

ROBERT
LOWELL
NOTEBOOK
1967-68

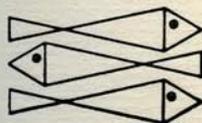
A

Robert Lowell

NOTEBOOK 1967-68

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FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX
NEW YORK



FOR HANNAH

WITH LOVE

AND THANKS FOR
SOMEONE LINDA

FROM

Ed

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3

An unaccustomed ripeness in the wood;
 move but an inch and moldy splinters fall
 in sawdust from the aluminum-paint wall,
 once loud and fresh, now aged to weathered wood.
 Squalls of the seagulls' exaggerated outcry,
 dimmed out by fog . . . Peace, peace. All day the words
 hid rusty fish-hooks. Now, heart's-ease and wormwood,
 we rest from all discussion, drinking, smoking,
 pills for high blood, three pairs of glasses—soaking
 in the sweat of our hard-earned supremacy,
 offering a child our leathery love. We're fifty,
 and free! Young, tottering on the dizzying brink
 of discretion once, we wanted nothing,
 but to be old, do nothing, type and think.

4

To summer on skidding summer, the rude spring rain
 hurries the ambitious, flowers and youth;
 the crackling flash-tone's held an hour, then we
 too follow nature, imperceptibly
 change from mouse-brown to the white lion's mane,
 to thin white, to the freckled, knuckled skull,
 bronzed by decay, by many, many suns . . .
 The child of ten, three quarters animal,
 three years from Juliet, half Juliet,
 already ripens for the night on stage—
 beautiful petals, what shall I hope for,
 knowing one choice not two is all you're given,
 health beyond the measure, dangerous
 to yourself, more dangerous to others?

(4)

3

Months of it, and the inarticulate mist so thick
we turned invisible to one another
across the room; the floor, aslant, shot hulling
through thunderheads, gun-cotton dipped in pitch,
salmon, when lighted, as the early moon,
snuffed by the malodorous and frosted murk—
not now! Earth's solid and the sky is light,
yet even on the steadiest day, dead noon,
the sun stockstill like Joshua's in midfield,
I have to brace my hand against a wall
to keep myself from swaying—swaying wall,
straitjacket, hypodermic, helmeted
doctors, one crowd, white-smocked, in panic, hit,
stop, bury the runner on the cleated field.

4

The vaporish closeness of this two-month fog;
thirty-five summers back, the brightest summer:
the Dealer's Choice, the housebound girls, the fog;
fog lifting. Then, as now, the after curfew
boom of an unknown nightbird, local hemlock
gone black as Roman cypress, the barn-garage
below the tilted Dipper lighthouse-white,
a single misanthropic frog complaining
from the water hazard on the shortest hole;
till morning! Short dreams, short shrift—one second, bright
as burning shavings, scattered bait and ptomaine
caught by the gulls with groans like straining rope;
windjammer pilgrims cowed in rubber hoods,
making for harbor in their yellow bus.

(6)

5

Going the limit on some slip of crabgrass,
 vibrating to the everlasting motor,
 a hundred yards, two hundred, above the ocean—
 or once in New Orleans, when the ceiling fan
 wrestled the moisture, and one pajama leg
 hung out of reach, caught on a leather blade—
 the generation bred to drink the ocean
 in that all-possible after Repeal;
 all girls then under twenty, and the boys
 unearthly with the white blond hair of girls,
 crawling the swimming pool's robin's-egg sky;
 safe, out of reach. The fall warms vine and wire,
 the ant's cool, amber, hyperthyroid eye,
 grapes tanning on these tried entanglements.

6

Shake of the electric fan above our village;
 oil truck, refrigerator, or just man,
 nightly reloading of the village flesh—
 there are worse things than marriage. Men find dates
 wherever summer is out, the nights of the swallow
 clashing in heat, storm-signal to stay home.
 On Court Street, Dyer's Lane, School, Green and Main,
 the moon-blanchd blacktop fusses like a bosom,
 dropping through shade-trees to the shadeless haven—
 woman as white as ever. One only knows
 her mother, sweatshirt gorged with tennis balls,
 still air expiring from the lavish arc—
 we too wore armor, strode riveted in cloth,
stiff as the broken clamshell labeled man.

(7)

Two in the afternoon. The restlessness.
 Greek Islands. Maine. I have counted the catalogue
 of ships down half its length: the blistered canvas,
 the metal bowsprits, once pricking up above
 the Asian outworks like a wedge of geese,
 the migrant yachtsmen, and the fleet in irons. . . .
 The iron bell is rocking like a baby,
 the high tide's turning on its back exhausted,
 the colored, dreaming, silken spinnakers
 shove through the patches in the island pine,
 as if vegetating millennia of lizards fed
 on fern and cropped the treetops . . . or nation of gazelles,
 straw-chewers in the African siesta. . . .
 I never thought scorn of things; struck fear in no man.

Up north here, in my own country, and free—
 look on it with a jaundiced eye, you'll see
 the manhood of the sallowing south, *noblesse*
oblige turned redneck, and the fellaheen;
 yet sometimes the Nile is wet; life's lived as painted:
 those couples, one in love and profit, swaying
 their children and their slaves the height of children,
 supple and gentle as giraffes or newts;
 the waist still willowy, and the paint still fresh;
 decorum without hardness; no harness on
 the woman, and no armor on the husband,
 the red clay Master with his feet of clay,
 catwalking lightly through his conquests, leaving
 one model, dynasties of faithless copies.

11

Both my legs hinged on the foreshortened bathtub,
 small enough to have been a traveler's . . .
 sun baking a bright fluff of balsam needles,
 loose yellow swaths; and yet the scene confines;
 sun falls on so many, many other things:
 someone, Custer, leaping with his wind-gold scalplock,
 a furlong or less from the old-style battle,
 Sitting Bull's, who sent our hundreds under
 in the Indian Summer—Oh that sunlit balsam,
 this wizened window, the sea-haze of gauze blue
 distance plighting the tree-lip of land to islands—
 wives split between a playboy and a drudge.
 Who can help us from our nothing to the all,
 we aging downstream faster than a scepter can check?

12

Everyone now is crowding everyone
 to put off leaving till the Indian Summer;
 and why? Because the others will be gone—
 we too, dull drops in the decamping mass,
 one in a million buying solitude. . . .
 We asked to linger on past fall in Eden;
 there must be good in man. Life fears us. Death
 keeps our respect by keeping at a distance—
 death we've never outdistanced as the Apostle boasted . . .
 stream of heady, terrified poured stone,
 suburban highway, rural superhighway,
 foot of skunkweed, masts of scrub . . . the rich poor. . . .
 We are loved by being distant; love-longing
 mists the windshield, soothes the eye with milk.

(10)

13

Mischievous fish-shapes without scale or eye
 swimming your leaf-green teagown, maternal, autumnal,
 swirling six inches past the three-inch heel,
 collapsing on us like a parachute,
 in a spate of controversial spatter . . . then
 exhaustion. We hunger for the ancient fruit,
 marriage with its naked artifice;
 two practiced animals, close to widower
 and widow, greedily bending forward
 for the first handgrasp of vermilion leaves,
 clinging like bloodclots to the smitten branch—
 summer afield and whirling to the tropics,
 to the dogdays and dustbowl—men, like ears of corn,
 fibrous growths . . . green, sweet, golden, black.

14

Iced over soon; it's nothing; we're used to sickness;
 too little perspiration in the bucket—
 in the beginning, polio once a summer. Not that;
 each day now the cork more sweetly leaves the bottle,
 except a sudden falseness in the breath,
 passive participation, dogged sloth,
 angrily skirting greener ice, the naught
 no longer asset or advantage. Sooner
 or later, and the chalk wears out the smile,
 this life too long for comfort and too brief
 for perfection—Cro-Magnon, dinosaur—
 the neverness of meeting nightly like surgeons'
 apprentices studying their own skeletons,
 old friends and mammoth flesh preserved in ice.

(11)

For Mary McCarthy

Your eight-inch, star-blue, softwood floorboard, your house
sawn for some deadport Revolutionary squire. . . .
A white horse doing small-point, flitching flies and smiling,
Dark Age luminary and Irish hothead,
the weathered yeoman loveliness of a duchess,
pale Diana, and rash to awkwardness. . . .
Whose will-shot arrows sing cleaner through the pelt?
You might say *will*, and not intelligence?
Others go on thinking it mind, mind, mind,
foundation on foundation, rococo stung,
stung repeatedly, by the battering ram's brass head of brass. . . .
I slip from wonder into bluster; you align
your lines more freely, ninety percent on target—
we can only meet in the bare air.

3

The vague, dark new hallway, some darker rectangle:
 the bathroom door, or a bedroom, someone else's;
 saw of the wrong snoring, or, worse, the right—
 each footstep a moral judgment, and the window
 holds out its thin, black terminal disk of joy,
 its blissfully withdrawing glimmer of immoral
 retribution, as I lie awake basking,
 trying to extend the dark, unspent minute,
 as the window frame gradually burns green;
 three panes still beam the polar blue of night,
 as my backbone swims in the sperm of gladness,
 as your figure emerges from your body,
 we are two species, even from the inside—
 a net trapped in the arms of another net.

4

Gradually greener in the window frame:
 the old oil, unfamiliar here, alive
 in a hundred eighteenth-century parks and landscapes—
 Sir Joshua Reynolds might retouch each fault:
 the cow-faced hound, the lonely, stalwart girl,
 the scarlet general, more oaken than his oaks—
 leaf, branch and trunk arranged as only money
 and nobility, both somewhat outlaw here,
 could render appropriate to the neighborhood:
 one great window, one bright watching eye—
 as aching I awake to go the home-walk,
 each pane, each windshield, familiar, unfamiliar,
 each shingled, checkered window is sheer face,
 the blindingly visible breasts freckle to brilliance.

Randall Jarrell: 1914-1965

1

Sixty, seventy, eighty: I see you mellow,
unchanging cricket, whistling down the grass-fires;
the same hair, snow-shocked, and wrist for tennis; now doubles,
not singles. . . . Who dares bridge that deadfall, sit
with you, watch the ivy turn, a wash of blood
on the infirmary wall, a fifth-act autumn,
see the years wrinkling up the reservoir?
Students waiting for Europe and spring term to end,
we saw below us, golden, small, stockstill,
cornfields and polo field, the feudal campus airdrome,
its Georgian Trust; behind, above us, castle,
towers, dorms, fieldhouse, bishop's house and chapel—
Randall, the same fall splinters on the windshield,
the same apples wizen on the whiplash bough.

2

Grizzling up the embers of our onetime life,
our first intoxicating disenchantments,
dipping our hands once, twice, in the same river,
entrained for college on the Ohio local;
the scene shifts, middle distance, back and foreground,
things changing position like chessmen on a wheel,
drawn by a water buffalo, perhaps
blue with true space before the dawn of days—
then the night of the caged squirrel on its wheel:
lights, eyes, peering at you from the overpass;
black-gloved, black-coated, you plod out stubbornly,
as if asleep, Child Randall, as if in chainstep,
meeting the cars, and approving; with harsh
luminosity grasping at the blank coin of the tunnel.

(24)

October and November

1. *Che Guevara*

Week of Che Guevara, hunted, hurt,
held prisoner one lost day, then gangstered down
for gold, for justice—violence cracking on violence,
rock on rock, the corpse of the last armed prophet
laid out on a sink in a shed, displayed by flashlight—
as the leaves light up, still green, this afternoon,
and burn to frittered reds; as the oak, branch-lopped
to go on living, swells with goiters like a fruit-tree,
as the sides of the high white stone buildings over-
shadow the poor, too new for the new world,
Manhattan, where our clasped, illicit hands
pulse, stop the bloodstream as if it hit rock. . . .
Rest for the outlaw . . . kings once hid in oaks,
with prices on their heads, and watched for game.

2. *Caracas*

Through another of our cities without a center, as hideous
as Los Angeles, and with as many cars
per head, and past the 20-foot neon sign
for *Coppertone* on a church, past the population
earning \$700 per capita
in jerry skyscraper living-slabs, and on to the White House
of El Presidente Leoni, his small men with 18-
inch repeating pistols, firing 45 bullets a minute,
the two armed guards petrified beside us, while we had champagne,
and someone bugging the President: "Where are the girls?"
And the enclosed leader, quite a fellow, saying,
"I don't know where yours are, but I know where to find mine." . . .
This house, this pioneer democracy, built
on foundations, not of rock, but blood as hard as rock.

(26)

Symbols

1. The Well

The stones of the well were sullenly unhewn,
none could deny their leechlike will to stay—
no dwelling near and four square miles of flatness,
pale grass diversified by wounds of sand,
the grass as hard as rock and squeezed by winter,
each well-stone rounded as an ostrich egg,
strange for unfinished stone. It seemed a kind
of dead chimney. The halting trespasser
was free to pitch the bucket, drinking cup
and funnel down the well—his neighbor's bucket
through bottomless, thin black hoops of standing water,
and plenty of elbowroom for scuttled gear;
room to reach the bottom, unnoticed, uncrushed. . . .
It's not the crowds, but crowding kills the soul.

2. Hell

"Circles of Dante—and in that dirt-roofed cave,
each family had marked off its yard of space;
no light except their coal fires laid in buckets,
no draft of air except their smoke, no water,
no hole to hide the excrement. I walked on,
afraid of stumbling on the helpless bodies,
afraid of circling. I soon forgot the Fascist
or German deserters I was hunting—screaming
children, old men, old women, coughing and groaning.
Then hit my head on the low dirt, and reached out
to keep from falling or hurting anyone;
and what I touched was not the filthy floor:
a woman's hand returning my quick grasp,
her finger tracing the lifeline on my palm."

Charles River

1

The sycamores throw shadows on the Charles,
while the fagged insect splinters to rejoin
the infinite, now casting its loose leaf
on the short-skirted girl and long-haired escort,
and the black stream curves, as if it led a lover—
not so our blood: in workaday times,
one takes cold comfort in its variations,
its endless handspring round the single I,
the pounding and pumping of overfevered zeal;
but for a week our blood has pointed elsewhere:
it brings us here tonight, and ties our hands—
if we leaned forward, and should dip a finger
into this river's momentary black flow,
the infinite small stars would break like fish.

2

The circuit of those snow-topped rural roads, eight miles
to ten, might easily have been the world's
top, round the pole, when I trailed on spreading skis
my guide, his unerring legs ten inches thick in wool,
and pinched my earlobes lest they turn to snowdrops—
hard knocks to school a lifetime; yet I went on swiping
small things. That knife, snow-yellow with eleven blades,
where is it now? It will outlast us all,
though flawed already when I picked it up. . . .
And now, the big town river, once hard and dead as its highways,
rolls blackly into country river, root-banks, live ice,
a live muskrat muddying the moonlight. You trail me,
Woman, so small, if one could trust the appearance,
I might be in trouble with the law.

5

Longer ago than we had lived till then,
 before the *Anschluss*, the thirty or forty million
 war-dead . . . but who knows now offhand how many?
 I tasted first love gazing through your narrow
 bay window at the hideous concrete dome
 of M.I.T., the last blanched, hectic glow
 sunset-blackened on the bay of the Esplanade:
 an imperial shrine in a landscape by Claude Lorrain,
 an artist out of fashion, like Nero, his Empire
 of heaven-vaulting aqueducts, baths, arches,
 roads, legions, plowshares beaten down to swords,
 the blood of the spirit lost in veins of brickdust—
 Christ also, our only king without a sword,
 turning the word forgiveness to a sword.

6

No stars worth noticing; the lights of man
 lunge road and sky; and life is wild here: straw
 puts teeth in the shore strip; the water smells and lives.
 We walk our tightrope, this embankment, jewed—
 no, yankeed—by the highways down to a grassy lip. . . .
 Once—you weren't born then—an iron railing,
 charmless and dignified, policed this walk;
 it matched the times, and had an esplanade,
 stamping down grass and growth with square stone shoes;
 the Charles itself, half ink, half liquid coaldust,
 testified to the health of industry—
 wrong times, an evil dispensation; yet who
 can hope to enter heaven with clean hands?
 A groan went up when the iron railing crashed.

Sleep

1

Four windows, five feet tall, soar up like windows,
rinsing their stained-glass angels in the void,
interminably alert the four-hour stay till morning:
a watery dearth, made plain, and made to last
by a light or two hung on a telephone pole;
ashcan and alley, the makeshift rooming-house,
clawed loose from packing crates, and painted gray,
frozen interminably to this four-hour verge. . . .
Heaven? Time stops here too—Flesh of my Flesh,
elastic past the mind's agility,
hair coiled back on guard like the spring of a watch,
legs showing pale as wooden matches, lit
by four streak windows of the uncreating dawn,
not night or day, here stealing a brief life from both.

2

Six straight hours to teach on less than three hours' sleep—
I know I'll be smitten by the hand of my cells,
my gray hairs will not go down to the grave in peace. . . .
I get to know myself, old bluff and bruiser,
who cannot stand up to the final round. . . .
To enjoy the avarice of loneliness,
sleep the hour hand round the clock, stay home,
lie like a hound, on bounds for chasing a hound,
roped short in a spare corner, nose on paws,
one eyelid raised to guard the bowl of water;
panting, "Better to die, than hate or fear,
better die twice than make ourselves feared or hated—
no, happier to live in a land without history;
where the bad-liver lives longer than the law."

Mexico

1

The difficulties, the impossibilities,
stand out: I, fifty, humbled with the years' gold garbage,
dead laurel grizzling my back like spines of hay;

you, some sweet, uncertain age, say twenty-seven,
unballasted by honor or deception.

What help then? Not the sun, the scarlet blossom,
and the high fever of this seventh day,
the wayfarer's predestined diarrhea, nausea,
the multiple mosquito spots, round as pesos.
Hope not in God here, nor the Aztec gods;
we sun-people know the sun, the source of life,
will die, unless we feed it human blood—
we two are clocks, and only count in time;
the hand's knife-edge is pressed against the future.

2

Faith that neither quickstep, nor slowstep, nor charges fanned
by the flame of Allah, nor hope of saving wife and child
weigh much against their concentrated fire—

Abel learned this falling among the jellied
green creepers and morning-glories of the saurian sunset.

Stand still, you'll feel the sureness, the delirium,
rank and file certain of smashing the enemy,
Dundee's clans at Killiecrankie, who broke
the English, so three days later they were still running.

We're knotted together in innocence and guile;
yet we are not equal; I have lived without
sense so long the loss no longer hurts;
reflex and the ways of the world will float me free—
you, God help you, must will each breath you take.

3

Wishing to raise the cross of the Crucified King
 in the monastery of Emmaus at Cuernavaca—
 world names for their avant-garde crucifixes
 and streamlined silver, the monks, like Paul, had earned
 the cost of depth-transference by their craft.

A Papal Commission camped on them two years,
 ruling analysis cannot be compulsory,
 their cool Belgian prior was heretical, a fairy. . . .

We couldn't find the corpse removed by helicopter;
 the cells were empty, but the art still sold;
 lay-neurotics peeped out at you like deer,
 barbwired in spotless whitewashed cabins, named
Sigmund and *Karl*. . . . They live the life of monks,
 one revelation healing the ravage of the other.

4

The lizard rusty as a leaf rubbed rough
 does nothing for days but puff his throat
 for oxygen, and tongue up the passing flies,
 sees only similar rusty lizards pant:
 harems worthy this lord of the universe—
 each thing he does generic, and not the best.
 But how fragrantly our cold hands warm to the live coal!
 We sit on the cliff like curs, chins pressed to thumbs,
 the Toltec temples changing to dust in the dusk—
 hair of the vulture, white brow of the moon: this too dust
 dust out of time, two clocks set back to the Toltec Eden,
 as if we still wished to pull teeth with firetons—
 when they took a city, they too murdered everything:
 man, woman and child, down to the pigs and dogs.

5

South of New England, south of Washington,
 south of the South, I walk the glazed moonlight:
 dew on the grass and nobody about . . .
 drawn on by my unlimited desire,
 like a bull with a ring in its nose and a chain in the ring. . . .
 We moved far, bull and cow, could one imagine
 cattle obliviously pairing for six long days:
 up road and down, then up again this same
 bricked garden road, stiff spines of hay stuck in our hides;
 and always in full sight of everyone,
 of the full sun, of the silhouetting sunset,
 shown up by the undimmed lights of the passing car.
 Then gone; I am learning to live in history.
 What is history? What you cannot touch.

6

Midwinter in Mexico, yet the tall red flowers
 stand up on many trees, and all's in leaf;
 twilight bakes the wall-brick large as a loaf of bread—
 somewhere I must have met this feverish pink before,
 and knew its message; or is it that I walk
 you home twenty times, and then turn back on my tracks?
 No moment comes back to hand, not twice, not once.
 We've waited, I think, a lifetime for this walk,
 and the white powder beneath our feet slides out
 like the sterile white salt of purity; even
 your puffed lace blouse is salt. The bricks glide; the commonest
 minute is not divided, not twice, not once. . . .
 When you left, I thought of you each hour of the day,
 each minute of the hour, each second of the minute.

11

Sounds of a popping bonfire; no, a colleague's
 early typing; or is he needing paregoric?
 Poor Child, you were kissed so much you thought you were walked
 yet you wait in my doorway with bluebells in your hair. [on;
 Those other *yous*, you think, are they meaningless *in toto*,
 test-rockfalls you crudely approached and coarsely conquered,
 leaving no juice in the flaw, mind lodged in mind?
 Those others, those *yous* . . . a child wants everything—
 things! A child, though earnest, is not quite mortal.
 Love blots the categories; yet men trust
 love's way is always through the common garden. . . .
 I ask only coolness, stillness, intercourse—
 sleep wastes the day lifelong behind your eyes,
 night shivers at noonday in the boughs of the fir.

12

To clasp, not grasp the life and light and fragile;
 as the intermeshing limbs of Lucifer
 sink to sleep on the tumuli of Lilith. . . .
 We're burnt, black chips knocked from the blackest stock:
 Potato-famine Irish-Puritan, and Puritan—
 gold made them smile like pigs once, then fear of falling—
 hipbones finer than a breast of a squab,
 eyes hard as stars, hearts small as elves, they turned
 the wilderness to wood, then looked for trees.
 They are still looking. Now our hesitant
 conversation moves from lust to love;
 friendship, without dissension, multiplying
 days, days, days, days—how can I love you more,
 short of turning into a criminal?

(63)

School

1. For Peter Taylor

That doleful Kenyon snapshot: you ham-squat on your bed,
jaw hung sidewise, and your eyes too glossy;
chest syrup, wicked greens of diesel oil;
you the same sickly green, except you are
transparent. I can almost touch and smell
those pajamas we were too brush-off to change,
and wore as winter underwear through our trousers.
When the snapshot was developed, I saw you couldn't
live a week, and thought you might have died,
squatting upright, a last dynasty mummy.
You live on: earth's obliquities of health,
though Adams knew the Southerner must go under—
love teases. We're one still, we are weaker, wilder—
stuck in one room again, we want to fight.

2. Randall Jarrell

The dream went like a rake of sliced bamboo,
slats of the dust distracted by downdraw;
I woke and knew I held a cigarette;
I looked, there was none, could have been none;
I slept the years now, and I woke again,
palming the floor, shaking the sheets. I found
nothing smoking. I am awake, I see
the cigarette burn safely in my fingers . . .
They come this path, old friends, old buffs of death.
Tonight it's Randall, the spark of fire though humbled,
his gnawed wrist cradled like his *Kitten*. "What kept you so long,
racing your cooling grindstone to ambition?
Surely this life was fast enough . . . But tell me,
Cal, why did we live? Why do we die?"

Those Older

1

They won't stay gone, rising with royal torpor,
as if held in my binoculars' fog and enlargement,
casting the raindrops of the rainbow: children;
loved by their still older elders in a springtide
invisible to us as the Hittites. We're too near now
to date their comings and goings—those *late* people:
Cousin Susie and Cousin Belle. Fate stamped
them with their maiden name *for life*—blood-rich,
and constellations from the dancing heart.
Our first to die . . . so odd and light and dry,
they seemed foreshadows of some earlier, strange creation,
hooded in snail-shells, the unassailable
deafness of their formidable asperity—
our girls . . . less than a toy, and more than a flower.

2

Another was a man in his middle life
from the days of his youth till the day of his death;
and yet the matching of his fresh-cut flowers
was over-delicate and dead for death,
as if the flowery coverlet lay like lead,
asserting that no primitive ferment
or slobbering poignance of the voyeur God
would ever corrupt or soil his earthly vestment
spread like King Solomon in the Episcopal morgue,
sanguine, still ready for his thousand lovers. . . .
Here at world's end, here with nowhere else to go,
lie those before us, and those just before us:
less than a toy, and more than a flower . . .
rich and poor, the poor . . . no trees in the sky.

No fence stands up between us and our object:
approaching nearer, nailing down the old,
and free to pick those neither ripe nor young,
as the hollow green wilderness sings the guillotine,
sings those before us. . . . I have had them fifty years:
all those grander, or finer, or simply older,
gone astraying down a backward street, the trees,
late-lopped, tar-boned, old prunes like stumps of martyrs;
and even this dead timber is bulldozed rootless,
and we face faceless lines of white frame houses,
sanded, stranded, undarkened by shade or shutter—
rich and poor . . . no trees in the sky—their stones,
so close they melt to a field of snow, as we pass,
won from the least desire to have what is.

3. *Vigil*

Famine's joy is in the enjoyment; who'll deny
the crash, delirious uterus living it up?
Therefore, we lie here, in heat or cold—heat knocking,
winter brushing the window white with frost.
It's not good moments, but the town defruited
gives us the toothache . . . to destroy a people
for its own good, and let the world go by:
green year, a green year, twenty percent for peace,
now down to ten or nine. We breathe, we live,
since our death is useless to killed or killing,
since the window shatters and the wind is blowing,
since the trees are leafless and the boughs are green,
the hunters hunted. . . . Why do we live and breathe—
tough as the cat, nine lives to go, then none?

4. *Le Cygne*

The virgin, the blind, the beautiful today,
dares it break the mirror of this lake,
hard, neglectful, hoarding under ice
a great glacier of flights that never fly?
The swan worsens, remembers it is he,
the magnificence that gives itself no hope,
the fortitude that finds no *raison d'être*—
the great boredoms blaze in the sterile winter.
The whole neck shakes in this white agony
inflicted by the space the swan denies;
he cannot deny the ice that ties his feet.
His pure brilliance led him to this grand asylum,
governed by staccato cries of grandeur,
pride that clothes the swan in useless exile.

7. *Utopia for Racoons*

My goiter expert smiles like a racoon,
"O.K., you're rich and can afford to die."
Claws me a minute, claws his notes for five,
claws me a day, then claws the notes for five;
could crack an adam's-apple like a walnut.
The doctor washes, licks his paws of me,
and sips his fountainpen for bubbly ink.
On a second floor in a second hospital,
two racoons wear stethoscopes to count the pulse
of their geiger-counter and their thyroid scan;
they sit sipping my radioactive iodine
from a small lead bottle with two metal straws,
"What little health we have is stolen fruit.
What is the life-expectancy of a racoon?"

8. *Fame*

We bleed for people, so independent and selfsuspicious,
if the door is locked, they just come back, instead of knocking—
hearts scarred by complaints they would not advance;
it was not their good fortune to meet their love;
however long they lived, they would still be waiting.
We believed you, they said, by believing you were lying. . . .
Timur saying something like: "The drop of water
that fails to become a river is food for the dust";
or "The eye that cannot size up the whole of the Tigris
in a drop is a child's game, not the eye of a man. . . ."
His face in the mirror was like the sun on a dewdrop;
the path of death is always underfoot;
this the sum of the world's scattered elements—
fame, a bouquet in the niche of forgetfulness!

9. *Growing in Favor*

This waking with a start of pathos to fear—
it comes too often now, though no less often
in the year of my first razor and the death of God;
thick then my tongue, as if anesthetized,
a fish, silk-screened, gaped air into a bubble,
red rose, wallpaper rose, drank dank plaster, turned a cabbage,
my blood clung to me, stuck, a thorn in blossom. . . .

A little further on, and I am nature:
my pinch of dust lies on the eternal dust-tray,
lies on call forever, never called. . . .

Who will call for me, call girl, when I start awake,
all my diminishment retarded, wake
to sing the dawnless alba of the gerontoi? . . .

— Old age is all right, but it has no future.

10. *Last Summer*

Asleep just now, just now I am awake,
see a man designed on the back of a card:
his trousers, laundered green; his coat, wet leaf;
his fair young flesh, sky-green of the deep vein.
I turn the card, the figure clears to trees and grass—
last summer for the wondered mind . . . for seeing
the dead servant's green turf beyond the pale,
white marble mantel, bust, rolled rug, the sheeted den,
the old master covered with his pillowslip—
searching as everyman for my one good deed,
crying love lost in the long apprenticeship:
friend, wife or child, their vanished art of breathing;
knowing I must forget how to breathe through my mouth,
now I am dead, and just now I was made.

April

1. *Roulette*

Didn't Plato ban philosopher-professors,
the idols of the young, from the Republic?
And occupational republicans? It wasn't just
the artist. The Republic! But it never was,
except in the sky-ether of Plato's thought,
steam from the ordure of his city-state.
His roulette wheel repeats; the man in the street
is mobile—never since Adam delved, such plans,
Utopia on the roads to demolition.
This much still certain: whoever takes the sword
must die by the sword, or someone else will die;
it doesn't matter—injustice slays disorder—
it doesn't matter, new establishments
will serve the people, the people people serve.

2. *Europa*

The headache, the night of no performance, dusk of daybreak:
limping home by the fountain's Dionysiac gushes,
water smote from marble, the felon water,
the watery alcoholic going underground . . .
to the stone museum. But we were an empire, soul-brothers
to Babylon and China, their imperishable
hope to go beyond the growth of hope.
In the dark night of lust's defensive war,
your breasts were breathing—like your will to breathe;
we should have bred *in aeternum*, instead of doing nothing.
How many of your lovers never died?
While your breasts, white bull's-eyes cupped by your tan,
flatten on the leather and horn of Jupiter,
daring to raise his privates to the Godhead.

April's End

1. *King David Senex*

Two or three times a night, and for a month,
we wrang the night-sweat from his shirt and sheets;
on the fortieth day, we brought him Abishag,
and he recovered, and he knew her not—
cool through the hottest summer day, and moist;
her rankness more delicate than all the flowers,
as if her urine caused the vegetation,
invisible pinpricks of the golden dew;
but later, the Monarch's well-beloved shaft
lay quaking in her haven; he thought the world
was flat, yet half the globe hung on each breast,
as two spent swimmers that did cling together;
Sion come to Israel, if they had held. . . .
This clinch is quickly broken, they were glad to break.

2. *Night-Sweat*

Work-table, litter, books and standing lamp,
plain things my stalled equipment, the old broom—
but I am living in a tidied room,
for ten nights now I've felt the creeping damp
float over my pajamas' wilted white. . . .
Sweet salt embalms me and my head is wet,
everything streams and tells me this is right;
my life's fever is soaking in night-sweat—
one life, one writing! But the downward glide
and bias of existing wrings us dry—
always inside me is the child who died,
always inside me is his will to die—
one universe, one body . . . in this urn
the animal night-sweats of the spirit burn.

3. *Caligula*

My namesake, Little Boots, Caligula,
you disappoint me. Tell me what you saw—

Item: your body hairy, badly made,
head hairless, smoother than your marble head;

Item: eyes hollow, hollow temples, red
cheeks roughed with rouge, legs spindly, hands that leave
a clammy snail's trail on your wilting sleeve,
your hand no hand can hold . . . bald head, thin neck—
you wished the Romans had a single neck.

That was no artist's bubble. Animals
ripened for your arenas suffered less
than you when slaughtered—yours the lawlessness
of something simple that has lost its law,
my namesake, not the last Caligula.

4. *To Werner von Usslingen*

Half eggshell and half eggshell, white the glass of water;
this whiteness soaked and doubled by the water,

soft goiter croaking for a plaster-cast,
heads flayed to the bone like Leonardo's felons,
deaf heads thrust forward at me not to hear
lipping with the astuteness of the deaf.

The eggshells rub like boughs. This double thing
more wizened than my skull, it isn't me—

I I; I more than I or I will die,
remembered as a plaster-cast's first cause . . .

Often fear, fame, fatuity will bring
self to the selves, to Werner von Usslingen,
his pure shield carved with German landsknecht French:
L'ennemi de Dieu et de merci.

7. *Utopia for Racoons*

My goiter expert smiles like a racoon,
"O.K., you're rich and can afford to die."
Claws me a minute, claws his notes for five,
claws me a day, then claws the notes for five;
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The doctor washes, licks his paws of me,
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On a second floor in a second hospital,
two racoons wear stethoscopes to count the pulse
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crying love lost in the long apprenticeship:
friend, wife or child, their vanished art of breathing;
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now I am dead, and just now I was made.

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must die by the sword, or someone else will die;
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will serve the people, the people people serve.

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How many of your lovers never died?
While your breasts, white bull's-eyes cupped by your tan,
flatten on the leather and horn of Jupiter,
daring to raise his privates to the Godhead.

5. *Nostalgie de la Boue*

The lines string out from nowhere, stretch to sorrow.
I think of others who were prominent,
musclers in any literary havoc,
now even lost to malice. "They exist,"
as the old Stalinist luminary said of friends
assigned Siberia. "It's thus," he smiled, "and thus."
Sometimes for days I only hear one voice,
one shirt that lasts five days, and not for saving.
As a child my other wife climbed a chair to dress;
"It was easier." It's easier to miss food,
not brush my teeth, forget to open mail;
the Muse shouts like vacation in my ear:
nostalgie de la boue that shelters ape
and protozoa from the rights of man.

May

1. *The Pacification of Columbia*

A patch of tan, a blood-warm roof-tile, then tan patch, then sky patch, as the jigsaw flung some mosque of Omar to vaultless consummation and blue consumption, exhalation of the sands of the desert to fire.

I got the message, one the puzzle never sent. . . .

No destructive element emaciates

Columbia this Mayday afternoon;

the thickened buildings look like buildings out

of Raphael, colossal classic, dungeon feudal;

horses, higher artistic types than their grooms,

forage Broadway's median trees, as if

nature were liberated . . . the police

lean on the burnished, nervous hides, show they,

at least, have learned to meet and reason together.

May 1, 1968

2. *Violence*

From the first cave, the first farm, the first sage,

inalienable our human right to murder—

“We must get used,” they say, “to the thought of guns;

we must get used to seeing guns; we must

get used to using guns.” Guns too are mortal. Guns

failed Che Guevara, Marie Antoinette,

Leon Trotsky, the children of the Tsar:

chivalrous ornaments to power. Tom Paine said

Burke pitied the plumage and forgot the dying bird.

How can a plucked bird live? Whoever puts

arms in the hands of the people is a criminal,

arms given the people are always used against the people;

the only guns that will not kill the owner

are forged by insight . . . fear made wise by anger.

(109)

7. *The New York Intellectual*

How often was this last salute recast?
Did the old critic need three hundred words,
such tact and tough, ascetic resonance,
the preposition *for*, five times in parallel,
to find himself "a beleaguered minority,
without fantasies of martyrdom,"
facing the graves of the New York Intellectuals,
"without joy, but neither with dismay"?
This art was needed for his quiet message,
his firm and unpermissive final sentence.
How often one would choose the poorman's provincial
out of town West Side intellectual
for the great brazen rhetorician serpent,
swimming the current with his iron smile!

8. *The Dissenting Academy*

The Moslem's hack-moon hangs over WABC
TELEVISION, with its queue of stand-ins;
real trees, the sky-distempered, skim of winter,
tremble on a yellow, nondescript brick tower—
our city! No garden city curbs more poodles,
our iron grinds like a hundred kinds of birds;
that's us, it isn't worth writing home about,
this is our home. . . . The scholar escapes his time;
college ivy darkens his small-pane window,
leaves gross as grapeleaf. His students prime the pump,
till he wattles like a turkey to his grant.
Scholarship proves the scholar less than mortal;
why should anyone settle for New York?
Dying without death is a life in the city.

9. *The Doctor*

(ELOISE AND ABELARD)

We know what orthodox analysis
could do with her, the talented, the taloned
cat hooked on the cold fish of Abelard.
They had one soul once, though his brain is bone,
and her neglected ember is extinct.
After his prison, to the woman came
energy such as she never knew before,
sprinkling on us like a fresh flow of blood,
old Sorbonne argot, filth for Saint Bernard,
untimely, mystical, pledged to the police. . . .
Abelard's tortuous debater's points
flew to the mark, feathered with her ecstasy—
his student crushes, and his fall like lightning,
in love with the dialectic, his Minerva. . . .

10. *Another Doctor*

"Have you ever lost a year off . . . somewhere?
The new owner can't sell it back to us, can he?
Our terrible losses, Harry Truman's loss
of a minute's sleep for Hiroshima, less than
a boy catching the paw of his mutt in the door of a car . . .
We're ghosts . . . Twice I heard a rattling stress of cherrystones,
then by my bed, a man. That flight was feudal
on steel-capped hoof and wing and foot of blood.
I've killed worse dragons—my doctor's on Heidegger
in German, in Germany, for my German Prof.
I love Lenin, he was so feudal. 'When I listen to Beethoven,'
he said, 'I think of stroking people's hair;
what we need are people to chop the head off.'
The horizontal is blood-colored and made by man."

Robert Kennedy: 1925-1968

1. *R.F.K.*

Here in my workroom, in its listlessness
of Vacancy, some old Victorian house,
airtight and sheeted for old summers,
far from the hornet yatter of the bond—
is loneliness, a thin smoke thread of vital
air. What can I catch from you now?
Doom was woven in your nerves, your shirt,
woven in the great clan; they too were loyal,
and you too more than loyal to them, to death.
For them like a prince, you daily left your tower
to walk through dirt in your best cloth. Untouched,
alone in my Plutarchan bubble, I miss
you, you out of Plutarch, made by hand—
forever approaching our maturity.

2. *Another Circle*

The modulation is most alive and firm,
when three or four colors are about the same,
when three or four words sound much the same,
say much the same. That's hardly how we talk
this first ride of summer, Harriet: I trapped in words,
you gagging your head-over-heels articulation.
The search. The circle. We can't hunt God. He hunts us,
and his story is sad . . . the Irish in black, three rows
ranked for the future photograph, the Holy Name,
fiercely believed in then, then later held to
perhaps more fiercely in their unbelief.
How they hated to leave this unpremeditated
gesture of their life! No Name can judge their killer,
his guiltless liver, kidneys, fingertips and phallus.

To Summer

1. *The Worst Sinner*

The earliest sportsman in our earliest dawn,
waking to what redness, waking a killer,
saw the red cane was sweet in his red grip;
the blood of the sheep matched the blood of the wolf;
yet Jonathan Edwards learned how to think himself
worse than any man that ever breathed;
he was a good man, and he thought with reason—
which of us hasn't thought the same thought worse?
Each night I lie me down to sleep in rest;
two or three times a week, I wake to my sin—
sins, not sin; not two or three days, seven.
God himself cannot wake up five years younger,
and drink away the chalice of our death-sentence,
like the best man in the best possible world.

x 2. *God of Our Fathers*

Say it's the one-way trip, the one-way flight,
strip the worse meaning from *trip* and *flight*;
then you could say you stood in the cold light of science,
seeing as you are seen, espoused to fact.
Strange, a life is the fire and fuel; we,
the animals, the objects, must be here
without a title-deed of evidence
that anything that ever stopped living
ever falls back to living when life stops.
There's more romance to the watchmaker God
of Descartes and Paley; He drafted and installed
the Apparatus for us. He loved to tinker—
Who having perfected what He had to do,
stood off shrouded in his loneliness.

3. *Whites*

This summer night, and then the summer night,
windows reflecting lighted on that white—
the door between is not the door between:
the Sabines, Casanova's weeping willow,
Death dropping his marble scythe to be a brother,
one skeleton among the skeletons. . . .
Ghengis and Attila killed fewer of their kind.
This kind is only expelled by prayer and fasting;
yet we were no kinder when we had the Faith,
and thought the massacred could be reformed,
and move like angels in the unwithering white,
file upon file, the beds of long-neck clams,
blue-white and hard and sharp and stiff and pure—
the clam-shell cunted in the ground of being.

4. *Heaven*

Smoke weakens the dim greens of Mexico,
the City, not the nation; as if field fires
of marijuana fumed in the back yards.
One sees the green dust as the end of life;
and through it, heaven. . . . Some child or cubist flays
the gardens of Versailles to cube, cone and ball—
this shouldn't strain our imagination. Heaven,
if we can be there, must be perfect. I've been there,
seen the Sun-King spit into the wind of Versailles;
he cannot tell his left hand from his right,
he holds up two smooth stones, marked *left* and *right*. . . .
In the straight hall, the straighter curtains lift,
a head higher, two heads higher, than the old dead King;
they dance spontaneously in the atheist air.

7. For Eugene McCarthy

I love you so. . . . Gone? Who will swear you wouldn't
have done good to the country, that fulfillment wouldn't
have done good to you—the father, as Freud says:
you? We've so little faith that anyone
ever makes anything better—the same and less—
or that ambition ever makes the ambitious;
the state lifts us, we cannot change the state—all
was yours though, lining down the balls for hours,
freedom in the hollow bowling-alley:
crack of the globe, the boys. . . . Picking a quarrel
with you is like picking the petals of the daisies—
the game, the passing crowds, the rapid young
still brand your hand with sunflecks . . . coldly willing
to smash the ball past those who bought the park.

July 6, 1968

8. The Immortals

"Dear Mary, with her usual motherly
solicitude for the lost overdog. . . ."
You've always wished to stand by a white horse,
a Jeanne d'Arc by Albrecht Dürer, armed and lettered
in the tougher university of the world. . . .
Since your travels, the horse is firmly there;
you stare off airily into the mundane gossip,
our still more mundane ethics, listen puzzled,
take note; once or twice, blurt your ice-clear sentence—
one hand, for solace, braided in the horse's mane. . . .
The immortals are all about us and below us;
for us *immortal* means another book;
there are too many . . . with us, the music stops;
the first violin stops to wipe the sweat from his bow.

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X 9. *For Harpo Marx*

Harpo Marx, your hand white-feathered the harp—
the only words you ever spoke were sound.
The movie's not always the sick man of the arts,
yours touched the stars; Harpo, your changing picture
is an unchanging still life, not nature dead.
You dumbly memorized an unwritten script . . .
I saw you first two years before you died,
near Fifth in Central Park, in fragile autumn:
old blond hair too blonder, old eyes too young.
Two movie trucks and five police lay spoke-wheel
like the covered wagon. The crowd as much or little.
I wish I had knelt; I age to your wincing smile—
Dante's movies, his groups of pain and motion;
the genus *happy* is one generic actor.

10. *Milton in Separation*

It was no loss to the cool and Christian Homer,
blind, cradled in his chair of work, pronouncing
divorce and *marriage* with hard, sardonic R's.
Though the dawn of separation was blank as any,
he only cared for life in the straits. Her flight
put a live elbow in his marble Eve. At first,
she filled the thirst for emptiness;
they grappled, then fell hookloose from the fireflash . . .
Live-cold in some Greenland on the globe's eyebrow,
free now to study what wooed you most, your writing,
your overobsession posterity must pay.
The bare skim milk of your study is blue to blindness;
the goldfinch flame in the tinderbush. You wished
to set the woods on fire and melt the glacier.

Eight Months Later

1. *Eight Months Later*

It's certain we burned the grass, the grass now burning:
the dismal stones of the field make off for the pond;
safe in the muddy water, they change to ducks
in brown fatigues, eight ducks without a drake—
if we lose the war eight women without a man. . . .
The cement mixer sings like a choir of locusts.
The worst of Manhattan is everything is stacked:
ten buildings dancing in the hat of one,
some rugged, one-family, 1890's château.
One family? This would house the early Mormons,
their *droit de seigneur*. One cell would tent Mohammed
through the teat-blown sand. . . . I wish I were elsewhere;
Mexico . . . Mexico? Where is Mexico?
Who will live this year back, cat on the ladder?

2. *Die Gold-Orangen*

X
We see the country where the lemon blossoms,
and the pig-gold orange glows on its dark branch,
and the south wind stutters from the blue hustings;
the bluebell is brown, the cypress points too straight—
we see it; it's behind us, love, behind us.
Do you see the house, the roof on marble pillars?
The sideboard silvers, and the arbors blaze;
the statue stands naked to stare at you.
What have I done with us, and what was done?
And the mountain, El Volcán, the climb of clouds?
The mule-man lost his footing in the clouds,
seed of the dragon coupled in the caves. . . .
The cliff drops; over it, the water drops,
and steams away the marks that led us on.

X 3. *Reading Myself*

Like millions, I took just pride and more than just,
first striking matches that brought my blood to boiling;
I memorized tricks to set the river on fire,
somehow never wrote something to go back to.
Even suppose I had finished with wax flowers
and earned a pass to the minor slopes of Parnassus . . .
No honeycomb is built without a bee
adding circle to circle, cell to cell,
the wax and honey of a mausoleum—
this round dome proves its maker is alive,
the corpse of such insect lives preserved in honey,
prays that the perishable work live long
enough for the sweet-tooth bear to desecrate—
this open book . . . my open coffin.

Circles

1. *Homing*

(FOR ELIZABETH)

To our 20th. We stand set: two trees, their roots;
sometimes the greenest cracks soonest in this soil,
white shells and sinking sand. One form *per sempre*;
ten or fifteen pounds superior, since
the Graces gave their hard gold ring, their fistcuff, *Love*—
crown met by what bypaths! Things cling to the aging:
Pharaoh, now black shellac, has the hair of a squaw,
orchid smelling purer than the live green grass.
By setting limits, man has withdrawn from the monsters:
metal rods and then another metal rod;
true markers mark-step, they neither take nor give.
And when I show my head by your birdhouse, you dive me,
graceful, higher, quicker . . . unsteady swallow. . . .
Who will uproot the truth that cannot change?

2. *The Hard Way*

(FOR HARRIET)

Don't hate your parents, or your children will hire
unknown men to bury you at your own expense.
Child, as old as your mother or father, last-year-high—
who will see the coruscations of your furrow,
adolescence sharking up salt mullet,
your destiny written in our hands rewritten?
Under the stars, one sleeps then, freed from household,
tufts of grass and dust and tufts of grass,
night oriented to the star of youth—
tough as the she-wolf's tits that suckled Rome,
per aspera ad astra. In backward Maine,
ice goes in season to the tropical,
then the mash freezes back to ice, and then
the ice is broken by another wave.

5. *Penelope*

Manet's bourgeois husband takes the tiller at Cannes,
the sea is right, the virgin's cocky boater,
naïve as the moon, streams with its heartstring ribbons—
as if Ulysses were a Sunday friendship. . . .

"Do clothes make the man, or a man the clothes?"
he whistles, gets no answer, sees the household
include him in its polished hollowness,
cellar, womb and the growths—this master, able
to change a silk purse into a sow's ear,
marching his knife-bright floors for wolftracks, thinking
something like this, or something not like this:
"How many a brave heart broken on monologue
revives on ass, or turns to alcohol.
Is it silk cuts scissors, or scissors silk?"

6. *Struggle of Non-Existence*

Here on this bank where Darwin found his fair one,
and thirty kinds of weeds of the wood in flower,
and a blue shirt, a blue shirt, and our love-beads
rattling together to show that we were young—
we found the fume-gray thistle far-gone in flower.

God dwells inside us and the plowman worm
working this soil that must have lost much sweetness

when Eden and the funk of Abel taught man
the one thing worse than war is massacre . . .

Man turns to dimwit quicker than the mayfly,
asks lucid moments, sleepless drowsiness;
the tissue sings to sinew, "Passerby . . ."

Dying beside you, I feel the live blood simmer
in my palms and my feet, and know I am alive.

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X 11. *High Blood*

I watch my blood pumped into crystal pipes,
red sticks like ladycrackers for a child—
nine-tenths of me, and yet it's lousy stuff.
Touched, it stains, slips, drips, sticks; and it's lukewarm.
All else—the brains, the bones, the stones, the soul—
is peripheral flotsam on this live flow.
On my great days of sickness, I was God;
and now I might be. I catpad on my blood,
and the universe moves beneath me when I move.
It's the aorta and heartbeat of my life;
hard rock turned high, chosen record purring,
as if the sapphire in the cat were stuck—
cry of high blood for blood that gives both tyrant
and tyrannized their short half-holiday.

12. *The Lost Tune*

As I grow older, I must admit with terror:
I have been there, the masterwork has lost;
music that taught, philosophies that danced,
their *vivace* clogs; I am too wise, or tired;
one's read the book, even the woman dies,
most women hold up longer than the arts—
yours was landscape, engraved in black and white
to better show the formal luxury of
a million trees and creepers marching up
the flank of a cliff, microscopes on each leaf;
below, your weaponed huntress hunts her huntsman,
the lover panting to her stag at bay;
not very true, yet art—had Schubert sung them, risen
from the Vienna greenroom to this death.

5. *Mink*

In the unspoiled age, when they caught a cow-mink,
they made her urinate around the traps,
and every bull-mink hunting along the stream
fell in the trap, and soon the mink were done—
the last we heard of was a freeze in the 50's,
the last bull making tracks in the snow for a last cow.
My friend, once professional, no longer traps:
"We've too many ways to make a living now"—
his a veteran's pension, and two working sons.
He builds houses for bluebirds, martins and swallows.
When a pair mates in one, it's like a catch,
like trapping something—he's sent, it's like a conversion,
China's lost will to excel without improving. . . .
His money goes to *Wildlife*; he killed too much.

6. *Cattle*

The moon, invisible behind a cloud-ledge,
briefly glitters its bonfire on the harbor. . . .
Machiavelli despised these furiously fought
mounted Tuscan mercenary battles:
lines rushed, and Greek met Greek; one man was killed,
men died of a stroke, but not the strokes of battle.
Our police hit more to terrorize than kill:
a hundred riots, nobody left dead;
clubs break and brains, women are rooked on curbs—
none killed or crippled visibly forever.
Is this tidal wave blown from a bubble of soap?
Why do we always undersell the weak?
Cattle have guts, but after the barn is burned,
they will look at the sunset and tremble.

Dies Irae, *A Hope*

- "The day this day of wrath will do the world,"
sings Sibyl on snow, sings David *guerrillero*,
"the judge is a hood, canaries sing in torture;
God shoots down everything, even what don't move."
God and our King of greatest majesty,
you who save those you must save free; you, whose
least anger makes our worst a derelict,
have descended from the hills for us,
kept walking to and fro for us on earth;
how often seeking us here you fell dead! . . .
- x Everything points to non-existence except existence—
on this day, the day God sees the world was good,
this day of the sinful man who must be judged—
good reason to pardon him, good reason to pardon.

For John Berryman

I feel I know what you have worked through, you
know what I have worked through—these are words. . . .

x John, we used the language as if we made it.

Luck threw up the coin, and the plot swallowed,
monster yawning for its mess of pottage.

Ah privacy, as if you wished to mount
some rock by a mossy stream, and count the sheep—
fame that renews the soul, but not the heart.

The ebb tide flings up wonders: rivers, beer-cans,
linguini, bloodstreams; how merrily they gallop
to catch the ocean—Hopkins, Herbert, Thoreau,
born to die like the athletes at early forty—

Abraham lived with less expectancy,
heaven his friend, the earth his follower.

NOTEBOOK 1967-68: as my title intends, the poems in this book are written as one poem, jagged in pattern, but not a conglomeration or sequence of related material. It is not a chronicle or almanac; many events turn up, many others of equal or greater reality do not. This is not my diary, my confession, not a puritan's too literal pornographic honesty, glad to share private embarrassment, and triumph. The time is a summer, an autumn, a winter, a spring, another summer; here the poem ends, except for turned-back bits of fall and winter 1968. I have flashbacks to what I remember, and notes on old history. My plot rolls with the seasons. The separate poems and sections are opportunist and inspired by impulse. Accident threw up subjects, and the plot swallowed them—famished for human chances.

I lean heavily to the rational, but am devoted to surrealism. A surrealist might not say, "The man entered a house," but, "The man entered a police-whistle," or "Seasick with marital happiness, the wife plunges her eyes in her husband swimming like vagueness on the grass." Or make some bent generalization: "Weak wills command the gods." Or more subtly, words that seem right, though loosely in touch with reason: "Saved by my anger from cruelty." Surrealism can degenerate into meaningless clinical hallucinations, or worse into rhetorical machinery, yet it is a natural way to write our fictions.

My opening lines are as hermetic as any in the book. The "fractions" mean that my daughter, born in January, is each July, a precision important to a child, something and a half years old. The "Seaslug etc." are her declining conceptions of God.

I have taken from many books, used the throwaway conversational inspirations of my friends, and much more that I idly spoke to myself. I have no wish to sleuth down my plagiarisms, but want to say that "Hell" is taken from two paragraphs of Glenn Gray's "The Warrior"; ideas and expressions in "Half a Century Gone"

The noises of commerce, the melan choly,
The enumeration
withy.

All the things in nature
Description, explain the
"unities" -- one word --
The unexpectedness of
the objectives or can.
Elimination of words 151

Arki: head, the
Lepus - p. 33

Plum (reg 51
Lepus - 123

The book can't have been called
Tifly goes -

What holds it together: Insensitivity