

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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## VICTORIES

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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.

HUMM: a wicked tune

I could lie in meadows and make clouds dragons  
birches shining knights and you a princess.

I could dance you to a rainbow castle  
present you winds for servants  
feathered entertainers and myself as king.

I could walk on seas to please you,  
fashion loaves from crumbs of pleasure,  
make lame capacities swift as thoroughbreds,

But I can hear the noise the earth makes,  
  spinning,  
loud enough to drown out trumpets on a hill.  
long enough to be a coffin or a cross.

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

prophesying 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 aaand 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 Incurable

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.