

Song for Bird and Myself

I am dissatisfied with my poetry.
 I am dissatisfied with my sex life.
 I am dissatisfied with the angels I believe in.
 Neo-classical like Bird,
 Distrusting the reality
 of every note.
 Half-real
 We blow the sentence pure and real
 Like chewing angels.

"Listen, Bird, why do we have to sit here dying
 In a half-furnished room?
 The rest of the combo
 Is safe in houses
 Blowing bird-brained Dixieland,
 How warm and free they are. What right
 Music."

"Man,
 We
 Can't stay away from the sounds.
 We're *crazy*, Jack
 We gotta stay here 'til
 They come and get us."

Neo-classical like Bird.

Once two birds got into the Rare Book Room.

Miss Swift said,
 "Don't
 Call a custodian
 Put crumbs on the outside of the window
 Let them
 Come outside."

Neo-classical

The soft line strains
 Not to be neo-classical.
 But Miss Swift went to lunch. They
 Called a custodian.
 Four came.
 Armed like Myrmidons, they
 Killed the birds.

Miss Munsterberg

Who was the first

American translator of Rilke

Said
 "Suppose one of them
 Had been the Holy Ghost."

Miss Swift,
 Who was back from lunch,
 Said
 "Which."
 But the poem isn't over.
 It keeps going
 Long after everybody
 Has settled down comfortably into laughter.
 The bastards
 On the other side of the paper
 Keep laughing.
 LISTEN.
 STOP LAUGHING.
 THE POEM ISN'T OVER. Butterflies.
 I knew there would be butterflies
 For Butterflies represent the lost soul
 Represent the way the wind wanders
 Represent the bodies
 We only clasp in the middle of a poem.
 See, the stars have faded.
 There are only butterflies.
 Listen to
 The terrible sound of their wings moving.
 Listen,
 The poem isn't over.

Have you ever wrestled with a bird,
 You idiotic reader?
 Jacob wrestled with an angel.
 (I remind you of the image)
 Or a butterfly
 Have you ever wrestled with a single butterfly?
 Sex is no longer important.
 Colors take the form of wings. Words
 Have got to be said.
 A butterfly,
 A bird,
 Planted at the heart of being afraid of dying.
 Blow,
 Bird,
 Blow,
 Be,
 Neo-classical.
 Let the wings say
 What the wings mean
 Terrible and pure.

The horse
 In Cocteau
 Is as neo-classical an idea as one can manage.
 Writes all our poetry for us
 Is Gertrude Stein
 Is God
 Is the needle for which
 God help us
 There is no substitute
 Or the Ace of Swords
 When you are telling a fortune
 Who tells death.
 Or the Jack of Hearts
 Whose gypsy fortune we clasp
 In the middle of a poem.

"And are we angels, Bird?"
 "That's what we're trying to tell 'em, Jack
 There aren't any angels except when
 You and me blow 'em."

So Bird and I sing
 Outside your window
 So Bird and I die
 Outside your window.
 This is the wonderful world of Dixieland
 Deny
 The bloody motherfucking Holy Ghost.
 This is the end of the poem.
 You can start laughing, you bastards. This is
 The end of the poem.

1956

A Poem to the Reader of the Poem

I throw a naked eagle in your throat
 I dreamed last night
 That I was wrestling with you on the mountainside.
 An eagle had a dream over our heads.
 We threw rocks at him.
 I dreamed last night—
 This is false in any poem.
 Last night never happened
 Couldn't
 Make you hear the poem so quickly
 That I could tell you what I dreamed last night
 That I could tell you that I dreamed I was wrestling
 With the reader of this poem.
 Dreamed
 Was it a wet dream?
 Or dry like a dream is
 When boys in a dream throw rocks at it.
 I heard myself sobbing in a wet dream.
 Don't worry, I will tell you everything.
 I had a dream last night
 That I was wrestling with you on the mountainside.
 Was it a wet dream?
 No, I would tell you if it was a wet dream.
 It was this poem
 Us
 I wrestled with you in this poem
 And it was not a wet dream.

Then define
 If you don't want to scare him out of the poem
 Define
 The dream
 The wrestling
 And lie
 And in
 What sweet Christ's name the eagle we were
 throwing rocks at was
 And why I love you so much
 And why it was not a wet dream.
 I can't deny
 The lie.
 The eagle was
 God or Charles Olson
 The eagle was men wrestling naked
 Without the hope of men wrestling naked.
 The eagle was a wet dream.

April, May, June, July, August, September,
 October,
 November,
 December,
 I love you, I love you,
 Scream when you come.
 There is not another room to go into
 But hell, Billy,
 It was hell when they shot you.

Dear Robin,

Enclosed you find the first of the publications of White Rabbit Press. The second will be much handsomer.

You are right that I don't now need your criticisms of individual poems. But I still want them. It's probably from old habit—but it's an awfully old habit. Halfway through *After Lorca* I discovered that I was writing a book instead of a series of poems and individual criticism by anyone suddenly became less important. This is true of my *Admonitions* which I will send you when complete. (I have eight of them already and there will probably be fourteen including, of course, this letter.)

The trick naturally is what Duncan learned years ago and tried to teach us—not to search for the perfect poem but to let your way of writing of the moment go along its own paths, explore and retreat but never be fully realized (confined) within the boundaries of one poem. This is where we were wrong and he was right, but he complicated things for us by saying that there is no such thing as good or bad poetry. There is—but not in relation to the single poem. There is really no single poem.

That is why all my stuff from the past (except the *Elegies* and *Troilus*) looks foul to me. The poems belong nowhere. They are one night stands filled (the best of them) with their own emotions, but pointing nowhere, as meaningless as sex in a Turkish bath. **It was not my anger or my frustration that got in the way of my poetry but the fact that I viewed each anger and each frustration as unique—something to be converted into poetry as one would exchange foreign money. I learned this from the English Department (and from the English Department of the spirit—that great quagmire that lurks at the bottom of all of us) and it ruined ten years of my poetry.** Look at those other poems. Admire them if you like. They are beautiful but dumb.

Poems should echo and reecho against each other. They should create resonances. They cannot live alone any more than we can.

So don't send the box of old poetry to Don Allen. Burn it or rather open it with Don and cry over the possible books that were buried in it—the *Songs Against Apollo*, the *Gallery of Gorgeous Gods*, the *Drinking Songs*—all incomplete, all abortive—all abortive because I thought, like all abortionists, that what is not perfect had no real right to live.

Things fit together. We knew that—it is the principle of magic. Two inconsequential things can combine together to become a consequence. This is true of poems too. A poem is never to be judged by itself alone. A poem is never by itself alone.

This is the most important letter that you have ever received.

Love,
 Jack

Dover Beach

Tabula rasa
A clean table
On which is set food
Fairies have never eaten.
Fairies, I mean, in the ancient sense
Who invite you to dinner.
The mind clean like that
Prepared
With proper provisions
For its journey into.
Almost like a web
(Dinner table)
Spider, fly, and the web are one
For one moment.
Time traveller,
Personal pronoun
Trapped in the mind. Why
Not put it all to sleep?
O anima cortese Mantovana
A whore's answer to a whore
They go to sleep them souls
But they move in their sleep
O anima cortese
As Pope would have written if he had cared or had known
Italian
The final table they show you
Is pop.
Ghost the weasel
Unman him. Make him drink
Lavender water mixed with ink.
Soda water they drink in the ghost canyons of their memories.
The sharp
Im
age
A new aesthetic
Each place firmly tied to its place
Eaches to each. Doesn't

Reach much
And the owl's bones
Are built in a nest with them. That's
A poem Pope would have been proud of
One keeps unmentionable
What one ascends to the real with
The lie
The cock in the other person's mouth
The real defined out of nothing. Asking
Shadows. Is pop. Pope
To the worms that bury them. Limit-
Less does it.
Damn it all, Robert Duncan, there is only one bordello.
A pillow. But one only whores toward what causes poetry
Their voices high
Their pricks stiff
As they meet us.
And this is rhetoric. The warning mine
Not theirs.
Words-
 worth
Nods
He heap good
Gray poet
English department in his skull.
And the sea changes
Despite the poet it is next to
The waves beat.
In his skull. Love pops
Crab shells and sand dollars
This you lose if you don't sea it. The
Crash.
Pope, Pope, Pope of the evening
Beautiful Pope. Help
Me as sheer ghost. I
Would like to write a poem as long as the hat of my nephew, as
 wide as is spoiled by writing
Crash
Those waves
Only in one skull

Skill at this is pop. Goes the weasel
(All of them weasels alone, seeking the same things)
On the beach
With the tide sweeping up
The whole sand like a carpet
And throwing it back. Ear full of sea foam. Whore Pound
Wondered Homer. Help
Us sleep as men not as barbarians.
Only in one skull
Those waves
They change
Patterns. The scattered ghosts of what happens
Is kelp. Whelp
Of bending and unbending
Ebbs and flows
Breaks and does not break. Dogs
The wetness in the sand
 Bitch
Howling all night. The bitch dog howls
At the absolute boundaries of sentences. The night they made
 the sea in
The second night. Stars bright as raspberries up there (they
 made the stars the first night) and the wind changes
Table of sand
As the moon begins to be created. No
Gnostrum will cure the ills that are on the face of it. No
 Babylonian poets employ charms
Each other's arms are not enough either when the sea shifts and
 changes
The flight of seagulls here. The pebbles there. Chickens of some
 hen.
Men curse it. For the torments it brings their boats, their rafts,
 their canoes, their reasons for existence. Their sight of the
 sea on their boats. Their child.
Chill-dren of the skull. Chilled beyond recognition. Pray for us
 who are living on the sand.
Aphrodite
 born of waters and of sea weeds
Under an island. Grave
Mother
Pray for us.

May, 1961

Intermissions

INTERMISSION I

"The movement of the earth brings harms and fears.
Men wonder what it is and what it meant."

Donne

In the next line

Contrasts this with "the celestial movement of the spheres."
Rhyme soothes. And in a book I read in college fifteen years
ago it said that this was an attack on the Copernican theory
and a spidery hand had penciled in the margin
"Earthquake."

Where is the poet? A-keeping the sheep
A-keeping the celestial movement of the spheres in a long,
boring procession
A-center of gravity
A-(while the earthquakes of happiness go on inside and outside
his body and the stars in their courses stop to notice)
Sleep.

INTERMISSION II

The Wizards of Oz have all gone kook
There are no unidentified flying objects. The
Moon may not be made of green cheese but my heart is. Across
the Deadly Desert We found a champion. The poem
Which does not last as long as a single hand touches.
Morning comes. And the signs of life
(My morning had a telegraph key at here)
Are less vivid. There is a long trail in the back country. Choose
Carefully your victim.
Around the campsite we argued who would choose the fire
I left in a huff with your hand
Naked.

INTERMISSION III

Stay there on the edge of no cliff. With no conceivable future
but progress—long, flat mesa-country. A few sheep you will
hold for the rest of your life. Rimbaud's lover
Who had tears fall on his heart or some sweet message.
Dare he
Write poetry
Who has no taste of acid on his tongue
Who carries his dreams on his back like a packet?
Ghosts of other poets send him shame
He will be alive (as they are dead)
At the final picking.