

WORMWOOD



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THE BURNING OF BRIDGES

They left in the night. Glancing cautiously around, they stepped from silent doorways and moved to the meeting places they had memorized. Whispering passwords, they came together in groups of two or three and then, more boldly uniting, they began to move out. In trucks, in cars, even in animal carts they made their way down to the river. Here they left their vehicles and, each man holding on to the arm of the one before, they crossed in the first light of dawn. Then they burnt the bridges.

It is a strange thing, the burning of bridges. The fire rages and a few feet below the water flows by as if nothing were happening. Then, when the flames have done their work, they meet with the water. With a crash they become one in a hissing steam that rises and suffuses the hot air.

In my life I have seen many beautiful things. I have seen trees covered with peach blossoms, and I have seen peach trees against the snow-capped mountains. I have seen children meeting each other for the first time, playing with each other and knowing each other through play and through love. I have seen young men and young women looking at each other with a new love, and I have seen whole peoples rise in one body against their oppressors. All these things in my mind are comparable only to the beauty of burning bridges.

The crowds that gather on each side of a burning bridge seem to be saying goodbye to each other in a peculiarly final way. Then they turn and return to the lives that await them, now on one side only of the river.

When a bridge has been burning all night, the last glow of the flames seems to welcome the rising sun. And when a bridge has been burning all day, its glow lingers on deep into the night.

When I was a child I loved to hear stories. My uncles and my aunts, my grandparents and my parents were all great raconteurs. In the long winter evenings after work was done, or in the soft days of summer as we worked side by side in the fields, they told me of strange deeds done in strange lands. But they never told me the story of the burning of the bridges. It was not until I became a man and saw it for myself that I realized why. And then I understood that the true story of the burning of bridges can never be told.

For those trapped in the middle of a burning bridge, there is little chance of escape. All they can do is leap into the river and hope that the current will bring them to one bank or the other.

Nana is a prostitute. Every day she sells her body to men, very few of whom she finds attractive. She does not like her work particularly, but she earns enough to buy fashionable clothes and to have her hair done once a week. As she sits under the dryer, she reads magazines and all of them seem to be filled with pictures of burning bridges. And when she dreams, or when she daydreams in isolation as a man she does not know takes his pleasure upon her body, she thinks mostly of burning bridges.

In my mind I have many associations with the burning of bridges. But the one thing I remember most vividly is how the paint on a white cadillac blistered as the bridge around it burned.

The deeper the chasm below, the more spectacular the burning of the bridge. The air rises with great power and thrills the flames into violence.

From my window I could see them. I had been reading all night, and had thought for a long time of a poem about the horn of a white ox. I was glad to have spent the night in solitary and focused contemplation, and it seemed a fitting climax when in the dawn I raised my eyes to the window and saw the bridges burning.

The first time you see a burning bridge, you remember it clearly and in precise detail. And also the second time.

But the third and fourth times and on all subsequent occasions, the event seems to lose its particularity and merge with all the others. It is not until the last time you see a burning bridge that the scene regains the peculiar clarity of the first. You know it, and somehow the fact that you have for the last time witnessed the burning of the bridges gives your life a shape that before it perhaps lacked.

THERE IS EVIDENCE

-- after the Tao of Sex

the woman who meets the standard
is naturally pleasant

her voice is settled &
her silken hair is black she

has delicate skin, slender limbs &
is neither tall nor short the slit

between her thighs is high there
is no hair on her pubic region

her emission
is abundant during intercourse

her body moves and shakes she behaves
in accord with the man

when a woman is moved by a man
there is evidence

-- David James

Venice CA

LISTEN, DOCTOR

Listen, doctor,
all my life
I've had this thing for paper.
Do you think it's serious?
My mouth begins to water

in printers' shops.
As a little girl
I wanted to have
more rainbow tablets than anybody.
We didn't have much money
so I used to stand
outside the windows of art stores
looking at those expensive blocks
of water color paper, the kind
you wet and lift with a razor.
Real class, to me, is still water color paper.

My husband complains
when we go on vacation
I pack half the bags with paper;
notebooks, sketchbooks ...
but I won't get caught in the sticks
without a tablet.
You should see my origami.
The lime is especially choice, and the red.
I've had this stash of origami papers
for years in the back of my desk,
in case of another world war.

Of course I discriminate.
Napkins, tissue -- these are so-so.
Wrapping paper's cute but dull.
Copy paper's bitter, squeaks
when you touch it, a modern
hysterical kind of paper I don't care for.
Kraft paper sacks are comfortable.
I've got a closetful.
Newsprint, lined and unlined,
has tooth and takes a soft pencil.

Often when going for something simple
like a magazine, or sandwich bags,
I find myself buying a ream
of 20 lb. bond I don't really need.
Those blank sheets in a good stiff box
turn me on. Doctor, I need to know,
am I normal?

BUS FARE

Today, when I was looking you up
in the phone book,
I saw the Greyhound number
and thought of when
the children were all babies

and I didn't have a car.
Sometimes on winter afternoons
when the babies were taking their naps,
I'd call the bus depot
and ask how much it cost
to get to different places
like Baltimore, or Atlanta, Ga.
It was \$68.50 one way to San Francisco,
forty bucks more if you came right back.
I almost called today
to see if the price had changed.
It was good to know
you didn't have to be rich
to get somewhere.

AMELIA

I am impressed by the story
of my mother-in-law's neighbor,
a lady named Amelia
who looks like a side of beef on wedgies.
Amelia has grey hair
and every other word she says is,
"goddammit."
Indoors and outdoors, she wears a mumu,
smokes Camels, carries a poodle.
On fine days, when windows are open,
you can hear Amelia cough
all over the neighborhood --
"goddammit this ... goddammit that."
She's outlived two husbands.
Here's the part that gets me.
When she ran off with the second one,
Amelia's first husband
drank prussic acid.
The neighbors say
she must be some woman.

-- Barbara Drake

Okemos MI

attic
box of
memoirs
pen tracks
on mildew

seen
a
caftan
of many
colors

factory
outlet
for
capezio
carved
in a hillside
of houses
the dull
walls
& tiny
sign

parade
she marched
to "sambre et
meuse" singing
wop songs
to herself
besides
they all
gave a
quarter
for her funeral

fence
a man's body
leans away
what for a
bow & arrow
bends back
& kills a
hundred
flies

child
a little
one
like a
crabapple
not wanted
any more
not
looked for

auntie sadie
she was
afraid
of the
irish
so she
listened
to bishop
sheen
she sold
that lot
of land
before
she died

locked
gift shop
if you
found a
keyhole
delft
inside
buy my
cards
from the
grocer

answer
gone for a
weekend
tiny
letters
in the
mailbox
a plant
for
company

bird
a hen
or a wren
big mouth
rimed
sequences

-- Gloria Kenison

Millis MA

From the beginning he ate her books. He borrowed volumes he thought she would not look at again and ate the end papers and several random pages. He razored pages out of the hardbounds and pulled paperback pages free from the glue cleanly. He kept a few books she would not miss and ate them when his borrowings became too frequent. She had a sizable library and kept her writing to herself, and so he knew he would have to marry her.

Inevitably, she discovered his vice. One Sunday she walked unexpectedly into the living room and found him on his haunches in front of the bookcase, the bottom half of a page from a quality paperback sticking out of his mouth. Like a little boy caught in a dirty deed, he was awash with guilt and fear, while he was also half conscious of the capillary action carrying his saliva farther down the page. She had suspected for some time that he was not only stealing pages, but whole books as well, and she was more curious than judgmental about what he was doing with them. Her memories of childhood made her tolerant of what others might have called deviant behavior, and so she went immediately to him, held his head to her breasts, and told him that her books were his to digest as he pleased.

They lived almost as cheaply as one. His need for food was inversely related to the amount of paper he ate. She bought many books, read them quickly, and fed them to him. She tried to find out what pleased him. She tried hardbounds and paperbacks, gothics and westerns, economics and sex, and finally decided it did not matter. He would eat any paper and, when particularly hungry, light cardboard. They probably had less garbage than anyone in the city. He displayed such great appetite and such lack of taste that she took to buying used paperbacks at the lowest possible cost and dumping them by his favorite chair.

He viewed the cheap menu as a sign of diminished ardor, but his plan was working. The less attention she paid to him, the more she gave to her work as a freelance journalist, essayist, and writer of occasional fiction. He had discovered her in her first appearance in the Sunday supplement and had taken off the following Monday to eat everything of hers that he could find in the public library, hiding in the lavatory by the reading room and stuffing himself until he had the dry heaves and could barely walk out at closing time.

When they were first married, she let him eat her rough drafts as soon as she revised a copy. He carefully concealed his joy. Nothing he had ever eaten compared to

the fresh, keen taste of her prose done by her own hand. He ate the piles of paperbacks just so at night, when she went to bed tired from working on her latest article, he could revel in her wastebasket, rolling balled scraps against his palate, sliding long sheets against the back of his throat, nearly inhaling the flimsy carbons. He feared that she would find out that he did not love her for herself.

His taste became more refined. Although anything she wrote had for him the richness of chocolate mousse in comparison to the bread pudding of even the best magazines, he ate her finished manuscripts like the finest full-course French dinners. The rarity of savoring a completed manuscript added to his delight. They were only available when a rejected story or article had to be retyped before it was sent out again, or when she agreed to a revision for a particular magazine. He knew the rejected or unrevised copy would eventually go in the wastebasket, but was anguished by their being in the apartment and not yet available to him.

He nagged her to get on with her work. She tried to find out what was annoying him, cooked him a good meal, or was especially appreciative in bed, but that kept her away from her work and made him even more irritable. He considered telling her, but the fear of losing her kept him silent. After one particularly difficult evening, he ran from the apartment and drove from one adult bookstore to another, eating what he could get away with inside and then using his admission fee to buy something to eat in the car as he drove to the next one. He gorged himself on the cheap, coarse, poorly prepared prose and went home bloated, nauseous, wrung out.

Unable to understand and finding him increasingly angry and depressed, she proposed a separation. He was terror stricken, and she relented. But the next time he returned from a binge he found a note on the coffee table telling him she was gone. Worn out from his debauch and too agonized to think, he ate the note and fell asleep on the carpet.

Soberer when he woke, he took stock. A few of her files were left, and many of her books, and he decided to take his time about what to do, using the remnants of her library and writings for sustenance. He made two attempts to talk with her -- one after eating the first service of divorce papers, the other when the last of her essays was gone and only her index cards remained.

He haunted libraries in search of another who might compare, but it was futile. He had grown so accustomed to her taste, so intimate with her nuance, so satisfied with her, that no one else would do. He spent the holiday season

buying huge amounts of wrapping paper at discount houses, but it did not cheer him. Then he took to eating scraps, gnawing labels off bottles, picking up discarded transfers in the subway.

She saw him early in January, fighting the garbage man in the alley behind her apartment. He lost the fight, stunned the blood from his nose with a scrap of paper, ate the paper, looked pleadingly up at her window and, when she closed the blind, walked sadly away.

He became a teacher of composition at a suburban community college, forever unsatisfied with his students' papers, searching vainly for the one writer who would once again satisfy his appetite for fresh, keen prose.

-- Michael R. Brown

Chicago IL

IN HER SHOP HANG PICTURES OF GERONIMO AND JESUS

Eating in my truck under
the salt cedars
I am surprised to find that the Mexican woman
who sells me tamales
has also put in
green olives.
I must remember to thank her.

COPPER AND BRASS

Bald, arms thick as tree trunks
(used to keep a junkyard,
almost killed a drunk who
stumbled in to sleep), Dell,
now heavy-equip. operator at the plant,
all day loads cinders
from the mound behind the mill stacks
into two dumps I drive,
racing one to the landfill
just down the road, emptying it,
roar back just in time to
jump out and into the other
as he rocks it with the final scoop.

Then off again,
careful not to back and lift
into the wires overhead.
Twenty-five minutes

till the whistle, Dell quits,
shows me where he sorts for salvage
copper and brass from
a heap of junk wire.
I help and listen, too pooped
to talk; he tells me
how his truck ran away
once sloping into Omaha --
I watch his thick stubby hands
yanking at the reddish wire,
throwing it into one barrel,
in the other,
scraps of yellow brass.

UP IN MAINE

Saw a payroll list
for the construction co.
Almost all the names were
French:

Beaulieu
Bouchard
De Vois
Gagnon
Gendron

Is that why we're working
for this lousy outfit?
Only Frenchmen take so little?

DOUG, SITTING IN
MAMA'S TRUCKSTOP

put a ten-dollar bill
in my boot
looked at it a coupla days
later--
all the ink worn off
just like a piece of paper
was I pissed! never
do that again

TOMMY

Tommy wore a scorpion
set inside clear plastic
on his belt buckle which
glowed in the dark
and cowboy boots tooled with oak leaves.
On the grounds crew,
he mowed lawns, trimmed,
examined the honeysuckle,
looked for rabbits, ate loquats

from one woman's tree.
The foreman, Dave, told him:
"You spray the dandelions today.
Fill this tank with weed-killer.
It's powerful. They
used it in Vietman.
Don't get it on your hands."
Tommy filled the tank, adjusted the nozzle
and disappeared to the lower tracts.
Emptied his tank into a trash bin,
rinsed and filled it with water.
Sprayed dandelions all day.
Two weeks later, Dave whistled:
"Can't understand why those dandelions won't die.
Cleared off half of Nam with it.
Better get those weeds a second time,
Tommy. Get em good."
Sure, Tommy sprayed those weeds!

THE FALL

Going up the ladder behind him,
I knew Kit would fall, sometime.
You could tell.
We calked leaks in the roof,
re-tarred around the vents
and came down.
It was only a two-twelve pitch.
When he did fall,
it was on another job and
the roof was four-twelve.
It wasn't all his fault:
the bastard had him working
before the roof had dried
and no safety rope --
so he was sliding and already looking
like a cat for a place to land,
but it was all hard.
He lay there crouched on his side,
foot broken.
Tears were running out the sides of his eyes
into his red beard.

-- Ben Jacques

Yarmouth ME

HE SAID HE WAS PATIENT THAT HE WANTED TO

but he'd wait he
wanted to hold
me but not too
tight put his
tongue on certain
nightmares lips
sealing like
marine catfish
males who carry
fertilized eggs
in their mouths
for 2 months go
without food
until well after
the babies hatch
as the young
learn to live
and swim in this
odd nest

MRS MOKAS

with her house
stuffed with branches
branches burning
all night burning
from october
she'd pick them up
in the yard there
was no heat
no toilet no
she said i don't
want no tv no relatives
to phone and made a
hole in the shed
for the cats to be
warm in fed the
deer sent her old man
packing some years
before kept 4
stoves it
was almost 90

MLA MADONNA

in her black velvet
instead of a suit
in her musk and
mink oil see thru
blouse that you can
see clear back
to SUNY see the
5/6th done PhD
the missing Wyatt
paper she's
vulnerable
she's dangerous
she'll draw you to
her like her long
legs did the
Wallace Stevens man
but this time
you flunk

WORMWOOD MADONNA

heats up your blood
makes you high

her skin is milky
the color of the
sick cat's eye

anise eyes

tastes men the 4th
taste becomes
a feeling you

see what
isn't there

she makes you crazy

-- Lyn Lifshin

Niskayuna NY

SUPPLIES FOR THE HUNTING LODGE

Ernest is polishing his gun
while the jam is on the table
wooden and swollen with memories.
Empty quart bottles to go back
to the grocer and he will not
question us until we leave.
The jam is on the table
and the jar is half full. The beer
is all gone but there is some wine
good and brave white.

POEM FROM ATOP A PURPLE HORSE

i can certainly go to Atlanta
without going to Plains.
The Pecan lady will open her door
and we will sit by the fireplace.
So nice her white pleated skirt
winter night a couple miles from Peachtree St.
The iron gate around her house,
missing is the black boy holding the lantern.
Knowing the Pecan lady,
the black boy is most likely hiding
in the garage.
i sit with an empty goblet
the purple couch uncomfortable
while she is on a chair across from me.
Maybe in an hour the ice will be broken
and enough drink will stir us together.
Floating for a second in the air
her peasant blouse.
Missing is the black boy holding the lantern.
He is for another time.

-- George Montgomery

Rosendale NY

HIS HANDIWORK

observing the sunset over the pacific,
the man said, "how could anyone experience such beauty
and not assent to the existence of the deity?"

"i couldn't agree with you more," i said,
"and furthermore i am compelled
to make the same reflection
each time i visit an insane asylum."

A PLAGUE GREW IN ANAHEIM

i've always been a yankees fan,
but i take almost as much pleasure
in an angels' loss as in a yankees' win.

i felt a little guilty this year,
because for once it meant pulling against
such outstanding players as rudi and grich
and ryan and tanana and bonds.

but as one by one they got injured,
mostly through managerial stupidity,
i was freed to laugh from the depths
of my being when ken brett was pitching
last week, with runners on second and third,
and the manager ordered him to put
the next batter, amos otis, on base
with an intentional pass, and otis yelled

some sort of insult, so, in spite of
the catcher's leaning far out the other
side of the box, brett threw at
the batter's head.

the ball rolled to the backstop
as the runner scored from third.

otis charged the pitcher,
the benches emptied,
and the umpire ended up beneath the melee.

the catcher retrieved the ball
but since he had no one to throw it to,
the runner on second came all the way home also.

i wonder if albert camus was an angels' fan.

NEWLYWED

since i recently got married for the third time
a number of acquaintances,
obviously hoping i could articulate for them
a justification of their own commitments to domesticity,
have asked me to comment on the institution.

(my close friends, knowing that i must have had
a specific reason for terminating a nine-years' love affair
by marrying the girl
do not make inquiries of me,
although, of course, i nonetheless provide my reasons,
free of charge,
at tedious and obnoxious length.)

so for those who would like to hear
my ringing formulation of the joys of matrimony,

here is what i have to say:

the only good thing about marriage
is that it doesn't last very long.

-- Gerald Locklin

Long Beach CA

HAPPY ENDING

King Kong does not die. He gets hip to the biplanes,
lets them dive by and ionizes them. Halfway down
the Empire State he leaps to another skyscraper,
then another and another, working his way way North
and West until people thin out and he can disappear.

Fay's boyfriend is sure she is dead OR WORSE
but just as he is about to call up the entire U.S.
Army, a scandal mag breaks the story. The couple
has been seen in seclusion at a resort somewhere near
Phoenix. Long lens telephoto shots show them sunning
by a pool. There are close-ups of Fay straddling
the monster's tongue and standing in his ear whispering
something Kong likes. Look, his grin is as big as
a hundred Steinways.

NARES MORIBUNDO

You lie in her bed wondering if she is in the other room calling the boyfriend who stormed out of that bar just before she picked you up and then under the streetlight said, "You certainly looked a lot better in that dim, corner booth."

Meditatively you disengage a booger. You stare at it. Carefully you place it between the mattress and box spring.

Soon the boyfriend will rush over. Reconciled, they will make passionate love and at the height of pleasure he reaches for a new handhold and discovers

She will deny. He will scrutinize: Whose is this? No one's. You met a nosepicker and brought him up here. No, never. Then it's yours. No, no. Good Lord, all these months in love with a secret sloven. What next, turds among the tea towels?

She pleads but he dresses and leaves. She weeps, heartbroken. She tries everything to win him back, even has her nostrils sewn shut. Nothing doing and she commits suicide

while you sit in some dim, corner booth, your nose in its jeweled scabbard.

A RETURNING STUDENT TAKES UNDERWATER BASKET WEAVING

My husband made fun, but three easy credits were right down my alley. Really, I just wanted to get my feet wet! But this is not easy. My teacher is so young. He guides my slow hands. Tucked in his tight, black trunks is his big roll book. Nearby young girls work, their baskets smooth as their breasts; now long, downy thighs float past my eyes. Lord, I am so distracted. How can I work like this? Oh, for the rigors of calculus, the dusty sleeve, the comic professor with his accent.

-- Ronald Koertge

South Pasadena CA

This is the face of Max Pechstein
red and black and yellow and green.
Nazis would carve up his appetite
cutting it into little chips of colored night
but we shall remember Max the yellow nose
the green chin the white tongue the eyes of rose.

ben pleasants'

PLEASANTRIES

Derain was always working in the rain
in the beginning. He saw pure cobalt
shadows in the forest and the umber
tears of spring that clung in fragments
to his breathing. All that in 1907-1910,
then the harpy of solidity caught him
like an icebox in his fatness and
drew him down toward death.

FROM: ALISO CAUDILAS

iii

Insanity
is not a part
of radical
chic.

xxi

"We should like
to know
what where
(he was)
but never why."

v

In the white room
there is space
for a race
between prussian
blue
and yellow

xxiv

I might remember
the center of the thing:
was it
North Africa?

vi

Four dark days:
grenades
in a basket of lace.

xxxii

Who juggles
oranges
in the corner
of the clowns
by Bruegel?
Poggio would know.

xv

Morphium slowdown:
I do not like
riding backward
on this bicycle
of ice.

xxxvi

Is it true
they both walked
on that bridge
passing one from the
east, the other
from the west?
Crane and Mayakovsky
both finding the same
death.

There is one
slender oak
overlooking
the rat's nest.

How far out
does a road
have to be
and not be
a part
of the city?

LIFE ON THE STAGE

The tragedy of theatre
as perhaps Racine would know
is not the lives that crumble
in the darkness of the soul
but all the days and nights it takes
to see that what is past
is gone
and cannot come again.

PARIS/77

Rivers run off into sand.
Women wear the clothes of men.
One last ride upon the Seine.
I'll not pass this way again.

WINTER NIGHT IN RENNES

The melody of winter is the music
I prefer.
All Rennes waits
for a train to Paris.
The world is spotted blue and black.
Wine spills down the face
of Verlaine
as I see him through the rain
on a newspaper stand.
In France there is no beginning
and no end.
Rennes is in the middle.

WINTER POST CARD

All the little villages of Brittany
are singing in Bretagne.
Snow covers them
from Brest to Rennes.
Off shore there are tankers
filled with poets
who were friends of Esenin.
They have small union books
and little red flags
and silver women
who ring like bells
when they climax.

And all the little villages of Brittany
are singing in Bretagne.

POEM FOR KENNETH REXROTH

Now the peach blossom withers.
How many others have gone before
down that long hallway
where footsteps end in darkness?

Laughter laps along the shores
of memory and the still
waters of the lake
fill up with willow boughs.

Now the gods of Tao --
the eight immortals
lift up pieces of the sky
for you to enter.

Buddhist scriptures crumble
as the pigment of your days
rubs off the rose.
And how shall you appear

among the shades of history?
As anarchist or scholar?
In the last year cut up all the flowers
and plant a single oak tree in your garden.

PAGES FROM A JOURNAL

I. AVOIDING POWER

What I have learned is to avoid all sources of power. If you are offered three jobs always take the one at the bottom and ask if there is not one lower still. When those in positions of power seek you out, ignore them, insult them, but don't anger them. If you must sit with them and make conversation, tell them nothing but lies; never share the secrets of your heart for they will use them against you.

To avoid power, make yourself seem powerless, absurd, unattractive, mad. Never admit to being a poet. If they ask if you are a poet, tell them you write little advertisements for shoe publications. When they ask you who you like in literature, tell them you read mostly comic books.

When the powerful seek you out, never try to hide from them. Show up with a hundred suggestions, all insane, and make them aware from the beginning that you could never be of use to them: also indicate that your services will cost them a great deal of money. That will usually drive them away.

When men of politics seek you out, tell them you are a practicing atheist, an antisemite, a supporter of the Spanish Inquisition. None of these things will do you any harm so long as you do not seek power, but they will immediately drive off the politician who prides himself on his love of humanity.

When men of business come to push you around, always always give in to whatever they wish but refuse to sign anything. If they drive you from your home, leave but burn it down. Tell them you had a dreadful accident with a kerosene lantern while fixing the refrigerator. Never go to court over anything. If you go to court, tell the judge you are an atheist and cannot say "I swear to tell the truth..." etc. Tell him truth is an absolute and you have no idea what truth and what non-truth is/are. If the judge threatens you with contempt of court, suggest a great love of the law, a fierce belief in the constitution, and a great ignorance of legal categories. Tell him you are only a poor logical positivist.

With policemen always be docile. Carry a John Birch card with you. Never demonstrate. If you are black, start singing "Oh Mary Don't You Weep, Don't You Mourn" or say the Lord's Prayer. Never put your hands near your body! If they take you into custody, piss all over the back seat of the police car (very quietly).

II. HELPING THE POOR

Be a counterfeiter, but never try to pass the money; instead drop it over poor sections of the city from airplanes. By dropping large amounts of phoney cash into the poorer quarters, you will supply many with ready cash and at the same time destroy the economy of the middle class by inflating the real value of money.

Never join a help the poor organization: these are always run by rich liberals who want to keep their hand on the pulse of the poor. Instead spread rumors that one of the people in the audience has cholera.

Steal from the rich. Make copies of their tax records and mail them to all their enemies. Put illegal drugs in their autos and call the police. Make them honorary chairmen of Nazi activities, mentioning their many services rendered.

Take a hundred tramps on an outing to Beverly Hills. Try to get them into a church service and see if the priest, minister, rabbi, throws these children of god from god's house.

Take a hundred terminal cancer patients to a charity ball at a grand hotel.

III. HOW THE POET SHOULD VIEW HIMSELF

Never call yourself a poet -- always refer to yourself as a writer. Do you want to be thought of as prophet, priest, seer, mystic? Leave that to the charlatans. Call yourself a writer. Never seek to be more than that! If you view yourself as a poet, you will likely become a professor and then you will never write any more poetry, but spend your life talking about how you

write it. Never let your friends refer to you as the poet. Correct them on the spot. Say "I am only a writer, not a poet. Sometimes I write poetry." Poets are at the top of everybody's shit list. Those were the guys the Nazis went looking for first.

After you have established that you are a writer, try to establish that you are only a weekend writer, not a professional. If you get money for your writing, never admit it or brag about it. Always say you are having a hard time making ends meet. If someone sends you a five dollar check in the mail, put it away toward a stock portfolio. Always be aware that a man with a stock portfolio can tell the world where to get off. Poets are not supposed to have a stock portfolio because they are supposed to love the poor, so have a stock portfolio, but say nothing about it. Try to get poor people to buy good stock and put it away against emergencies. Always use the capitalists by imitating them. Never let yourself be dependent on parents, universities, publishers, magazines, or managers.

Try to get employment that has nothing to do with writing! The writer (he will always call himself a poet) who teaches poetry in a university is giving out his life blood in little doses. He will have little or nothing left for his writing. The fact that he starts a thousand nincompoops on their way to a life of crime as poet rooters is even worse, though these people will always buy his books and ask him to sign them. A writer (try not to use that word) is better off as a gardener, a lineman, a bank president, a bank robber, a pimp, a revolutionary, a computer programmer, or a detective than he is as a journalist, a teacher, an ad man, a tv scripter, or a professor. Try to get a job that does not rob you of your thoughts, that leaves your mind alone during the day so you can still use it at night or better yet a night job so you can half sleep at night and write during the day. A watchman is an ideal job provided you do not take it seriously.

-- Ben Pleasants

Beverly Hills CA

THE MARYLAND MUSEUM OF FIRE

Entering the foyer, you notice first the hoses and then the ribbons in cases of glass and chrome. To the right is an entire wall devoted to commemorative plaques of famous fires of the past: The Laughing Hen Inn (1784), The Great Baltimore Fire (1904), The Shell Oil Refinery Explosion (1968). The rooms open from here in progression. The Equipment Room shows the development from wooden bucket to Hook & Ladder. The Uniform Room has some of the original helmet insignia designed by Margaret Hanley of Jacobsville. It is easy to see the importance of rubber and, later, of synthetic foams in the protection of the firemen. The Hall of Heroes has wax and plaster casts of all the firemen to perish in the line of duty along with their biography and several personal effects. The last room is rarely open to the public. Here the ladies of the Women's Auxiliary, who raised the money for this museum through bakesales and neighborhood carnivals, tend smoldering coals, keeping the fires, the really big fires, burning for their men. There are five exits at the Maryland Museum of Fire. It is open 9 to 5 every day but Monday. Smoking is not permitted.

PORTRAIT

He considers himself a donator,
Or, if you prefer, a donor.
It is the way he lives.

It started innocently enough,
First, a pint of blood
Then a kidney here, a retina there.

He doesn't ask for much:
Clean sheets, a hot lunch, car fare home;
These make him happy.

He sees life as a subtraction, a reduction.
Each year he wants to grow smaller
If only to pare another thumbnail, transplant
another hair.

He knows loss is a matter of adjustment.
He fondly recalls each body part discarded,
Each vital organ given away.

The pounds lost dieting,
The pancreas sent to Paraguay,
The larynx bestowed upon the mute soprano.

Now his eyes,
Without corneas, without retinas,
ask to give you something, anything

But don't ask for his heart.
He will give you anything,
Anything, that is, that he has left.

-- Peter Woolson

Ithaca NY

THINGS TO DO WITH A WOMAN: #2 THE LAUNDRY

You need two women for this.

After soaking your clothes
in biodegradable soap for 24 hrs.
find a nice stream
close to your back door:
make sure it's clear and cold.

Place the two women face-to-face
in the water.

Husk each one
naked to the waist and dunk them.
Give one your first load.

Be certain the water cascades
over their heads
that they resemble boulders.

While one sits idle her duds
clustered like kelp on her lap
the other proceeds to whang
her load over her partner's head.

When she's done the other
repeats the process all afternoon
until the job gets finished.

Before any of this feed them
eggplant and granola after give

them wedges of the best
cheese you can lay your hands
on plus mugs of chamomile tea.
With proper care and maintenance
they can keep you
in clean clothing year round.

PIQUE

I found Him just outside Andys Eats in Dubuque. "Ok,"
He said. "Make it short. I haven't got all day."

"Right," I replied. "So what's black, white, and read
all over?"

He looked pissed. "Everything."

"Hey, that's not the right answer."

"Sure it is. Take a look."

And sure enough. Houses. Sky. People. You name it.
Three colors everywhere.

Moral: Never monkey with a god out to lunch in Iowa.

THE GANGSTERS

at the undergraduate poets reading
the graduate poets sit in the dark
like hit men from the Eastern Slicks.
the first girl up tells of her woes
and perishes in a hail of rhetoric.
the second rises to speak tragically
of obesity and impotent men.
she slips on a careless word
vanishing into a well of pity.
but the last girl walks on
and suddenly lifts
her skirt over her head.
the audience is stunned.
the gangsters are speechless.
the reading goes on in a dream.

-- Paul H. Cook

Tempe AZ

love, you've uprooted me for the last time
bent my mind slipped my spine out of gear
for the last time
I'm onto you & yr covenants, yr false spikenard
yr mock-orange, yr joe pyeweed blossoms of swamp deception
of love, hang it the fuck up now, like a good little
wayward star

FOR ALL THE WOMEN WHO SELL TUPPERWARE WITHOUT KNOWING
THE MEANING OF "TUP"

the castle gets colder everyday
we do not joust for time
metal utensils on dark wooden table gleam
like fixed art & we glow
only because we are healthy

but our mouths live like islands
dont touch no mor
& no matter how diligently I haul
what I haul, catch fish, chop wood,
I am still yr queen untupped,
I am still yr queen, how strange

even loyalty
can be perverse,
even perversion clean

cd take up embroidery,
cd take up quilting,
cd take up w/other men
who're short, well muscled, dark
& move me under them w/the white-haired
grace of dancers
whose occupation is that of telephone company repairmen

but I don't go for charity balls
anymore than for chastity
or selling tupperware

-- Barbara Moraff

Strafford VT

THE LAST DAYS

The Wallachian Prince? O yes very likely she said and slammed the door in his face.

Later five or six were seated at the Café Riche under the falling clustered acacia. When they left the bill was not paid.

Desperate he remembered a room full of light, his mother shining at the edge saying look an oriole and he looked but of course outside the window she said.

INTRODUCTION

Across the yard, Lucy's mother made beaded lamp shades for headboards. Her father was always mean. The lamp shades had cottage scenes.

And once at the lake I saw the mother. A thin man-boy had her against the side of a cottage. They did it standing up. Returned home I saw her out back, staring at the river. "Don't say ya seen me at the lake," she said.

WE TRAVEL A CONTOUR MAP

Yesterday I remembered hope. Changes come.

As when a man, much moved by mass, comes out of church, stubs his toe oops ouch swears laughs.

Or when he came out and on the way for the paper discovered he'd put a five in the plate not a one. He started to go back, explain, stopped. "I gave it to God the hell with it."

-- Ellen Tifft

Elmira NY

RECOLLECTION

My dad had a large
collection of hand tools.
As a boy I didnt
understand his sudden
anger at my misuse
or misplacing of a tool.
Tonight stepping into garage
seeing my tools
(& my age reflected
by their numbers)
I thot of him
& the inevitable frustrations
of ownership he
must have felt.

GOLDEN BEAR RACES

Went to track 1st
time last week bought
good cigar beer settled
down but couldnt relax
didnt know what
who to bet finally
put 2 to show
on Pat's Birthday
in 3rd & won. Now
reluctant to bet know
Pat wont carry a guy
to more than one
gift at a time.

NEW TERRITORY

If I could just start
over things would be
different. Less jealousy.
More caring tenderness he
tells her. I could make
our experience pay off.
I'm willing she says
but he's busy mapping
out new territory
& doesnt hear.

JAZZ

If it werent for Bird
Diz & Miles there'd be
more gaps in here
than I got already.
Jazz sutures
my wounds.

O, SO, SHE SAYS

Soon as I answer her
knock she asks are you
a Christian? I hem &
haw then say what is
this struggle to live
but a search for God?
But are you Christian?
What should I say?
She smells good &
has a promising smile
so I say no
but I'm weak
& a poor reader
& Jesus knows
I need attention.
O, so, she says
reaching thru screen
door for my soul.

THIS HALLOWEEN

not unlike others
started at dark little
people masked & armed
with Alpha Beta bags
knocking
& threatening meekly
for treats parents
watching from sidewalk
& occasional siren
wailing red lights
pulsing in the
distance

TOM'S VIEW

Ten miles upriver
Folsom Lake is shrunken
& emaciated by drought.
The American River
is drying up. Salt
water threatens the Delta.
Most of us sense
we're in the grip
of something evil.
But Tom Witt sees
it as a weeding
out ... a revolving plan
by Mother Nature to
harmonize her parts ...
us included.

KALTENBACH'S ART

Cut into empty field
& piled up carefully
by tractor & student hands
it's a raw dirt pyramid
inhabited by ground squirrels.
Will it be here in Spring
greened by native grains
& weeds or leveled by
demand for parking?

MING AT ELEVEN

Ming has patience of a statue.
A skill he used
to employ to catch
mice & birds.
Now he sits
like gray marble
eyes closed totally
absorbed in deeper pleasures.

BAMBOO STALK

Bamboo stalk bending
too far down appears
void of dignity.
"Maybe you should
cut it off --
it looks awful."
Bending to cut it
I see it has
been chopped halfway
thru by mower.
An old wound.
I stake & bind
it gently.

ROCK & ROLL

Elton John made around
8 million bucks in 1976.
I made under 13 thousand.
Gary Snyder
won the Pulitzer for
poetry in '75 & probably
cleared less than me.
This is very odd ...
hard to digest mentally
& emotionally & tends
to make one crazy
unless equalized
in some way.

BELL

Michael is rare one
puts in 12-15 hr days
for Oakland Museum
& California art
& doesn't turn
in overtime.

-- Phil Weidman

North Highlands CA

GAGAKU

ah their big hands
cloth covered
and uncovered
a brown dark mahogany
brown
african hands
what beautiful manos
and now
simple garden glove cloth
covers
their hands
their big slow yet graceful
moving hands
sweep in the air or vacuum sweep
in my vision
hands
sweep
like
a conductor's hands
a chopin waltz
an ives' answer
sweep in the air
slow graceful motion
hands bigger than all
visible only
to this imagination
a dagger appears
a shining blade
chrome
perhaps stainless steel
sweeps in the air
or vacuum sweeps
in my vision
that blade
my red spurts
jets of my juice

GAGAKU

genius is
knowing when to
stop
though I usually
quit early

GAGAKU

back here
nowhere else to go
oregon was pretty
took care of itself
south idaho stunk
almost died there
in a bug storm
now there's nowhere else
to go but here
the women are not calling me
and I am
not calling them

here I see demons
banging brass colored
cymbals
they are dressed in black
they move in a circle
humping their backs and then
straightening their backs
serpentlike with grace
they move in circle
both clockwise and
counterclockwise
simultaneously

-- Steve Richmond

Santa Monica CA

THE DEATHLY BRAVO

they always applaud each work
and four or five voices respond
with the same ringing
"BRAVO! BRAVO!"
as if they had heard a fresh
and vital creative
breakthrough.

where has the audience gone
that used to select and
discriminate?

now the thought in the minds of
the audience is:
we understand music
we know
therefore we
respond.

and afterwards
at the wheels of their autos
they come out of the underground
parking lot
with more rudeness and crassness
than any boxing match crowd
than any horse race crowd
cutting off other cars ...
swerving
bludgeoning ...

the March to the Gallows, indeed
Pictures at an Exhibition, of course
the Bolero, yes
The Afternoon of a Fawn ...

honking
zooming toward the freeways
BRAVO west L.A.
BRAVO Westwood Village
BRAVO the Hollywood Hills
BRAVO Beverly Hills.
Pathetiqué, indeed.

A 56 YEAR OLD POEM

I went with the two ladies
down to Venice
to look for antique furniture.
I parked in back of the store
and went in with them.
\$125 for a clock, \$700 for 6 chairs.
I stopped looking.

the ladies moved about
looking at everything.
the ladies had class.
I waved goodbye to one of the ladies
and walked out.

it was a Sunday and the bar
wasn't much better,
everybody was nervous and young
and blonde and pale.

I finished my drink and got 4 beers
at the liquor store
and sat in my car drinking them.

upon finishing the 4th. beer
the ladies came out.
they asked me if I were all right.
I told them that every experience
meant something
and that they had pulled me out of
my usual murky
current, it was quite all
right.

the one I knew best had bought a table
with a marble top for \$100.
she owned her own business and was a
civilized person.
she was civilized enough to know a neighbor
who had a van
and while I sat in her apartment drinking
1974 Zeller Schwarze Katz
they went down and got the table.

later she wanted to know what I thought about
the table and I said I thought it was all right,
sometimes I lost one hundred dollars at the
racetrack. we watched tv in bed and later
that night I couldn't climax. I think it was
because I was thinking about that marble table.
I'm sure it was. I don't have any antique marble
tables at my place, I never have any trouble at
my place. sometimes but
very seldom.
I don't understand the whole antique
business.

it seems to be a giant
con.

-- Charles Bukowski

Los Angeles CA

NOTED AS RECEIVED:::

WATERLAND: A Gathering from Holland (transl. by John Stevens
Wade, \$1.50 fm. Holmgangers Press, 22 Ardith Lane, Alamo CA
94507. ¶ Pictures & Words/Threes & Other Numbers by Keith
Shein, \$3.50 fm. Trike Press, Box 732, Pismo Beach CA 93449.

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