout
return into the water
and leave him on the bank to sleep,

now the rain begins, slowly
at first as a rising sound
drowning out the river,

and the man begins to stir,
his limbs feel light
as if tied to the clouds

with strands of fishing line,
he is a puppet of the clouds
tethered to the storm itself,

the wind sweeps his hat away
as he begins his broken dance
holding hands with the rain,

leaping at the sound of thunder.

The Visions of St. Francis

at dawn
a girl walked
by the church

despair has wings
the passage read

pigeons yodeled
as she passed
almost dead for lack of sleep

she had been
fucked by locals

now she only looked
upon the dawn, its
tenants
and embarking clouds

where flowers grew (she would go there)

far from the city
with its veils
and sullen halls (she would go there)

beyond the cranks
and pulleys
of the Mental Illness

Institute (she would
go there) where flowers grew
and seeped such juices

as would burn her skin

Bait

my heart (at 22) is taxed.
i hear it gush at night rivers
in my ear. a man is attacked
on the road for nothing: never

travel in a coach without a shot-
gun muttered Rumpelstiltskin. fish
nibble at my heart and i wish
to god that one would be caught

on the hook embedded there. luck.
the line's held by a fisherman
with an awful face of bone and weed.

he tugs the line. the hook is stuck.
my heart is sunk off Newfoundland
trying to discipline the sea

Avoirdupois/lbs.

i like my music better than
my words. Or today it seems so...
i drag out the dull performance
endlessly beneath a fallow

sky: no sprout, no root will take up
there, so-thick clouds are stitched into
the Sleeping Bag from which i gulp
my gallon echo: full. Daily news

accumulates by the fireplace.
(i will burn it when i find a
match) but the atmosphere is lace-
d with gasoline and some dime-a-

dozen tune penetrates my head
like a ten-penny spike driven

through a loaf of bread

"Carmina Archilochos"

the purposeless dead and dullest
of books moan where it is sunny.
We sing (though our cause is hopeless)
a summer testimony.

Andromeda recedes behind
her rock, the sky cushions thunder
and the moon draws placid tides
over bronze gods reclining under

sunken galleys. Oars and dolphins
mimic empty jars. A joplite
only dreams of war and virgins
tasting olives in the halflight

where the shy dead are hurling long
spears far into the ashen dawn

The Motel and Mr. Hawkes (Jack)

avenues of rain: the windswept
avenues of rain show bronze now
the sun has come to peel the wet-
ness up. Sparrows (his among clouds)

dissemble. An arcadian
pasture fills with goats and horny
shepherds. They dance around a lady in
a flimsy gown whose been throwing

roses at them all their lives.
Their mouths fill with slobber (ring
around the rosy) it's a loss

they feel because her tempting thrives
amid their dream: "if the birds sing,"
(they will) "the nudes are not far off."

untitled

Apu, apu. Utter nonsense
laid aside in sleep, i mean: COLD
day cold, night cold; cold of skin, cold
of heart. Cold so cold defenses

alip the way naked bodies slip
into the icy river. No.
Colder. The icy jackets fit.
We journey over unsunned snow

with our mouths full of invented
roses, roses that would shatter
if we spoke. We grin and gather
icicles instead...the scented

shadow of a Pine freezes, a thing
so finely tuned we grin, it rings

and then our grins freeze

Break-down

a small dog is on the lawn. "forever"

haunts a cauldron full of turning fruit. So
today i see the June sun (a fellow
with my fingertips on his lapels repeats
a distant marriage in my ear: she keeps
a spot in her bed for you. Piano
masters toss dice in A: Taylor, Satie...

this longing rots: i gather wood for fire.

a "tasseled garden" (tourist attraction)
draws a stranger to my bed: an old love,
a fictive wife who knows the stakes are higher
now the June sun has found a dove

to pester. Love involves a slight infraction
of the rules: a cage, a pistol and a lyre

untitled

a favorite angel jack-knifed
in his sleep last night (a pond as
usual) and, Donne-like, he swived
her underwater. she, blonde as

wheat or straw, surfaced dripping wet
and spread her wings, to dry them out,
like a cormorant. he forgets
what message brought her here and doubts

she will return again (the dream
was nice. now he drinks his coffee
in the sun and blinks at the gleam
of a starlings back. precisely

nine months have passed since he heard her
whisper: it was a loveless murder

Water Boy

Punch let him have it in the gut.
Others sensed a flood when the moon
rose (a flood moon). and before Tut
could whisper "lust and moss" a broom

swept his ashes up. The Sweeper
wanders down a corridor
of sleep. A Sandman with deeper
motives, better sand, prepares more

young for slumber. "Your eyes are tombs,
Love, when i look in them." i won't.
i'll eat flowers and listen for brooms
in deserted streets and i won't

even mind if Aquarius
spills buckets full of moonlight in the dust

the Ist

Heartbeat, god and mountain (roses
fleshed with sun) such antipathy
swells within a poem: pithy
words and nothing else: take Moses

(for e.g.) with his tablet
and put him in the movies with
lots of extras. What happens? This
does: he stays there) a rabbit

jumps: god hollers in his walnut
shell: my voice is the flesh of space
(a long yell). Ordinarily,

god doesn't yell, he whimpers; but
today he's pissed: Moses blew a take)
my words wander/aimless ivy

untitled

Scales tip. The difference between musk and blubber is not the weight or size, though the smell of one seems to outweigh the other. A plate

of food, dead shrimp...Mr. Johnson sang: "When i woke up this morning, all my shrimp were dead and gone." Perhaps sex (or none) made him sing

the blues. Bastard moons and Hotel lobbies fortified the subject until a song emerged; still, a Hell-hound sniffed his trail through suspect

dreams of recognition and the binge ended with a little poison in a syringe.

Peer Gynt

for Mark Young

"to destroy something lovely and
holy and fair...." it ran and i
shuddered/struck with the old demand
for mercy because i have to lie

a bit to oil the movement: this
(i'm glad to say) is not. Police
bother me, as well as dogs (if
they're mad) and so it happens fleece

is gilded, not gold. Something still
remains, some lesser stuff the dregs
of which i savor just as well.

Anthills develop into hills.

and i use spit and pins and thread...

"You can patch up a fiddle, but never a bell."

Mao Tse Tung and That Woman: a Dream

a 19th century geologist
compared the earth to a wrinkled apple:
mountains pinched and thumbsize oceans with ample
room for any normal dragon and a list

of unearthed bones. My uncle's kitchen full
of Chinese coins and beer was better. Here,
the wrinkles crawl and tides collide with years
the sun has coaxed from stone (i stop to pull

a rabbit from my thigh and put a leech
on my eyelid. Faces merge and babble
songs together. i pick one to grapple
with forever: i'm sick of private speech.

She (who offered me this apple) fades.
Another woman's come to paint my days.

untitled

my lungs hurt. Self-pity again...
and nothing but a glass of milk.
Oops. Ethel Waters and Rilke
at odds: the battle's won by ten

P.M., or bed. my gramophone
is broken and the rhetoric
of loneliness prevails: my own
voice (no cymbal, drum or hot lick

supports it) now pretends to speak
and in doing so, finds it doesn't
want to lie. what irony! Wasn't
Solomon a man of song? sleep

tight. i'll opt for Ethel Waters
and my bed: to hell with authors

Artaud mumbles

a plague in Marseilles, a ship passes by,
swine sniff the winding-sheets of dead
men and drop in their tracks (i've read
about this, and Dresden too: why

insist on action?) The sun should
be enough, or a saw about
to saw the log in half and clout
the peaceful sleeper: we have wood,

what we need is nails, and prayer
to strike a better deal with Love:
afraid, we run with what we get

and starve: the odds are hardly fair:
the subterranean flash of
an autumn sun about to set

a blimp

(a paragraph of fear) "The Graph
Zeppelin loomed outside Harold
Arlen's window, then Ira told
him how the Germans were..." and the laughs

were rife. Period piece: German
doctors, Grosz, jews, Brecht and bleachers
full of Hitler youth. The feature
followed newsreels of them marching

in the streets in black and white: flicks.
Later, in the alley where men
piss on bricks, drink bathtub gin
and dream up impressionistic

peep shows: knees and venom, smart whips
held by senators in bras and slips.

"a small town in Vermont in which"

remorseless evenings and guitars
go with sadness and oblivion:
not romantic, like a million
spiders connecting all the stars

or boots left on a forest path
with the laces out or tin snips
or dogwood blossoms shedding chips
of ivory or sculling past

Liberian freighters: not
romantic, more another mode:
myxolodian, odd: a road
on which you'd find a perfect spot

to sit and watch the sun come down
upon the only steeple in the town

a song, a note

the bitter end: excrescence
(i am drunk with sun and being
indoors away from it.) Even
shadows drilled through noon convince

me that the summer was the worst
possible...but its all we have
right? the shore rehearses gravel,
we thirst and ache: our aches and thirst

are nothing: we cry ourselves to
sleep but remember nothing in
the morning: we wish we could sin
but lack conviction and the few

talents we possess are wasted
wasting time writing words which rhyme

Morning Song

i smoke too many cigarettes.
i think too much of fucking
you (days go on, today nothing
seems solid.) Lean and out of debt

the taker smiles: "i am my own
man." 10th Street merchants crank their
awnings down. The fat sun shines fair
enough: no rain or snow has blown

across the bay. Cherry blossoms
fall, desultory. Scrap flowers
hunt for sun among the sour
piles of battered cans. Here, awesome

Deaths occur (where i linger most)
begging minutes from the passing ghosts

(from Lyra)

I

a wet dawn opens
scant ghost
moving through the birches
and the ferns

touching finger
shoots and humid soil
where the damp stones
where the damp stones

sink deeper into folds
of earth as bare feet
move among the ferns
and birches

the damp stones
the damp stones listen
to the palest root
seeking water

when the moon is up
where ashen faces peer
among the ferns
(ashen faces

of the moonspend souls)
drained faces
paling in the dawn
where the stones listen

and the dead whisper "go"

I (sotto)

This morning
of the sparrow blinking
in the sun,
singing, as the white light leans

across the bed
 and as the water drops
 into the sink a
 broken song: she wakens

(to see a woman rise
 her yawning
 and her lazy eyes,
 the sunlight on her breast...)

he slips down
 stairs and hulks above the stove
 sets a water pot to boil
 then goes outside

she nods,
 drifts into a picture
 of a house in Hyde Park,
 a room filled with dolls

and hoarfrost on the lawn,
 it's so cold for October
 (cats lick their morning milk)
 sleep clutches

at her hands and feet
 and makes them cold,
 he climbs back
 up the stairs

and sees her
 in her summer gown
 asleep
 with winter falling down

around her, no
 protection from
 the season's wind
 which blows inside

she confounds
 a star
 with the closing of an eye
 (now burns a summer morning

through a window pane,
 a lorn moon
 still pulling at her love

(from Lyra)

2

so hot
so hot he smells her in his
sweat, it's September
and they pray for rain

the kind of rain
that falls
in Normandy
when night is spent

behind a tapestry
of distant thunder
and a hound
barks (up) a crescent

moon (she ducking
in an alley full
of bats the humid
sky a blanket full
of holes

5

a bag of corn husks
hanging from a beam,
a flock of mad crows
sitting in a tree,

this is the harvest,
hogs wallow, moles wait
for winter to begin
it is too late

the sun leans down more,
old men try to lift their heads
and fail (chins quiver)
they must go to bed

and sleep for years, the
 leaves loosen, fall,
 a nuthatch picks a stump
 where black ants crawl

amid moss and wood (he
 rocks and her he misses most of all

6 (the Clock and the Cat)

a clock sits
 on the mantle piece
 1839
 it no tick

below it red coals
 glow and spew
 ashes up the chimney,
 a draft cools

his back and Hicks
 (a cat) sits
 by the fire
 purring to the bricks

the hands say 3 o'clock,
 a draft
 wheezes through the screen
 (the moon

a pale smudge
 behind the rain)
 it hasn't tict
 in a century

(stir the ashes)
 but it may be that late
 for once it
 may be right

A River Song

when sheets of moss
thicken on the roof

when the rain becomes
a juice that bites the tongue
and chokes the gutter stones

i remember that the river's stones
are like your body's organs
when you sleep

some blood inspired lullabye

The Stargazer

The Babylonian
sky tonight
is faultless (with a moon

as fine as any ironstone
bowl stuck
beneath a foot
of soil,

a map
of careful fractures
in the glaze

of age, of cold,
a certain calendar
of change

they pull it up
each month
and rub it clean
with denim

so it shines

I

tongues differ
but the stars won't change.
another aspect
of the sun
will only bring a body closer
into summer, fall

another side of warmth

II

they scan the stars
for omens, gods and animals
and miss the light
itself
which plays upon the bowl:

a cup of special water

III

to taste the lather
of an ætive wave
is to have a portion of the world
upon the tongue

a clod of earth and fire make the rest, one
in either hand will do

IV

let the iris
swallow stars
(as that
credible flower
closes
on a dozing bee
in the endless dusk
of summer)
and so remember sleep

V

the Pleiades
are a bee's wings
on the surface of a pond

VI

the white bowl
packed in soil
is as fine as any moon
rising in the east
through air as thin as tracing paper

age showing in its face as
plains and craters - fractures
in the blue glaze (the night wind
a denim cloth
polishing the umber moon
to a dull finish

the Babylonians had it:
the proper star,
a plumb bob in the desert wind.

a slit across the heavens is a rule of thumb

PARABLES FOR SPRING

MR. OATES' MOON

It is 3:15 a.m., Friday, June 26th, 1929 and I am in my room listening to music. I record the precise date because I have been sleepless for the last five days; that is, since Monday, June the 21st at 7:15 (or so) when I awoke from a deep, restful sleep looking forward to the Wainwright Summer Solstice Festival which was held that evening, beginning with a buffet supper served beneath a spacious red-striped canopy, on the estate of Marshall Oates, a local well-to-do corporate lawyer and patron of whatever "arts" managed to find their way into the little town of Wainwright, Pennsylvania; "arts" which might find their way into town much as any vagrant would, wandering down some avenue lined with elms, shocked that anyone could possibly read hunger in his blank expression, much less invite him in for warm biscuits and tea. The chicken was perfect. I served myself three helpings of strawberry-rhubarb pie while Mrs. Oates stood on a grassy knoll singing Schubert to Mr. Oates' competent accompaniment on a white baby-grand which had been moved, for the occasion, out onto the lawn. After my prolonged dessert, I sat on a marble bench drinking highly illegal chilled gin and watched some of the more prominent

members of the Wainwright Rotary drive golfballs across the flawless lawn into Mr. Oates' magnificent stand of white birches which were located 150 yards south of the Main House. Such was the generosity of our host - that he would let his guests drive golfball after immaculate golfball into the deepening summer twilight, with no thought of retrieval; whack, whack they went and sailed (often three or more at a time) into Mr. Oates' birches where they could be heard knocking against trunks and limbs and ripping through the plush carpet of ferns.

Toward the end of the evening, as the earnest businessmen, teachers and politicians bid their host "Goodnight!" (on the shortest night of the year no less), I found myself accepting a lift into town with Mrs. Eleanor ("Elly") Perkins, a widow and the proud owner of a beige 1927 Stearns-Knight roadster. We discreetly sipped two fingers of gin as the other automobiles moved in solemn file down the gravel drive toward the highway. After the tail lights of the last guest had winked behind a distant hedge and as the murmuring of its exhaust faded from our ears, we started. Moving off into the summer night, across the flawless lawns, I was surprised by a coolness in the air and,

removing my hat, I lay my arms across my chest, eased myself down into the red leather seat, tipped my head back (that I might view the sky) and set about to enjoy the ride - thoroughly. Upon reaching the highway, I began to realize that I was feeling...odd?...out of sorts? No - not out of sorts, for I could not recall having felt better since Brant Pearson's wedding in March. Certainly odd. The moment of my awareness began to expand and I felt myself becoming keenly conscious of each, extreme direction of the road on which we sped, as well as the continual rush of the outlined overhanging trees; the wind roaring in my ears, entering my nose and my slightly parted lips; I became aware of the moonlight behind the black, overhanging trees; reflected strips of moonlight on the chrome appointments of the automobile: the bulbous silver lamps, the edge of the windscreen, the neat trim; the moonlight glittering in the rings on Elly Perkins' fingers, the fingers which were wrapped lightly around the rosewood steering wheel...does the moon belong to Mr. Oates? I asked myself, and this road, these trees, these liquid tires floating over tar and stone still warm from today's sun and the sun, is the sun equally his? and the light summer clothing I am clothed in? and I remembered the golfballs

soaring through the dusk, through a net of sound the crickets had thrown up around us; the gin, the chicken... the strawberry-rhubarb pie? Am I insane?

Mrs. Perkins let me out beneath a streetlamp and asked me if I were interested in bridge. I told her that I was and that we should certainly follow it up. I thanked her and ascended the spiral staircase to my room. Upon entering, I immediately opened a window: a breeze met my face, a cool breeze; it was as if two women, with their faces inches away from my own, were blowing softly into each one of my eyes. I closed them and leaned against the window jamb.

What can I do? Not a moment's sleep in five days! Throughout the mornings and the afternoons I wander aimlessly about the town, looking in windows, inquiring after invalids, eating bowl after bowl of vanilla ice cream; towards evening, I stroll down to the lake and skim stones across the water until it gets dark. Only then do I walk to my Neo-Gothic residence situated between two brooding elms, stop half-way down the walk, gaze up at my tower room with its ten casement windows and sigh: another night of it,

the ceaseless winding of my grey Victrola, hearing the same Sonata over and over again until I sweat with the effort of winding and the music rattles in my skull like 12 beans in a glass jar piano piano piano...

Sometime after midnight, I stop. I hear the sound of the wind coursing through the elms and I feel within me a nascent suspicion and I get up slowly, deliberately and stand before my closet door in my sweat-damp and sleepless white suit coat. Soon I know it is there and I am filled with hope. I feel the promise of sleep around me as if I were being lowered, blindfolded, into a warm bath. I turn the brass doorknob and feel its oiled mechanism give. The scent of cedar envelopes me as I push the door open: it is there...a great horned owl perched peacefully, sentiently, on the iron clothes rack. Sobs and laughter clog my throat at once. I move toward the owl. I reach out and run my hand down its feathered back. It blinks. I lift it gently from its perch and carry it slowly to the open window. I pause. With the owl on my forearm, lighter than a cat, I lean bodily into midsummer. It blinks. I smell newly mown lawns, sweet and damp, below me in the darkness. And then, with Mr. Oates' moon large before me and a memory

of warm tar roads stretched like snakes between the hills still fresh in my mind, I lift my extended arm and let the creature fall; it does not flap its wings, it only opens them, wide, and upon the wind which courses through the elms, the owl glides, away, into mid-summer, into the farthest reaches of the night.

I feel my bones are lead. I feel myself sliding down my spiral bannister over and over i spiral down the varnished bannister: I sleep.

THE GAZEBO

Summer seems to have departed, though it is August and warm, for the odors of the premises, once so rich, now seem thin and barely "summersome", trapped in shade, floating upwards from a level bed of blowers at dusk, familiar in the peculiar way summer smells can be familiar, triggering words, names and unrelated scenes suddenly, as if by some secret mechanism only scents possess and not (as many suppose) because the human body is the intersection of diverse associations or, worse, a well of primal memories any startled sense may tap or that the subtle pageant of the conscious mind is merely leakage from a darker, more unsettled place; some human "cellar" wherein anything may lurk. Not so. Smells act insidiously and undermine the other senses, spur them on toward more distinct awarenesses: a slightly old corpse beneath the lilac bush, there, not twenty feet from where I sit in this gazebo smoking oval Turkish cigarettes, watching the storm clouds gather, ready, at any moment, for the downpour to begin, for thunder and for the lightning to electrify the smells I am now breathing. My smoke hangs around me for a moment and then moves over the railing and out

on to the lawn where it reaches the inevitable rose trellis, or the blue hydrangea and loses whatever solidarity my lungs have lent it among petals and stems. I enjoy this. I relish my cigarette and inhale, with the foreign tobacco, every odor the garden has to offer. Sometimes an unusually sparse odor wafts in my direction. Only then, when it is faint and indefinable, am I sad that the smoke has probably dulled my palate and my nose: to think that my odor threshold could be lower! Another passes by, a smell so light I can only think: a smell, there is a smell in my vicinity which I can't quite grasp because my equipment is too cumbersome; I am shotgunning hummingbirds instead of plucking them in midflight with my thumb and forefinger from the cloying August air... But these gossamer scents are pleasing, if only in their vagueness and I am reconciled to my having had to leave at least one half (the lighter half) of these sensations pass unrealized, unsmelled.

What about the body lying underneath the lilac bush? If I were a journalist, a detective or of even a mildly curious disposition, I would care. As it is, I don't. It was here when I arrived and no doubt shall remain here when I have gone. His face (for it is a "him") lies hidden in the uncut grass.

His clothes are drab (black, if you will) and remarkably clean. I've been tempted to get up and look through his pockets for a wallet, a card or for some hastily composed suicide note full of mis-spellings and desperate statements concerning God-knows-what situation for which there seemed to be no solution. Or just boredom. He seems to have been a polite person. Perhaps there is a bullet hole in his forehead? Who knows?

The house, or properly speaking, the mansion to which this gazebo belongs has fallen, in recent years, into a ramshackle affair unsafe to enter, save for the hall and the front room, but which is still pleasant to look at. From my bench, I can see the kitchen door and the corner of an outbuilding reputed to have once been "servants quarters" but which had been used, after the war, as a "guest house". Long ago, I spent my summers there. I was one among Vivien's many guests. We drank, and when we weren't drinking, swam and when we were unable to swim, we ate or slept. I spent the entire summer dazed by alcohol, sun and, perhaps most of all, by Vivien herself. Since then, I have made a little money (enough to afford Turkish smokes now and then) and have forgotten most of the brilliant schemes which, during those few blinding summers,

my friends and I hatched on nothing more than a few drinks, smiles and otherwise not knowing what to do with ourselves. Now I talk to myself more than to others and bathe regularly in a tub which rests on lion's feet.

Since Vivien's uncle died, the house has remained unoccupied and, by virtue of his not having paid taxes on the property for 26 years, unsold. No one could afford the taxes, even if the house, the land and the pool could be had for a song. For a while, it seemed as if it were destined to become a rest home, but another building was erected (there being grants and donations available) in its stead. So it had fallen apart and had become the local haunted house. Only after all the windows had been broken and the molded plaster ceilings had fallen down did any of the townspeople think to question Vivien's uncle's sanity and, by extension, Vivien herself. It was now a house in which only those with tortured minds could have lived; by the looks of it, it was the only conclusion which could be drawn. Vivien had lived there, but only in the summer. No one had taken that into consideration; in fact, it made it worse. People would spend a great deal of time wondering where she spent her winters. Who would have guessed that she

spent them in a small city not more than a hundred miles away...working! They would see her on occasion walking about the vacant grounds. "Poor Vivien," they said.

The body does smell some. Not unlike lilac, rosewater and a dash of the compost heap I'm certain isn't far off. The sky is darkening and paint peels from the railing and the floor of the gazebo. I hear thunder distant and ominous. Any time now Vivien should arrive and some of the mysteries (at least one) shall be solved. I must admit that I'm just a bit curious. Do the last odors of his conscious life still linger in his nostrils and do the flies, that even now investigate his ears, find him at all attractive, as rich as a slab of steak left in the garbage for the dogs? a jar of spilled honey? Is he an important man? The first large raindrops interrupt my speculation: I light another cigarette and tug at the cuffs of my shirt and, in the midst of a building summer storm, in the wooden gazebo, eight-sided and white, I wait for Vivien.

The air around me is excited by the lightning flashing almost overhead, the breezes stink of ozone and the leaves, once still, begin to stir on

the lilac bush and on the trees; the green-ness of the lawn grows deeper as the sky darkens; there is a patter of drops on the roof, on the weed choked flowers, on the hands of the deadman lying peacefully in the grass, on the water of the birdbath, on paper - yes! paper! on the newspaper Vivien is holding over her head as she runs across the green length of the lawn, her high heels puncturing the soft loam as she goes, to where I am sitting, certain, perhaps smiling, in the gazebo: Vivien has come!

And there is a pause in the afternoon, a silence between the claps of thunder. Vivien takes a seat directly across from me. We are smiling at one another, unable to say hello, afraid perhaps and shy; but, above all, we know, despite the changes and the years which stretch between us. I toss my spent butt into the grass. The smoke is gone and I begin to wonder what effect has her seeing the decrepit mansion had upon her, the former site of what could only be called revels, the rooms of her youth? Is she sad? I doubt it. Once these lawns and these trees framed moments only she could have nurtured; only she could be held responsible, not the moon, not summer; not even the flowers themselves whose odors astound and titillate

our inmost imaginings. Nor do I suppose Vivien could fall prey to the sentimental notion that these odors, the rose, the lily, the macabre lilac could have been more powerful or more subtle than they are right now, at this very moment. I must bridge the years. We are amused, pleased and astonished. At what? That we are still able to suspend ourselves in a delicious physical silence which neither of us can break but which we both relish and prolong? Sharpened senses? I imagine the years passing in an instant, the grass becomes brittle and brown, flowers wilt and release the dry scents of decay, all of the leaves descend at once in a sudden rush, the sky roils with brief preparatory storms, thunder and lightning; the air becomes cold, as in a vacuum; snow descends and covers us with rakish drifts, the elms groan, crack and contract with the freezing temperatures, sheets of lightning flash against a sky full of magnified winter stars; we hear the sound of the pool freezing, a sound like squeezed cork; snowflakes cling to our eyelashes, our breaths are visible and then the sun comes out and pours fire on the scene, the snow recedes, we sit in puddles of melted snow, the trees grow limber, buds appear; larks, bats and robins fill the air; green seeps back into each blade

of grass, each stem; flowers explode before our eyes as summer returns and as we sit, the cycle repeats itself for as many seasons as we have been apart. Throughout it all, we are not fazed. Slim shoots of ivy dart out from under my fingernails and climb up my arms. Vivien is coy. She waits. Seven winters come and go in as many minutes, seven springs..."so what if we are old," Vivien seems to be saying, "so what if we are old: can it really make a difference? has anything really changed? I suppose much has changed, but has anything been lost?" and I relent, grateful for the years, the impenetrable moments which have been fleeing before our very eyes and though time itself, in its sordid "dailyness", seems profane, the product of time is sacred; the crows feet around our dimming eyes, the muscles that no longer twitch with the desire to move. It occurs to me that this gazebo set in this overgrown garden is a shrine and we have come here to pay homage to the days and nights that have slipped by like a dotted line whose origins and end are impossible to reckon; it occurs to me further that this meeting has lent a fullness to the past, a completion we had been, each of us, seeking.

Dusk is falling. Vivien winds her

sable, with its black weasel-like eyes, closer to her neck, as if to say, "You are right. But I can't appreciate only the swiftness of the years and ignore the events, the monuments which fill them; I have been walking uphill these seven years, feigning indifference and smiling benignly on love and my heirloom silver alike. And all this while the hysteria was mounting. I am not the cause of it, though I can not be too sad, the years pass and with the years, those who people them. I am not the cause of that." Vivien's eyes and the glass eyes of her sable meet mine as I watch her. Her expression is one of acceptance. I feel my consciousness reach out and hold her face in gloved hands. She turns her head and glances over her shoulders, turning so that the skinny animal wound around her neck shifts just so, turning to look for a few seconds at the corpse beneath the lilac bush - just so, not coldly and not without fondness...just so and then she turns again to look at me, her expression remains unchanged. I am not ready to accept what Vivien has, for I am a little curious and my curiosity is gaining before her feigned indifference. Is this the man? I think: is this the man who, in the last

summer of my youth, carried Vivien across the lawn with one high-heeled shoe balanced on her toe while I stood in the door of the guest house with the other shoe in my hand? Is this the man who went away that night with Vivien sleeping on the backseat of his car while he, happy at last, whistled "Black Magic" and drove up the mountain road which lead to his home? I suspect it is. I feel Vivien wanting to explain and I begin to speculate on the chrome plated .25 cal. Browning automatic in her purse and her phone call last night wishing to meet me here, at the gazebo, after all these years. I remember her dashing through the rain to meet me only moments ago with a newspaper held over her head. Perhaps she came to me for help, I thought. Could Vivien have it in her to do this? Could she have aimed the pistol at the man's head and pulled the trigger and watched the tiny red spot appear on his forehead like a cast mark on an Indian and see his widened eyes fill with disbelief? Could she have done it? And as I looked across to where she sat I thought: is this the Vivien I once knew, the girl who sat naked on the diving board with her legs beneath her and her head forward with a cocktail cherry balanced on her extended tongue? Yes, yes it is. Vivien could not have done it.

Then I moved. I got up and walked over to her and offered her one of my Turkish cigarettes. She accepted it and I produced my Zippo and saw, for an instant, its flame in her eyes, in the eyes of her sable fur piece. In the darkness, I returned to my bench, sat down, and, stretching my legs in front of me, I made up my mind to ignore the corpse beneath the lilac bush and concentrate only on the glowing ash of the cigarette which brightened making a halo around her face when she inhaled. We sat, facing each other in the gazebo, in utter darkness, amid the odors of a mild evening, for some minutes, until the cigarettes were out and that's the last thing I remember.

HELEN

We were living near the river then.

It was a hot night and we had, if not through sheer laziness, then in hopes of finding some small relief, been sitting around our shabby kitchen table drinking beer and, between spurts of what seemed then to be fairly dull scraps of needless conversation, had been listening to the insects on the porch, the summer insects whose bodies made noises akin to the sound of someone eating bread and beans in a nearby room; or, if not the sound, akin to the feel of beans and bread as they slammed their soft blind bodies, winged bodies, against the screen door and, occasionally, against the yellow insect-proof light bulb which I had so carefully screwed into the rusty, crumbling socket not more than three weeks ago, long before I'd even begun to realize the extent to which they would be attracted to our lights, from as far as the river with its mosquito spawning pools and inlets, and its hot, flashing marshes.

"Troy was stupid."

That's about the time it started; our so-called fruitful discussion in which she, the woman I was living with, patiently reared some truths and

falsehoods concerning, I could only suppose, our relationship: lies we could, through some process, mutually expose and, hopefully, painlessly enjoy: it was too hot to argue. Besides, we avoided arguments, in the usual sense of the word, and in their place rolled ponderous silences, like stinking beached whales, between us or in a lighter vein complained, with reason, of each other's food or of each other's sexual or even musical preferences.

The heat became far too intense to withstand much longer. It would be better to employ it, to work at it until it became either a point of contention between us or an atmosphere from which we might extract some pleasure. Both of us recognized that this need lurked behind the disregard we had been showing to each other ever since the sun had gone down, ever since our light dinner and even as we sat, me peeling the wet label from my beer bottle, thinking of my idleness; and she, sitting an arms length away from me drawing neat diagrams on a ketchup stained paper napkin with a black Magic-Marker. She watched the black ink spread in a fuzzy circle when the felt tip was left on the napkin too long. She looked up.

"The Trojans were dumb."

Finally (having tried desperately to cling to my favorite image, an image of my own idleness: lying on my sofa in the front room, with the white stuffing protruding in places along the sides and arms; having vacant thought, wishing it would rain) I gave in.

"How come?"

"You know, Helen. Not to mention the horse."

She was careful: the wooden horse being an enigma which has always staggered me, as an image, perhaps as a "symbol" and, lastly, as a mere tactic. In a word, clever. She knew what she was doing. But it was more than that. It had something to do with her peculiar relationship with the moon which I, at turns, despised and envied; something to do with her sense of physicality which could not be dislocated or projected, which could not be shaken. Her intimidating but welcome presence awakened me on more than one occasion. Often, stretched on my tattered sofa of an afternoon, I would go through it again and again: the imaginative technician, an Ionian with the beginnings of a vast, Socratic beard and a speech defect; the tent in which the heroes sat, Achilles among them, and held council,

solemnly at first and then, as the wine gained its inevitable victory over solemnity, giddily. After an hours time, the heroes, having become nearly hysterical with the absurdity of the plan, slapping their knees and lifting their leathern skirts obscenely, decided that, after all, why not? At which point one of the younger of them stood up and came dangerously near to spilling his cup of wine on Achilles' tunic before he managed to blurt out, "Of course! Why didn't I think of that! and the others, though in high spirits, took his joke rather coldly and set about questioning the Ionian on some of the practical details of the scheme; he had it all figured out. Almost immediately such lumber and hardware as were needed were found and brought to the Ionian's tent, a place which soon became the site of much activity. One whole ship was dismantled for its oak stays and, for expedients sake, all those who had fostered hopes of returning to their homeland in it were either put to the sword or drowned by their reluctant follows. Too bad, I say, but the wood was needed. Those involved in the actual construction worked in the orange glare of a few torches and I could see them from where I lay in my tent with a thick sheep-skin clutched around my shoulders running their eyes

along pale boards, fitting joints, consulting with the Ionian and hoisting great cross-members with brute force; I could see chips fly out of the torchlit circle and land at the feet of fascinated soldiers; I could see the gleam of an adze.

That very night the Greek camp, livestock included, removed itself from the Trojan plains and boarded the ships which had been anchored in the bay, tethered to rotting ropes, for years. The actual building of the horse went quickly enough and inside six hours, just as the first light of dawn graced the Eastern sky, outlining the blood bespattered walls of Troy itself, it was finished. And it was beautiful; not beautiful in the way that slim Arabian mares are, but a powerful horse with great wooden slabs for flanks and a proud majestic head. It stood, in horse jargon, 60 hands high, allowing for a foot and a half or so where the horse's massive hooves joined the stout axles on which the beast would roll. Five lucky hoplites, myself among them, had been chosen to hide within the animals cramped but adequate interior. In the dust colored dawn I embraced my superiors, slipped out of my sandals, removed my sword nicked greaves, my leather skirt and, standing quite naked, (save for my tunic and my sword) on the familiar ground of past battles whose

frenzy I could almost smell, I whispered what could well have been my last prayers to the numerous and much maligned gods; one for silence, one for stealth and one particularly weak prayer for my own survival. I was afraid and yet, as I remember it, elated at the prospect of my being able to count myself among the few who would first enter Troy, deceive the stubborn Trojans and perhaps, just perhaps...

I was the first one in. We entered by means of a door (which, when shut, was all but invisible; even the Ionian could not at first find it) located just behind the animal's ribcage. With as much ceremony as I could muster, I slithered into the horse's belly and made my way back, through virtual darkness, to my appointed place just inside the left rear flank. As the others squeezed in behind me, I sensed a moment's panic, feeling naked legs and arms close to my own naked legs and arms; sensing the attenuated breathing, the general air of expectancy and joy mingled with that unmistakable scent of doom; the odor of warriors. One of my comrades laughed (for we hoplites are light-hearted fellows who appreciate nothing more than a good sense of humor, next to war, wine and women). Our spirits were eased slightly and a few more took the liberty of making bad jokes which we laughed at anyway, grateful for the release. The only sound left was the sound of

those Greeks who had watched us enter the horse quitting the scene; the telling sound of ashen spears being trailed behind their contemplative bearers in the sand, a hissing noise....and then it died and we waited, sweating, in the darkness.

* * *

Whispering. I think I must have dozed, for the whispering of what seemed to be Trojan shepherds startled me. They were circling us, whispering. Soon the inevitable knocks came; one, then another. I felt us all stiffen at once. Wait. Wait. Whispering again. Then silence. Thin strips of sunlight were now visible on the inside of the horse. I occupied myself with these discrepancies for quite some time, forgiving (for example) the ship's carpenters because they had to work by torch-light and subdued torch-light at that and taking stock of the fact that the day outside seemed to be pleasant enough. I shuddered at the possibility of my meeting my death having not seen the sun rise or feel its warmth on my cheeks or see it dance on the mirrored surface of my bronze helmet, my bronze helmet with its brilliant blue plume. In short, I was grateful for what little sunlight that did find its way into the bowels of my horse, my hiding place. When it did happen, I wasn't quite prepared. The slow rocking motion

accompanied by the creak and rumble of the large wooden wheels surprised me. Was it possible? I had heard no human voices, had smelt no rank team of oxen: we were moving. But to what place? For all I knew, we could have been being dragged to the bottom of the sea.

Soon it became apparent that, for good or ill, we were moving slowly toward the gates of Troy. Voices, outside, came to us like oil over water as we drew near. An official and a soldier were talking.

"What the hell is this?"

"A wooden horse. The Greeks left it."

"When did they leave?"

"Last night."

"I don't like it. In fact, it stinks."

"Burn it, sir?"

I shuddered. I think we all shuddered. I think we all strained the very limits of patriotism, valor, religiosity and rational capability at the mention of such a horrifying possibility. As we sat there nursing our fear (me with a cramp in my hamstring) a new texture wove itself into the hum of the crowd. Was it? I forgot the spasms in my leg and listened: it was the sound of a liquid, female voice.

"It's nice."

Such a lovely voice! My heart

quicken: could it be?

"I think it's nice."

There was a pause in which I imagined all eyes to be trained on the source of those few delicious words, those simple testaments of supernatural beauty: I was unstrung.

"It's pretty. Can I have it?"

The crowd cheered. They too had been moved by her straightforward appraisal of the wooden horse. Yes, they seemed to be shouting, give her the horse, go ahead, let her keep it, she loves it, she loves the horse. Something in her eyes as well as in her words must have swayed the official (whoever he was; I thought the worst) and brought him home to the fact that there was no other alternative but than to give her what she had so eloquently expressed a need of having. He spoke.

"Of course you may have it!"

And a great thundering round of cheering and applause broke forth and, seemingly, shook the horse itself, although, I realized, it was only that we were being dragged through the gates of the city by the force of the crowd into a wide sunlit courtyard which had been, in better days, the market place of Troy. We were set, I suppose, on display. Now everyone joined

in on the leisurely perusal of the "gift". Our plan was working perfectly.

All morning and throughout the afternoon we were the subject of every conversation, every child's toes and fingers; the center of even an informal celebration which included much oratory and dancing, as well as the sober reflection upon those Trojans who had offered their lives in defence of their city. I heard Hector's name more than once that afternoon while sweat streamed down my forehead and stung my eyes and trickled down my sides: the Greeks had stolen away in the night, there is nothing to do but dance and sing and reap the joys of freedom; we have a horse, left to us by them and we may even spit on it but we won't because we are so glad!

And they didn't spit, but it was intolerably hot; surely they could smell us?

* * *

I couldn't resist. By a process of contortion which seemed, for the longest time, to produce little more than cramps and splinters, i managed to turn my body, twist my neck in such a way as to allow my left eye (the good one) to squint between the thick boards of the horse's flank. Outside, in the sun

drenched courtyard, I found that though everyone still maintained an especially festive mood, they had ceased gathering about us, touching the legs, the tail (a blonde swath of unwound hemp) and making inane comments about how our devilishly conceived "monument" did, indeed, resemble a horse. One old Trojan declared haughtily that "it was not for want of art that the Greeks camped in the shadows of our walls." His companion agreed, though I suspect he missed the point entirely and considered his friend's remark to be merely witty, a remark which at base was unkind, not to say depraved, and made me flush with anger and, I must admit, some embarrassment. But would I see her? As I gazed into the sunlight, three thoughts struck me almost simultaneously: (1) that there could not be more than 600 persons left alive in Troy, (2) that they must have drawn their water from some rank underground stream (the access to which quite possibly being the cistern from which certain women were withdrawing large pear-shaped jugs) and (3) that it would be ridiculous to hope that she would appear before me, here, in the hot courtyard, where the women were withdrawing smelly water from a hidden well. Still, I looked with interest at the smooth, white interior wall surfaces, the chickens, the rude livestock pens and the oblique shadows which fell

across the entire scene. I thought: she must be in some high, frescoed chamber surrounded by a frieze depicting dolphins leaping gracefully out of the blue waters of the Mediterranean; having her arms annointed with these Eastern oils whose scents reveal unfathomed skies; having water run down her spine to where it must form a shivering pool in the small of her back; she must be sleeping in some breezy recess of this stubborn desert metropolis.

The afternoon drew on.

* * *

Two soldiers approached the horse. Both, by their talk, seemed convinced something was amiss. They spoke in muted, earnest tones and circled us as the shepherds had. I remembered myself as a child running between stately marble columns, in the lightest of togas, looking for the perfect hiding place... a bush, near the steps of the Temple of Apollo, where I squatted, hardly daring to breathe, knowing that they must come. I hear them, I hear their bare feet on the wide marble floors of Apollo's Temple; they come nearer and nearer until I must hold my breath in order to hear theirs and all I can think is: I have to piss, I have to piss...

I have to piss. They might find me.

* * *

It was dark. The strips of sunlight in the horse's flank had withered long ago. One of my companions let himself down through the secret door and hung, upside down, between the horse's legs to get a look around. He found himself staring (upside down as he was) face to face with a drunken Trojan. He laughed weakly and stumbled off into the darkness. Once the coast was clear, my companion let himself down and dashed, as only a Hoplite can, toward the gates where, we hoped, the entire Greek army was waiting. They were. They slipped in, insidiously, and took position. I climbed out of the horse and, inhaling a gulp of fresh air, I gazed into one of the clearest nights I had ever beheld; it was the sort of night one welcomed in Asia Minor, limpid and still; a perfect night on which to launch a deadly surprise attack.

The drunken man lurched into the courtyard followed by a soldier.

"See? They're all around us!"

We killed them both. Then, at first stealthily, we moved, at last, on Troy: we ran through rooms impaling unlucky somnambulists on our

spears, hacked at sleeping flesh, threw virgins out of high windows, kicked in the chests of ancient whimpering men as if they were wicker baskets; we started fires, overturned carts of melons, tore apart docile pets with our bare hands, ruined every work of art in sight, slit the throats of goats and cowering officials, we murdered, maimed, raped and looted; all this to the screams and wails of roused stricken Trojans whose plight appeared no less pitiful than that of the terrorized chickens which ran, everywhere, flapping useless wings, trying desperately to fly, to rise up above the hellish scene, above the city that was once safety itself to hero, king and beggar alike; white chickens, the bloodstained gowns of sleepers running in circles, bellowing oxen, hysterical sheep; soon the bodies were heaped everywhere among the shadows, beneath the starlit heavens, amid painful groans and supplications...

I was running down a long hall willfully decapitating both the living and the dead, striking out at everything, still or in motion; anything in my way as I moved through carnage and waste, slipping in the pools of blood on the polished floors, with one desire foremost in my mind: to catch even the most fleeting glance of one person, just one glance...

* * *

She stood before me, naked. I closed my eyes, opened them and gazed. She had (demurely it seems) removed all of her clothing and stood before me: passive, yet confident that I would feel the full force of her exposure; I could see it in her eyes. Her clothes lay in a heap on the kitchen floor and above the persistent hum of the refrigerator I could hear moths flopping wearily against the screen, against the yellow insect-proof lightbulb. The label was only partially peeled; the rest of it lay in a neat pile (much as her clothes did - only in miniature) on my shabby kitchen table. Then she spoke. I knew she was going to bring it up. She had to. We both had to.

"If it wasn't for Dr. Heinrich Schliemann..."

"Yes?"

"If it hadn't been for Dr. Heinrich Schliemann, I wouldn't be standing here before you like this."

"No?"

"No."

"What about Homer?"

"You've never read Homer."

She was right, I hadn't. And even if I had, right now, at this moment, it would have made

but little difference. I had been caught and I would have to admit that her move had been executed with... perfection. Years later, I would remember it, calmly insert my ivory bookmark into a page (any page) of my tattered paperback Homer and dream awhile: it had been done with perfection and I had acted childishly, but it worked out; in the end we repayed the moths, the lightbulb and the river.

She was going to speak again; the insects and the appliances wove their delicate background noises.

"Are you aroused?"

"Yes."

But I waited. I sat. I took a long pull from my still chilly beer. Over half of the bubbling, effervescent beer remained. I was aroused.

"I am..."

"The Woman-With-Whom-I-Am-Living."

"Yes."

And she smiled and I smiled and I inserted my thumb into the neck of the beer bottle and shook it vigorously until the bottle nearly burst, aimed it at her and by lifting my thumb ever so slightly sent a thick stream of beer foam in a graceful arc from where I was sitting to that area of her chest just above her

breasts and had the supreme pleasure of watching it cascade, for the briefest of moments, down over her breasts and her stomach before I got up and ran, wild with joy, through the screendoor, through clouds of dizzying phototactic insects, onto the lawn, into the heat of summer and down, down a gentle slope to where the river flowed, complacently, through the hottest August night I have ever had the pleasure of remembering.

I had intended to leap, fully clothed, into the river, but the approach was difficult. Rather than leap from the height of six feet into murky shallow water, I chose to run down an old cowpath for what seemed to be the right amount of time before entering the river itself. I must have misjudged it, for when I did turn toward the river, my steps became sluggish and noisy. Then it was too late. Even while I was trying to recall exactly where I had made my mistake, I was up to my knees in thick river ooze. I saw her, a pale sprinting form, on the cowpath I had followed.

"Hey!"

She stopped. Not more than thirty feet away.

"Watch out. There's muck. Quicksand."

"Bullshit."

"Honest. I'm up to my thighs
in it."

"You stuck?"

"Yup."

"Well get out then."

"Can't."

"Try."

"Can't."

"I'm not going out there."

"Please?"

But I wasn't worried. I had ceased
sinking and now probably rested on a log or, better,
the sunken spinal column of a long since drowned cow.
I couldn't move much.

"You'll have to stay there."

"No."

"Have to."

"Get a board or something."

"..."

"Help."

I watched her wade through the ooze
toward me.

"This is as far as I am going. Do
it yourself."

I told her how my ending up in the muck had been by accident and certainly not by design and I told her that I had only wanted to entice her into the river. That's all. Only the river, not the muck.

Easing myself off my foothold, I paddled through the ooze. Virulent river mosquitos swarmed around my head, got in my nose, ears and my eyes. When I reached her I was able to stand and we pushed on to the cowpath cursing and slapping ourselves senseless. She was bitten. I was covered with leeches. We walked up the cowpath and up the grassy slope toward the yellow porchlight of our house. Once back in the kitchen, I stood by the door covered with black river slime. I switched off the light. The insects dispersed.

* * *

We burned the leeches off with smouldering match heads. We lay on the bed and wished for breezes. They came and our skin grew cool. The river flowed, I suppose, complacently throughout our sleep. Later on, much later on, it rained. We may have heard thunder.

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THE MUSIC BOX : ELSA

Elsa sat inside the camp investigating (as would any nosey stranger) the contents of a cabinet she had rifled every summer for the last six years, with the same relish and with the same genuine surprise: hooks, sinkers, tubes of glue, twine, steel punches in a cedar box and, inevitably, a calendar which consisted of one month, July. In the square with a 10 and a black crecent moon, between the slim horns, someone had scribbled ENO'S 213 EGGS. That, of course, was years ago when ENO'S was a mere clearing on the side of the road where a lame attendant shuffled back and forth between the pump, a produce stand and the ramshackle building with Post Office stencilled on the window. ENO'S vegetables were his own and partially because of that fact and the thousands of people from the city who trickled down the road in every sort of vehicle, they were dear. Elsa knew this. She also knew that ENO himself was dead and had been so for the last six years, since the first summer she had come to swim in the lake. ENO died and the dust no longer rose, for they had paved the road. Why, Elsa thought as she sat gazing out the window toward the beach, do they sit in the sun for eight hours, glazed with sweat, when they could as

easily sit, more comfortably, in a cool place suffused with the smell of hot cedar and mint which aproned the steep slope leading to the road? Once the afternoon began to deepen and the water, the rocks and the birches began to grow more distinct, with shadows particular and accurate, you could swim out to the raft, stand up, and see your shadow stretch a hundred feet across the water; that is the time to swim, when the fish jumped, when all the odors which had lingered a few inches above the ground, under mint and ivy, began to rise and inform the evening shade; that is the time to swim thought Elsa as she lay in the wicker chair turning over plums and arranging long spikes on the table beside her: that is the time to swim, not now. Now the sun was too hot and the white caps, reaching up from the glassy troughs, are not only white but touched by the perpendicular sun; bronzed. Now is when the gravel at the water's edge is only gravel and the colored stones beneath a foot of water are only colored stones. Nothing very interesting, only early afternoon and what the others call a "perfect" day. Plums are good, with insides that look and feel like the inside of your cheek, only darker.

How old were these flies? Had even one lasted for a month or more? Weightless carcasses

littered the windowsill on which Elsa leaned when she left the wicker chair. They, like so many other things, simply appeared or disappeared. She had never seen one die. Joseph didn't like them. Probably they were too dry and would stick in his teeth the way popcorn stuck to Elsa's teeth, those brown translucent cups which just cover the molars and get stuck beneath the gums. Perhaps flies' wings are the same, for Joseph.

Elsa leaned closer to the windowpane, so her breath marked it, and saw, beyond the steps of the slight embankment made from weathered boards to the stoney beach where her Aunt and Uncle stood opening cans of beer. Did they fuck? Last week, as Tournament was drawing to a close and as the people from the city disappeared, Elsa lay awake watching, through her screen, the lights from across the lake while her Uncle puttered in the kitchen, no doubt looking for a can of beer. Elsa wondered then. Even their sleeping seemed laborious, with continual snoring and the wretched creak of the bedsprings and the unending trips to the bathroom which, she thought, they somehow couldn't manage without first getting into a complete nocturnal wardrobe: slippers, bathrobe, and a flashlight to frighten off racoons. Once there, for one had to go outside to reach the toilet, they coughed and drank water for five minutes; then the screendoor slammed and the abrupt shadows of the flashlight darted on the ceiling as they made their way through

the camp and into the bedroom. Then they would talk.

"Were they out there?"

"Got the spareribs."

"Already?"

"Only saw their eyes under the truck."

"Good night."

"A skunk, I think."

"Hmmm."

"Poor Joseph."

"Joseph!"

"Too bad."

"Oh yes. Joseph. Good night."

Joseph had been torn apart by racoons.

The garbage hadn't been touched, so it was decided that Joseph died bravely, exercising at long last his territorial imperative. Poor Joseph met his end, in other words, protecting left over spareribs.

"Lloyd?"

"Hmmm."

"Poor Joseph."

"Hmmm. It's a damn shame."

"He was a good cat."

"It's a damn shame."

But on that night, as the Tournament was drawing to a close, there was no conversation, only

movement, self-conscious movement because the racket of the bed was neither loud, nor regular. At first it seemed that Lloyd was getting into bed, and if it was, he couldn't find a comfortable position for some twenty minutes and then there was the breathing when the bed stopped. Elsa listened and watched the lights on the far off shore twinkle much in the same way as the larger stars above them. Elsa experienced a strange sensation, lying there with the screen, the slight wind, the stars and lights; it was their secrecy which was exciting, not so much that they, perhaps, were excited. Even now, drenched in the afternoon, opening cans of beer; that seemed to be lost. They took long pulls at the moist cans. Lloyd pointed to a small sailboat halfway out in the bay, and her Aunt sat down heavily in the collapsible beach chair thinking about the day when both of them had gone fishing out beyond the rocks of Sunset Island. Lloyd had caught three bass which Elsa wouldn't eat. She liked pumpkin seed, or blue gills or sunfish... whatever they were called, for everyone called them something different. Elsa liked any yellow fish that lived among the clean rocks in the shallow waters of the bay. Or summer squash or pears or...

The windowsill was hard on Elsa's elbows. She crushed one of the fly carcasses, they were brittle

and made the same sound as her hair did that night when Mr. Eno's son (himself a man, who could think about such things as selling an entire store) accidentally burned her hair with his cigarette. The crushed flies sounded just the same. He was that close and Elsa panicked, though she couldn't make a sound, and felt relieved when a bit of her hair was singed by his cigarette, as he backed off a little and began apologizing, even more so when it looked as if she were going to cry. That changed everything. She felt at least as awkward as he did and was relieved (though, again, she couldn't show it, any more through her expression than by words she couldn't speak) to find another person who could blush as deeply as she. At another time, when he had delivered groceries, he asked her why she wasn't out enjoying the sun and she said something smart like, 'I'm afraid I'll melt,' he only laughed and told her she was a tease and she couldn't understand it. It wasn't long after that when Mr. Eno's son again came by with groceries and, before he even put them down said something like 'Melt in the mouth, but not in the hand' and tossed her a package of M & M candies. Elsa caught them and threw them back as hard as she could for she really was mad but she didn't connect. The bag split open on the corner of the table and the candies scattered all over. Mr. Eno's son only laughed and

walked out and Elsa spent about half an hour on her knees picking up M & M's; they were everywhere. As she crushed some more flies Elsa wondered if she really was a tease or whether, as Lloyd put it, men like Mr. Eno's son couldn't really understand her and misinterpreted everything. He was helpful like that and did understand things even though her aunt was after him for days to carve a marker for poor Joseph's grave and when he finally said (after saying, "We'll see, we'll see" until it nearly drove her mad), "Joseph's lucky he got a grave, never mind a fucking marker." she almost hit him. They both ran down to the beach and argued for about an hour. That was the week the Tournament was drawing to a close. Lloyd did understand things and after Elsa told him about Mr. Eno's son, he told her not to worry. He sold the store anyway and moved into town. Now there is a bigger ENO'S right off the new traffic circle. Even when they paved the old road, it didn't help; no one used it any more. Cars from the city wheeled in on the new highway, circled down the exit ramp and stopped right across from a sign that read, ENO'S Gas and Vegetables Turn Left. So he wouldn't be around any more and Elsa wouldn't miss him, though it was nice to have someone come around now and then while her aunt and Lloyd were on the beach drinking beer. Which, Elsa wondered, is

more clean: a fly or a dog's mouth; if flies are as filthy as they say, then a dog's must be cleaner. Her mouth, she concluded, must lie somewhere in between; scissors cut paper, rock breaks the scissors. Now I lay me down to sleep and hope it's time for dinner soon. Elsa flopped down into the wicker chair and looked at the table beside her. Outside on the beach her Uncle was wading slowly out into the water for his final afternoon swim. The resistance of the water made his passage labored, his thick legs pushing, his wide stomach plowing through the water like an overloaded ferry. He turned and waved to his wife before diving into the warm, green water. Elsa would swim after dinner; that was the time to swim she thought, after eating any yellow fish that lived among the clean rocks in the shallow waters of the Bay or pumpkin seed, or bluegills or sunfish or summer squash or pears or...plums are good, with their insides like the insides of your cheek. Elsa picked up one of the long spikes from the table beside her and pushed it slowly into the plum, until a few beads of juice squeezed through and stained her white shorts.