

THE POCKET POETS SERIES

LUNCH POEMS

by

Frank O'Hara

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LUNCH POEMS

Frank O'Hara



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CITY
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to Joseph LeSueur

Some of these poems have appeared previously in *Yugen*, *Evergreen Review*, *Poetry*, *Locus Solus*, *The Beat Scene*, *Big Table*, *Signal*, *Nugget*, *The Floating Bear*, *C*, *The New American Poetry*, and *City Lights Journal*, to all of whom the author and publisher offer their thanks.

MUSIC

If I rest for a moment near The Equestrian
pausing for a liver sausage sandwich in the Mayflower Shoppe,
that angel seems to be leading the horse into Bergdorf's
and I am naked as a table cloth, my nerves humming.
Close to the fear of war and the stars which have disappeared.
I have in my hands only 35c, it's so meaningless to eat !
and gusts of water spray over the basins of leaves
like the hammers of a glass pianoforte. If I seem to you
to have lavender lips under the leaves of the world,

I must tighten my belt.

It's like a locomotive on the march, the season
of distress and clarity

and my door is open to the evenings of midwinter's
lightly falling snow over the newspapers.

Clasp me in your handkerchief like a tear, trumpet
of early afternoon ! in the foggy autumn.

As they're putting up the Christmas trees on Park Avenue
I shall see my daydreams walking by with dogs in blankets,
put to some use before all those coloured lights come on !

But no more fountains and no more rain,
and the stores stay open terribly late.

ALMA

*"Est-elle almée? . . . aux premières heures bleues
Se détruira-t-elle comme les fleurs feues. . ."*

— Rimbaud.

1

The sun, perhaps three of them, one black one red, you know,
and her dancing all the time, fanning the purple sky getting
purple, her fancy white skin quite unoriental to the dirty child-
ren's round eyes standing in circles munching muffins, the cock-
roaches like nuggets half hid in the bran. Boy! how are you,
Prester John? the smile of the river, so searching, so enamelled.

2

What mention of the King?
the spinning wheel still turns,
the apples rot to the singing,
Alceste on winter sojourns

is nice at Nice. Wander,
my dear sacred Pontiff, do dare
to murder minutely and ponder
what is the bloody affair

inside the heart of the weak
dancer, whose one toe is worth
inestimable, the gang, the cheek
of it! it's too dear, her birth

amidst the acorns with nails
stuck through them by passionate

parents, castanets! Caucasian tales!
 their prodigality proportionate :

“Sacred Heart, oh Heart so sick,
 make Detroit more wholly thine,
 all with greeds and scabs so thick
 that Judas Priest must make a sign.”

Thus he to bed and we to rise
 and Alma singing like a loon.
 Her dancing toenails in her eyes.
 Her pa was dead on the River Gaboon.

3

Detroit was founded on the great near waterways next to Canada which was friendly and immediately gained for herself the appellation “the Detroit of Thermopylae”, a name which has stuck to this day wherever ballroom dancing is held in proper esteem. Let me remind you of that great wrist movement, the enjambement schizophrene, a particularly satisfying variation of which may be made by adding a little tomato paste. Great success. While in Detroit accused of starting the Chicago fire. Millions of roses from Russians. Alma had come a long way, she opened a jewelry shop, her name became a household word, she'd invented an arch-supporter.

How often she thought of her father! the castle, the kitchen-garden, the hollihocks and the mill stream beyond curving gently as a parenthesis. Many a bitter tear was shed by her on the boards of this theatre as she pondered the inscrutable meagerness of divine Providence, always humming, always shifting a little, never missing a beat. She guested one season at the height of her nostalgia with the Metropolitan Opera Ballet in *Salammbô*; her

father seemed very close in all that oriental splendor of bamboo and hotel palms and stale sweat and bracelets, an engagement of tears. In the snow, in her white fox fur wraps, how more beautiful than Mary Garden !

4

Onward to the West. "Where I came from,
 where I'm going. Indian country." Gold.
 Oh say can you see Alma. The darling
 of Them. All her friends were artists.
 They alone have memories. They alone
 love flowers. They alone give parties
 and die. Poor Alma. They alone.

She died,

and it was as if all the jewels in the world
 had heaved a sigh. The seismograph
 at Fordham University registered, for once,
 a spiritual note. How like a sliver
 in her own short fat muscular foot.
 She loved the Western World, though
 there are some who say she isn't really dead.

1953

ON RACHMANINOFF'S BIRTHDAY

Quick ! a last poem before I go
off my rocker. Oh Rachmaninoff !
Onset, Massachusetts. Is it the fig-newton
playing the horn? Thundering windows
of hell, will your tubes ever break
into powder? Oh my palace of oranges,
junk shop, staples, umber, basalt ;
I'm a child again when I was really
miserable, a grope pizzicato. My pocket
of rhinestone, yoyo, carpenter's pencil,
amethyst, hypo, campaign button,
is the room full of smoke? Shit
on the soup, let it burn. So it's back.
You'll never be mentally sober.

1953

POEM

I watched an armory combing its bronze bricks
and in the sky there were glistening rails of milk.
Where had the swan gone, the one with the lame back?

Now mounting the steps
I enter my new home full
of grey radiators and glass
ashtrays full of wool.

Against the winter I must get a samovar
embroidered with basil leaves and Ukranian mottos
to the distant sound of wings, painfully anti-wind,

a little bit of the blue
summer air will come back
as the steam chuckles in
the monster's steamy attack

and I'll be happy here and happy there, full
of tea and tears. I don't suppose I'll ever get
to Italy, but I have the terrible tundra at least.

My new home will be full
of wood, roots and the like,
while I pace in a turtleneck
sweater, repairing my bike.

I watched the palisades shivering in the snow
of my face, which had grown preternaturally pure.
Once I destroyed a man's idea of himself to have him.

If I'd had a samovar then
 I'd have made him tea
 and as hyacinths grow from
 a pot he would love me

and my charming room of tea cosies full of dirt
 which is why I must travel, to collect the leaves.
 O my enormous piano, you are not like being outdoors

though it is cold and you
 are made of fire and wood!
 I lift your lid and mountains
 return, that I am good.

The stars blink like a hairnet that was dropped
 on a seat and now it is lying in the alley behind
 the theater where my piano is echoed by dying voices.

I am really a woodcarver
 and my words are love
 which willfully parades in
 its room, refusing to move.

ON THE WAY TO SAN REMO

The black ghinkos snarl their way up
the moon growls at each blinking window
the apartment houses climb deafeningly into the purple

A bat hisses northwards
the perilous steps lead to a grate
suddenly the heat is bearable

The cross-eyed dog scratches a worn patch of pavement
his right front leg is maimed in the shape of a V
there's no trace of his nails on the street a woman cajoles

She is very old and dirty
she whistles her filthy hope
that it will rain tonight

The 6th Avenue bus trunk-lumbers sideways
it is full of fat people who cough as at a movie
they eat each other's dandruff in the flickering glare

The moon passes into clouds
so hurt by the street lights
of your glance oh my heart

The act of love is also passing like a subway bison
through the paper-littered arches of the express tracks
the sailor sobers he feeds pennies to the peanut machines

Though others are in the night
far away lips upon a dusty armpit
the nostrils are full of tears

High fidelity reposed in a box a hand on the windowpane
the sweet calm the violin strings tie a young man's hair
the bright black eyes pin far away their smudged curiosity

Yes you are foolish smoking
the bars are for rabbits
who wish to outlive the men

1954

2 POEMS FROM THE OHARA MONOGATARI

1

My love is coming in a glass
the blood of the Bourbons

saxophone or cornet
qu'importe où?

green of glass flowers dans le Kentucky

and always the same handkerchief
at the same nose of damask

turning up my extravagant collar
tossing my scarf about my neck

the Baudelaire of Kyoto's never-ending pureness
is he cracked in the head?

2

After a long trip to a shrine
in wooden clogs so hard on the muscles
the tea is bitter and the breasts are hard
so much terrace for one evening

there is no longer no ocean
I don't see the ocean under my stilts
as I poke along

hands on ankles feet on wrists
naked in thought
like a whip made from sheerest stockings

the radio is on the cigarette is puffed upon
by the pleasures of rolling in a bog
some call the Milky Way
in far-fetched Occidental lands above the trees
where dwell the amusing skulls

A STEP AWAY FROM THEM

It's my lunch hour, so I go
 for a walk among the hum-colored
 cabs. First, down the sidewalk
 where laborers feed their dirty
 glistening torsos sandwiches
 and Coca-Cola, with yellow helmets
 on. They protect them from falling
 bricks, I guess. Then onto the
 avenue where skirts are flipping
 above heels and blow up over
 grates. The sun is hot, but the
 cabs stir up the air. I look
 at bargains in wristwatches. There
 are cats playing in sawdust.

On

to Times Square, where the sign
 blows smoke over my head, and higher
 the waterfall pours lightly. A
 Negro stands in a doorway with a
 toothpick, languorously agitating.
 A blonde chorus girl clicks : he
 smiles and rubs his chin. Everything
 suddenly honks : it is 12 :40 of
 a Thursday.

Neon in daylight is a
 great pleasure, as Edwin Denby would
 write, as are light bulbs in daylight.
 I stop for a cheeseburger at JULIET'S
 CORNER. Giulietta Masina, wife of
 Federico Fellini, è *bell' attrice*.

And chocolate malted. A lady in
foxes on such a day puts her poodle
in a cab.

There are several Puerto
Ricans on the avenue today, which
makes it beautiful and warm. First
Bunny died, then John Latouche,
then Jackson Pollock. But is the
earth as full as life was full, of them?
And one has eaten and one walks,
past the magazines with nudes
and the posters for BULLFIGHT and
the Manhattan Storage Warehouse,
which they'll soon tear down. I
used to think they had the Armory
Show there.

A glass of papaya juice
and back to work. My heart is in my
pocket, it is Poems by Pierre Reverdy.

CAMBRIDGE

It is still raining and the yellow-green cotton fruit looks silly round a window giving out on winter trees with only three drab leaves left. The hot plate works, it is the sole heat on earth, and instant coffee. I put on my warm corduroy pants, a heavy maroon sweater, and wrap myself in my old maroon bathrobe. Just like Pasternak in Marburg (they say Italy and France are colder, but I'm sure that Germany's at least as cold as this) and, lacking the Master's inspiration, I may freeze to death before I can get out into the white rain. I could have left the window closed last night? But that's where health comes from! His breath from the Urals, drawing me into flame like a forgotten cigarette. Burn! this is not negligible, being poetic, and not feeble, since it's sponsored by the greatest living Russian poet at incalculable cost. Across the street there is a house under construction, abandoned to the rain. Secretly, I shall go to work on it.

1956

POEM

Instant coffee with slightly sour cream
in it, and a phone call to the beyond
which doesn't seem to be coming any nearer.
" Ah daddy, I wanna stay drunk many days "
on the poetry of a new friend
my life held precariously in the seeing
hands of others, their and my impossibilities.
Is this love, now that the first love
has finally died, where there were no impossibilities?

1956

3.

Oh to be an angel (if there were any!), and go
straight up into the sky and look around and then come down

not to be covered with steel and aluminum
glaringly ugly in the pure distances and clattering and
buckling, wheezing

but to be part of the treetops and the blueness, invisible,
the iridescent darkneses beyond,

silent, listening to
the air becoming no air becoming air again
1958

IMAGE OF THE BUDDHA PREACHING

I am very happy to be here at the Villa Hügel
and Prime Minister Nehru has asked me to greet the people of
Essen

and to tell you how powerfully affected we in India
have been by Germany's philosophy, traditions and mythology
though our lucidity and our concentration on archetypes
puts us in a class by ourself

“ for in this world of storm and stress ”
— 5,000 years of Indian art ! just think of it, oh Essen !
is this a calmer region of thought, “ a reflection of the mind
through the ages ” ?

Max Müller, “ primus inter pares ” among
Indologists
remember our byword, Mokshamula, I rejoice in the fact of 900
exhibits

I deeply appreciate filling the gaps, oh Herr Doktor Heinrich
Goetz !
and the research purring onward in Pakistan and Ceylon and
Afghanistan
soapstone, terracotta-Indus, terracotta-Maurya, terracotta Sunga,
terracotta-Andhra, terracotta fragments famous Bharhut
Stupa
Kushana, Ghandara, Gupta, Hindu and Jain, Secco, Ajanta,
Villa Hügel !

Anglo-German trade will prosper by Swansea-Mannheim
friendship
waning now the West Wall by virtue of two rolls per capita
and the flagship BERLIN is joining its “white fleet” on the Rhine

though better schools and model cars are wanting, still still oh

Essen

Nataraja dances on the dwarf

and unlike their fathers

Germany's highschool pupils love the mathematics

which is hopeful of a new delay in terror

I don't think

1959

SONG

Is it dirty
does it look dirty
that's what you think of in the city

does it just seem dirty
that's what you think of in the city
you don't refuse to breathe do you

someone comes along with a very bad character
he seems attractive. is he really. yes. very
he's attractive as his character is bad. is it. yes

that's what you think of in the city
run your finger along your no-moss mind
that's not a thought that's soot

and you take a lot of dirt off someone
is the character less bad. no. it improves constantly
you don't refuse to breathe do you

1959

THE DAY LADY DIED

It is 12 : 20 in New York a Friday
 three days after Bastille day, yes
 it is 1959 and I go get a shoeshine
 because I will get off the 4 : 19 in Easthampton
 at 7 : 15 and then go straight to dinner
 and I don't know the people who will feed me

I walk up the muggy street beginning to sun
 and have a hamburger and a malted and buy
 an ugly NEW WORLD WRITING to see what the poets
 in Ghana are doing these days

I go on to the bank
 and Miss Stillwagon (first name Linda I once heard)
 doesn't even look up my balance for once in her life
 and in the GOLDEN GRIFFIN I get a little Verlaine
 for Patsy with drawings by Bonnard although I do
 think of Hesiod, trans. Richmond Lattimore or
 Brendan Behan's new play or *Le Balcon* or *Les Nègres*
 of Genet, but I don't, I stick with Verlaine
 after practically going to sleep with quandariness

and for Mike I just stroll into the PARK LANE
 Liquor Store and ask for a bottle of Strega and
 then I go back where I came from to 6th Avenue
 and the tobacconist in the Ziegfeld Theatre and
 casually ask for a carton of Gauloises and a carton
 of Picayunes, and a NEW YORK POST with her face on it

and I am sweating a lot by now and thinking of
 leaning on the john door in the 5 SPOT
 while she whispered a song along the keyboard
 to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing

POEM

Wouldn't it be funny
if The Finger had designed us
to shit just once a week?

all week long we'd get fatter
and fatter and then on Sunday morning
while everyone's in church

ploop!

1959

NAPHTHA

Ah Jean Dubuffet
when you think of him
doing his military service in the Eiffel Tower
as a meteorologist
in 1922
you know how wonderful the 20th Century
can be
and the gaited Iroquois on the girders
fierce and unflinching-footed
nude as they should be
slightly empty
like a Sonia Delaunay
there is a parable of speed
somewhere behind the Indians' eyes
they invented the century with their horses
and their fragile backs
which are dark

we owe a debt to the Iroquois
and to Duke Ellington
for playing in the buildings when they are built
we don't do much ourselves
but fuck and think
of the haunting Métro
and the one who didn't show up there
while we were waiting to become part of our century
just as you can't make a hat out of steel
and still wear it
who wears hats anyway
it is our tribe's custom
to beguile

how are you feeling in ancient September
I am feeling like a truck on a wet highway
how can you
you were made in the image of god
I was not
I was made in the image of a sissy truck-driver
and Jean Dubuffet painting his cows
“with a likeness burst in the memory”
apart from love (don't say it)
I am ashamed of my century
for being so entertaining
but I have to smile

1959

PERSONAL POEM

Now when I walk around at lunchtime
I have only two charms in my pocket
an old Roman coin Mike Kanemitsu gave me
and a bolt-head that broke off a packing case
when I was in Madrid the others never
brought me too much luck though they did
help keep me in New York against coercion
but now I'm happy for a time and interested

I walk through the luminous humidity
passing the House of Seagram with its wet
and its loungers and the construction to
the left that closed the sidewalk if
I ever get to be a construction worker
I'd like to have a silver hat please
and get to Moriarty's where I wait for
LeRoi and hear who wants to be a mover and
shaker the last five years my batting average
is .016 that's that, and LeRoi comes in
and tells me Miles Davis was clubbed 12
times last night outside BIRDLAND by a cop
a lady asks us for a nickel for a terrible
disease but we don't give her one we
don't like terrible diseases, then

we go eat some fish and some ale it's
cool but crowded we don't like Lionel Trilling
we decide, we like Don Allen we don't like
Henry James so much we like Herman Melville
we don't want to be in the poets' walk in
San Francisco even we just want to be rich
and walk on girders in our silver hats
I wonder if one person out of the 8,000,000 is
thinking of me as I shake hands with LeRoi
and buy a strap for my wristwatch and go
back to work happy at the thought possibly so

1959

ADIEU TO NORMAN, BON JOUR TO JOAN AND JEAN-PAUL

It is 12 : 10 in New York and I am wondering
 if I will finish this in time to meet Norman for lunch
 ah lunch ! I think I am going crazy
 what with my terrible hangover and the weekend coming up
 at excitement-prone Kenneth Koch's
 I wish I were staying in town and working on my poems
 at Joan's studio for a new book by Grove Press
 which they will probably not print
 but it is good to be several floors up in the dead of night
 wondering whether you are any good or not
 and the only decision you can make is that you did it

yesterday I looked up the rue Frémicourt on a map
 and was happy to find it like a bird
 flying over Paris et ses environs
 which unfortunately did not include Seine-et-Oise
which I don't know

as well as a number of other things
 and Allen is back talking about god a lot
 and Peter is back not talking very much
 and Joe has a cold and is not coming to Kenneth's
 although he is coming to lunch with Norman
 I suspect he is making a distinction
 well, who isn't

I wish I were reeling around Paris
 instead of reeling around New York
 I wish I weren't reeling at all
 it is Spring the ice has melted the Ricard is being poured

we are all happy and young and toothless
 it is the same as old age
 the only thing to do is simply continue
 is that simple
 yes, it is simple because it is the only thing to do
 can you do it
 yes, you can because it is the only thing to do
 blue light over the Bois de Boulogne it continues
 the Seine continues
 the Louvre stays open it continues it hardly closes at all
 the Bar Américain continues to be French
 de Gaulle continues to be Algerian as does Camus
 Shirley Goldfarb continues to be Shirley Goldfarb
 and Jane Hazan continues to be Jane Freilicher (I think !)
 and Irving Sandler continues to be the balayeur des artistes
 and so do I (sometimes I think I'm "in love" with painting)
 and surely the Piscine Deligny continues to have water in it
 and the Flore continues to have tables and newspapers
 and people under them
 and surely we shall not continue to be unhappy
 we shall be happy
 but we shall continue to be ourselves everything
 continues to be possible
 René Char, Pierre Reverdy, Samuel Beckett it is possible isn't it
 I love Reverdy for saying yes, though I don't believe it

1959

RHAPSODY

515 Madison Avenue
 door to heaven? portal
 stopped realities and eternal licentiousness
 or at least the jungle of impossible eagerness
 your marble is bronze and your lianas elevator cables
 swinging from the myth of ascending
 I would join
 or declining the challenge of racial attractions
 they zing on (into the lynch, dear friends)
 while everywhere love is breathing draftily
 like a doorway linking 53rd with 54th
 the east-bound with the west-bound traffic by 8,000,000s
 o midtown tunnels and the tunnels, too, of Holland

where is the summit where all aims are clear
 the pin-point light upon a fear of lust
 as agony's needlework grows up around the unicorn
 and fences him for milk- and yoghurt-work
 when I see Gianni I know he's thinking of John Ericson
 playing the Rachmaninoff 2nd or Elizabeth Taylor
 taking sleeping-pills and Jane thinks of Manderley
 and Irkutsk while I cough lightly in the smog of desire
 and my eyes water achingly imitating the true blue

a sight of Manahatta in the towering needle
 multi-faceted insight of the fly in the stringless labyrinth
 Canada plans a higher place than the Empire State Building
 I am getting into a cab at 9th Street and 1st Avenue
 and the Negro driver tells me about a \$120 apartment
 "where you can't walk across the floor after 10 at night
 not even to pee, cause it keeps them awake downstairs"
 no, I don't like that "well, I didn't take it"
 perfect in the hot humid morning on my way to work
 a little supper-club conversation for the mill of the gods

you were there always and you know all about these things
 as indifferent as an encyclopedia with your calm brown eyes
 it isn't enough to smile when you run the gauntlet
 you've got to spit like Niagara Falls on everybody or
 Victoria Falls or at least the beautiful urban fountains of Madrid
 as the Niger joins the Gulf of Guinea near the Menemsha Bar
 that is what you learn in the early morning passing

Madison Avenue

where you've never spent any time and stores eat up light

I have always wanted to be near it
 though the day is long (and I don't mean Madison Avenue)
 lying in a hammock on St. Mark's Place sorting my poems
 in the rancid nourishment of this mountainous island
 they are coming and we holy ones must go
 is Tibet historically a part of China? as I historically
 belong to the enormous bliss of American death

CORNKIND

So the rain falls
 it drops all over the place
 and where it finds a little rock pool
 it fills it up with dirt
 and the corn grows
 a green Bette Davis sits under it
 reading a volume of William Morris
 oh fertility! beloved of the Western world
 you aren't so popular in China
 though they fuck too

and do I really want a son
 to carry on my idiocy past the Horned Gates
 poor kid a staggering load

yet it can happen casually
 and he lifts a little of the load each day
 as I become more and more idiotic
 and grows to be a strong strong man
 and one day carries as I die
 my final idiocy and the very gates
 into a future of his choice

but what of William Morris
 what of you Million Worries
 what of Bette Davis in
 AN EVENING WITH WILLIAM MORRIS
 or THE WORLD OF SAMUEL GREENBERG

what of Hart Crane
what of phonograph records and gin

what of "what of"

you are of me, that's what
and that's the meaning of fertility
hard and moist and moaning

1960

HOW TO GET THERE

White the October air, no snow, easy to breathe
 beneath the sky, lies, lies everywhere writhing and gasping
 clutching and tangling, it is not easy to breathe
 lies building their tendrils into dim figures
 who disappear down corridors in west-side apartments
 into childhood's proof of being wanted, not abandoned, kidnapped
 betrayal staving off loneliness, I see the fog lunge in
 and hide it

where are you?

here I am on the sidewalk
 under the moonlike lamplight thinking how precious moss is
 so unique and greenly crushable if you can find it
 on the north side of the tree where the fog binds you
 and then, tearing apart into soft white lies, spreads its disease
 through the primal night of an everlasting winter
 which nevertheless has heat in tubes, west-side and east-side
 and its intricate individual pathways of white accompanied
 by the ringing of telephone bells beside which someone sits in
 silence denying their own number, never given out ! nameless
 like the sound of troika bells rushing past suffering
 in the first storm, it is snowing now, it is already too late
 the snow will go away, but nobody will be there

police cordons for lying political dignitaries ringing too
 the world becomes a jangle

from the index finger
 to the vast empty houses filled with people, their echoes

of lies and the tendrils of fog trailing softly around their throats
now the phone can be answered, nobody calling, only an echo
all can confess to be home and waiting, all is the same
and we drift into the clear sky enthralled by our disappointment
never to be alone again

never to be loved
sailing through space : didn't I have you once for my self?
West Side?
for a couple of hours, but I am not that person

1960

A LITTLE TRAVEL DIARY

Wending our way through the gambas, angulas,
 the merluzas that taste like the Sea Post on Sunday
 and the great quantities of huevos they take off
 Spanish Naval officers' uniforms and put on plates,
 and reach the gare de Francia in the gloaming
 with my ton of books and John's ton of clothes bought
 in a wild fit of enthusiasm in Madrid; all jumbled
 together like life is a Jumble Shop

of the theatre

in Spain they said nothing for foreigners
 and we head in our lovely 1st class coach, shifting
 and sagging, towards the northwest, while in other compartments
 Dietrich and Erich von Stroheim share a sandwich of chorizos
 and a bottle of Vichy Catalan, in the dining car
 the travelling gentleman with linear mustache and many
 many rings rolls his cigar around and drinks Martini y
 ginebra, and Lillian Gish rolls on over the gorges
 with a tear in her left front eye, comme Picasso,
 through the night through the night, longitudinal
 and affected with stars; the riverbeds so far below look
 as a pig's tongue on a platter, and storms break over
 San Sebastian, 40 foot waves drench us pleasantly and we see
 a dead dog bloated as a fraise lolling beside the quai
 and slowly pulling out to sea

to Irun and Biarritz

we go, sapped of anxiety, and there for the first time
 since arriving in Barcelona I can freely shit
 and the surf is so high and the sun is so hot
 and it was all built yesterday as everything should be

what a splendid country it is

full of indecision and cognac
and bikinis, sens plastiques (ugh ! hooray !); see the back
of the head of Bill Berkson, aux Deux Magots, (awk !) it gleams
like the moon through the smoke of the Renfe as we passed
through the endless tunnels and the silver vistas
of our quest for the rocher de la Vierge and salt spray

1960

FIVE POEMS

Well now, hold on
 maybe I won't go to sleep at all
 and it'll be a beautiful white night
 or else I'll collapse
 completely from nerves and be calm
 as a rug or a bottle of pills
 or suddenly I'll be off Montauk
 swimming and loving it and not caring where

*

*

*

an invitation to lunch
 HOW DO YOU LIKE THAT?
 when I only have 16 cents and 2
 packages of yoghurt
 there's a lesson in that, isn't there
 like in Chinese poetry when a leaf falls?
 hold off on the yoghurt till the very
 last, when everything may improve

*

*

*

at the Rond-Point they were eating
 a oyster, but here
 we were dropping by sculptures
 and seeing some paintings
 and the smasheroo-grates of Cadoret
 and music by Varèse, too
 well Adolph Gottlieb I guess you

are the hero of this day
along with venison and Bill

I'll sleep on the yoghurt and dream of the Persian Gulf

* * *

which I did it was wonderful
to be in bed again and the knock
on my door for once signified "hi there"
and on the deafening walk
through the ghettos where bombs have gone off lately
left by subway violators
I knew why I love taxis, yes
subways are only fun when you're feeling sexy
and who feels sexy after *The Blue Angel*
well maybe a little bit

* * *

I seem to be defying fate, or am I avoiding it?

1960

prematurely since you won't have done anything horribly
mean yet
except keeping them from the darker joys
it's unforgivable the latter
so don't blame me if you won't take this advice
and the family breaks up
and your children grow old and blind in front of a TV set
seeing
movies you wouldn't let them see when they were young

1960

PISTACHIO TREE AT CHATEAU NOIR

Beaucoup de musique classique et moderne Guillaume and not
 as one may imagine it sounds not in the ear
 what went was attributed to wandering aimlessly off
 what came arrived simply for itself and inflamed me
 yet I do not explain what exactly makes me so happy today
 any more than I can explain the unseasonal warmth
 of my unhabitual heart pumping vulgarly the blood
 of another I loved another and now my love is other
 my love is in the movies downstairs and yesterday
 bought ice cream and looked for a pigeon-menaced owl
 mais, Guillaume, où es-tu, Guillaume, comme les musiques

and like the set for *Rigoletto* like the set for *Roma*
 like so many sets one's heart is torn like Berman's
 spacious haunt where tenors walk in pumps and girls
 in great big hats or none at all "or perhaps he recorded
 the panorama of hills and valleys before the strangely
 naked" and rain is turning the set into a dumpling

wherever I see a "while" I seem to lose a little time
 and gradually my feet dragging I slow down the damn bus
 it is because of you so I can watch you smile longer
 that's what the Spring is and the elbow of noon walks
 where did you go who did you see the children proclaim
 and they too gradually fill the sepulchre with dolls
 and the sepulchre jumps and jounces and turns pink with wrath

STEPS

How funny you are today New York
like Ginger Rogers in *Swingtime*
and St. Bridget's steeple leaning a little to the left

here I have just jumped out of a bed full of V-days
(I got tired of D-days) and blue you there still
accepts me foolish and free
all I want is a room up there
and you in it
and even the traffic halt so thick is a way
for people to rub up against each other
and when their surgical appliances lock
they stay together
for the rest of the day (what a day)
I go by to check a slide and I say
that painting's not so blue

where's Lana Turner
she's out eating
and Garbo's backstage at the Met
everyone's taking their coat off
so they can show a rib-cage to the rib-watchers
and the park's full of dancers and their tights and shoes
in little bags
who are often mistaken for worker-outers at the West Side Y
why not
the Pittsburgh Pirates shout because they won
and in a sense we're all winning
we're alive

the apartment was vacated by a gay couple
who moved to the country for fun
they moved a day too soon
even the stabbings are helping the population explosion
though in the wrong country
and all those liars have left the U N
the Seagram Building's no longer rivalled in interest
not that we need liquor (we just like it)

and the little box is out on the sidewalk
next to the delicatessen
so the old man can sit on it and drink beer
and get knocked off it by his wife later in the day
while the sun is still shining

oh god it's wonderful
to get out of bed
and drink too much coffee
and smoke too many cigarettes
and love you so much

MARY DESTI'S ASS

In Bayreuth once
we were very good friends of the Wagners
and I stepped in once
for Isadora so perfectly
she would never allow me to dance again
that's the way it was in Bayreuth

the way it was in Hackensack
was different
there one never did anything
and everyone hated you anyway
it was fun, it was clear
you knew where you stood

in Boston you were never really standing
I was usually lying
it was amusing to be lying all
the time for everybody
it was like exercise

it means something to exercise
in Norfolk Virginia
it means you've been to bed with a Nigra
well it is exercise
the only difference is it's better than Boston

I was walking along the street
of Cincinnati
and I met Kenneth Koch's mother
fresh from the Istanbul Hilton
she liked me and I liked her
we both liked Istanbul

then in Waukegan I met a furniture manufacturer
and it wiped out all dreams of pleasantness from my mind
it was like being pushed down hard
on a chair
it was like something horrible you hadn't expected
which is the most horrible thing

and in Singapore I got a dreadful
disease it was amusing to have bumps
except they went into my veins
and rose to the surface like Vesuvius
getting cured was like learning to smoke

yet I always loved Baltimore
the porches which hurt your ass
no, they were the steps
well you have a wet ass anyway
if they'd only stop scrubbing

and Frisco where I saw
Toumanova "the baby ballerina" except
she looked like a cow
I didn't know the history of the ballet yet
not that that taught me much

now if you feel like you want to deal with
Tokyo
you've really got something to handle
it's like Times Square at midnight
you don't know where you're going
but you know

and then in Harbin I knew
how to behave it was glorious that
was love sneaking up on me through the snow
and I felt it was because of all
the postcards and the smiles and kisses and the grunts
that was love but I kept on traveling

1961

ST. PAUL AND ALL THAT

Totally abashed and smiling

I walk in
sit down and
face the frigidaire

it's April
no May
it's May

such little things have to be established in morning
after the big things of night

do you want me to come? when
I think of all the things I've been thinking of I feel insane
simply "life in Birmingham is hell"

simply "you will miss me
but that's good"

when the tears of a whole generation are assembled
they will only fill a coffee cup

just because they evaporate
doesn't mean life has heat

"this various dream of living"

I am alive with you

full of anxious pleasures and pleasurable anxiety
hardness and softness

listening while you talk and talking while you read
I read what you read

you do not read what I read
which is right, I am the one with the curiosity
you read for some mysterious reason

I read simply because I am a writer
the sun doesn't necessarily set, sometimes it just disappears

when you're not here someone walks in and says
"hey,
there's no dancer in that bed"

O the Polish summers! those drafts!
those black and white teeth!
you never come when you say you'll come but on the other hand
you do come
1961

MEMOIR OF SERGEI O. . . .

My feet have never been comfortable
since I pulled them out of the Black Sea
and came to your foul country
what fatal day did I dry them off for
travel loathesome travel to a world
even older than the one I grew up in
what fatal day meanwhile back in France
they were stumbling towards the Bastille
and the Princesse de Lamballe was
shuddering as shudderingly as I
with a lot less to lose I still hated
to move sedentary as a roach of Tiflis
never again to go swimming in the nude
publicly little did I know how
awfulness could reach perfection abroad
I even thought I would see a Red Indian
all I saw was lipstick everything cov-
ered with grass or shrouds pretty
shrouds shot with silver and plasma
even the chairs are upholstered to a
smothering perfection of inanity
and there are no chandeliers and there
are no gates to the parks so you don't
know whether you're going in them or
coming out of them that's not relaxing
and so you can't really walk all you can
do is sit and drink coffee and brood
over the lost leaves and refreshing scum
of Georgia Georgia of my heritage
and dismay meanwhile back in my old

country they are renaming everything so
I can't even tell any more which ballet
company I am remembering with so much
pain and the same thing has started
here American Avenue Park Avenue South
Avenue of Chester Conklin Binnie Barnes
Boulevard Avenue of Toby Wing Barbara
Nichols Street where am I what is it
I can't even find a pond small enough
to drown in without being ostentatious
you are ruining your awful country and me
it is not new to do this it is terribly
democratic and ordinary and tired

1961

YESTERDAY DOWN AT THE CANAL

You say that everything is very simple and interesting
 it makes me feel very wistful, like reading a great Russian novel
 does

I am terribly bored
 sometimes it is like seeing a bad movie
 other days, more often, it's like having an acute disease of the
 kidney

god knows it has nothing to do with the heart
 nothing to do with people more interesting than myself
 yak yak

that's an amusing thought
 how can anyone be more amusing than oneself
 how can anyone fail to be
 can I borrow your forty-five

I only need one bullet preferably silver
 if you can't be interesting at least you can be a legend
 (but I hate all that crap)

1961

POEM EN FORME DE SAW

I ducked out of sight behind the saw-mill
 nobody saw me because of the falls the gates the sluice the
 tourist boats

the children were trailing their fingers in the water
 and the swans, regal and smarty, were nipping their "little"
 fingers

I heard one swan remark "That was a good nip
 though they are not as interesting as sausages" and another
 reply "Nor as tasty as those peasants we got away from the
 elephant that time"

but I didn't really care for conversation that day

I wanted to be alone

which is why I went to the mill in the first place

now I am alone and hate it

I don't want to just make boards for the rest of my life

I'm distressed

the water is very beautiful but you can't go into it

because of the gunk

and the dog is always rolling over, I like dogs on their "little" feet

I think I may scamper off to Winnipeg to see Raymond

but what'll happen to the mill

I see the cobwebs collecting already

and later those other webs, those awful predatory webs

if I stay right here I will eventually get into the newspapers
 like Robert Frost

willow trees, willow trees they remind me of Desdemona

I'm so damned literary

and at the same time the waters rushing past remind me of
 nothing

I'm so damned empty

what is all this vessel shit anyway

we are all rushing down the River Happy Times

ducking poling bumping sinking and swimming
and we arrive at the beach
the chaff is sand
alone as a tree bumping another tree in a storm
that's not really being alone, is it, signed The Saw

1961

FOR THE CHINESE NEW YEAR
& FOR BILL BERKSON

*One or another
Is lost, since we fall apart
Endlessly, in one motion depart
From each other.*

— D. H. Lawrence

Behind New York there's a face
and it's not Sibelius's with a cigar
it was red it was strange and hateful
and then I became a child again
like a nadir or a zenith or a nudnik

what do you think this is my youth
and the aged future that is sweeping me away
carless and gasless under the Sutton
and Beekman Places towards a hellish rage
it is there that face I fear under ramps

it is perhaps the period that ends
the problem as a proposition of days of days
just an attack on the feelings that stay
poised in the hurricane's center that
eye through which only camels can pass

but I do not mean that tenderness doesn't
linger like a Paris afternoon or a wart
something dumb and despicable that I love
because it is silent oh what difference
does it make me into some kind of space statistic

a lot is buried under that smile
 a lot of sophistication gone down the drain
 to become the mesh of a mythical fish
 at which we never stare back never stare back
 where there is so much downright forgery

under that I find it restful like a bush
 some people are outraged by cleanliness
 I hate the lack of smells myself and yet I stay
 it is better than being actually present
 and the stare can swim away into the past

can adorn it with easy convictions rat
 cow tiger rabbit dragon snake horse sheep
 monkey rooster dog and pig "Flower Drum Song"
 so that nothing is vain not the gelded sand
 not the old spangled lotus not my fly

which I have thought about but never really
 looked at well that's a certain orderliness
 of personality "if you're brought up Protestant
 enough a Catholic" oh shit on the beaches so
 what if I did look up your trunks and see it

II

then the parallel becomes an eagle parade
 of Busby Berkeleyites marching marching half-toe
 I suppose it's the happiest moment in infinity
 because we're dissipated and tired and fond no
 I don't think psychoanalysis shrinks the spleen

here we are and what the hell are we going to do
with it we are going to blow it up like daddy did
only us I really think we should go up for a change
I'm tired of always going down what price glory
it's one of those timeless priceless words like come

well now how does your conscience feel about that
would you rather explore tomorrow with a sponge
there's no need to look for a target you're it
like in childhood when the going was aimed at a
sandwich it all depends on which three of us are there

but here come the prophets with their loosening nails
it is only as blue as the lighting under the piles
I have something portentous to say to you but which
of the papier-mâché languages do you understand you
don't dare to take it off paper much less put it on

yes it is strange that everyone fucks and every-
one mentions it and it's boring too that faded floor
how many teeth have chewed a little piece of the lover's
flesh how many teeth are there in the world it's like
Harpo Marx smiling at a million pianos call that Africa

call it New Guinea call it Poughkeepsie I guess
it's love I guess the season of renunciation is at "hand"
the final fatal hour of turpitude and logic demise
is when you miss getting rid of something delouse
is when you don't louse something up which way is the inn

III

I'm looking for a million-dollar heart in a carton
 of frozen strawberries like the Swedes where is sunny England
 and those fields where they still-birth the wars why
 did they suddenly stop playing why is Venice a Summer
 Festival and not New York were you born in America

the inscrutable passage of a lawn-mower punctuates
 the newly installed Muzack in the Shubert Theatre am I nuts
 or is this the happiest moment of my life who's arguing it's
 I mean 'tis lawd sakes it took daddy a long time to have
 that accident so Ant Grace could get completely into black

didn't you know we was all going to be Zen Buddhists after
 what we did you sure don't know much about war-guilt
 or nothin and the peach trees continued to rejoice around
 the prick which was for once authorized by our Congress
 though inactive what if it had turned out to be a volcano

that's a mulatto of another nationality of marble
 it's time for dessert I don't care what street this is
 you're not telling me to take a tour are you
 I don't want to look at any fingernails or any toes
 I just want to go on being subtle and dead like life

I'm not naturally so detached but I think
 they might send me up any minute so I try to be free
 you know we've all sinned a lot against science
 so we really ought to be available as an apple on a bough
 pleasant thought fresh air free love cross-pollenization

oh oh god how I'd love to dream let alone sleep it's night
 the soft air wraps me like a swarm it's raining and I have
 a cold I am a real human being with real ascendancies
 and a certain amount of rapture what do you do with a kid
 like me if you don't eat me I'll have to eat myself

it's a strange curse my "generation" has we're all
 like the flowers in the Agassiz Museum perpetually ardent
 don't touch me because when I tremble it makes a noise
 like a Chinese wind-bell it's that I'm seismographic is all
 and when a Jesuit has stared you down for ever after you clink

I wonder if I've really scrutinized this experience like
 you're supposed to have if you can type there's not much
 soup left on my sleeve energy creativity guts ponderableness
 lent is coming in imponderableness "I'd like to die smiling" ugh
 and a very small tiptoe is crossing the threshold away

whither Lumumba whither oh whither Gauguin
 I have often tried to say goodbye to strange fantoms I
 read about in the newspapers and have always succeeded
 though the ones at "home" are dependent on Dependable
 Laboratory and Sales Company on Pulaski Street strange

I think it's goodbye to a lot of things like Christmas
 and the Mediterranean and halos and meteorites and villages
 full of damned children well it's goodbye then as in Strauss
 or some other desperately theatrical venture it's goodbye
 to lunch to love to evil things and to the ultimate good as "well"

the strange career of a personality begins at five and ends
forty minutes later in a fog the rest is just a lot of stranded
ships honking their horns full of joy-seeking cadets in bloomers
and beards it's okay with me but must they cheer while they honk
it seems that breath could easily fill a balloon and drift away

scaring the locusts in the straggling grey of living dumb
exertions then the useful noise would come of doom of data
turned to elegant decoration like a strangling prince once ordered
no there is no precedent of history no history nobody came before
nobody will ever come before and nobody ever was that man

you will not die not knowing this is true this year

1961

POEM

Lana Turner has collapsed !
I was trotting along and suddenly
it started raining and snowing
and you said it was hailing
but hailing hits you on the head
hard so it was really snowing and
raining and I was in such a hurry
to meet you but the traffic
was acting exactly like the sky
and suddenly I see a headline
LANA TURNER HAS COLLAPSED !
there is no snow in Hollywood
there is no rain in California
I have been to lots of parties
and acted perfectly disgraceful
but I never actually collapsed
oh Lana Turner we love you get up

1962

could be if we
were children again and everything uninteresting
you never had a chance to be

Emma Bovary
nor I Julien Sorel in that attic in the States
and now

I remember you only through American
Folk Art opening near the Fonda del Sol
where are you Sally with your practicality
and bottles of fireflies

blinking on
and off for footlights

1962

FANTASY

(dedicated to the health of Allen Ginsberg)

How do you like the music of Adolph
 it, I like it better than Max Steiner's. Take his
 score for *Northern Pursuit*, the Helmut Dantyne theme
 was . . .

Deutsch? I like
 and then the window fell on my hand. Errol
 Flynn was skiing by. Down
 down down went the grim
 grey submarine under the "cold" ice.

Helmut was
 safely ashore, on the ice.
 What dreams, what incredible
 fantasies of snow farts will this all lead to?

I
 don't know, I have stopped thinking like a sled dog.

The main thing is to tell a story.
 It is almost
 very important. Imagine

throwing away the avalanche
 so early in the movie. I am the only spy left
 in Canada,

but just because I'm alone in the snow
 doesn't necessarily mean I'm a Nazi.

Let's see,
 two aspirins a vitamin C tablet and some baking soda
 should do the trick, that's practically an

Alka

Seltzer. Allen come out of the bathroom
and take it.

I think someone put butter on my skis instead
of wax.

Ouch. The leanto is falling over in the
firs, and there is another fatter spy here. They
didn't tell me they sent

him. Well, that takes care
of him, boy were those huskies hungry.

Allen,
are you feeling any better? Yes, I'm crazy about
Helmut Dantyne

but I'm glad that Canada will remain
free. Just free, that's all, never argue with the movies.

1964

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Often this poet, strolling through the noisy splintered glare of a Manhattan noon, has paused at a sample Olivetti to type up thirty or forty lines of ruminations, or pondering more deeply has withdrawn to a darkened warehouse firehouse to limn his computed misunderstandings of the eternal questions of life, co-existence and depth, while never forgetting to eat Lunch his favorite meal. . . .

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