

# Wormwood \* \* \* 92





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CHAUVINIST

Imagine your world is framed on the belly  
of a big woman who sleeps.

You build a house,  
start a business, vegetable garden,

set down roots. And just when you think  
you're settled for life

she sits up and sings.  
The house begins to pitch,

your dishes crack, even the dog  
is highly disoriented.

You lose it all --  
the fat broad has ruined your life.

-- Laura Neary

## WHEN PIGS FLY

From the trees by the barn  
seven pigs fly out -- pink angels --  
and swoop to the lake for a swim  
in water the color of pigs.

Now from the house comes the family,  
the farmer taken a wife, son, daughter --  
the bull, the cow, the boar, the sow --  
they disturb the pigs, who lift,  
swoop again, arrow south.

It's a sign of grace says daughter,  
disgusting says wife, and impure.  
Son points out the graceful pattern  
of pigs and sky. Farmer swears, damn,  
those pigs were expensive.

-- Laura Neary

Amherst MA

## THE REINVENTION OF ACTION PHOTOGRAPHY

The trapdoor in the black wall opened, and a seagull  
flew directly in front of the black hangar over the  
black floor. It was fixed from the roof, in front,  
and from the right.

When all the stills were put together, there was an  
overlapping moment of white-angled-silver, an inter-  
connectedness looking, even to astonished eyes, spon-  
taneous. There was an instantaneity in the three-  
dimensional no-bird on its way where all lines meet in  
the Great Identical. A lobed fungus growing from a  
lobed fungus on a rotten tree in a wood growing in a  
wood was as near relative to this bird as any other  
bird.

The bird became a figure I needed to be convinced of.  
It was stopped, pretendedly in motion. So the dead  
chain of being becomes important. I will have to re-  
animate this chain, crank it up to make the museum take  
off.

I tried another approach. I placed a brilliant point on the lumbar vertebrae of a man clothed in black walking away from my camera. The trails were snails, lines clear and yet incoherent in an early morning continuum, before the real sun. Yet I saw the revelation of the hip's hidden sacrifice. It dominated my eye. Then -- terror, as the ghost came apart, and when I came to reassemble the skeins I found it hard to believe in what I'd done. I had been haunted by desires, but the desires became lines of abstraction at exact intervals.

And yet, I had heard an unhearable music; had seen a flight that needed no air. The hip may have swayed itself out of existence, the bird complicated itself into infinity. But wings still flutter in my eyes. A back sways down steps. Explanations spring to my lips.

#### THE MICE AND THE WALAM OLUM

Eating lunch, though we've only just finished breakfast. Taking notes, reading. Getting sunburnt at the same time (a black moth settles on a yellow navel), something I've just taken to.

"I'm only doing this, you understand, to get my daily dose of Vitamin D."

"So you say. But pretty soon you'll be spreading your fingers, just like the rest of us."

I move the chair sideways and sit across it. The back struts were depriving me of my full stretch rights. I turn to the figures in my notebook, bring them up to date for tax rebate ("business trip").

"Maybe you should put down what I steal."

I hike it up a bit. Include the cosmetic case deer-mice gnawed through to get at the almonds (why's she keep nuts with rouge and lipstick?). The two resident rodents loom over me from the roof. Groom each other. From time to time one looks down. With one of their great variety of sounds, at length one remarks to the other:

"They are peaceful. They have great things. Who are they?"

## STICK BOY

A tall man, lean; skin taut with the stretch of past suns. He is walking down a rough path which once had parallel walls; lines stretching from houses, dividing gardens of beans, root crops, peas, squash, and the occasional flower. Now, where walls had been, lines of grass darker for decayed mortar and lime. Where gardens had been, flat grasslands stretch. Where houses had been, horizon ....

He is walking down one of the overgrown paths, a path he used to know well. He is surprised to see that, among the grass and weeds, miniature versions of the original vegetables are still growing; scattered, but growing. He bends down to take a closer look at cabbage heads no bigger than mushrooms, tendrils of beans creeping up grass stems ....

An apple, normal size, whizzed past his ear. Then another. And another, till one hit him in the cheek as he stood up. Sharp as a sting. A boy, ankle deep in green grass running in over and among the vegetables. A black boy. From just beyond where the man could catch him with a quick lunge, the boy continued to pelt him with apples stuck on the end of a long stick, and flung with the force of a spearthrower. The man walked slowly, pretending indifference, though he was hit with increasing frequency. Then he left the crumbled path and circled closer to the boy. In one fast rush he had him in his grasp ....

The boy squirmed and kicked, but made no noise. The man tried to get a better hold, but the tighter he gripped, the faster he felt the boy escaping him. Slowly, as he watched, the boy's body began to grow smooth, divide into sections, sprout long lance-shaped leaves; become bamboo, a bamboo that rose higher and higher before his astonished eyes. Twisting one end of itself into the earth, it began to wave the other end in the air. The man looked about in bewilderment. All around had been open grassland. Now he found himself hemmed in at the center of four tall bamboos, already beginning to close over the top of his head, twenty feet in the sky ....

Before the top could seal him off, he grabbed one of the poles and, tearing, ripping, managed to heave it out of the ground, soil still clinging to its roots. With it he began to beat the remaining three. But he found that his bamboo simply bounced off the others, stinging his hands. Its end began to splinter. He felt the day getting dark, and thrust the shattered

bamboo above him, waving it wildly to keep the sky from shutting. The remaining three plants continued growing. The shattered stem in his hand began to draw his hand down toward the earth. The sky kept growing darker ....

-- Brian Swann

New York NY

VENICE 1976

You were present on that Sunday  
when all the bells of Venice  
peeled through the morning mist  
San Giorgio Maggiore looking so much like  
the Christian Science Mother Church,  
with its Byzantine tiles

and we admired the glassblower's craft  
in a back alley of San Gregorio.  
The clinking roses seemed all that remained  
of the old symbols, the old guard,  
and a faded world that peeled at the touch.

The waters of Il Canal Grande were misty  
like memories that resurrect the moment  
and surprise by their context.  
From there we went on to Olga's  
she the hieratic keeper of this past.  
Her colloquy was intertwined with  
the speech of those bells,  
the idealism that would not budge  
from its center, her invective  
that spilled onto the canal  
where Aphrodite rose once out of the sea  
with the image of a city  
on her headband.  
"Maestro," said Ungaretti to Pound,  
"you sit first," that rattan chair  
a throne for laureates.

And as the vaporetto made its slow course  
toward San Michelle, island of the dead,  
we thought of our grandfathers pacing  
their islands in the sun  
making their gentle compositions --  
the musician with his Symphony of Psalms  
another who asked the wind to speak.

It shall never be the same  
we would not want that.  
But ask for another sound  
to bear us on the crowded swells  
to rock us gently, to send us  
down the dark precincts of some  
shattered step, and buoy us up again.  
Remember the bells of that Sunday.  
Do not forget  
they will never be quite  
the same as on that day.  
But we were there  
we were there.

-- Marc Widershien

Brookline MA

#### ON THE NATURE OF ANGELS

You have accurately noted how they tread  
the airy waters of our upper-story  
windows, summoning us to an exalted  
final swim, and you have noted how they fall  
into the freshly-opened blossoms of our beds,  
  
how they ravish us with the sleek marble cocks  
that one finds everywhere so mysteriously  
broken from the groins of statues. Our wedlocks  
are picked by them: we discover in our wives  
some seedling sparks from the same fireworking shocks  
  
that bomb-burst through our body's every cell.  
As children, we prayed to be their wards, wanting  
them to column night's galleries that fell  
around us, to atlas the magically seen-through  
skies of our rooms. We were not ready for the angel  
  
that nearly alighted on us, dragonflying  
over our succumbed bodies, and were surprised  
that they had sex, surprised at how much it stings,  
surprised by its warmth, and by their tongues inside  
our mouths repeating their fluttering wings.

## AN OLD FRIEND

This woman at the door to my room  
in the Pittsburgh Hilton could  
not be Sheila, could be her youngest  
daughter's grandmother, the way her hood  
of child-scrawled hair with cobweb gray  
strains back the skin of her face. I would  
have guessed her close to sixty, stranger's  
guess, not still in her forties. I face  
her with shock; but more than shock, it is age,  
my old age, that affronts me with its trace  
of a once-familiar person so well  
secluded. But now I must erase  
the first chill outlines that shape my eyes,  
invite her in, attempt to dispel  
the inevitable comparison  
of her life to mine, although I smell  
the shameless stench of misfortune trail  
beside her skirts through the borrowed cell  
of my importance, ill at ease, almost  
too apologetic to inhale.  
I do not fail to note the expense  
of my shoes, each well-tempered fingernail,  
next to her boot-rag clothes and the red  
hide of her hands. The brunt of her tale  
was to marry badly, be abandoned,  
but not before five unwarranted  
children were born. This did expected  
hurt to her body. But worse, it bled  
the focus of her talent, perhaps  
genius. I know. All her friends have read  
her life, have written of it, and have  
folded it up again on the scraps  
of crinkly blue onionskin paper  
it occurred on, fastening the flaps  
of the envelope with a shake of the head.  
She sits and soon her shoulders collapse,

palms upward, as one should never sit,  
and she would not be Sheila unless

she had two canvas bags stuffed with sheet  
music, two recorders for duets,

and artist's pads in case we will sketch.  
We were raised at the same address,

but I clambered up counterclockwise,  
like bindweed, while she grew up like vetch

around life's long palings. I revise  
my sympathy; I will not presume

that her life would have been mine except  
for those small things I could itemize

(and started to). A fragile perfume  
issues from where her soul has been kept:

they are poems written on goldenrod  
foolscap somewhere in an upper room.

#### A WALK IN TAKASHIMADAIRA

-- to Teruo

This is your country  
and you have to live in it,  
yet you clearly seized my hand in bold daylight,  
in the clamor of the street,  
and held on to it through three red-lights, across  
the railroad bridge, past the bicycle shop, right

to your apartment door.  
As we broadsided a fleet  
of teen-age boys, you must have felt my hand fight  
your grasp, because you quickened  
your fingers like the tines of a cage around  
a fitful bird, quenching there its fit for flight,

and we sedately  
erased their loafing glances.  
Suddenly I am sailing through the skylight  
of André Masson's ceiling  
and the world's hateful gray has been blown away  
beneath marblings of azure and crocoite,

gold and cinnabar.  
Now I might be Pepito  
in love with Miss Ruiz, floating on a bright

cloud of Xochimilco flowers,  
cloying as the topping from a birthday cake.  
Only your anchor hand stops my heart, that kite,

from bursting its frame,  
so buoyed is it -- a comic  
strip balloon filled with exclamation points, light  
warm and waxen and birthday-candle brazen  
flows down from my heart and makes our hands unite.

-- Roger Finch

Tokyo, Japan

#### SAME DAY DEVELOPING

Due to problems in the darkroom, the place that promised "same day developing" was unable to develop my pictures the same day. I had to go back the next day. They were very sorry about the inconvenience. I sipped complimentary coffee and looked at lenses in a velvet display case (just as I had the previous day). Then I heard that dreaded voice from the darkroom: "We've got problems...." The identical problems. Already I could see the same day developing in that place.

#### OLIVER

I'm walking behind a man in a blue turban. This is the diamond district. Obviously, if the diamonds are anywhere, they are hidden in his turban. He keeps touching it. It is pinned from the inside. Now someone comes out of a coffee shop and almost knocks him over. Instinctively his hands fly up to make sure the turban is still secure. He glances this way and that, hoping he hasn't attracted too much attention. As he hurries across the block I see his reflection in a store window. He has olive skin. It's exactly five shades darker than an olive.

## DEMONSTRATIONS

What a pathetic job this woman has, demonstrating a popcorn popper in a major department store. The popcorn puffs out blue and green, due to food dye. The smell of salt and butter attracts ravenous crowds. They grab handfuls of the corn but aren't the least bit interested in the popper. Smacking their lips, they move on. Now the woman has to start all over again with a new crowd that's ravenous for popcorn but that isn't the least bit interested in the popper. She cranes her neck so they can hear her in the back. "Remember, ladies and gentlemen, that what makes this delicious popcorn is this marvelous popper. Would anyone care to know more about this wonderful popper?" But they've gotten what they want out of her and are already long gone.

-- Peter Morris

North Brunswick NJ

## A PROFESSOR DREAMING

The student watched the professor smiling gently to himself, no longer aloof or gloomy. The subject of their discussion had been forgotten and he seemed so far away and dreamy,  
so very dreamy.

The student was surprised, for normally the professor was austere, even imperious, in manner, whether in lecture-hall or study. He was efficient, precise, and so serious,  
so very serious.

The professor was far away in a room in Rio, where his education had been completed, awaiting the naked return of a girl with golden hair, a girl with a smile so lecherous and inviting,  
so very inviting.

## TRANSGRESSIONS

When youth  
and beauty are  
sacred the transgressions  
most feared are deformity and  
old age.

### HOLY BATHING PLACE: ALLAHABAD

#### i.

Ancient Prayaga, where the Jumna  
meets the Ganga and where all India  
mingles together in holy pilgrimage.

Here in the deep shade of a Moghul wall  
rows of barbers attend the orthodox,  
for whom immersion at this hallowed place  
requires a total shaving of the head.

Nearby in an underground temple  
stands a sacred banyan tree which many  
Hindus believe will never die,  
first mentioned by a Chinese traveller  
over thirteen hundred years ago.

#### ii.

A smiling Brahmin sitting placidly  
under a bright yellow sunshade  
gives his blessing for a small fee.

A Rajasthani peasant clutching a bundle  
threads his way warily between  
buffalo carts, camels, and sauntering cows,  
between sadhus, gypsies and beggars.

A Delhi business man in a loincloth  
strolls along the sand watching the women  
throwing rose-petals into the Ganga,  
then lingers before a gaudy picture of Brahma  
at one of the many improvised stalls.

## ENLIGHTENMENT

At last  
enlightenment  
comes with a blinding truth:  
some things are possible and some  
are not.

-- Raymond Tong

Bristol, Avon, England

## THE PASADENA FREEWAY

Originally Arroyo Seco Parkway, you were the first freeway in Los Angeles. This inspires hatred in shortsighted people who see you as merely the crucible of noxious progress, but others value your originality and pioneer status. We come to drive at all hours and we come alone, single peas in restless pods.

Because you wind like Ferndell's nature trails, you are the safest of all the freeways, not like those whose exit speeds are measured in g's. And the air quality is so sensational that careless drivers plunge into pollution as into huge, dingy marshmallows and are safe.

Of course you are cosmopolitan. Conceived in the Crown City, you glide ever downward, through a smudged and mysterious barrio which you divide like a blade. All along the way, people have sprayed their names. El Grande Jacinto is everywhere, and blue-eyed commuters wonder if the giant hyacinth will ever stalk their pretty streets.

Then you skirt Chavez Ravine which hides a band of men who steal and run for a living. They do not have an epic name like Giants or a pious one like Padres, but they are called something dear to the heart of every motorist: Dodgers.

Mostly, then, you are lost in the badlands of downtown or you plunge gratefully into the cool Harbor Frwy. Sunset Boulevard at the unfashionable end takes a little of the action plus Hill St. leading into Chinatown, kingdom of the No. 4 dinner.

You are the pioneer freeway, reminder in your sinuousness of the pastoral days of concrete, beloved to those of us who drive. And who doesn't! When we are trapped on the San Diego, Santa Monica, San Berdoo, Harbor, Foothill, Santa Ana Freeways, we long to lift our eyes and know that home is just across the dry arroyo that was your maiden name until -- like everyone else here -- you changed it, honoring the city you wear on your long and lovely self like a sprawling trinket.

Oh, Pasadena Freeway, we have loved you from the beginning, all of us who soon after Johnny's monologue raise our hands as if we were holding the sacred wheel and in our dreams negotiate your movie star curves all night long.

#### ON BEAUTY

It is conceivable The Incredible Melting Man just wants to get out of those wet clothes. But not likely: 2000 frames ago he saw himself in a mirror of standing water and knew he would never be held again or kissed goodnight by even the scuzziest.

I couldn't resist his loneliness, so during commercials I imagine an escape to Green Bay. The weather is superb. He gets a room, a Frigidaire, some rubber jeans. It is just another brand of grief: He likes this girl at the ice cream store but Spring threatens and during solitary sex his hand sticks to himself. She would scream like all the others and by June he'd be nothing but a raging pomade.

I know what's coming: high voltage wires ruled against the dawn. Good. Monsters should not live on. A rampage that lasts for years is just a job. And what's he to become, The Incredible Puddle?

Better let them lure you toward the transformer. Your lot is to be dreadful and to fry so that those of us who survive these long nights can sleep at last and dream the handsome dream and wake once more restored.

CONFIDENTIAL REPORT ON THE NASTY  
NASTY CENTER FOR BAD HABITS

Behavior Modification here has nothing to do with scare films of gooey alveoli much less tiny, electrical shocks. Sincere practitioners simply convince hacking clients that smoking is tantamount to masturbation. After a few of these "Reasoning Sessions," 3 pack a day men are so ashamed to be seen handling that "filthy little thing" that they are, for the most part, non-smokers. Two side effects, however, should be noted: 1) Stolen moments with a full color centerfold of Prince Albert, 2) Complacent whacking off at the dinner table as the coffee is brought in.

WAY OFF IN THE CORNER

of the athletic field the drummers from our college band are practicing. It is faint and a little ominous like the jungle telegraph in Tarzan movies. Whenever that starts everybody looks up like the booms were there. Naturally the natives go smug, Tarzan speaks drum, even the blonde neo-Nazis with gold fever are smart enough to swear. The only person who doesn't know shit is the sweaty little professor dragged along for cultural carte blanche. And he slinks into his tent full of books and Kaopectate and tries to catalogue something that looks suspiciously like an elephant turd big as a tire.

When I get to class I grab the first black guy I see and scream, "I don't want the gold, I don't want the fertility goddess. Keep the pearls and the diamonds. I'm just here for the elephant shit."

And he says tenderly, "You ok, Mr. Koertge?"

"THE THING IS TO NOT LET GO OF THE VINE."

-- JOHNNY WEISSMULLER

Of course he is right, otherwise he would not be Tarzan King of the Jungle, but Tarzan King of the Emergency Ward.

But he is not right all the time. Like the vine, his advice has an end. For him it might be when Simba and Tantor grow immune to yodels and he has to face the evil white men alone. When Jane is old, her little bark skirts no longer fetching. Or when he is just tired, the trees seem taller than before and every vine a python.

So there comes a time at the edge of some sinister veldt when the thing to do is not hold on but let go at the peak and fly into the arms of the Ape Mother at whose dark and leathery breast we rest content at last knowing what it is we have been all this time hurrying through the forest toward.

ETERNA 27

I use it every day. Under my eyes the skin dries out. Also my beauty mask (by mail from Anne Carpenter) once a week or so. When the clay sticks to my beard and my blue eyes shine, I look like a warrior. That's ironic. I know how the men in my family feel about cosmetics. Remember the phrase "shit a brick"? It's fun to be vain and to make repairs on the only body I'll ever have. And who needs coveralls or a timing light, just Dove soap, Henna Clay Masque and Eterna 27 which reminds me of eternally twenty-seven, tempting I guess but not something I'd wish on a friend or even those baby Capones who know next to nothing about what it means to be a man.

THIS IS FOR EVERY MAN WHO LICKS  
HIS SHOULDER DURING SOLITARY SEX,  
RUBS HIS BEARD AGAINST THE STRIPEY  
DELTOID MUSCLE OR BITES HIMSELF HARD.

THIS IS FOR THE WOMAN WHO AT THE BODY'S  
BUFFET TOUCHES HER BREASTS ONE AT A  
TIME THEN REACHES FOR THE PLACE  
SHE HAS MADE CLEAN AS MOTHER'S KITCHEN.

Masturbation should be as exciting as any  
heavy date: have a drink first, lay out  
some poppers, open that favorite book  
to the most shameful passage because  
without blessed shame nothing is  
as much fun.

And please don't jump up afterwards  
and rush for the washcloth like all  
the relatives were on the porch  
knocking, their hands hot from  
casseroles and a cake with God's  
name on it.

Rather lie there, catch your breath,  
turn to yourself and kiss all the nimble  
fingers, especially the one that has  
been you-know-where, kiss the palms  
with their mortal etchings and finally  
kiss the backs of each hand as if  
at the end of a special audience  
the Pope has just said that you are  
particularly blessed.

I WAS JUST SITTING

watching you open those long,  
flat maps.

They were so old and you  
24.

How had I found you without  
even a star to guide me.

-- Ronald Koertge

South Pasadena CA



**edward field's income tacks**

INCOME TACKS: FROM MY DIARY

1.

A curious thing, the English word --  
for plain speaking, wonderful,  
but takes almost a miracle  
born of adversity  
or the kind of genius that I'm not  
to make it sing:

Overlooking the wintry  
supermarket parking lot,  
tip-top on a bare tree,  
a solitary bird  
pouring its heart out,  
breast quivering.

2.

If only I was the one  
before writing was discovered  
to whom it occurred  
that the spoken word  
could be written down  
or chiseled in stone,

and having only heard them spoken,  
I was the one to have found  
that words could each be broken  
into separate units of sound,

and even better,  
that each one of these  
with elegance and ease  
could be written in shape of a letter.

3.

Listening to Jewish songs  
reminds me of all my unshed tears.

4.

Try to remember in the difficult hours:  
Every problem is a teaching.

5.

My instructions: Let it all go.  
Let what go?  
Stop asking and just do it --  
you know.

6.

When he came to, people were holding his arms  
trying to calm him down.

Had he actually been running around  
naked through the streets, shouting  
he was sick of the whole mess?

He felt terribly confused -- perhaps he was insane  
or at any rate out of control.

And would he go off again that way?

7.

The reason I need to write poetry is  
I keep forgetting important things --  
like my feelings.

8.

Don't talk to me about 'dropping the Mind'  
and other fake-spiritual notions:  
The intellect is the best critic  
and corrective to the emotions.

9.

While shaving my face, I answer my critics,  
marshalling rebuttals, and arguing  
my right to write as I want to:  
Who are you to tell me what to do?  
You don't have the least idea what poetry's about,  
etcetera ...

and going over and over where the chin  
makes its difficult transition to the neck:  
Why can't a clown for once cry real tears?

Oh, I say, you pompous ass.

10.

I have one eye of reality  
and one of woe,  
but where is my eye of pleasure?  
In reality is my pleasure --

but I'll admit to another eye,  
if you could call it an eye,  
somewhere down below.

11.

How I wonder at anyone able to say:  
When I look at my face  
I feel tender toward myself.

12.

I'm committed to being beautiful  
but that doesn't mean I ignore  
what is not its opposite but its twin --  
I revel in ugliness like a new-found freedom.

13.

I only like parts of waking  
but every part of sleeping.

14.

Not have been circumcised by a rabbi but a doctor,  
my etheric body is uncircumcised still,  
making it difficult connecting on both levels --  
the confusion lies in their not being  
together, one and the same  
and I find myself supplying  
an imaginary foreskin.

15.

I still feel I should desire women  
but at least I'm sure now I don't.

## 16.

## Stories from the Lives of My Friends

One went crazy in Tangier  
 not only from kif and drugs  
 but when he learned the truth about  
 his friends in the medina there:  
 Each a murderer or had hired killer thugs,  
 and one of them threatened to 'rub him out.'

Two others, after years together, thought  
 an arrangement of a looser kind  
 might suit them better, so they split,  
 but in an unexpected twist of plot  
 one of them went blind  
 and they moved back in together again.  
 It could hardly be taken as a gift  
 yet, oddly, they were as happy then  
 as any two friends who ever lived --  
 though sex was not the key to it.

## 17.

Leading him through the streets  
 he is like an animal beside me,  
 a blind lion or horse in captivity,  
 wind blowing through his proud mane,  
 for whom to hold on to my shoulder  
 is necessary, but a humiliation.

## 18.

## Guide Dog Sonnet

Some dogs live a life of ease,  
 playing with children, being taken out for walks,  
 while others, and maybe the lucky ones are these,  
 have to work, pulling carts, doing circus tricks,  
 guarding property, or as I do,  
 leading my master through streets to be his eyes.

There, if a friendly dog invites me to  
 a sniffing fest of assholes, noses, pricks,  
 I can't forget that though I have my needs  
 it's in my master's safety duty lies.  
 And if we pass a hydrant and I've got to go  
 lift my leg, I must say firmly no.

Not for a biscuit do I make this sacrifice:  
 Being useful is how I get my kicks.

19.

Being a couple, with the resources of two,  
in public impact you benefit  
because the combined effect of both of you  
more than doubles it.

20

#### The Psychology of Couples

Each becomes, after years, an expert on the other,  
an enraging quality you could kill for.

The goal: Weaken your mate, make him dependent --  
an outsider can always tell who's on top.

Revenge is a complex game  
and brother, nothing is forgotten.  
It's a lifelong struggle as you get  
a death grip on each other.

21

#### A Terrifying Line

Ladies and gentlemen,  
we are approaching the German border.

22.

Economic solution: Put ad in paper:

Strong feminist poetry wanted,  
nominal expense,  
guaranteed publication.

Another, shorter and cheaper:

Sure cure for impotence,  
send donation.

23.

Old New Yorkers, no matter where we go,  
are forever part of the garbage we left behind:  
Beating the junkman and the truck to it,  
we furnish our wardrobes with what we find --  
jeans, shirts, fur coat, sweater --  
in the supermarket of the garbage can are better  
things than in the store.

But then the city passed a law  
and dog owners dutifully began  
picking up the dog shit  
and dumping it in the nearest can --  
no thanks, I don't need any more of it,  
and left the treasures from then on.

24.

You know but do not dare to know.  
It's because of that you ask them how,  
if the baby comes out of momma,  
it looks like dad ... a pitiful sight  
the way they blush and stammer,  
and you know instantly you were right.

25.

At fifty-two I understood coffee,  
the martini at fifty-three,  
and after sciatica at fifty-four --  
aspirin plus coffee plus a shot of liquor.

26.

The ears of old men,  
like their dicks, grow flaccid.  
Boys' ears are crisp,  
or you might say, stiff.

27.

That of which I'm most afraid  
is not the inevitable hearing aid  
but ending up one of the park benchers,  
each with pacemaker and dentures,  
a replacement socket for the hip,  
and an aluminum walker lest I slip.

28.

In the corner of the garden where I pee  
the nettles grow fiercely big and bristly,  
fed perhaps by something in the urine filtered  
through the soil,

and growing bolder, attracted by the spray  
that gives their leaves a gloss,  
they start leaning into the spot I aim at  
so I can't fail to pee directly on them,

but undiluted, it's too hot, too strong,  
and the boldest wither under it.

29.

You men with superior technological minds,  
you invent devices of all kinds --  
atomic missiles, atom plants, and bombs.

But what do we do if disaster comes,  
cracking the atom-generating station  
and leaking poison radiation?  
Where do the deadly wastes go, and even more,  
what about atomic war?

Come boys, isn't there more to figure out?  
But this you do not care about.

30.

To Whatever Future Race Survives

We seem about to destroy ourselves,  
and if we do,  
I want you to know that at least  
some of us knew.

-- Edward Field

New York NY &  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Center-section cover art:

Thomas Wiloch, Westland MI

THE TIME I DRANK WITH ALLEN GINSBERG

"you don't remember me," she says,  
"but ten years ago i saw you drinking beer  
with allen ginsberg in the 49er tavern."

i say, "i've never met ginsberg.  
are you sure it wasn't bukowski?  
maybe ferlinghetti, everson, or edward field?"

"oh no," she says, "it was ginsberg all right."

"maybe it wasn't me. maybe it was chuck stetler  
or elliot fried or leo mailman or david barker  
or ray zepeda or hubert lloyd."

"oh no," she says, "it was you all right,  
and it was ginsberg you were drinking with."

i feel her ample tit against my elbow.

you know it's amazing how you can even forget  
something memorable  
like drinking beer with allen ginsberg.

REVISED STANDARD VERSION

He was looking up the correct pronunciation of "maleficent"  
in the dictionary his wife had bought him for Father's Day  
when he noticed that the word "male"  
was no longer included.

He paged rapidly in search of "virility"  
and, in growing panic, he scanned for "manly."  
But he couldn't even come up with "man,"  
let alone "testes," "testosterone," or "penis."  
"Macho" was in there though,  
defined as "an archaism for an obsolete obscenity."  
When he came upon "boy" defined as  
"archaic diminutive for an obsolete 'type'  
of young woman,"  
he knew the war was over.

He thought of running a white flag  
up his now un-named member,  
but of course it wouldn't stand for it.

## EMERITUS

seventeen years ago  
when i first arrived on campus  
there was this guy who was already  
one of the most popular and respected professors.  
he had the flair for teaching  
but he was also way ahead of his time  
in anticipating the role film  
would come to play in education.  
he was developing courses in film  
long before the time would arrive  
when only courses with film in the title  
would attract the required enrollment.  
he always kept a cork-board outside his office  
with the week's clippings of cinema reviews and ratings.  
i always made a point of perusing it myself.

then he had a stroke.

it took him two years to learn  
a new way of talking.

when he returned to teaching  
it took less than a year  
before the students  
(he was difficult to listen to)  
bitched him into retirement.

## THE 366th DAY OF THE YEAR

i love my children  
and i love my wife,  
who does not believe that i love her.  
i even love our cramped one-bedroom beach flat,  
with so many of us so close amidst the avalanche  
of books and toys and bills.

but unrelieved proximity breeds nervous and  
communicative breakdowns, so i don't regret  
this saturday with everyone else at the in-laws.  
i don't trip on the way to the typewriter.  
i can read or answer letters  
without driving to the office.  
eat without sharing.  
call a confidant.  
nap on the couch.  
not stand in line for the bathroom.  
watch a ballgame without feeling guilty.

hear no voices.

god, don't mistake this as a prayer for loneliness  
or worst of all, loss of loved ones.  
i always want my family to come home to.  
i want them to come home to me tonight.

but these few hours of october light,  
i stretch, inhale, take pen in hand.

### APRÈS LE MÉTRO DERNIER

Who would you have been  
during the Nazi occupation of France?  
It's a question I would like to ask  
of all my friends  
and all my (blush) fellow Americans,  
and one I often ask myself.

I'll answer it first, for myself.  
I would hope that I would do  
everything within my power to aid the Jews  
and other unfortunates  
and to bring about the downfall  
of the tyrants.  
But I know I might be arrested  
before I had a chance to do anything  
simply for being a teacher and a writer  
and outspoken,  
although not, I hope, a spouter of party lines.  
And I would have serious vulnerabilities,  
such as my children,  
not to mention my dislike of pain,  
which could be used to make me crack.  
Other things that would work against me  
would be my affinity for booze,  
my lack of experience with prisons,  
my fear of humiliation,  
my lack of martial skills,  
and my distrust of all politics,  
even my own.

So I know I could behave  
as a coward and a scoundrel.  
My best chance of not doing so  
would rest in my commitment not to waste  
the only life I have.

Now, your turn.  
My friends who are teachers, writers, cops,  
doctors, lawyers, politicians, students.  
Would you curry favor with the authorities?  
How far would you let yourself go  
before drawing up short of incurring their wrath?  
Would you sacrifice your job, your success,  
your wife, your kids, your comfort, your life?  
Would you try to pretend that nothing was happening?  
Would you tell yourself the pendulum would soon swing back  
without any effort or involvement of your own?  
Would you keep looking for the danger from without  
when we had already been taken over from within?

Come to think of it,  
when is the last time,  
in this land of the free and home of the brave,  
that you took a major political risk!

#### THE BLUE NUN AND I

bicycle to las vegas.  
we eat in one of the cheap coffee shops  
in one of the five main downtown hotels.

she has a hot turkey sandwich with the trimmings.  
i have a hot roast beef sandwich with the trimmings.

the bill comes to five bucks.  
her dinner is better than mine.  
we bicycle out to the strip,  
stop in front of caesar's palace.  
"where's joe louis?" she asks.  
"he's dead," i say.

"what lights!" she says;  
"i've never seen so many lights."

"the place is vulgar," i say;  
"it is the apex and the nadir of vulgarity.  
everybody says so.  
i've never heard vegas described by anyone  
with powers of description  
as anything but vulgar."

"it is the city of light,"  
the blue nun says; "the people  
want light -- let them have light."

## THE BEST YEAR OF HER LIFE

When my two-year-old daughter  
sees someone come through the door  
whom she loves, and hasn't seen for a while,  
and has been anticipating,  
she literally shrieks with joy.

I have to go into the other room  
so that no one will notice the tears in my eyes.

Later, after my daughter has gone to bed,  
I say to my wife,  
"She will never be this happy again,"  
and my wife gets angry and snaps,  
"Don't you dare communicate your negativism to her!"

And, of course, I won't, if I can possibly help it,  
and of course I fully expect her  
to have much joy in her life,  
and, of course, I hope to be able  
to contribute to that joy --  
I hope, in other words, that she'll always  
be happy to see me come through the door --

but why kid ourselves -- she, like every child,  
has a life of great suffering ahead of her,  
and while joy will not go out of her life,  
she will one of these days cease to actually,  
literally, jump and shriek for joy.

## COLD, STRAIGHT FROM THE CAN

i want to thank you for teaching me  
to eat spaghetti-and-meat balls  
cold, straight from the can.

actually, what i saw you  
(to my original horror) consume  
was a can of campbell's split-pea soup,  
uncooked.

i have not yet reached that point of spiritual perfection  
at which i can conceive of spooning  
campbell's split-pea soup  
to my lips,  
cold, straight from the can,

but i can conceive of minestrone  
as the next distinct possibility.

## WE SHOULD HAVE EXPECTED IT

my good friends,  
dave cherin and patricia esme dominique o'connor cherin,  
blessed their children with beautifully evocative names:

alexander hamilton cherin,  
dylan thomas cherin,  
and sara isadora cherin.

now dylan thomas wants to be called bob.

## THEY INSIST ON CALLING IT OVERCOMPENSATION

pericles said,  
"we athenians have beauty without effeminacy."

isn't that all that hemingway  
tried to give america?

## THE LAST UNSPOILED BEAUTY IN AMERICA

i was already attracted to  
this fortyish but obviously former beauty queen

but when she grabbed the glasses  
of those who had left  
and emptied the beer back into our pitcher,

i knew i must see more of her.

## WHY THERE WAS NO GREAT MIGRATION OF PARISIANS TO AMERICA

there was  
but they returned  
upon learning  
that the indians  
did not speak french.

-- Gerald Locklin

Long Beach CA

CHARMING MADONNA

twists legs a  
round you twists  
words till they  
take you in too

EARLY COOL MADONNA

her green  
presses against  
you, nipples  
like noses  
against glass

HYDROPONICS MADONNA

grows without  
a place to root

PAROLE MADONNA

is sick of all  
penal institutions

ACCESSORY MADONNA

gloves them  
and leaves them

MADONNA WHO GETS AROUND

has big lips

FAST LANE MADONNA: 1

just feels the  
spray of what's  
passing

FAST LANE MADONNA: 2

feels smashed

MADONNA WHO YOU HAVE TO  
HAND IT TO

otherwise she  
grabs it

MADONNA OF THE MESSY HOUSE

around her bed:  
spoons like lovers  
licked and left

LEFTOVER MADONNA

makes you feel  
good twice

WOK MADONNA

gets you going  
fast, leaves  
you in your  
own juices

-- Lyn Lifshin

Niskayuna NY

LOVER

i.

Joe turns the cardboard ignition, presses the cardboard gas pedal, every morning in his cardboard trailer he goes, "brrmm, brrmm, " he needs a new cardboard engine.

ii.

Joe's the biggest thing in his small home by a long railroad in a "huge" town pointing to "far away" cardboard Santa Fe, not the cardboard stars.

iii.

If you could get close enough to the cardboard sunrise you would hear the sound of Joe's cardboard water thumping into his cardboard basin, his cardboard face crumbling. Then soon his cardboard typewriter would start thudding,

"...DER DER DAH DAH DER ...."

WALLPAPERING

I've stuck wallpaper on my walls,  
on my ceiling and windows  
and chimney and TV  
and washing machine.

I don't want any of the neighbors saying  
they're better wallpapered than me.  
I've dipped wallpaper in cologne  
and then put it on my kitchen floor

and bedroom and bathroom floors  
and my canary and goldfish and rattlesnake.  
Nor do I care if Clyda comes  
to the back door, announcing,

"a wave of violent wallpaper  
has swept through Turkey."  
Let no one say my wallpaper is violent:  
I scrubbed it well with Ajax before using it

on my jersey and skirt and bra.

## PYRAMID

When a pyramid is in its usual position the bubbles rise to the peak and escape through a special opening in a few

big gulps. But when the pyramid is upsidedown the bubbles rise to the large dirt-clogged bottom, too spread out to be forceful, and escape slowly, unpredictably.

## TV

Time to polish the TV. Time to get comedy out of the TV corner dust. I like to laugh, a girl in tights in an empty house. A girl

with What? A missing husband? A funny cat who wraps himself round the boiler? A girl who never lived in an apartment and therefore doesn't understand one room plays?

Time to color the TV like an old aunt. A little rouge on the cheeks and hams in oil. A girl who likes oil paintings in old house galleries. A girl who never lived in an old house.

## MONICA

Her name is Monica: a cardboard doll wearing lots of one-sided colored paper clothes. Her face has peeled off and her feet

are torn and if you put her in a tub of water she'd probably dissolve. But she isn't yours: and you only ever see her through a neighbor's

window. It could be your eyes.

-- Nichola Manning

Long Beach CA

## MOTHER-DEATH

The resuscitation team had little time for decency: his mother lay on the floor with her nightie hiked around her neck. The team seemed indifferent to the exposure: the shanks, the little body like a worm in a nutshell, the sagging breasts.

He grabbed an afghan from the couch, one full of strong flower-colors, and covered her parts.

The team kept thumping on her chest. They clamped an oxygen cup over her mouth. Nothing helped, as she sunk deeper into the floor, through the cement slab, lower than the potatoes.

## HIS MOTHER'S BURIAL

While the grave-digger dug his mother's grave squirrels romped beneath an oak tree.

The old digger cut quilt-exact squares of turf and piled them on a tarmac. His shovel had a square end and cut through the sand and roots.

His mother would lie beside his dad, her concrete box containing her blue coffin touching his gray concrete box containing his brown coffin.

He had the digger pause while he stroked his dad's box: dead twelve years -- bones, shredded clothes, and little black beads for his eyes. The sand was carrot-red. Would their juices, in the sense of mush, blend through into some neutral space?

His mother preferred no coffin or cement -- just the corpse arranged feet down, head up, in the sand. He had touched her hands and kissed her forehead and knew how iced-over death is.

Spiney carrot tops struck him in the face, across his mouth.

## HIS SISTER

His oldest sister hid cucumbers  
and shucked-corn under her skirts  
rather than giving him any.  
She gave their mother squash turned soft,  
leathery cobs of corn, and beans  
too full of rust to sell.  
She was a voracious canner.  
When her son brought home  
a baby girl with big floppy ears,  
a baby that was his wife's, not his,  
she grew fangs, and dared  
either of her sisters to approach.  
The brother she accused of cheating  
on their mother's will, and hissed  
a steamy nostril-full of green fire,  
which did little more than singe his ear  
and send him more quickly  
back to California.

-- Robert Peters

Huntington Beach CA

## QUITS

I knew this one  
he'd been famous for decades  
he said  
listen, we'll write letters to each other  
we'll keep carbons and then we'll  
bring out a book of our correspondence  
  
so I said  
all right  
and we began  
  
he was in Greece and I was in East Hollywood  
  
he started writing about his days in Paris and Algiers  
how he had met Burroughs and Ginsberg and Corso  
and Gysin  
there was even something about Picasso  
  
all I could write about was how I lost at the racetrack  
I was due in court for drunk driving  
my woman was leaving me  
the post office was trying to fire me for absenteeism

he wrote that he was supported by a Prince  
and that wasn't the first one  
and how he lived in a thatched hut  
with boys and goats  
under a sometimes active volcano  
he smoked exotic dope night and day  
he spoke seven languages  
he was on speaking terms with major editors & publishers  
they were in England, Italy and America  
he had stayed in that famous Paris hotel  
(his poems had those startling breaking lines  
my lines just went from corner to corner)

he sent a half dozen photos of himself (dated)  
he had been to many brave places  
he was smiling in fur hats  
he had natty open shirts with chains  
he had a drooping intellectual mustache

I wrote back that I had puked that night  
I had mixed vodka with gin  
I wondered if my woman was coming back

I finally gave up on the correspondence  
I told him that I couldn't go on anymore

oh

he wrote back  
so you quit  
I out-wrote you so you quit  
you didn't want it known that I could out-write you

you are the best

I wrote back  
you are a Prince

I don't know if I believed that  
he must have  
he never complained about our broken correspondence again.

#### THE BIG BENEFIT READING

I had gotten sucked into reading with this  
group and found out that we were reading

to save some political prisoners in some  
oppressed state

and so when I got up I told them that I  
wasn't reading to save anybody but  
myself.

and some of the dainty souls out there  
hurled some dainty invectives at me

and I read my crap and got off  
stage

and since the promoter had promised me  
\$\$\$\$ ("after the show, Chinaski, you'll  
get yours," he had told me) so I sat in  
the audience and waited

I sat with an acquaintance  
a Jewish homosexual exile from Crete

and there was a poet up there reading and  
that poet finished his long poem

and my Crete acquaintance asked me during  
the applause: "what happened to the  
mother?"

"what mother?" I asked.

"almost all the poem was about his mother  
and then -- she simply vanished," he told  
me

"I can't blame her," I told him

meanwhile

it was a stinking wasted night

they all got up there and it was difficult  
to tell whether the poets or the audience were  
closer to utter lifelessness

I finally got the promoter backstage afterwards and  
demanded my \$\$\$\$ as promised

and he told me, "listen, there were many better poets  
here tonight than you and they all donated their time."

"and I'm going to donate your ass if you don't follow  
through on your word!"

and I reached out and ripped all the buttons from the  
front of his shirt

and he said, "all right, all right, take it easy!"  
and pulled a roll of bills from his pocket and slipped  
me a few

I jammed that into my pocket and got out of there  
some months later it was learned that the promoter  
had never forwarded the funds to said oppressed

political prisoners of said political state  
which figured to me because I  
didn't like his face or the way he combed his  
hair  
and I didn't like his English accent  
nor did I like his slack-jawed  
lemon-faced girlfriend who kept accusing me of  
treachery "against the peoples of the world who  
are fighting for the peoples of the world."

I've never read with a group again for any  
reason  
which is the best reason  
of them all.

### SICK

I had this night job and I'd sit in the bed  
looking out the window in the late afternoon  
the last of the sun would come into the room  
through the leaves of this large bush  
and when I thought about what was out there  
waiting, I'd reach for the telephone.

the office clerk knew my voice:

"yes, Chinaski, what is it this time?"

"just write something down," I'd tell him,

"common cold, flu, the clap ...."

I'd hang up.

it was good watching it slowly get dark  
listening to people coming home  
parking their cars, turning on their TVs  
making kitchen sounds, talking.

then I'd get up and drink four or five hours  
alone,

then go back to bed and sleep.

and the next night at the factory everybody  
would be very small and wrinkled

and I'd walk in tall and shining

all eyes and coolness,

secretly assured;

the men didn't understand and the girls

all loved me, and the foreman came forward

to speak to me of absenteeism

as I took out a cigarette, lit it and

listened.

-- Charles Bukowski

San Pedro CA

VERY HIGHLY RECOMMENDED:::.....

Continued from Wormwood:90. ¶ Todd Moore's The Name Is Dillinger, unpriced fm. author, 900 West 9th St., Belvidere IL 61008. ¶ Robert Peters' What Dillinger Meant To Me, \$5.95 fm. The Sea Horse Press, 307 West 11th St., New York NY 10014. ¶ Planet Detroit: Anthology Of Urban Poetry (edit. Kurt Nimino & Christine Lahey-Dolega), \$3.50 fm. 8214 St. Marys, Detroit MI 48228. ¶ Norbert Blei's Adventures In An American's Literature, \$5.95 fm. Ellis Press, P.O. Box 1443, Peoria IL 61655. ¶ F. A. Nettelbeck's Bar Napkin Poems, unpriced fm. Clown War (no working address). ¶ Barbara Moraff's Learning To Move, \$3 fm. Potes & Poets Press, Box 6554, Hartford CT 05540. ¶ Toby Lurie's Conversations With The Past (\$1.95), Albert Drake's Reaching For The Sun (\$1.50) and Hugh Fox's Almazora 42 (\$2.50) fm. Laughing Bear, P.O. Box 23478, San Jose CA 95153. ¶ Joe Napora's Tongue and Groove, \$1 fm. Ptolemy/Browns Mills Review, P.O. Box 908, Browns Mills NJ 08015. ¶ Judson Crews' More, unpriced fm. Buckwalter Circumnavigation Editions, c/o W.B. Anderson, RR #5, Box 1808, Las Cruces NM 88001.

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Dorrit Willumsen's if it really were a film (\$6), Benny Andersen's Selected Stories (\$6) and Asger Schnack's Aqua (\$3.50) fm. Curbstone Press, 321 Jackson St., Willimantic CT 06226. ¶ David Tipton's nomads and settlers (unpriced) fm. Blackweir Press, 20 Newfoundland Rd., Cardiff CF4 3LA Wales and Moving House (unpriced) fm. Blind Lion Books, 120 Harrogate St., Undercliffe, Bradford, W Yorks BD3 OLE, England. ¶ Antonio Cisneros' Helicopters In The Kingdom Of Peru, \$2.50 fm. Rivelin Press, 24 Aireville Rd., Frizinghall, Bradford BD9 4HH England. ¶ Michael Mac Donald's Games, \$1.50 fm. Antinomian, 4339 Gregory, Castro Valley CA 94546. ¶ Thomas Orzag-Land's Antarctic Testimony, \$5 fm. Tern Press, c/o author, Top Floor, 64 Highgate High St., Highgate Village, London N6 5HX England. ¶ Robert Grady Head's The Enriched Uranium Poems, \$3 fm. Bookstore, Seneca Trail, Lewisburg WV 24901. ¶ Laurel Speer's T. Roosevelt Tracks The Last Buffalo (unpriced) fm. Rhiannon Press, 1105 Bradley Ave., Eau Claire WI 54701. ¶ Michael C Ford's Sleepless Night In A Soundproof Motel (unpriced) fm. Mud-born Press, 209 W. De la Guerra, Santa Barbara CA 93101.

RECOMMENDED:::.....

John Yamrus' Start To Finish (unpriced) fm. Ansuda Publications, P.O. Box 158, Harris IA 51345 and Someone Else's Dreams, \$4.95 fm. Applezaba Press, 410 St. Louis, Long Beach CA 90814. ¶ John Elsberg's The Price of Reindeer, \$1 fm. White Ewe Press, Box 996, Adelphi MD 20783. ¶ Sam Albert's As Is, \$7.95 fm. Wampeter Press, Box 512, Green Harbor MA 02041.

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THE WORMWOOD REVIEW : 9 2

INDEX	PAGES
Charles Bukowski.....	155 - 158
Edward Field's Special Section: INCOME TACKS: FROM MY DIARY.*.....	137 - 144
Roger Finch.*.....	126 - 129
Ronald Koertge.....	132 - 136
Lyn Lifshin.....	151
Gerald Locklin.....	145 - 150
Nichola Manning.....	152 - 153
Peter Morris.*.....	129 - 130
Laura Neary.*.....	121 - 122
Robert Peters.....	154 - 155
Brian Swann.....	122 - 125
Raymond Tong.....	130 - 132
Marc Widershien.*.....	125 - 126

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