

M A D M A N

by

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ABSTRACT

I presume to collect these poems and call them a book because they all claim an attitude toward the "modern" situation that is at once ironically detached and pathetically trapped. Through this attitude I give you desire, inhibition, tenderness, violence, naivety, sarcasm, hatred, tolerance, pride, consciousness, and as many other, as I can, of the colors of human determinism. The styles range as the voices and the lusts, and no one of them is more mine than another.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ALEMBIC	First
THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL	IT
CANADIAN FORUM	Procrustes random notes on grandmother
EDGE	Delight
POTLATCH	Order
TANGENT	HUMM: a wicked tune
TRACE	In the night

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The poems in this book are arranged
on the premise that to create life
in a world obsessed with death
is a dangerous thing.

You accuse me of conventionality?

I was born there.

and my travels, I

admit, have been few

and unpretentious.

You confuse me of rhetoric?

the problem of art.

Of course I have some trouble

eliminating mother, first love, wife.

You seduce me of feeling.

and I fear these tokens

are not enough.

OMENS

Having been told what to fear,
I can answer only that I feel.

Order

From here
one drop of water is mine.
Many sparkle on branches
(variations of echoes) but
one is constant,
no star for wise men
no scientific complex of atoms
symbol of grace or man
tear from a weeping god,
but water drop (poised before falling
from a dormant branch)
that I have journeyed here to see.

Cyclic

Oakleaves crisp. and the parish bell sounds
sharp from
far away.

Ice in breath.

still the sun shines (at horizon
crawls round structures to make shadows
from dwellingplaces, mountains
children giants and
from a rottenleaning telephone pole
(on which is crow)

a cross

on which is blob that
turns, to become crow and re-
turns to

blob

and talks the while to other shadows
propheying what?

BATTLES & BATTLEFIELDS

Have I HEARD of the bomb?

Union

Most of you I'll flush away
but some, name my blood
or withhold, when moonlight eludes my guards
and return, when darkness hunches and
howls
for lightning.
Most of you I'll waste.

Staff

the hottest day of the year.

An overcoated grandfather
swings his ash cane

I am for you sir!

Thrust, monsieur!

at invisible enemies

on the other side of the walk.

The jeers of three children reach him
and his wizard's wand
waves a thousand evil spells
onto elves and pixies

but

considering their youth

(and his)

he blesses the fleeing forms
and with crosier loosely held
archpriest-pilgrim returns to homeshrine.

Tonight

three smooth bodies and one wrinkled
will lie awake

and wonder

when the curse will fall
while invisible enemies enter
and run round bedrooms
and

Thrust! Thrust monsieur!

Man-maid

Wiped dew from her lips
combed grass from her earthen hair
shielded her from the sun
taught her to feed through his soul,
and

gratified
severed the cord
watched the parasite grasp
gasp
and die.

Land of Plenty

Snowstrands fold around the pimples,
seep into the pores of the earth's face.

Stillfalling

flakes mask the ice

stubbled sidewalk

bootscarred grass

cream wrinkled shrubbery

fur the bald Oak when

starling descends to snowface

(over what may be green

pecks for eyes while

white dust gathers around.

IT

I often wonder how

it

would be

back in the days when men were, so to speak,

eighteen-year-old virile

BOYS

before luxuries spoiled us for the

finer things before

modern technology made us

soft

before there

were so many spectaculars

that a spectacular

lost its

virginity.

I don't know about you but I live on a

routine:

drinking bouts Mon Wed Fri 9:30

debaucheries Tues Thurs Sat with

time off for behavior and

commendation for keeping it down or

keeping it up. I get fed

down with it all,
dream of meeting HER again for

the first time/but this time/bayeebee!

in five feet of dewy grass
under the hot sun, her head
moving towards me, her neck
and the pulse of grass below

pulsing, below. Oh!
the rapture of it all
day long without the wonders
of modern science. I
dream of meeting her again
and again and
of four brats raising cain on our third
anniversary, eight on our sixth and so
on in an arithmetical pro-
gression I
wonder what went wrong it
must have been those scientifically-roasted peanuts
that retain their freshness all night long I
had
for a midnight snack.

Son

the waiting,
watching her mind grow large with instinct
and fear,
savaging breasts' bitter juice,
resting an ear
to translate her belly's rapid message

. FIERCE NOWS

and holding her hand
between, when it lay dozing, unaware of company,
and during, when veins screamed life
like arched bodies naked from a bed of coals.

And of course at the window among kinsmen I
like an idiot grinning from payday to payday,
at her bedside with my eyes full of expensive flowers
and chocolates that she can't eat
because they'll give HIM
diarrhea.

Lonely. the empty house, the bed I shun.
lonely waiting the return of my young wife,

my Jocasta.

random notes on grandmother

The foxhair is ragged from battle.

The last teeth are black.

I answer that I did not set the trap!

Your moustache is darker, against the pallor.

Do they never shave it now?

If you had howled louder

I might have checked the traps last spring.

I am sorry your bones are broken.

I do not think your chest has strength
to drown indefinitely.

If I had not been told you were unconscious
I would have feared your open eyes.

WARRIORS

If there was only one question,
only one answer:

Diogenes

Foolish of me to lose

his name,

companion of my youth.

We shared contagions years ago

fought the same enemies.

I do

remember

her name

and the day her long nails

combed hairs on the back of my hand.

That night they burned together.

I thanked him for telling me.

Ixion

Is no man strong enough to touch her
they asked

I HAVE

The boast became a fact
My daughter howled in darkness.

 another fact
My daughters pleaded for attention.

 another
Three daughters ran naked for clothes
 about my one-room legacy in Torin.

Another

I wait for a son to carry my chains.

Venus on Madison Avenue

I weave golden apples for gods.
I rival ice, but womb the earth.
I loom a goddess to the West.

WE string necklaces of seeds
to drape around our buttocks
go identically to
mid-day costume parties
and religiously
to aphrodisiacs at night.

THEY make my mouth and nails fluorescent
shave my calves and cup my breasts
pad my eyes, wreath my hair
net my thighs and harness my loins

bottle my lust
and drink my sweat
in the name of
golden
apples

and I love it.

Press my navel and
see me climax

Sinon

I was bound to open the mystery.

One does start with small digressions,
a blooded brother or a bloodied sweetheart.
I say they are small, in scope,
I strung a reputation of them.

One catalytic motion dissolves the string
and scattered acts disrobe. I knew, but
I was obliged by craft, what
remained for me to do.

It is not what I intended.

Pithecanthropus

I lack words.

Look behind my eyes.

Playmates mocked my lacks.

Elders marvelled

found no answer to my riddle

clawed to death my dam.

Her mate has never returned.

Me, they feared to touch.

I sought revenge

but the means have remained

mists, within my head.

Now I have found a female

strange as I.

Do I dare love her?

The beast within says

yes.

I fear the consequence.

Sisyphus

I have buried four grandfathers
and one grandmother (one still lives!),
two mothers and seven fathers, five
children and ten wives (three I never
married), fourteen sisters (I am without
brother), nine cousins (all unfortunately
childless) and six sets of uncles and
aunts.

I tried to kill them but failed.
They died.

This is the way I make my waiting
NOT WITHOUT HOPE

One still lives.

Charon

Gentlemen, my fee, iff you will be so kind. and if not, then, I am not, as indeed I desire to be, your servant. Speak not of what you have already paid, I'm sure it has been much but, believe me, I've heard it ALL before. And offer no alternatives, no musical performances (music always nice indeed but this neither the time nor the) no bribes (I am, of course, above) no threat of violence (you understand that I am under the protection of?) and so on. Doubtless you have heard of certainnn back ways in by which the fee can be avoided, but I assure you you can readily discount these. The Ferry Authority has carried out at my request a thorough investigation and has now assured me that my monopoly is, in every sense of the word, just that. So cough it up and we shall be away (running a little late as it is) thank you sir and you sir and you aaannd you? haven't? Always a piker in the I'M AFRAID IGNORANCE OF THE REGULATION IS NO EXCUSE. Of course, I, personally, am sorry about all this. But I don't make the rules so if you'd just step aside and let these other gentlemen Come along now from time to time I'll be pointing out landmarks of interest perhaps you noticed the sign on our gate as you came in built in the year eleven thousand nine aught six by the then Minister of Public and Administrative

Joan

waiting for God to streak my womb
with the spirit of a savior,

(I cannot feel

rending flesh like ice
parts earth,

(I cannot feel

listening for fire to pass
my snow thighs,

(I cannot feel

These times.
men of France

I WANTED YOU

Tityus in anecdotery, years after top-billi
ng in Operating Studio III at Saint Vincent
's Hospital for the Physically Incorrigible

Before night came

I recall telling those two white-coated basta
rds:

NOT MY LUNGS

YOU ASSHOLES

Tantalus after THE CURE

never a more unfortunate man than
me, up to my neck in
troubles. those
sweatflanked supervirgins prance
by three feet above my
head like myths upon the water,
water, every. where
they wear their skirts an
inch below their

oats
they're mounts for
gods three
feet above my head an glass, two
inches of amber
hair and
not ONE
drops to
drink.

Tithonus

It is again spring.
A light breeze is some relief
(the winters are hard)
but no release.

Will you believe that, long ago,
I was unequalled in beauty,
had fibred, unhaired legs to support me,
shoulders clean as dew,

and ideas for the future.
I would mate the dawn,
mount and fertilize the stars,
reign forever.

I have done all that.
Now grass supports me, for
my flesh is wintered hard,
and my ideas light as wind.

Biton

Whatever else you toss from memory
retain this:

I am the elder, the stronger, piston-
sinewed. My part of power
eclipsed my share of praise.

Only her goodness
halved rewards.

My
eyes are open.

Cleobis

Whatever you preserve,
forget that
I exerted all.
Baffled tongues feel no lies. Therefore
boast.
I
dream.

Procrustes

My own growing, my own learning was long and painful enough to stretch my breath until it surrendered like crystal at the high-pitched touch of humanity, if you'll pardon the conceit, enough to cut my heart away from the simple pleasures like life and so, now that I'm in the not-entirely-enviable position of being the all-knowing judge (I can, you see, laugh at my pomposity) who judges YOU I may, remembering--perhaps wistfully --my younger days, offer this encouragement: FIT DAMN YOU FIT DAMN YOU FIT DA

Philoctetes

Because it was a defect you rejected me
Because it was an asset (I laugh
at your inadequacies) you returned,
BEGGING.

What you wanted, I had always. This
I grasp.

What plagues is
I surrendered. Abstracts
haunt me

conscience,
obligation,
fear of pain,

unresolved,

but I can expiate in part.
Do not expect me again.

Penelope

Without you, the rain
beats seconds, the days
are rivers

 nights ice. I
(touching only the deadwooden
floor and naked skeletal
chair

 compose tendrils to
blossom at the spring
 of your return.

Pygmalion

What the land lacked,
my mind needed,
my hand provided,

rather I saw echoes in your name
and prayed them
perfect, remote.

My mistake, began with touching, I
entered the mirror to
siege the blood

and found veins of marble.

My warning, then:
Do not flesh wrong myth.
or
Do not presume miracle.

Zeus

What a family.

DEFEATS

laugh.

First

early spring we whispered through the trees
brushing fresh lips against the morning and each other
till I drew from your well throat
long liquid pleasure
and unnoticed by chirping birds
you dropped unnature slowly to the ground
became flashing white in virgin sunlight
in the green grass growing around your
tickling your toes you were
white snow melting into my
cooling my wetting my thirsty body

But now,
when cut grass rots rainpelted,
you were robin's egg that I stole from the nest.

Bulletholes in the Sun

two spots.
 tongues of gas, black, against
 the body
 spurting fire.

 no border skirmish,
 but total destruction of hopes within
 the body
 and genesis of tiny planets with-
 out heat from
 the body
 of a star.

 nor are we eagles to look upon the sight
 (the body)
 and be refreshed.

Growths

There is nothing to look
at. but
baffled rectacles of glass
divide the black wall into

Outside the trees grow too slowly.
I've seen them before.

Humming light frames me in the window
I think
The panes are green.
One is broken and looks like thin ice
that will never be water.

The naked trees are ugly people.

Behind me
you are dead.
The roots from your eyes
inhale almost all of the air now

VICTORIES

I have
to write of
these.

SPOILS

Answers I give you in words,
yet words are not answers,
but conductors.
Energy is a gift.

In the night

tastes of you on my fingertips
like those few dead leaves
at the ends of the oak tree's body
are all that save the skeleton
from the sky

Ignorance, of course, is bliss

The last few days, I should imagine,
were not unlike Pompeii.

life as usual

Cats pulled dirt over their own

My uncle sold short on 200 Telephone preferreds

My kid sister changed boyfriends

Miss October wore big breasts

and very sheer but not quite sheer enough
panties.

Then it happened.

I ran to warn the others

The sky is falling The sky is falling

but they wouldn't listen

no one

not even she.

For days they passed with lowered eyes.

Huge pieces of sky fell about my ears.

Institutions

aspirations

crumbled.

When it was over,

life as usual.

I did the only decent thing

sold my house at a profit

and bought a pulmanized automobile.

To me

what had happened was as clear as

air (a fantastic number of particles

unseen by man)

for I

fortunately

have perfect vision.

with corrective lenses

Delight

Leaving your house
we enter private night.
My heels down familiar stairs
like gods playing with thunder
in a world of still cold air
and only infrequent drops of rain.

Your night hair hangs long
down your back
and your black cotton hand
gloves itself in mine
so

naturally
that my razor sharp cheeks glisten
damp as desire.

Were Three

Looking back on it I see the change, at
when I stopped the lamp that burned beside,
I sold my part of talking, slowly
as the dusklight slowly stopped, and watched
the other two be darkness moving, not,
as before they were sweat forehead cleaved
nose and all the brilliance of exceeding
energy, but as fuel unraped, a lump of coal not
burning but carried, the mannish woman
softened, her sharp voice heavied with past,
and the man's unreally soft, soft as his body.

And looking back I see my own position
as I felt it then a lone observer not unlike
the other two but neither like them nor like
anyone. Nor they each other.

after.

when your sentences have
yielded to the darkness.
your body twitches
as its mind un-
ravels memories
of mine.

Fragments

and because the stars diffused
themselves so finely, falling
washed the air so
harshly that the flood
applauded and mud ran thick
through veins to burden the
wells,

breathing is gay
once more
though common.

And so we search the skies again.

Poetry

Lost in your hair
my fingers hunt the
source of your rivers.
In the jungle hills
hunger softly
for my will
is a cage.

Between your muscles
I plant screams
cultivate whispers, when the flesh
accepts, harvest winds,
when the nerve weeps.

ask, of your pores, no
songs, of your skin,
no stories.