

THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

# LEONARD COHEN



'The last word in love and despair' *OBSERVER*

# THE FLAME

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## FOREWORD

This volume contains my father's final efforts as a poet. I wish he had seen it to completion—not because it would have been a better book in his hands, more realized and more generous and more shapely, or because it would have more closely resembled him and the form he had in mind for this offering to his readers, but because it was what he was staying alive to do, his sole breathing purpose at the end. In the difficult period in which he was composing it, he would send “do not disturb” e-mails to the few of us who would regularly drop by. He renewed his commitment to rigorous meditation so as to focus his mind through the acute pain of multiple compression fractures and the weakening of his body. He often remarked to me that, through all the strategies of art and living that he had employed during his rich and complicated life, he wished that he had more completely stayed steadfast to the recognition that writing was his only solace, his truest purpose.

My father, before he was anything else, was a poet. He regarded this vocation, as he records in the notebooks, as some “mission from G-d.” (The hyphen indicated his reverence to the deity; his reluctance to write out the divine name, even in English, is an old Jewish custom and is further evidence of the fidelity that he mixed with his freedom.) “Religion, teachers, women, drugs, the road, fame, money ... nothing gets me high and offers relief from the suffering like blackening pages, writing.” This statement of purpose was also a statement of regret: he offered his literary consecration as an explanation for what he felt was poor fatherhood, failed relationships, and inattention to his finances and health. I am reminded of one of his lesser-known songs (and one of my favorites): “I came so far for beauty, I left so much behind.” But not far enough, apparently: in his view he hadn't left enough. And this book, he knew, was to be his last offering.

As a kid, when I would ask my dad for money to buy sweets at the corner store, he'd often tell me to search the pockets of his blazer for loose bills or change. Invariably, I would find a notebook while going through his pockets. Later in life, when I would ask him if he had a lighter or matches, I would open drawers and find pads of paper and notebooks. Once, when I asked him if he had any tequila, I was directed to the freezer, where I found a frosty, misplaced notebook. Indeed, to know my father was (among many other wondrous things) to know a man with papers, notebooks, and cocktail

napkins—a distinguished handwriting on each—scattered (neatly) everywhere. They came from nightstands in hotels, or from 99-cent stores; the ones that were gilded, leather-bound, fancy, or otherwise had a look of importance were never used. My father preferred humble vessels. By the early 1990s, there were storage lockers filled with boxes of his notebooks, notebooks containing a life of dedication to the thing that most defined the man. Writing was his reason for being. It was the fire he was tending to, the most significant flame he fueled. It was never extinguished.

There are many themes and words that repeat throughout my father's work: frozen, broken, naked, fire, and flame. On the back of the first album cover are (as he put it in a later song) the "flames that follow Joan of Arc." "Who by fire?" he famously asked, in a song about fate that wickedly made use of a Jewish prayer. "I lit a thin green candle to make you jealous of me." That candle was only the first of many kindlings. There are fires and flames, for creation and destruction, for heat and light, for desire and consummation, throughout his work. He lit the flames and he tended to them diligently. He studied and recorded their consequences. He was stimulated by their danger—he often spoke of other people's art as not having enough "danger," and he praised the "excitement of a thought that was in flames."

This fiery preoccupation lasted until the very end. "You want it darker, we kill the flame," he intoned on his last album, his parting album. He died on November 7, 2016. It feels darker now, but the flame was not killed. Each page of paper that he blackened was lasting evidence of a burning soul.

—Adam Cohen, February 2018

## EDITORIAL NOTE

In the last months of his life, despite severe physical limitations, Leonard Cohen made selections for what would be his final volume of poems. *The Flame* presents this work in a format that his editors, Professors Robert Faggen and Alexandra Pleshoyano, and his longtime Canadian publisher believe reflects Leonard's intentions, based on the manuscript that he compiled, and using stylistic choices he made for previous books as a guide. Robert Faggen began the project working closely with Leonard, and Alexandra Pleshoyano joined to assist with completion of the editing in April 2017. Adam Cohen, Leonard's son, suggested the title.

Leonard provided clear instructions for the organization of the book, which was to contain written work and a generous sampling of his drawings and self-portraits. He envisioned three sections. The first section contains sixty-three poems that he had carefully selected, chosen from a trove of unpublished work that spans decades. Leonard was known to work on his poems for many years—sometimes many decades—before they were published; he considered these sixty-three poems completed works.

The second section contains the poems that became lyrics from his last four albums. All the lyrics for Leonard's songs begin as poems, and thus they can be appreciated as poems in their own right more than those of most songwriters. Notably, Leonard has published some of his lyrics as poems in the *New Yorker* prior to release of the album on which the song containing the lyrics appears. This was true most recently for "Steer Your Way," and previously for "A Street," "Almost Like the Blues," and "Going Home." In presenting the lyrics of Anjani Thomas's album *Blue Alert* (2006), produced by Leonard, and Leonard's *Old Ideas* (2012), *Popular Problems* (2014), and *You Want It Darker* (2016), we have followed the formatting which Leonard used in his book of selected poems and songs, *Stranger Music* (1993), which featured many lyrics. Careful readers will note differences between how these poems appear in *The Flame* and how the lyrics appear in the lyrics accompanying the albums.

The third section of the book presents a selection of entries from Leonard's notebooks, which he kept on a daily basis from his teenage years up until the last day of his life. Robert Faggen supervised the transcription of more than three thousand pages of notebooks that span six decades. Though Leonard participated in the selection of notebook entries for *The*

*Flame*, he did not specify a final order. It would be challenging—if not impossible—to proceed chronologically because Leonard would often work in the same notebooks over many years with various coloured inks showing the different entries. Leonard numbered the notebooks in a system that we do not understand. That said, we chose to follow the numerical order of the notebooks even if these are apparently not always chronological. These notebook selections include a variety of stanzas and lines—what Leonard once called “scraps”—and readers familiar with Leonard’s work will often see entries that appear to be working drafts of poems and lyrics. No attempt has been made to form a definitive narrative between these notebooks, and the entries have been reproduced here as closely as possible to the way they appear in the notebooks themselves, with no attempts made to change punctuation or line breaks. In transcribing the notebook entries, we followed certain conventions, and the following symbols are used in listing variants: {} indicates a word or phrase written above or below the line; [?] indicates an illegible word or phrase; and \*\*\* indicates a break between notebook entries.

In addition to these three sections of the book, Leonard wished to publish his acceptance speech for the Prince of Asturias Award, given in Spain on October 21, 2011. Elsewhere we are including—courtesy of Leonard’s friend and colleague Peter Scott—one of Leonard’s last e-mail exchanges, written less than twenty-four hours before his passing.

Leonard had suggested that some of his self-portraits and drawings be included, a practice that he began in *Book of Longing* (2006). Since Leonard did not have the chance to make these selections, Alexandra Pleshoyano chose nearly seventy self-portraits from more than 370 that he created, along with twenty-four drawings from his artwork. Leonard also agreed that we could reproduce some of the notebook pages to illustrate the book; twenty such selections are included here.

Finally, a few notes on individual poems. The poem “Full Employment” is essentially a longer version of the poem “G-d Wants His Song.” The similarity between the poem “The Lucky Night” and the poem “Drank a Lot” is also worth noting. The poem “Undertow” was released as a song on Leonard’s album *Dear Heather* (2004). The poem “Never Gave Nobody Trouble” was also released as a song on Leonard’s live album *Can’t Forget: A Souvenir of the Grand Tour* (2015). The poems “A Street” and “Thanks for the Dance” are presented in slightly different versions as lyrics in the

second part of the book. Those familiar with the *Leonard Cohen Files* website, hosted by Jarkko Arjatsalo, will recognize a few poems, self-portraits, and drawings, which had been posted there with Leonard's permission.

Robert Faggen and Alexandra Pleshoyano  
July 2018



# POEMS

## **HAPPENS TO THE HEART**

I was always working steady  
But I never called it art  
I was funding my depression  
Meeting Jesus reading Marx  
Sure it failed my little fire  
But it's bright the dying spark  
Go tell the young messiah  
What happens to the heart  
There's a mist of summer kisses  
Where I tried to double-park  
The rivalry was vicious  
And the women were in charge  
It was nothing, it was business  
But it left an ugly mark  
So I've come here to revisit  
What happens to the heart  
I was selling holy trinkets  
I was dressing kind of sharp  
Had a pussy in the kitchen  
And a panther in the yard  
In the prison of the gifted  
I was friendly with the guard  
So I never had to witness  
What happens to the heart  
I should have seen it coming  
You could say I wrote the chart  
Just to look at her was trouble  
It was trouble from the start  
Sure we played a stunning couple  
But I never liked the part  
It ain't pretty, it ain't subtle  
What happens to the heart  
Now the angel's got a fiddle  
And the devil's got a harp  
Every soul is like a minnow

Every mind is like a shark  
I've opened every window  
But the house, the house is dark  
Just say Uncle, then it's simple  
What happens to the heart  
I was always working steady  
But I never called it art  
The slaves were there already  
The singers chained and charred  
Now the arc of justice bending  
And the injured soon to march  
I lost my job defending  
What happens to the heart  
I studied with this beggar  
He was filthy he was scarred  
By the claws of many women  
He had failed to disregard  
No fable here no lesson  
No singing meadowlark  
Just a filthy beggar blessing  
What happens to the heart  
I was always working steady  
But I never called it art  
I could lift, but nothing heavy  
Almost lost my union card  
I was handy with a rifle  
My father's .303  
We fought for something final  
Not the right to disagree  
*Sure it failed my little fire*  
*But it's bright the dying spark*  
*Go tell the young messiah*  
What happens to the heart  
*June 24, 2016*

failed  
portrait



## **I DO**

I do, I love you Mary  
More than I can say  
Cuz if I ever said it  
They'd take us both away  
They'd lock us up for nothing  
And throw away the key  
The world don't like us Mary  
They're on to you and me  
We got a minute Mary  
Before they pull the plug  
50 seconds maybe  
You know that's not enough  
30 seconds baby  
Is all we got to love  
And if they catch us laughing  
They gonna rough us up  
I do, I love you Mary  
More than I can say  
Cuz if I ever said it  
They'd take us both away  
They'd lock us up for nothing  
And throw away the key  
The world don't like us Mary  
They're on to you and me



## LAMBCHOPS

thinking of those lambchops  
at Moishe's the other night  
we all taste good to one another  
most bodies are good to eat  
even reptiles and insects  
even the poisonous lutefisk of Norway  
buried in the dirt a million years before serving  
and the poisonous blowfish of Japan  
can be prepared  
    to insure reasonable risks  
at the table  
if the crazy god did not want us to eat one another  
why make our flesh so sweet  
I heard it on the radio  
a happy rabbit at the rabbit farm  
saying to the animal psychic  
don't be sad  
it's lovely here  
they're so good to us  
we're not the only ones  
said the rabbit  
    comforting her  
everyone gets eaten  
as the rabbit said  
to the animal psychic  
2006

9:22 PM

how the  
pearls  
are made

the oyster  
is not asked

the  
painful  
peaceful  
irritation

the grain of  
sand is not  
asked

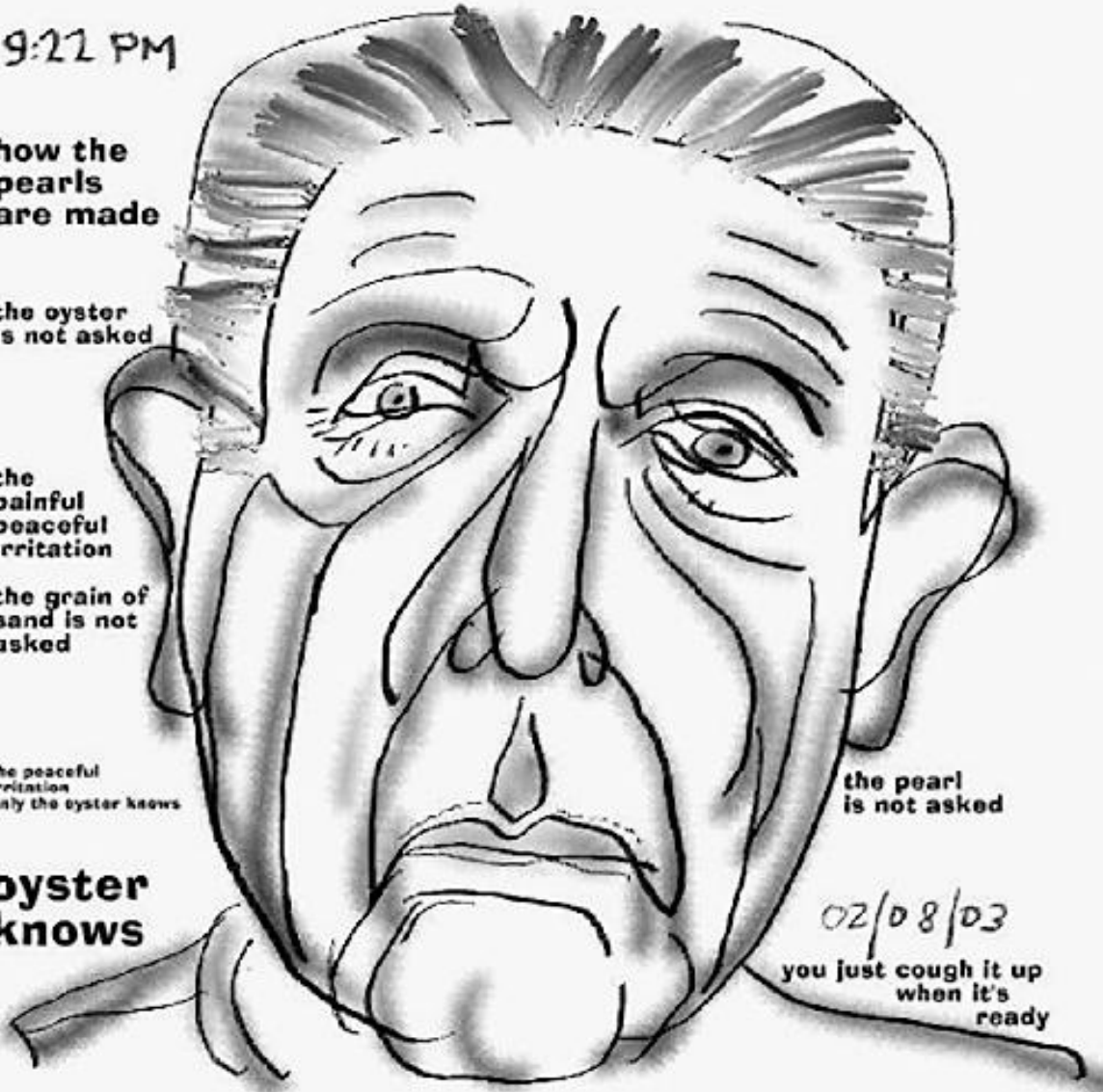
the peaceful  
irritation  
only the oyster knows

**oyster  
knows**

the pearl  
is not asked

02/08/03

you just cough it up  
when it's  
ready





## **NO TIME TO CHANGE**

No time to change  
The backward look  
It's much too late  
My gentle book  
Too late to make  
The men ashamed  
For what they do  
With naked flames  
Too late to fall  
Upon my sword  
I have no sword  
It's 2005  
How dare I care  
What's on my plate  
O gentle book  
You're much too late  
You missed the point  
Of poetry  
It's all about them  
Not about me

careless is the way

to go



## **I DIDN'T KNOW**

I knew that I was weak  
I knew that you were strong  
I did not dare to kneel  
Where I did not belong  
And if I meant to touch  
Your beauty with my hand  
Then come the boils and blood  
Which I would understand  
You tore your knees apart  
The loneliness revealed  
That drew this unborn heart  
From chains that would not yield  
But weakened by your exercise  
You fell against my soul  
The stricken soul the mind denies  
Until you make it whole  
So I can love your beauty now  
Though seeming from afar  
Until my neutral world allow  
How intimate you are  
Sometimes it gets so lonely  
I don't know what to do  
I'd trade my stash of boredom  
For a little hit of you  
I didn't know  
I didn't know  
I didn't know  
How much you needed me



## I CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE

O apple of the world  
we weren't married on the surface  
we were married at the core  
I can't take it anymore  
surely there must be  
a limit for the rich  
and a hope unto the poor  
I can't take it anymore  
and the lies that they tell  
about G-d  
as if they owned the store  
I can't take it anymore



## UNDERTOW

I set out one night  
When the tide was low  
There were signs in the sky  
But I did not know  
I'd be caught in the grip  
Of the undertow  
And ditched on a beach  
Where the sea hates to go  
With a child in my arms  
And a chill in my soul  
And my heart the shape  
Of a begging bowl



## ON RARE OCCASIONS

On rare occasions  
the power was given me  
to send waves of emotion  
through the world.

These were impersonal events,  
over which I had no control.  
I climbed on the outdoor stage  
as the sun was going down  
behind the Tower of Toledo  
and the people did not let me go  
until the middle of the night.

All of us,  
the musicians, the audience,  
were dissolved in gratitude.  
There was nothing but  
the starry darkness,  
the smell of fresh cut hay,  
and a hand of wind caressing  
every single forehead.

I don't even remember the music.  
A wide unison whispering arose  
which I didn't understand.

When I left the stage  
I asked the promoter  
what they were saying.

He said they were chanting:  
*to-re-ro, to-re-ro*

A young woman drove me back to the hotel,  
a flower of the race.

All the windows were rolled down.  
It was a ride free from error.  
I could not feel the road  
or the pull of destination.

We didn't speak  
and there was no question of her

entering the lobby,  
or climbing to my room.  
Only recently  
I remembered that drive of long ago,  
and since then,  
I need to be weightless  
But I never am.



We do not bless  
we convey  
the blessings



ten to five  
in the morning

June 20, 2013

## MY LAWYER

My lawyer tells me not to worry  
Says that junk has killed the revolution  
Leads me to the penthouse window  
Tells me of his plan  
To counterfeit the moon  
1978



## **I CAN'T BREAK THE CODE**

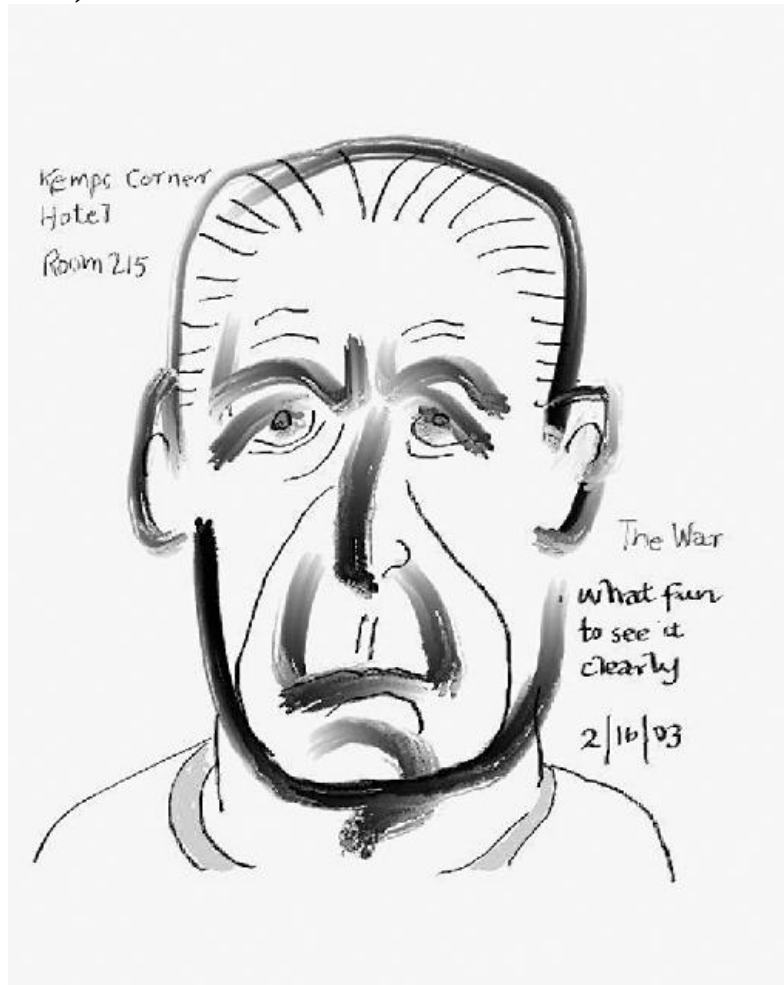
I can't break the code  
Of our frozen love  
It's too late to know  
What the password was  
I reach for the past  
Keep coming up short  
And everything feels  
Like a last resort  
Tho' we've called it quits  
And there's nothing left  
Still I hear my lips  
Make these promises  
Though we've squandered the truth  
And there's little left  
We can still sweep the room  
We can still make the bed  
When the world is false  
I won't say it's true  
When the darkness calls  
I will go with you  
In a time of shame  
In the great Alarm  
When they call your name  
We'll go arm in arm



When she is not calling you

## I'M LOOKING AT THE FLAG

I'm looking at the flag  
My hand against my heart  
If only we could win  
(One of) these wars we like to start



**THE LUCKY NIGHT!!!! SUNDAY MARCH 7, 2004**

Let's say that on that lucky night  
I found my house in order  
and I could slip away unseen  
tho' burning with desire  
Escaping down a secret stair  
I cross into the forest  
the night is dark but I am safe—  
my house at last in order  
But luck or not, I do it right  
and no one sees me leaving  
hidden, blind and secret night—  
my heart the only beacon  
But O that beacon lights my way  
more surely than the sun,  
and She is waiting for me there—  
of all and all, the only One  
And then the night commands me  
to enter in Her side  
and be as Adam is to Eve  
before they need divide  
So I can show Her what's been kept  
for Her and Her alone—  
a secret place that Love had left  
before the world was born  
Her nipples underneath My hand  
Her fingers in My hair—  
a forest crying from the dead  
and fragrance everywhere  
And from the wall a grazing wind  
weightless and serene  
wounds Me as I part Her lips  
and wounds Us in between  
And fastened here, surrendered to  
My Lover and My Lover,  
We spread and drown as lilies do—

forever and forever



## **HE SAYS HE WANTS TO KILL US**

he says he wants to kill us  
he says it very often  
just let him know you love him  
his attitude will soften  
let's wait a little while  
let's wait a little longer  
the enemy is gaining strength  
let's wait until he's stronger





## **ROSHI SAID**

1.

Roshi said:

Jikan san, there's something I want you to know

yes, Roshi

you are the worst student I've ever had

2.

I disappeared for ten years.

When I came back to Los Angeles

Roshi invited me for dinner.

After dinner Roshi wanted to see me alone.

Roshi said:

When you left half of me died.

I said:

I don't believe you.

Roshi said:

Good answer.

3.

During Roshi's sex scandal (he was 105)

my association with Roshi

was often mentioned in the newspaper reports.

Roshi said:

I give you lots of trouble.

I said:

Yes, Roshi, you give me lots of trouble.

Roshi said:

I should die.

I said:

It won't help.

Roshi didn't laugh.

## **IF THERE WERE NO PAINTINGS**

If there were no paintings in the world,  
Mine would be very important.  
Same with my songs.  
Since this is not the case, let us make haste to get in line,  
Well towards the back.  
Sometimes I would see a woman in a magazine  
Humiliated in the technicolour glare.  
I would try to establish her  
In happier circumstances.  
Sometimes a man.  
Sometimes living persons sat for me.  
May I say to them again:  
Thank you for coming to my room.  
I also loved the objects on the table  
Such as candlesticks and ashtrays  
And the table itself.  
From a mirror on my desk  
In the very early morning  
I copied down  
Hundreds of self-portraits  
Which reminded me of one thing or another.  
The Curator has called this exhibition  
Drawn to Words.  
I call my work  
Acceptable Decorations.

**JAN 15, 2007 SICILY CAFÉ**

And now that I kneel  
At the edge of my years  
Let me fall through the mirror of love  
And the things that I know  
Let them drift like the snow  
Let me dwell in the light that's above  
In the radiant light  
Where there's day and there's night  
And truth is the widest embrace  
That includes what is lost  
Includes what is found  
What you write and what you erase  
*And when will my heart break open*  
*When will my love be born*  
*In this scheme of unspeakable suffering*  
*Where even the blueprint is torn*

Our suntans are not enough

We need  
more  
love

We  
don't  
have  
enough  
love

We need  
your  
love



## DEPRIVED

Deprived of Sahara's company  
I looked around the room  
and spied her purse  
at the foot of the chair  
I went through every item  
in a little notebook  
written with an eyebrow pencil  
I found the very poem  
which you are reading now—  
the writing smudged  
but word for word:  
*"Straighten up, little warrior,"* it ended  
*"It's not as though you  
wasted your life  
by loving me."*

no gifts  
this morning  
no free samples  
doesn't even  
look like me  
want to write  
a "love song"  
for the tread-  
mill  
and the rowing  
machine

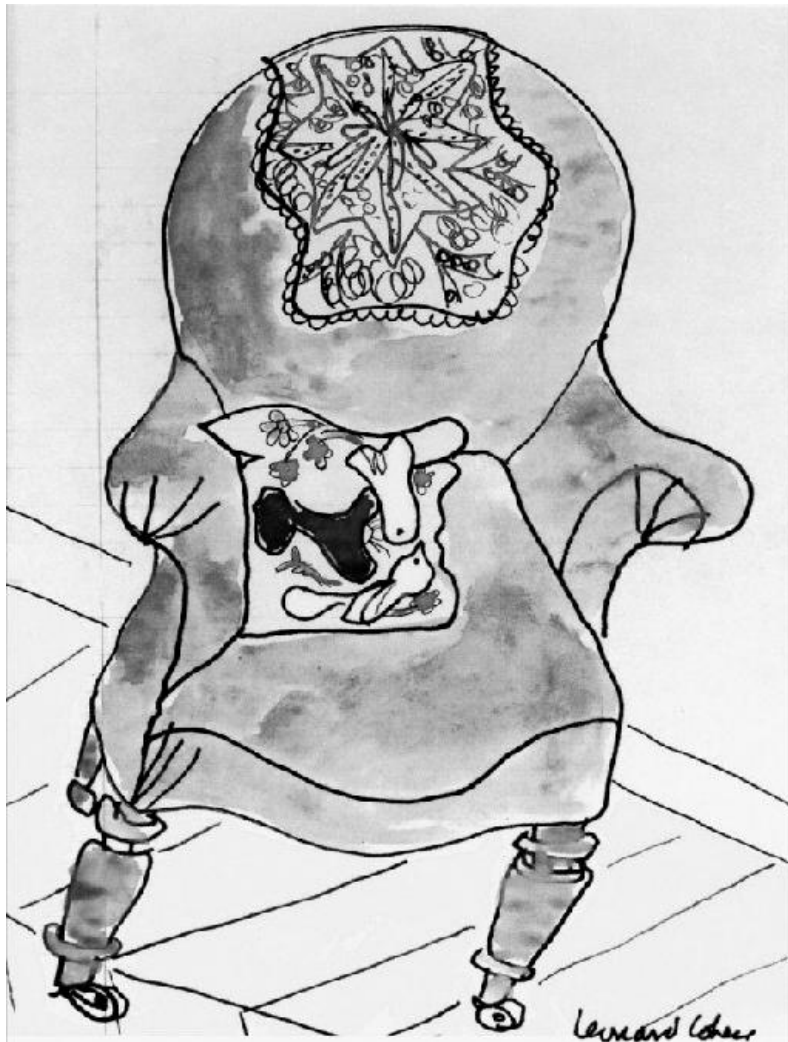
baby baby what you do to me  
baby baby what you do to me



1/28/03

## **DIMENSIONS OF LOVE**

Sometimes I hear you stop abruptly  
and change your direction  
and start towards me  
I hear it as a kind of rustling  
My heart leaps up to greet you  
to greet you in the air  
to take you back home  
to resume our long life together  
Then I remember  
the uncrossable dimensions of love  
and I prepare myself  
for the consequences of memory  
and longing  
but memory with its list of years  
turns gracefully aside  
and longing kneels down  
like a calf  
in the straw of amazement  
and for the moment that it takes  
to keep your death alive  
we are refreshed  
in each other's timeless company





## **FULL EMPLOYMENT**

**For V.R. (1978–2000)**

Vanessa called  
all the way from Toronto.  
She said that I  
could count on her  
if ever I was down and out.  
After I hung up the phone  
I played  
the six-holed wooden flute  
she gave me  
on the occasion of our parting.  
I figured out the fingering  
and I played it better  
than I had ever done.  
Tears came out of my eyes  
because of the sound,  
and the recollection  
of her extraordinary beauty  
which no one could avoid,  
and because she said  
a song had gone missing,  
and I had been selected,  
out of all the unemployed,  
I had been selected  
to recover it.

*I see you in windows  
that open so wide  
there's nothing beyond them,  
and nothing inside.*

*You take off your sandals  
you shake out your hair,  
your beauty dismantled  
and worn everywhere.*

*The story's been written.  
The letter's been sealed.*

*You gave me a lily,  
but now it's a field.*



you kick off your sandals  
you shake out your hair  
it's torn where you're dancing  
it's torn every where

it's torn on the right  
and it's torn on the left

and it's torn in the centre  
which few can accept



come gather the pieces  
all scattered and lost  
the lie in what's holy  
the light in what's not



Montreal

## **I HEAR THE TRAFFIC**

I hear the traffic  
On the Main  
Love my coffee  
Love Charmaine  
Another day  
To rise and fall  
Make a buck  
Start and stall  
I love Charmaine  
Her heart is kind  
I'm still a fool  
She doesn't mind  
Her eyes are grey  
But when I'm mean  
Her eyes display  
A shade of green  
*February 26, 2000*



## **HOMAGE TO MORENTE**

When I listen to Morente  
I know what I must do  
When I listen to Morente  
I don't know what to do  
When I listen to Morente  
My life becomes too shallow  
To swim in  
I dig but I can't go down  
I reach but I can't go up  
When I listen to Morente  
I know I have betrayed  
The solemn promise  
The solemn promise that justified  
All my betrayals  
When I listen to Morente  
The alibi of my throat is rejected  
The alibi of my gift is overthrown  
With six impeccable threads of scorn  
My guitar turns away from me  
And I want to give everything back  
But no one wants it  
When I listen to Morente  
I surrender to my feeble imagination  
Which itself has surrendered long ago  
To the Great Voice of the Taverns  
And the Families and the Hills  
When I listen to Morente  
I am humbled but not humiliated  
I go with him now  
Out of the darkness of what I could not be  
Into the darkness of the song I could not sing  
The song that hungers for an earthquake  
The song that hungers for religion  
Then I hear him begin the great ascent  
I hear Morente's Aleluya

His thundering murderous serene Aleluya  
I hear it rise to the impossible occasion  
And pierce the ordinary ambiguities  
With the sharpened horns  
Of his own inconceivable ambiguities  
His cry his perfect word pitched against  
The baffled contradictions of the heart  
Wrestling them embracing them  
Strangling them with a jealous conjugal desperation  
And he hangs it there beneath his voice  
Above all the broken ceilings  
The disappointed sky  
His voice escaped from the mud of hope  
And the blood of the throat  
And the strict training of the cante  
And he hangs it there  
The Kingdom of Morente  
Which he does not enter as Morente  
But as the great impersonal anointed Voice  
Of the Taverns and the Families and the Hills  
And he takes us there  
By the bleeding finger by the throat by the soiled lapel  
Takes what's left of us  
To his Kingdom  
the Kingdom of Poverty he himself established  
The only place we want to be  
Or ever wanted to be  
Where we can breathe the childhood air  
The unborn air  
Where we are nobody at last  
Where we cannot go without him  
Long live Enrique Morente  
Long live the Family Morente  
The dancers the singers  
The disciples of the Taverns and the Families and the Hills





# the dazed middle self

the inner self is clear and ambleless  
the outer self is confident and highly functional  
I show you the dazed middle self - the DMS

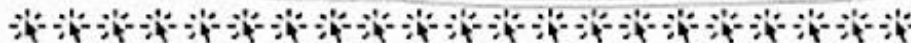


2/6/03

Room 215

Hotel

Kemps Corner



## **HOMAGE TO ROSENGARTEN**

If you have a wall, a bare wall in your house  
All the walls in my house are bare  
And I love the bare walls  
The only thing I would put up  
On one of my beloved bare walls  
Not beloved  
It doesn't need beloved  
It doesn't need an adjective  
The wall is fine as it is  
But I would put up a Rosengarten  
A Rosengarten produced with a wooden  
Comb and black ink  
Going nowhere forever in a swirl of indelible parallel curves  
Is it a letter or a woman?  
It is another perfect startling black letter in a word  
Among hundreds of words  
In a continuing Rosengarten epic that celebrates  
Mankind's holy and relentless desire for itself  
Your heart is the same as the white paper  
Upon which the woman is so carefully splashed  
Both need her in order to become significant  
If you had a vast white wall  
And if you hung hundreds of his commanding women in a row  
You would not have to study the calligraphy  
For very long  
To understand and to forgive yourself  
For falling in love so often  
And for championing our mysterious and radiant race  
And it would silence whatever foolish argument  
About beauty  
You had been tricked into embracing  
And it is the same with a piece of furniture  
I have one or two wooden tables  
That I bought for a song long ago  
I've polished them for years

And I don't want anything on them  
Except elbows a plate and a glass  
But I have a Rosengarten on one of them  
Because a Rosengarten celebrates the wood it stands on  
Because it is made with the same mind  
That made the table a hundred years ago  
The mind of honour and skill and modesty  
That patiently manifests an artifact  
Of unutterable usefulness  
You would have to live with a Rosengarten  
To know how useful it is  
As useful as a table or a wall  
To serve your helplessness  
To locate your "wrecked life" in a room  
You have forgotten to explore  
Just as there is no extra word in a great poem  
In a Rosengarten  
There is no extra volume  
There is no gesture, no conceit, no winking eye  
Soliciting a compliment  
It is as it is  
Respectful of the tradition from which it arises  
But independent of it too  
It stands there surrounded by the room  
Establishing second after second  
New alarming original friendships with the air and the light  
Which the room so deeply needs  
To irrigate and refresh your struggle  
And if you have a garden or an acre  
And you want it to flourish  
Place a number of Rosengartens here and there  
His great commanding Asherahs  
The streamlined female presence  
Which men and women sought and worshipped  
In the "high places" of the Bible  
And still do today  
As we walk hand in hand

Through the bewildering and shabby insignificance  
Of our official corrected public and private daily lives  
And here She is:  
Fully born from herself  
Urgent and accommodating  
A thrust of polished energy that does not cut the air  
But softens it and ignites it softly  
Offered up on a simple stone staircase  
Which in itself is a masterpiece of escalating harmony  
Offered to the mystery of beauty  
Which no one dare explain  
Offered up for the secret reasons  
Which are known to all  
Offered up in the usual conditions of distress  
And the deep inner certainty of perfection  
And now your garden  
Does not need reminding

## **I'M ALWAYS THINKING OF A SONG**

I'm always thinking of a song  
For Anjani to sing  
It will be about our lives together  
It will be very light or very deep  
But nothing in between  
I will write the words  
And she will write the melody  
I won't be able to sing it  
Because it will climb too high  
She will sing it beautifully  
And I'll correct her singing  
And she'll correct my writing  
Until it is better than beautiful  
Then we'll listen to it  
Not often  
Not always together  
But now and then  
For the rest of our lives

## **ROSHI'S POEM**

Whenever I hear  
The edgeless sound  
In the deep night  
O Mother!  
I find you again.  
Whenever I stand  
Beneath the light  
Of the seamless sky  
O Father!  
I bow my head.  
The sun goes down  
Our shadows dissolve  
The pine trees darken  
O Darling!  
We must go home.  
*Tr. Leonard Cohen*

## **KANYE WEST IS NOT PICASSO**

Kanye West is not Picasso

I am Picasso

Kanye West is not Edison

I am Edison

I am Tesla

Jay-Z is not the Dylan of anything

I am the Dylan of anything

I am the Kanye West of Kanye West

The Kanye West

Of the great bogus shift of bullshit culture

From one boutique to another

I am Tesla

I am his coil

The coil that made electricity soft as a bed

I am the Kanye West Kanye West thinks he is

When he shoves your ass off the stage

I am the real Kanye West

I don't get around much anymore

I never have

I only come alive after a war

And we have not had it yet

*March 15, 2015*

## **OLD FRIENDS**

An old man tells his friend (over the telephone) that he is going to shule that evening. It is a broken-down shule in a hostile black neighbourhood in Los Angeles. There is never even half a minyan (ten men). The worshippers are old, the prayers are badly spoken, the place is draughty and full of shabbiness and lumbago. The old man is inviting his friend to laugh with him over the wreck of a failed spiritual adventure, an adventure in which both of them once cherished the highest hopes. But his friend does not laugh. His friend becomes Nachmanides, the Bodhidharma, and St. Paul all rolled into one religious accountant. "You should not have told me that you were going to shule. You lose all the merit you would have gained had you remained silent." What? Merit? Silence? Who is the old man talking to? That's rich. His friend is rebuking him for boasting about his piety, but he lets it go (sort of). After they say goodnight, the old man puts on his robes, which don't fit so well now that he's given up smoking. There is an almost full bottle of Prozac on his night-table. He bought the refill a couple of months ago, but almost immediately stopped taking the pill. It didn't work. Hardly anything works anymore. You can't even tell your friend (over the telephone) about your lumbago without getting a lecture. At least his dentist didn't reproach him when he went back last week. After two years' absence and a rotting mouth which everyone (dentist, assistant, himself) could smell when the scraping started. His dentist was an old man too. "Let's tackle this," was all he said. The old man ties the strings of his robe and puts on all the lights in the house (so he won't get robbed again). He drives into the war zone, locking his doors on the way, and



he parks in the courtyard of the zendo (it isn't really a shule). Eunice is there. She's been there for twenty-five years. "At my age," I heard her say the other night, something about how easily she catches cold now. Koyo is there. I forget his Christian name. The fingers of his right hand are swollen from a cat bite. Infected. He fumbles with the incense. Eunice sneezes and coughs and hacks. A police helicopter drowns out the chanting. The place is freezing. Just the three of us. The fluff is coming out of the cushion, just like the juice is coming out of this story, and I'm not pissed off at you anymore either, Steve. And what is more, old friend, you have a point. You have a point.

*1985*

Bodhidharma  
brought Zen  
to the West  
but I  
got rid of it

Sheraton Tel Aviv  
12<sup>th</sup> floor  
grey and white  
the windy sea



## **THE APPARENT TURBULENCE**

You were the last young woman  
to look at me that way  
When was it  
sometime between 9/11 and the tsunami  
You looked at my belt  
and then I looked down at my belt  
you were right  
it wasn't bad  
then we resumed our lives.  
I don't know about yours  
but mine is curiously peaceful  
behind the apparent turbulence  
of litigation and advancing age

## WATCHING THE NATURE CHANNEL

the boredom of God  
is heartbreaking  
fiddle fiddle fiddle



## **THE CREATURE**

the creature who says  
“me” and “mine”  
need not bend down in shame—  
along with lakes and mountains  
the ego is created  
and divine

## THE INDIAN GIRL

You're waiting. You've always been waiting. It's nothing new. You've waited whenever you wanted anything, and you were waiting when the kettle sang to the canary and the Indian girl let you make love to her secretly before she died in a car accident. You were waiting for your wife to become sweet, you were waiting for your body to become thin and muscular, and the girl from India, in her apartment on Mackay Street, she said, *Leonard, you've been waiting for me all afternoon, especially when we were all listening to the canary in your wife's kitchen, that's when it really got to you, the three of us standing in front of the cage, the kettle whistling and our great expectations for the canary, the song that was going to lift the three of us out of the afternoon, out of the winter—that's when the waiting was too much for you, that's when I understood how deeply and impersonally you desired me, and that's when I decided to invite you into my arms.* Supposing she said this to herself. And then I drove her home and she invited me up to her apartment and she did not resist my profound impersonal affection for her dark unknown person, and she saw how general, how neutral, how relentlessly impersonal was this man's aching for her—and she took me to the green Salvation Army couch, among the student furniture, she took me because she was going to die in two weeks in a car accident on the Laurentian highway, she took me in one of her last embraces, because she saw how simple I would be to comfort, and I was so grateful to be numbered among her last generous activities on this earth. And I went back to my wife, my young wife, the one who would never thaw, who would bear me children, who would hate me for one good reason or another all the days of her life, who would know a couple of my friends a little too well. We stood, the three of us, listening to the duet of the canary and the kettle, the steam clouding the windows of our kitchen on Esplanade, and the Montreal winter shutting everything down but the heart of hope. Mara was her name, and she came to visit us, as we made visits in those days, driving through the snow to meet someone new.

1980



## MARY FULL OF GRACE

You step out of the shower  
Oh so cool and clean  
Smelling like a flower  
From a field of green  
The world is burning Mary  
It's hollow dark and mean  
I love to hear you laugh  
It takes the world away  
I live to hear you laugh  
I don't even have to pray  
But now the world is coming back  
It's coming back to stay  
Stand beside me Mary  
We have no time to waste  
The water's not like water now  
It has a bitter taste  
Stand beside me Mary  
Mary full of grace  
I know you have to leave me  
The clock is ticking loud  
I know it's time to leave me  
The time has come around  
My heart has turned to weaponry  
That's why my head is bowed  
Stand beside me Mary  
We have no time to waste  
The animal is bleeding  
And the flower is disgraced  
Stand beside me Mary  
Mary full of grace





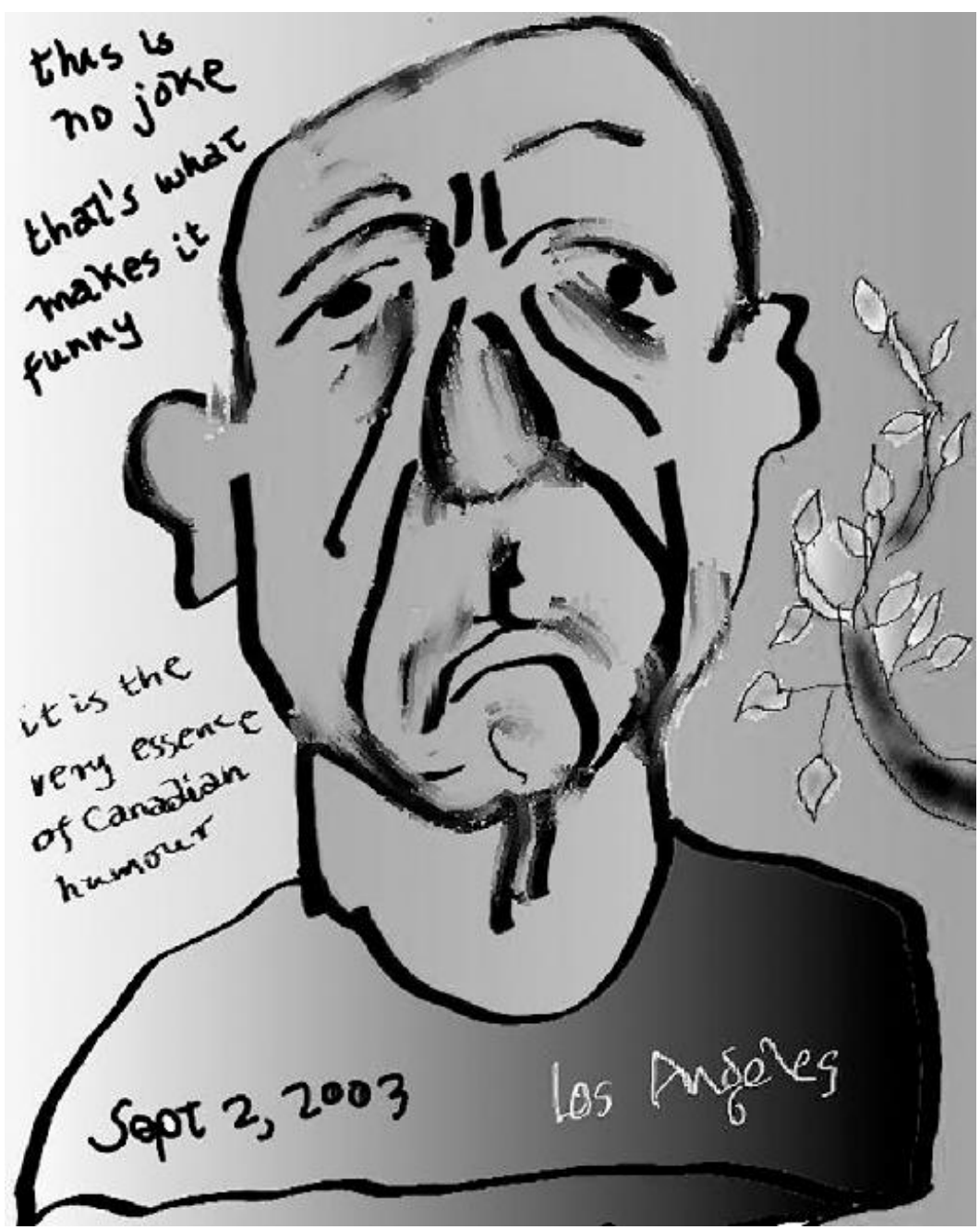
## THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

The *Los Angeles Times*  
is going to be read  
by a man named Carlo.  
He will die carrying his wife  
(who cannot use her legs)  
to the bathroom.  
I will sit in the sun  
writing about them.  
My dog will die,  
my hamster, my turtle  
my white rat, my tropical fish  
my Moroccan squirrel.  
My mother and father will die,  
and so will my friends Robert and Derek.  
Sheila will die  
in her new life without me.  
My high school teacher will die,  
Mr. Waring.  
Frank Scott will die,  
leaving a freer Canada behind him.  
Glenn Gould will die  
in the midst of his glory.  
Marshall McLuhan will die  
having altered several meanings.  
Milton Acorn will die  
just after putting out his cigar  
on my carpet.  
Lester B. Pearson will die  
wearing the bow tie of Winston Churchill.  
Bliss Carman will die  
before I learned about his loneliness.  
The Group of Seven will die  
having made some places famous  
where I used to camp,  
where I pitched my tent

and gutted fish  
in the loving sight of Anne of Carlyle.  
My brother-in-law,  
the most eminent of all Frequent Flyers,  
he will die a True Son of the Law  
and leave my sister 2 million miles.  
It doesn't matter  
that all these deaths occurred  
long before I prophesized them.  
History will overlook  
the tiny glitches in sequential time  
and concentrate  
rather  
on my relentless concern  
with matters mostly Canadian.

*Terrace of Medical Building, November 15, 1999*





this is  
no joke  
that's what  
makes it  
funny

it is the  
very essence  
of Canadian  
humour

Sept 2, 2003

Los Angeles

## **YOU WANT TO STRIKE BACK AND YOU CAN'T**

You want to strike back and you can't  
And you want to help but you can't  
And the gun won't shoot  
And the dynamite won't explode  
And the wind is blowing the other way  
And no one can hear you  
And death is everywhere  
And you're dying anyhow  
And you're tired of the war  
And you can't explain one more time  
You can't explain anymore  
And you're stuck behind your house  
Like an old rusted truck  
That will never haul another load  
And you're not leading your life  
You're leading someone else's life  
Someone you don't know or like  
And it's ending soon  
And it's too late to begin again  
Armed with what you know now  
And all your stupid charities  
Have armed the poor against you  
And you're not who you wanted to be  
Not remotely he or she  
How am I going to get out of this  
The untidy mess the untidiness  
Never to be clean again or free  
Soiled by gossip and publicity  
You're tired and it's over  
And you can't do any more  
That's what this silence  
That's what this song is for  
And you can't explain anymore  
And you can't dig in  
Because the surface is like steel

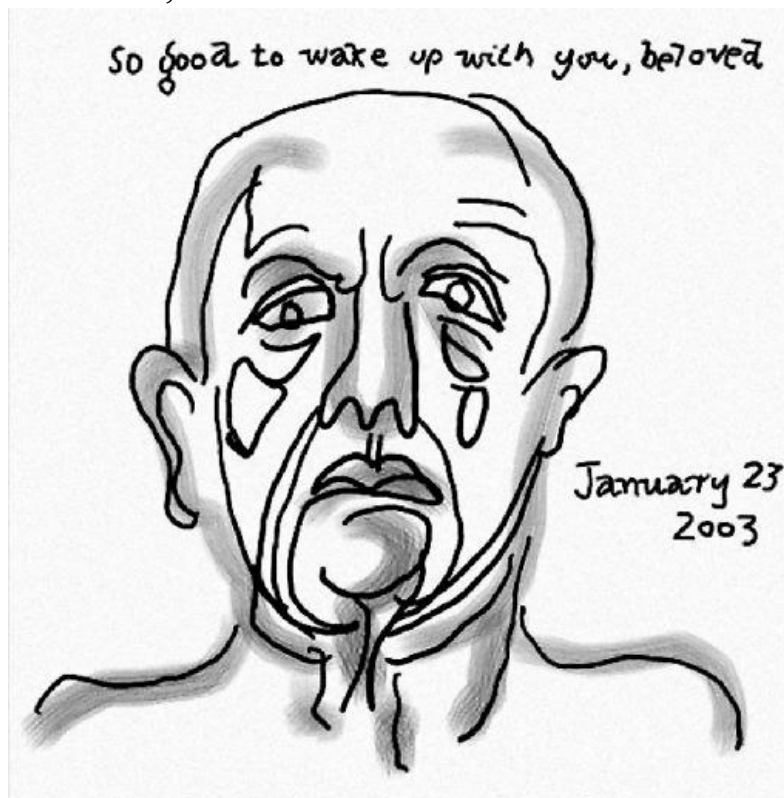
And all your fine emotions  
Your subtle insights  
Your famous understanding  
Evaporate into stunning  
(To you) irrelevance  
I don't remember when  
I wrote this  
It was long before 9/11



you  
can't  
emerge

## WHEN YOU WAKE UP

When you wake up into the panic  
and the tulips from Ralph's  
have almost had it,  
why don't you change the water  
and cut the stems,  
maybe find a vase a little taller  
to help them stand up straight?  
When you wake up into the panic  
and the Devil's almost got you  
to throw yourself off the cliffs of religion,  
why don't you lie down  
in front of the ferocious traffic  
of your daily life  
and get creamed by some of the details?  
*December 13, 1993*





## WHEN DESIRE RESTS

You know I'm looking at you  
you know what I'm thinking  
you know you're interested  
I am very skillful  
you will forget that I am old  
unless you want to remember it  
unless you want to see  
what happens to desire  
how free it becomes  
how shamelessly involved in love  
for every woman  
and her stockings.

When desire rests,  
it is signaled by two people  
faraway on a green blanket  
(or is it the flowers of moss);  
two people waving from a distance  
stretched out like things  
that have to dry  
with tender smiles on their  
little round faces;  
waving at desire  
as it rests in the foreground  
foothill-shaped, peaceful,  
devoted as a dog made of tears.

## WHAT IS COMING 2.16.03

what is coming  
ten million people  
in the street  
cannot stop  
what is coming  
the American Armed Forces  
cannot control  
the President  
of the United States  
and his counselors  
cannot conceive  
initiate  
command  
or direct  
everything  
you do  
or refrain from doing  
will bring us  
to the same place  
the place we don't know  
your anger against the war  
your horror of death  
your calm strategies  
your bold plans  
to rearrange  
the middle east  
to overthrow the dollar  
to establish  
the 4th Reich  
to live forever  
to silence the Jews  
to order the cosmos  
to tidy up your life  
to improve religion  
they count for nothing

you have no understanding  
of the consequences  
of what you do  
oh and one more thing  
you aren't going to like  
what comes after  
America

What is coming  
ten million people  
in the street  
cannot stop

What is coming  
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to tidy up your life  
to improve religion  
they count for nothing

you have no understanding  
of the consequences  
of what you do

oh and one more thing  
you aren't going to like  
what comes after

America

## **WHAT I DO**

It's not that I like  
to live in a hotel  
in a place like India  
and write about G-d  
and run after women  
It seems to be  
what I do

## SCHOOL DAYS

I headed the school  
I was the school head  
John was the arms  
Peggy was the asshole  
and Jennifer the toes.  
I loved the asshole best.  
In my striped football sweater  
and in my v-neck hockey shirt  
I was a sight.  
No wonder Peggy fell  
under my influence.  
Until the accident.  
Then I lost her.  
Flags wave and banners ripple.  
All is lost for the visiting team.  
There I am in a bad seat  
scowling at our victory.  
I cannot take my eyes off  
her little bouncing skirt.  
I'm talking about the cheerleader  
named Peggy.  
That was forty-seven years ago.  
The Past.  
I never think about The Past  
but sometimes  
The Past thinks about me  
and sits down  
ever so lightly on my face—  
And me and Peggy  
and John and Jennifer,  
our scarves in the wind,  
we're speeding  
in the family roadster  
to someone's house  
in Nantucket

and I can walk again.

With a great sense of relief  
(prompted by a study of the lower face)  
he begins to experience the sweet  
anonymity in the blessed order  
of all withering things



September 2003  
Los Angeles



## **THE FLOWERS HATE US**

the flowers hate us  
the animals pray for our death  
as soon as i found out  
i murdered my dog  
now i knew what they were up to  
the daisy the iris the rose  
why there was no peace among men  
why nothing worked  
there is no going back  
throw out your friend's bouquet  
kill the animals all of them  
but don't eat their meat  
now that i know what they're thinking  
their sex organs in the air  
their stinking fur  
and their tug at the heart  
what they would do to us if they won  
how great it will be without them  
just getting on with our short lives  
which are longer than theirs  
and until now, sadder  
the flowers hate us  
the animals pray for us to die  
as soon as i found out  
i murdered my dog  
They hate us  
They pray for us to die  
Wake up America  
Murder your dog



## **UNBIBLICAL**

I thought I'd get away  
But now I have to stay  
I think I'd better say:  
As usual  
It wasn't up to me  
I heard the stern decree  
I wasn't meant to be  
That beautiful  
Some people catch the bus  
They're luckier than us  
In spite of all the fuss  
They're credible  
They want to get on board  
They don't like to be ignored  
They're children of the lord  
They're terrible  
You've heard this all before  
I had some but they had more  
I was rotten to the core  
But merciful  
And that was my mistake  
I didn't kill the snake  
I gave the snake a break  
Unbiblical



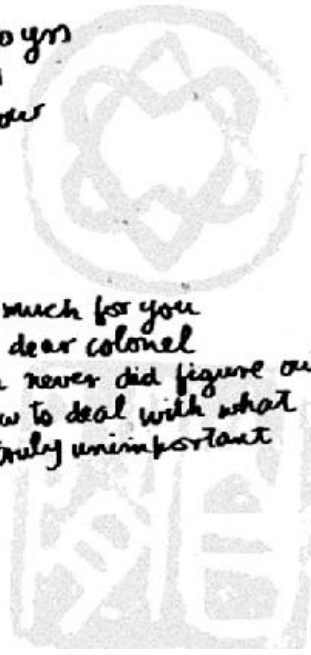
## **WINTER ON MOUNT BALDY**

It's winter on Mount Baldy  
The monks are shoveling snow  
It's swinging free, the Gateless Gate  
But no one seems to go  
It's cold and dark and dangerous  
And slippery as a lie  
Nobody wants to be here  
And me, I'd rather die  
All the food is second-hand  
And everyone complains  
The priceless shit of yesteryear  
Is frozen in the drains  
It's winter on Mount Baldy  
The monks are shoveling snow  
It's swinging free, the Gateless Gate  
But no one seems to go  
Forget about your purity  
Your blemishes and stains  
You want to climb Mount Baldy  
You're going to need your chains  
It's cold and dark and dangerous  
And slippery as a lie  
Nobody wants to be here  
Some say they'd rather die  
You had the Himalayas  
And the great Tibetan plains  
You want to take Mount Baldy  
You're going to need your chains  
*August 21, 2015*

this way is really the best way  
I'm sorry to say  
whatever you have in mind  
won't do anymore  
I base this on over 50 yrs  
of close observation  
this is the best way now  
this is comfortable  
this is home



As much for you  
my dear colonel  
you never did figure out  
how to deal with what  
is truly unimportant



## **DOESN'T MATTER**

it doesn't matter darling,  
it really doesn't matter,  
and i don't say  
it doesn't matter,  
in order to hurt you into feeling:  
that it DOES MATTER,  
that it REALLY DOES MATTER.  
not at all,  
not at all.  
i stand beside you  
in the midst of this vast enterprise  
of human activity and desire,  
deafened by the noise  
of my own heart,  
twisted by an appetite  
for justice and for peace,  
and i look at you,  
the one i tried to love,  
the one who tried to love me,  
and it comes to us  
from the place where we began,  
the place where we will end,  
a voice that includes  
your voice, and my voice,  
and we are  
gathered together,  
we are born together,  
and we die in each other's arms,  
and it is heard as a mighty voice,  
or a gentle voice,  
a whispered voice,  
or a thundered voice,  
above all,  
the voice that we most  
desperately

long to hear,  
it is the voice that can forgive us,  
and it says,  
it doesn't matter  
darling,  
it is the truth,  
the truth of all forgiving.  
listen now. listen from  
the wreck of your baffled love.  
it is the truth,  
the very truth  
of all forgiving.  
it doesn't matter darling.  
it really doesn't matter.



## GRATEFUL

The huge mauve jacaranda tree  
down the street on South Tremaine  
in full bloom

two stories high

It made me so happy

And then

the first cherries of the season  
at the Palisades Farmers Market

Sunday morning

“What a blessing!”

I exclaimed to Anjani

And then the samples on waxed paper  
of the banana cream cake  
and the coconut cream cake

I am not a lover of pastry  
but I recognized the genius of the baker  
and touched my hat to her

A slight chill in the air  
seemed to polish the sunlight  
and confer the status of beauty

to every object I beheld  
Faces bosoms fruits pickles green eggs  
newborn babies

in clever expensive harnesses

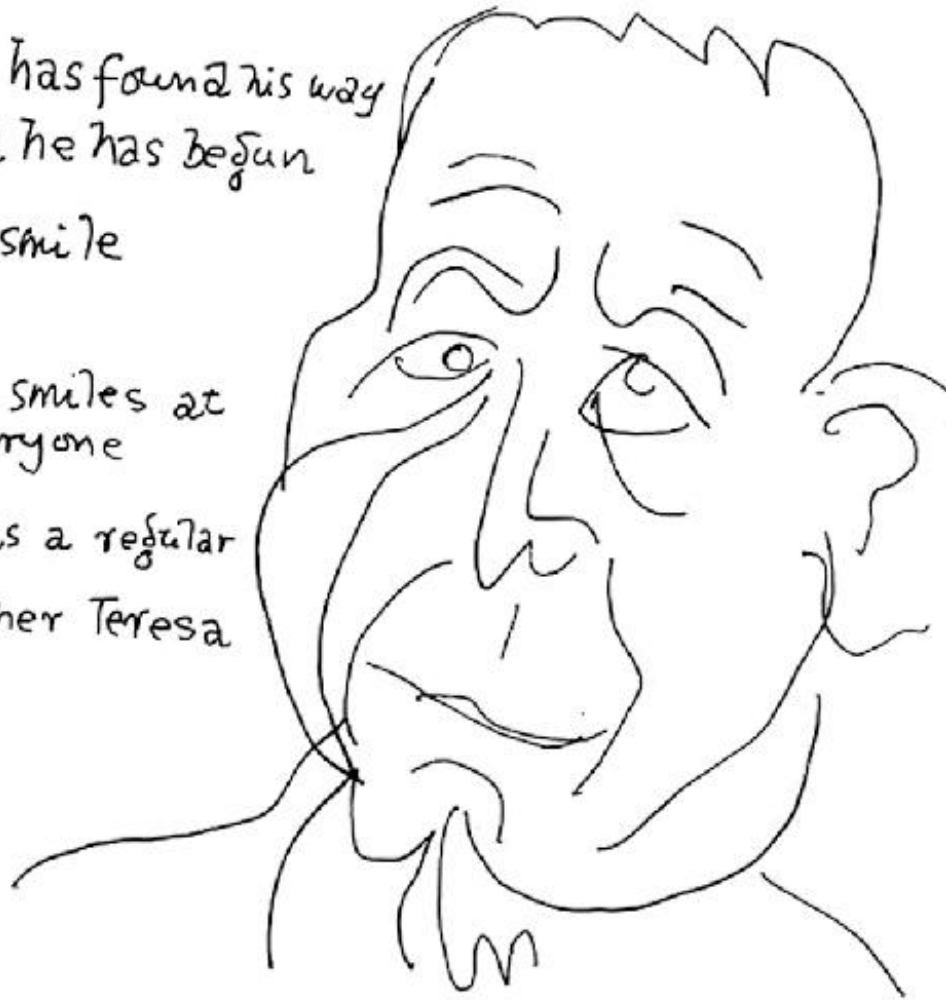
I am so grateful  
to my new anti-depressant

---

he has found his way  
and he has begun  
to smile

he smiles at  
everyone

he is a regular  
Father Teresa



## ANTIQUÉ SONG

Too old, too old to play the part,  
Too old, God only knows!  
I'll keep the little silver heart,  
The red and folded rose.  
And in the arms of someone strong  
You'll have what we had none.  
I'll finish up my winter song  
For you. It's almost done.  
*But oh! the kisses that we kissed,  
That swept me to the shore  
Of seas where hardly I exist,  
Except to kiss you more.*  
I have the little silver heart,  
The red and folded rose.  
The one you gave me at the start,  
The other at the close.  
He waited for you all night long.  
Go run to him, go run.  
I'll finish up my winter song,  
For you. It's almost done.

I spoke to  
you  
yesterday  
on my  
long  
walk



I spoke  
to you,  
belated

January 1, 2004

## **ELEVATOR MIRRORS**

My father had a mustache,  
But not his father or his brothers  
I am very tempted  
In the new hotels  
The elevators are often so dark  
The mirrors are useless  
(Like this one)  
I don't want to go anywhere  
I've been to the Acropolis (1959)  
I sat on the old stones  
And was photographed with a woman (1970)  
Who troubled my life  
From then until now (2008)  
Dying in reasonable circumstances  
Is mostly what I hope for  
But here I am on the road  
Far from reasonable circumstances  
There is a woman I like  
She is young and beautiful and kind  
And cannot sing  
But she wants to be a singer  
I used to keep a full picture of her  
Hidden on my laptop  
Then I thought:  
I can't do this again  
And I dragged it (reluctantly)  
To the little trash basket  
Which I did not empty for quite a while  
In the elevator  
Of the Manchester Malmaison Hotel  
I have to put on reading glasses  
To find the button for my floor  
The corridors are dark purple  
Lit with pinpoint lights  
Bass-heavy hip-hop

Dooming the generation  
From hidden speakers  
You squint to find your door  
(The entire enterprise  
Of travel and lodging  
Now pitched  
As a dangerous erotic adventure)  
I'm no one to say  
Who can or can't be a singer  
God knows my own credentials  
Were not extensive  
It was Good Fortune  
As success always is  
Period  
(A really lovely person  
I don't have to introduce  
To anyone at Sony)

## **LISTEN TO THE HUMMINGBIRD**

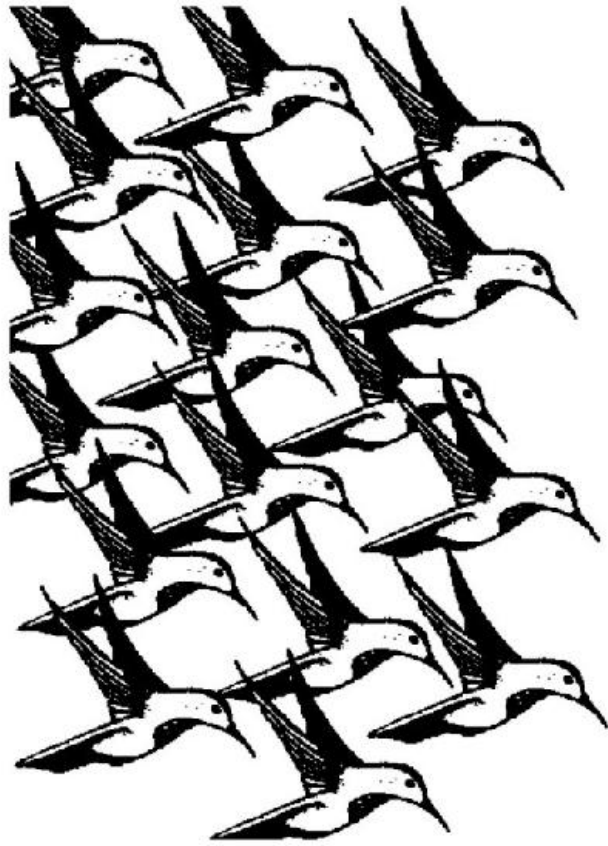
Listen to the hummingbird  
Whose wings you cannot see  
Listen to the hummingbird  
Don't listen to me.

Listen to the butterfly  
Whose days but number three  
Listen to the butterfly  
Don't listen to me.

Listen to the one in charge  
Who studies your ID  
Listen to the one in charge  
Don't listen to me.

Listen to the sovereign heart  
Resign its sovereignty  
Listen to the sovereign heart  
Don't listen to me.

Listen to the mind of God  
Which doesn't need to be  
Listen to the mind of God  
Don't listen to me.





## **I THINK I'LL BLAME**

I think I'll blame  
my death on you  
but I don't know you  
well enough  
if I did  
we'd be married now  
For the full enjoyment  
(and I promise you  
there is such a thing)  
it is not enough to read  
between the lines  
that is child's play  
and we are not that fond  
of children  
One day  
you will pick up this book  
as if  
for the first time  
and say to yourself:  
I don't know how the guy  
pulled it off  
Line after line  
rises from my predicament—  
the nerve, you'll say  
the fucking nerve  
And strengthened by  
your indifference  
to the matter  
not to mention  
the entire question of the  
past  
You will recall  
how good you were to me  
how good I was to you  
And standing at some

commanding place  
like a window or a cliff  
you will know  
the full enjoyment

Hotel Kemp's Corner  
Room 215  
9:36 PM

yes  
always somewhat  
off balance

but peaceful  
in his work  
peaceful  
in his vertigo

an old man  
with his pen  
deeply familiar

with his  
predicament



## **MY GUITAR STOOD UP TODAY**

My guitar stood up today  
and leaped into my arms to play  
a Spanish tune for dancers proud  
to stamp their feet and cry aloud  
against the fate that bends us down  
beneath the thorny bloody crown  
of sickness, age, and paranoid  
delusions I, for one, cannot avoid

**MY CAREER**

So little to say

So urgent

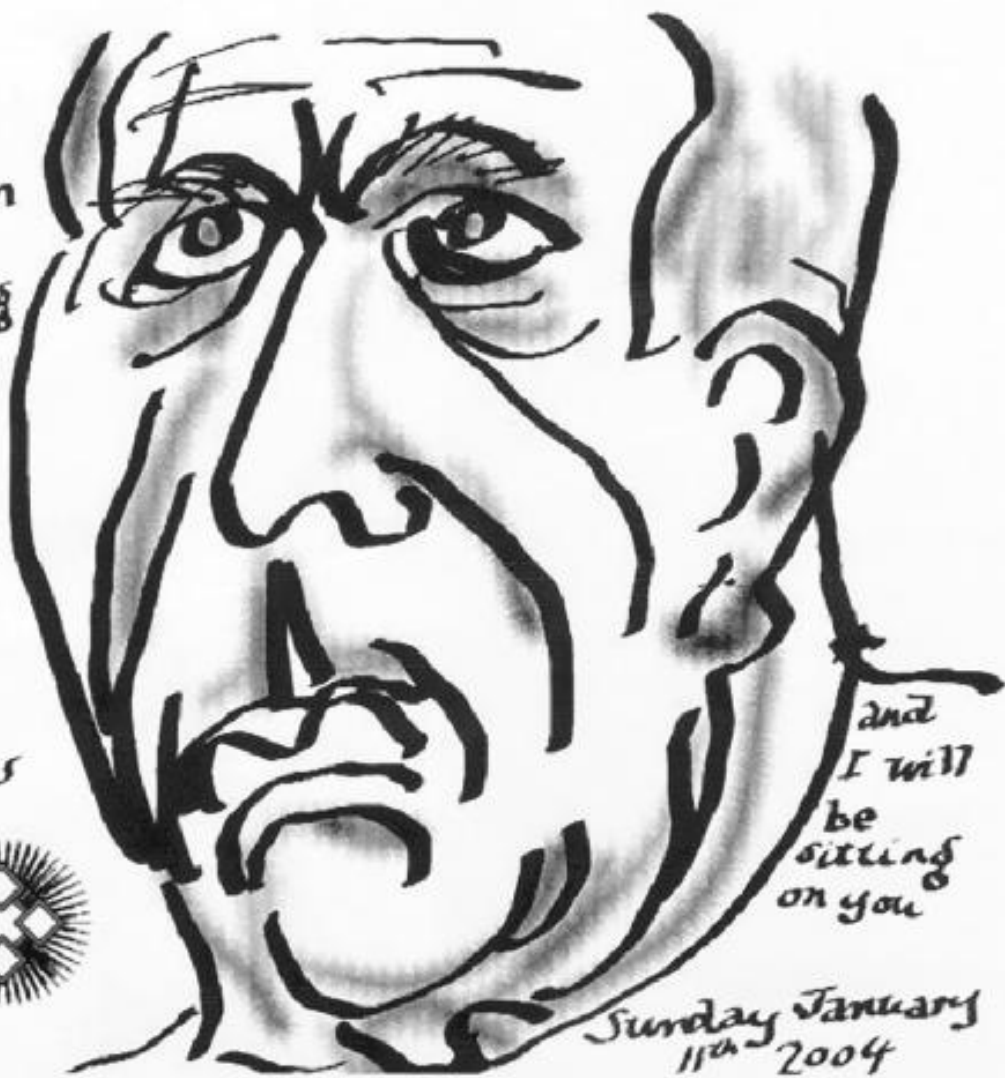
to say it



## **NEVER GAVE NOBODY TROUBLE**

i couldn't pay the mortgage  
and i broke my baby's heart  
i couldn't pay the mortgage  
and i broke my baby's heart  
never gave nobody trouble  
but it ain't too late to start  
don't want to break no window  
don't want to burn no car  
don't want to break no window  
don't want to burn your car  
you got a right to all your riches  
but you let it go too far  
you sail the mighty ocean  
in a yacht designed for you  
you sail the mighty ocean  
in a yacht designed for you  
but the ocean's thick with garbage  
you ain't going to make it through  
never gave nobody trouble  
i'm a law and order man  
never gave nobody trouble  
i'm a law and order man  
never gave nobody trouble  
but you know damn well I can

if I  
catch  
you  
making  
fun  
of me  
I will  
wash  
your  
face  
with  
snow



and  
I will  
be  
sitting  
on you

Sunday January  
11th 2004



## ORDINARY GUY WITH PROBLEMS

Ordinary guy with problems  
You've seen him around  
Some of the places you go  
He's not caving in  
Don't have to be nice to him  
He knows where to get a drink  
He can be alone  
Ordinary guy with problems



We are beginning  
to get the idea  
that someone  
is trapped  
in there

## **DRANK A LOT**

i drank a lot. i lost my job.  
i lived like nothing mattered.  
then you stopped, and came across  
my little bridge of fallen answers.  
i don't recall what happened next.  
i kept you at a distance.  
but tangled in the knot of sex  
my punishment was lifted.  
and lifted on a single breath—  
no coming and no going—  
o G-d, you are the only friend  
i never thought of knowing.  
your remedies beneath my hand  
your fingers in my hair  
the kisses on our lips began  
that ended everywhere.  
and now our sins are all confessed  
our strategies forgiven  
it's written that the law must rest  
before the law is written.  
and not because of what i'd lost  
and not for what i'd mastered  
you stopped for me, and came across  
the bridge of fallen answers.  
tho' mercy has no point of view  
and no one's here to suffer  
we cry aloud, as humans do:  
we cry to one another.  
And now it's one, and now it's two,  
And now the whole disaster.  
We cry for help, as humans do—  
Before the truth, and after.  
And Every Guiding Light Was Gone  
And Every Teacher Lying—  
There Was No Truth In Moving On—

There Was No Truth In Dying.  
And Then The Night Commanded Me  
To Enter In Her Side—  
And Be As Adam Was To Eve  
Before The Great Divide.  
her remedies beneath my hand  
her fingers in my hair—  
and every mouth of hunger glad—  
and deeply unaware.  
and here i cannot lift a hand  
to trace the lines of beauty,  
but lines are traced, and beauty's glad  
to come and go so freely.  
and from the wall a grazing wind,  
weightless and routine—  
it wounds us as i part your lips  
it wounds us in between.  
and every guiding light was gone  
and every sweet direction—  
the book of love i read was wrong  
it had a happy ending.  
And Now There Is No Point Of View—  
And Now There Is No Other—  
We Spread And Drown As Lilies Do—  
We Spread And Drown Forever.  
You are my tongue, you are my eye,  
My coming and my going.  
O G-d, you let your sailor die  
So he could be the ocean.  
And when I'm at my hungriest  
She takes away my tongue  
And holds me here where hungers rest  
Before the world is born.  
And fastened here we cannot move  
We cannot move forever  
We spread and drown as lilies do—  
From nowhere to the center.

Escaping through a secret gate  
I made it to the border  
And call it luck—or call it fate—  
I left my house in order.  
And now there is no point of view—  
And now there is no other—  
We spread and drown as lilies do—  
We spread and drown forever.  
Disguised as one who lived in peace  
I made it to the border  
Though every atom of my heart  
Was burning with desire.  
*Sunday, March 7, 2004*



## IKKYU

Ikkyu  
is not a monk,  
not much of a poet,  
and as a lover,  
it's hit and run.  
He'd need  
a hundred years of America,  
and a long shower  
just to keep his hand in.

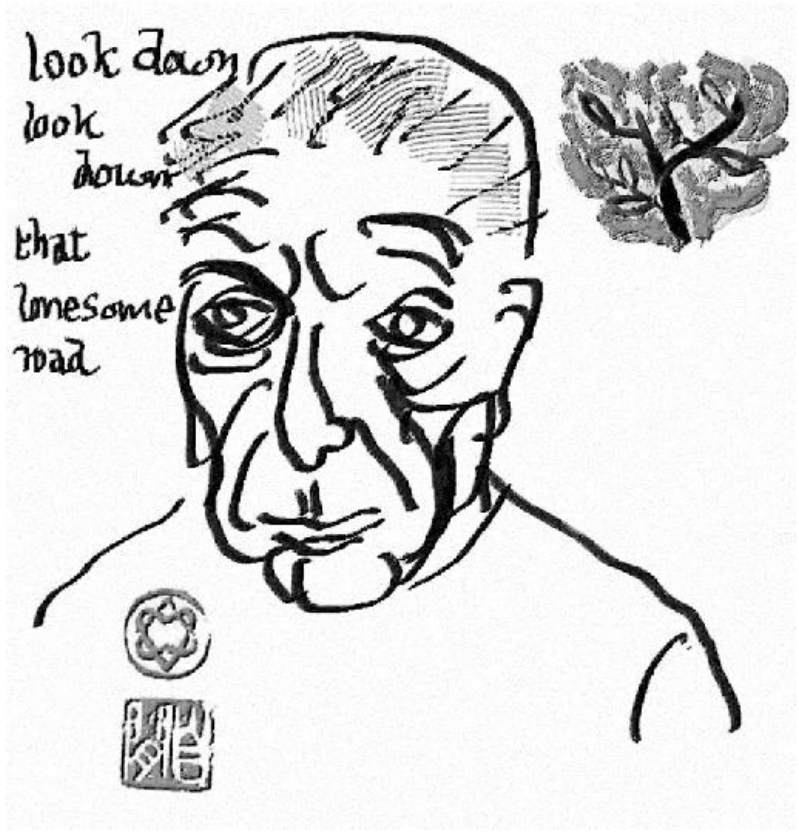


## **FLYING OVER ICELAND**

over Reykjavik, the “smokey bay”  
where W.H. Auden went  
to discover the background  
of all our songs,  
where I myself was received  
by the Mayor and the President  
(600 miles an hour  
30,000 feet  
599 miles an hour  
my old street number on Belmont Ave)  
where I, a second-rater  
by any estimation,  
was honoured by the noblest  
and handsomest people of the West  
served with lobster  
and strong drink,  
and I never cared about eyes  
but the eyes of the waitress  
were so alarmingly mauve  
that I fell into a trance  
and ate the forbidden shellfish

## **G-D WANTS HIS SONG**

Vanessa called  
all the way from Toronto  
she said that I  
could count on her  
if ever I was  
down and out  
After I put the phone down  
i played the six-holed wooden flute  
she gave me  
on the occasion of our parting  
i figured out the fingering  
and I played it better  
than I had ever done  
Tears came out of my eyes  
because of the music  
and the recollection  
of her extraordinary beauty  
which no one could avoid  
and because she said  
there was a missing song  
and I had been employed





## ALL HE KNOWS

All he knows  
is that this has happened before—  
this moment, next moment, last moment.  
It is playing a second time,  
maybe a third.  
Yes, a third time.  
He remembers remembering it.  
*Hydra,*  
*August 1999*



## **IF I TOOK A PILL**

If I took a pill  
I'd feel you so much better  
I'd write you a poem  
That sounds like a letter  
I'd kill someone mean  
And I'd cut off his ear  
And I'd send it to you  
With "I wish you were here"  
I'm trying to finish  
My shabby career  
With a white cigarette  
And a curtain of beer  
I begged you to come  
I begged on the phone  
How wrong can you get  
I was better alone  
I am trying to finish  
My shabby career  
With a little truth  
In the now and here



## **MOVING ON**

I loved your face, I loved your hair  
Your T-shirts and your eveningwear  
As for the world, the job, the war  
I ditched them all to love you more  
And you're gone, now you're gone  
As if there never was a you  
Who broke the heart and made it new  
Who's moving on, who's kidding who  
I loved your moods, I loved the way  
They threatened every single day  
Your body ruled me, though it's true  
'Twas more hormonal than the view  
And now you're gone, now you're gone  
As if there never was a you  
Queen of lilac, Queen of blue  
Who's moving on, who's kidding who  
I loved your face, I loved your hair  
Your T-shirts and your eveningwear  
As for the world, the job, the war  
I ditched them all to love you more  
And now you're gone, now you're gone  
As if there never was a you  
Held me dying, pulled me through  
Who's moving on, who's kidding who



## **WAS I ALONE**

Was I alone  
    When we swore  
        To keep it true  
Was I alone  
    Or was I there  
        With you  
Temptations  
    There were more  
        Than a few  
Was I alone  
    Or was I there  
        With you  
Was I alone  
    When the mind  
        Was split in two  
Was I alone  
    Or was I there  
        With you  
There was death  
    But I knew  
        What to do  
Was I alone  
    Or was I there  
        With you  
You'll have to wait  
If you're waiting  
For an argument  
With me  
You'll have to wait  
Till it's over  
And life and death  
Agree



Somewhat  
reluctant  
to get  
involved

January 13, 2004

## **COME AND SEE**

come and see  
they will say  
you did not know me  
they will say  
you did not love me  
they will say  
you did not thirst  
for the taste of me  
they will say i lied  
about our youthful encounter  
when i lifted my hem  
and i let my form shine through  
the folds  
of a terrible day  
40 years i wandered  
in your desert  
a moment of your beauty  
and 40 years of breathlessness  
to balance it  
40 years of remorse  
40 years of disappointment  
sleep which gives no rest  
caress which does not calm  
excitement with no background  
arousal from no depth  
the shallows of excitement  
because it was not you  
and a hand across my mouth  
to silence me  
a clever fatigue  
to shut me down  
a knot in my throat  
a blow to the brain  
a sweet distraction  
to kill the appetite



a flush of sugar  
to kill the appetite  
and then forgetting you  
for 40 years  
building houses  
for women  
whom you sent  
to remind me  
see how i failed you  
but that doesn't mean  
it never happened  
this began  
and fizzled out  
once again  
too tired  
to love you  
or look for you  
in the suffering  
and did i forget to thank you  
for what i felt  
a moment ago  
when you beckoned me  
with god knows what  
drunken promises



## **THANKS FOR THE DANCE**

Thanks for the dance  
It was hell, it was swell, it was fun  
Thanks for all the dances  
One two three, one two three one  
There is a rose in your hair  
Your shoulders are bare  
It's a costume  
But I'm a believer  
So turn up the music  
Pour out the wine  
Stop at the surface  
The surface is fine  
We don't need to go any deeper  
Thanks for the dance  
I hear that we're married  
One two three, one two three one  
Thanks for the dance  
And the baby you carried  
It was almost a daughter or a son  
And there's nothing to do  
But to wonder if you  
Are as tired as I am  
Of leaving  
We're joined in the spirit  
Joined at the hip  
Joined in the panic  
Wondering if  
We've come to some sort  
Of agreement  
Thanks for the dance  
It was hell, it was swell, it was fun  
Thanks for all the dances  
One two three, one two three one  
It was fine, it was fast  
We were first, we were last

In line at the  
Temple of Pleasure  
But the green was so green  
And the blue was so blue  
I was so I  
And you were so you  
The crisis was light  
As a feather  
Thanks for the dance  
It was hell, it was swell, it was fun  
Thanks for all the  
dances  
One two three, one two three one

## A STREET

I used to be your favourite drunk  
Good for one more laugh  
Then we both ran out of luck  
And luck was all we had  
You put on a uniform  
To fight the Civil War  
I tried to join but no one liked  
The side I'm fighting for  
*So let's drink to when it's over*  
*And let's drink to when we meet*  
*I'll be standing on this corner*  
*Where there used to be a street*  
You left me with the dishes  
And a baby in the bath  
And you're tight with the militias  
You wear their camouflage  
I guess that makes us equal  
But I want to march with you  
An extra in the sequel  
To the old red-white-and-blue  
*So let's drink to when it's over*  
*And let's drink to when we meet*  
*I'll be standing on this corner*  
*Where there used to be a street*  
I cried for you this morning  
And I'll cry for you again  
But I'm not in charge of sorrow  
So please don't ask me when  
I know the burden's heavy  
As you bear it through the night  
Some people say it's empty  
But that doesn't mean it's light  
*So let's drink to when it's over*  
*And let's drink to when we meet*  
*I'll be standing on this corner*

*Where there used to be a street  
It's going to be September now  
For many years to come  
Every heart adjusting  
To the strict September drum  
I see the Ghost of Culture  
With the numbers on his wrist  
Salute some new conclusion  
Which all of us have missed  
So let's drink to when it's over  
And let's drink to when we meet  
I'll be standing on this corner  
Where there used to be a street*

## **I PRAY FOR COURAGE**

I pray for courage  
Now I'm old  
To greet the sickness  
And the cold  
I pray for courage  
In the night  
To bear the burden  
Make it light  
I pray for courage  
In the time  
When suffering comes and  
Starts to climb  
I pray for courage  
At the end  
To see death coming  
As a friend

# LYRICS



# **Blue Alert**

## **BLUE ALERT**

There's perfume burning in the air  
Bits of beauty everywhere  
Shrapnel flying; soldier hit the dirt  
She comes so close. You feel her then  
She tells you No and No again  
Your lip is cut on the edge of her pleated skirt  
Blue Alert

Visions of her drawing near  
Arise, abide, and disappear  
You try to slow it down; it doesn't work  
It's just another night I guess  
All tangled up in nakedness  
You even touch yourself  
You're such a flirt

Blue Alert  
You know how nights like this begin  
The kind of knot your heart gets in  
Any way you turn is going to hurt  
There's perfume burning in the air  
Bits of beauty everywhere  
Shrapnel flying; soldier hit the dirt  
Blue Alert.

She breaks the rules so you can see  
She's wilder than you'll ever be  
You talk religion but she won't convert  
Her body's twenty stories high  
You try to look away, you try  
But all you want to do is get there first  
Blue Alert

The night I rose  
Bombay

Smelling the empty  
bottle of Royal Muske

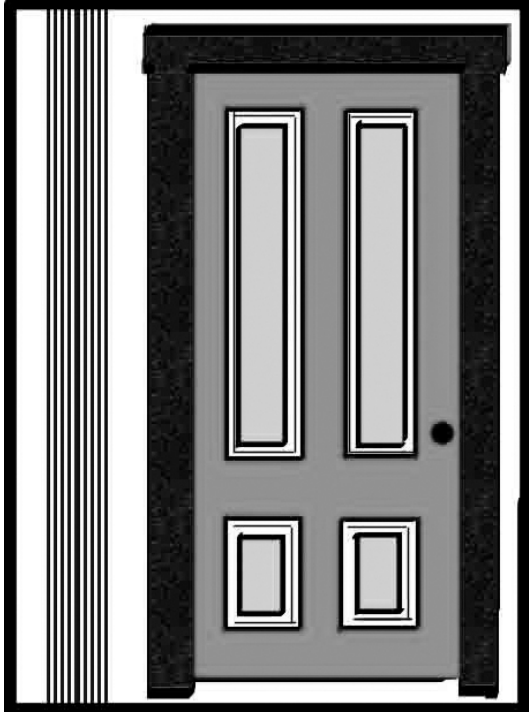


after a photo  
taken by Blanca



## **INNERMOST DOOR**

Nowhere to go  
Nothing to say  
You won't hear my voice  
Till it's far, far away  
I'm too tired now  
To fight anymore  
We're saying goodbye  
At the innermost door  
When I am alone  
You'll come back to me  
It's happened before  
It's called memory  
I must go back  
To where we began  
When I was a woman  
And you were a man  
If you come with me  
I'll never begin  
We made us a home  
But the roof's fallen in  
When I am alone  
You'll come back to me  
It's happened before  
It's called memory  
I'm not even sure  
If I know where to start  
But starting is second  
First we must part  
I'm too tired now  
To fight anymore  
We're saying goodbye  
At the innermost door



## **THE GOLDEN GATE**

Looking back, to San Francisco  
Wearing my blue Chinese dress  
A yellow jacket with padded shoulders  
Smoking Sobranie cigarettes  
Four o'clock and the fog comes in  
We all remember the sea  
For several seconds our sins are forgiven  
Mine against you, yours against me  
Don't wait for me and don't be sorry  
Forget all the letters we wrote  
Leave to the foghorns our lonesome story  
Let them sustain the heavy note  
We order another margarita  
Sipping it slow by the window  
Nobody needs an Indian teacher  
All they need is San Francisco  
For we are driving most carefully home  
Down roads that are floating and veiled  
The Golden Gate  
It's still gold  
It's still great  
Nobody's drunk  
Nothing has failed

## **HALF THE PERFECT WORLD**

Every night she'd come to me  
I'd cook for her, I'd pour her tea  
She was in her thirties then  
Had made some money, lived with men  
We'd lay us down to give and get  
Beneath the white mosquito net  
And since no counting had begun  
We lived a thousand years in one  
The candles burned  
The moon went down  
The polished hill  
The milky town  
Transparent, weightless, luminous  
Uncovering the two of us  
On that fundamental ground  
Where love's unwilled, unleashed,  
Unbound  
And half the perfect world is found

## NIGHTINGALE

I built my house beside the wood  
So I could hear you singing  
And it was sweet and it was good  
And love was all beginning  
Fare thee well my nightingale  
'Twas long ago I found you  
Now all your songs of beauty fail  
The forest gathers round you  
The sun goes down behind a veil  
'Tis now when you would call me  
So rest in peace my nightingale  
Beneath your branch of holly  
Fare thee well my nightingale  
I lived but to be near you  
Though you are singing somewhere still  
I can no longer hear you



## **NO ONE AFTER YOU**

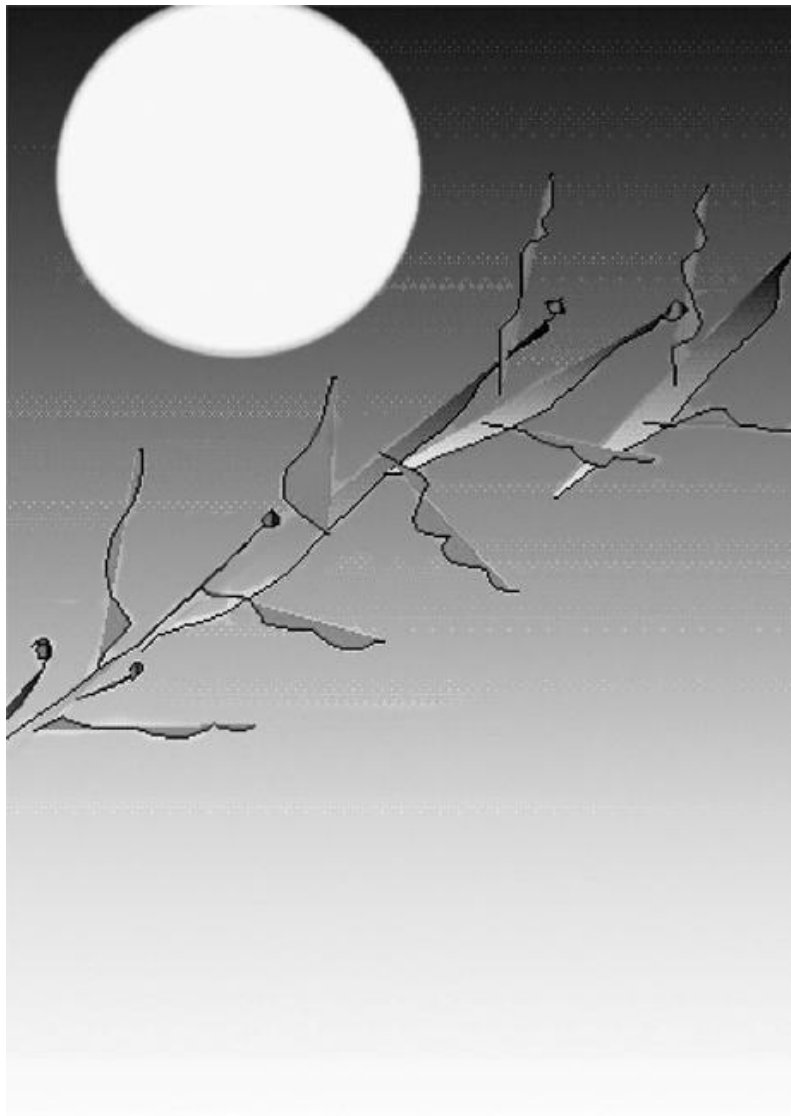
I danced with a lot of men  
Fought in an ugly war  
Gave my heart to a mountain  
But I never loved before  
I'm nervous when you turn away  
My heart is always sore  
Tuxedo gave me diamonds  
But I never loved before  
Been on the road forever  
I'm always passing through  
But you're my first love and my last  
There is no one, no one after you  
I've lived in many cities  
From Paris to L.A.  
I've known rags and riches  
I'm a regular cliché  
I tremble when you touch me  
I want you more and more  
I taught the Kama Sutra  
But I never loved before  
Been on the road forever  
I'm always passing through  
But you're my first love and my last  
There is no one, no one after you  
Thought I knew the facts of life  
But now I know the score  
Been around the block and back  
But I never loved before

## **NEVER GOT TO LOVE YOU**

The parking lot is empty  
They killed the neon sign  
It's dark from here to St. Jovite  
It's dark all down the line  
They ought to hand the night a ticket  
For speeding: it's a crime  
I had so much to tell you  
But now it's closing time  
I never got to love you  
Like I heard it can be done  
Where the differences are many  
But the heart is always one  
The memories come back empty  
Like their batteries are low  
It feels like you just left me  
Tho' it happened years ago  
They're stacking up the chairs  
Wiping down the bar  
I never got to tell you  
How beautiful you are  
I never got to love you  
Like I heard it can be done  
Where the differences are many  
But the heart is always one  
Don't know how it happened  
But I missed the exit sign  
It's dark from here to St. Jovite  
It's dark all down the line

## **THE MIST**

As the mist leaves no scar  
On the dark green hill  
So my body leaves no scar  
On you, nor ever will  
When wind and hawk encounter  
What remains to keep?  
So you and I encounter  
Then turn then fall to sleep  
As many nights endure  
Without a moon or star  
So will we endure  
When one is gone and far



## **CRAZY TO LOVE YOU**

I had to go crazy to love you  
Had to go down to the pit  
Had to do time in the tower  
Now I'm too tired to quit  
I had to go crazy to love you  
You who were never the one  
Whom I chased through the souvenir heartache  
My braids and my blouse all undone  
*Sometimes I'd head for the highway*  
*I'm old and the mirrors don't lie*  
*But crazy has places to hide me*  
*Deeper than saying goodbye*  
I had to go crazy to love you  
Had to let everything fall  
Had to be people I hated  
Had to be no one at all  
Tired of choosing desire  
I've been saved by a blessed fatigue  
The gates of commitment unwired  
And nobody trying to leave  
*Sometimes I'd head for the highway*  
*I'm old and the mirrors don't lie*  
*But crazy has places to hide me*  
*Deeper than saying goodbye*

## THANKS FOR THE DANCE

Thanks for the dance  
I'm sorry you're tired  
The evening has hardly begun  
Thanks for the dance  
Try to look inspired  
One two three, one two three one  
There's a rose in my hair  
My shoulders are bare  
I've been wearing this  
                  costume forever  
Turn up the music  
Pour out the wine  
Stop at the surface  
The surface is fine  
We don't need to go any deeper  
Thanks for the dance  
I hear that we're married  
One two three, one two three one  
Thanks for the dance  
And the baby I carried  
It was almost a daughter or a son  
And there's nothing to do  
But to wonder if you  
Are as hopeless as me  
And as decent  
We're joined in the spirit  
Joined at the hip  
Joined in the panic  
Wondering if  
We've come to some sort  
Of agreement  
It was fine it was fast  
I was first I was last  
In line at the Temple of Pleasure  
But the green was so green

And the blue was so blue  
I was so I  
And you were so you  
The crisis was light  
As a feather  
Thanks for the dance  
It's been hell, it's been swell,  
It's been fun  
Thanks for all the dances  
One two three, one two three one





# Old Ideas

## GOING HOME

I love to speak with Leonard  
He's a sportsman and a shepherd  
He's a lazy bastard living in a suit,  
Living in a suit  
But he does say what I tell him  
Even though it isn't welcome  
He just doesn't have the freedom  
To refuse  
He will speak these words of wisdom  
Like a sage, a man of vision  
Though he knows he's really nothing  
But the brief elaboration of a tube  
Going home  
Without my sorrow  
Going home  
Sometime tomorrow  
Going home  
To where it's better  
Than before  
Going home  
Without my burden  
Going home  
Behind the curtain  
Going home  
Without the costume  
That I wore  
He wants to write a love song  
An anthem of forgiving  
A manual for living with defeat  
A cry above the suffering  
A sacrifice recovering  
But that isn't what I need him to complete  
I want to make him certain  
That he doesn't have a burden  
That he doesn't need a vision

That he only has permission  
To do my instant bidding  
Which is to SAY what I have told him  
To repeat  
*Going home*  
*Without my sorrow*  
*Going home*  
*Sometime tomorrow*  
*Going home*  
*To where it's better*  
*Than before*  
*Going home*  
*Without my burden*  
*Going home*  
*Behind the curtain*  
*Going home*  
*Without this costume*  
*That I wore*  
I love to speak with Leonard  
He's a sportsman and a shepherd  
He's a lazy bastard  
Living in a suit



we are going home

We will not stay much longer

## AMEN

Tell me again  
When I've been to the river  
And I've taken the edge off my thirst

Tell me again  
We're alone & I'm listening  
I'm listening so hard that it hurts

*Tell me again  
When I'm clean and I'm sober*

*Tell me again  
When I've seen through the horror*

*Tell me again  
Tell me over and over*

*Tell me you want me then*

*Amen*

Tell me again  
When the victims are singing  
And Laws of Remorse are restored

Tell me again  
That you know what I'm thinking  
But vengeance belongs to the lord

*Tell me again  
When I'm clean and I'm sober*

*Tell me again  
When I've seen through the horror*

*Tell me again  
Tell me over and over*

*Tell me that you love me then*

*Amen*

*Amen*

*Amen*

*Amen*

Tell me again  
When the day has been ransomed  
& night has no right to begin  
Try me again

When the angels are panting  
And scratching the door to come in

*Tell me again*

*When I'm clean and I'm sober*

*Tell me again*

*When I've seen through the horror*

*Tell me again*

*Tell me over and over*

*Tell me that you need me then*

*Amen*

*Amen*

*Amen*

*Amen*

*Tell me again*

When the filth of the butcher

Is washed in the blood of the lamb

*Tell me again*

When the rest of the culture

Has passed thru' the

Eye of the Camp

*Tell me again*

*When I'm clean and I'm sober*

*Tell me again*

*When I've seen through the horror*

*Tell me again*

*Tell me over and over*

*Tell me that you love me then*

*Amen*

*Amen*

*Amen*

*Amen*



## **SHOW ME THE PLACE**

*Show me the place*

Where you want your slave to go

*Show me the place*

I've forgotten, I don't know

*Show me the place*

For my head is bending low

*Show me the place*

Where you want your slave to go

*Show me the place*

Help me roll away the stone

*Show me the place*

I can't move this thing alone

*Show me the place*

Where the Word became a man

*Show me the place*

Where the suffering began

The troubles came

I saved what I could save

A thread of light

A particle a wave

But there were chains

So I hastened to behave

There were chains

So I loved you like a slave

*Show me the place*

Where you want your slave to go

*Show me the place*

I've forgotten, I don't know





waiting  
for his  
orders



amid  
the  
symbols  
of the  
past

12/25/03

## DARKNESS

*I caught the darkness  
Drinking from your cup  
I caught the darkness  
Drinking from your cup  
I said: Is this contagious?  
You said: Just drink it up*



I got no future  
I know my days are few  
The present's not that pleasant  
Just a lot of things to do  
I thought the past would last me  
But the darkness got that too  
I should have seen it coming  
It was right behind your eyes  
You were young and it was summer  
I just had to take a dive  
Winning you was easy  
But darkness was the prize



I don't smoke no cigarette  
I don't drink no alcohol  
I ain't had much loving yet

But that's always been your call  
Hey I don't miss it baby  
I got no taste for anything at all  
I used to love the rainbow  
I used to love the view  
I loved the early morning  
I'd pretend that it was new  
But I caught the darkness baby  
And I got it worse than you



*I caught the darkness  
Drinking from your cup  
I caught the darkness  
Drinking from your cup  
I said: Is this contagious?  
You said: Just drink it up*

## ANYHOW

It's a shame and it's a pity  
The way you treat me now  
I know you can't forgive me  
But forgive me anyhow  
The ending got so ugly  
Even heard you say  
You never ever loved me  
Oh but love me anyway  
Dreamed about you baby  
You were wearing half your dress  
I know you have to hate me  
But could you hate me less?  
I used up all my chances  
And you'll never take me back  
But there ain't no harm in asking  
Could you cut me one more slack?  
I'm naked and I'm filthy  
And there's sweat upon my brow  
And both of us are guilty  
Anyhow  
Have mercy on me baby  
After all I did confess  
Even though you have to hate me  
Could you hate me less?  
It's a shame and it's a pity  
I know you can't forgive me  
The ending got so ugly  
You never ever loved me  
Dreamed about you baby  
I know you have to hate me  
I'm naked and I'm filthy  
And both of us are guilty  
Anyhow  
Have mercy on me baby

July something  
2007

let us be a little  
merciful  
this morning



because it has been taken away  
what has been taken away?  
how to do it

## **CRAZY TO LOVE YOU**

Had to go crazy to love you  
Had to go down to the pit  
Had to do time in the tower  
Begging my crazy to quit  
Had to go crazy to love you  
You who were never the one  
Whom I chased through the souvenir heartache  
Her braids and her blouse all undone  
*Sometimes I'd head for the highway*  
*I'm old and the mirrors don't lie*  
*But crazy has places to hide in*  
*Deeper than saying goodbye*  
Had to go crazy to love you  
Had to let everything fall  
Had to be people I hated  
Had to be no one at all  
I'm tired of choosing desire  
Been saved by a sweet fatigue  
The gates of commitment unwired  
And nobody trying to leave  
*Sometimes I'd head for the highway*  
*I'm old and the mirrors don't lie*  
*But crazy has places to hide in*  
*Deeper than saying goodbye*  
Had to go crazy to love you  
You who were never the one  
Whom I chased through the souvenir heartache  
Her braids and her blouse all undone



the mirror in my room

after a photo taken by the  
great painter of mood Bianca  
Nixdorf Kemp's Corner Hotel  
2003

## COME HEALING

O gather up the brokenness  
And bring it to me now  
The fragrance of those  
promises  
You never dared to vow  
The splinters that you carry  
The cross you left behind  
Come healing of the body  
Come healing of the mind  
*And let the heavens hear it*  
*The penitential hymn*  
*Come healing of the spirit*  
*Come healing of the limb*



Behold the gates of mercy  
In arbitrary space  
And none of us deserving  
The cruelty or the grace  
O solitude of longing



Where love has been confined  
Come healing of the body  
Come healing of the mind  
O see the darkness yielding  
That tore the light apart  
Come healing of the reason  
Come healing of the heart  
O troubled dust concealing  
An undivided love  
The Heart beneath is teaching  
To the broken Heart above  
O let the heavens falter  
And let the earth proclaim:  
Come healing of the Altar  
Come healing of the Name  
O longing of the branches  
To lift the little bud  
O longing of the arteries  
To purify the blood  
*And let the heavens hear it*  
*The penitential hymn*  
*Come healing of the spirit*  
*Come healing of the limb*  
*O let the heavens hear it*  
*The penitential hymn*  
*Come healing of the spirit*  
*Come healing of the limb*



## BANJO

There's something that I'm watching  
Means a lot to me  
It's a broken banjo bobbing  
On the dark infested sea  
Don't know how it got there  
Maybe taken by the wave  
Off of someone's shoulder  
Or out of someone's grave  
It's coming for me darling  
No matter where I go  
Its duty is to harm me  
My duty is to know  
*There's something that I'm watching  
Means a lot to me  
It's a broken banjo bobbing  
On the dark infested sea*



## LULLABY

Sleep baby sleep  
The day's on the run  
The wind in the trees  
Is talking in tongues  
*If your heart is torn*  
*I don't wonder why*  
*If the night is long*  
*Here's my lullaby*  
Well the mouse ate the crumb  
Then the cat ate the crust  
Now they've fallen in love  
They're talking in tongues  
*If your heart is torn*  
*I don't wonder why*  
*If the night is long*  
*Here's my lullaby*  
Sleep baby sleep  
There's a morning to come  
The wind in the trees  
they're talking in tongues  
*If your heart is torn*  
*I don't wonder why*  
*If the night is long*  
*Here's my lullaby*



## DIFFERENT SIDES

We find ourselves on different sides  
Of a line that nobody drew  
Though it all may be one in the higher eye  
Down here where we live it is two  
I to my side call the meek and the mild  
You to your side call the Word  
By virtue of suffering I claim to have won  
You claim to have never been heard  
*Both of us say there are laws to obey  
But frankly I don't like your tone  
You want to change the way I make love  
I want to leave it alone*

The pull of the moon the thrust of the sun  
And thus the ocean is crossed  
The waters are blessed while a shadowy guest  
Kindles a light for the lost  
*Both of us say there are laws to obey  
But frankly I don't like your tone  
You want to change the way I make love  
I want to leave it alone*

Down in the valley the famine goes on  
The famine up on the hill  
I say that you shouldn't you couldn't you can't  
You say that you must and you will  
*Both of us say there are laws to obey  
But frankly I don't like your tone  
You want to change the way I make love  
I want to leave it alone*

You want to live where the suffering is  
I want to get out of town  
C'mon baby give me a kiss  
Stop writing everything down  
*Both of us say there are laws to obey  
But frankly I don't like your tone  
You want to change the way I make love*

*I want to leave it alone  
Both of us say there are laws to obey  
But frankly I don't like your tone  
You want to change the way I make love  
I want to leave it alone*

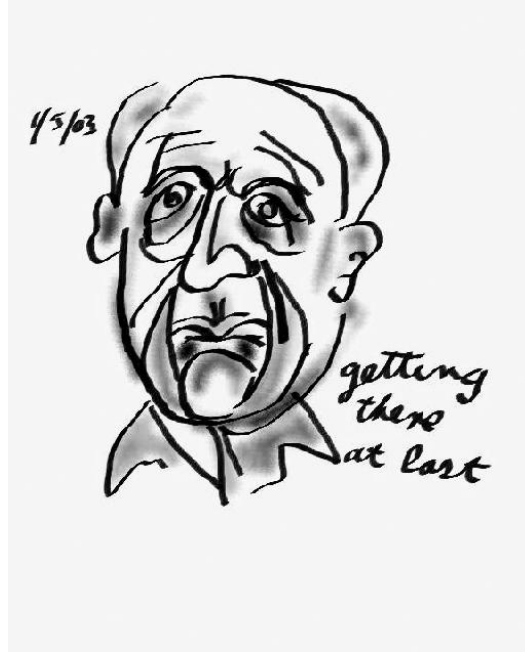
# Popular Problems



## SLOW

I'm slowing down the tune  
I never liked it fast  
You want to get there soon  
I want to get there last  
It's not because I'm old  
It's not the life I led  
I always liked it slow  
That's what my momma said  
I'm lacing up my shoe  
But I don't want to run  
I'll get here when I do  
Don't need no starting gun  
It's not because I'm old  
It's not what dying does  
I always liked it slow  
Slow is in my blood  
*I always liked it slow:*  
*I never liked it fast*  
*With you it's got to go:*  
*With me it's got to last*  
It's not because I'm old  
It's not because I'm dead  
I always liked it slow  
That's what my momma said  
All your moves are swift  
All your turns are tight  
Let me catch my breath  
I thought we had all night  
I like to take my time  
I like to linger as it flies  
A weekend on your lips  
A lifetime in your eyes  
*I always liked it slow:*  
*I never liked it fast*  
*With you it's got to go:*

*With me it's got to last*  
It's not because I'm old  
It's not the life I led  
I always liked it slow  
That's what my momma said  
I'm slowing down the tune  
I never liked it fast  
You want to get there soon  
I want to get there last  
So baby let me go  
You're wanted back in town  
In case they want to know  
I'm just trying to slow it down



## **ALMOST LIKE THE BLUES**

I saw some people starving  
There was murder, there was rape  
Their villages were burning  
They were trying to escape  
I couldn't meet their glances  
I was staring at my shoes  
It was acid, it was tragic  
*It was almost like the blues*  
I have to die a little  
Between each murderous thought  
And when I'm finished thinking  
I have to die a lot  
There's torture and there's killing  
There's all my bad reviews  
The war, the children missing  
*Lord, it's almost like the blues*  
I let my heart get frozen  
To keep away the rot  
My father says I'm chosen  
My mother says I'm not  
I listened to their story  
Of the Gypsies and the Jews  
It was good, it wasn't boring  
*It was almost like the blues*  
There is no G-d in Heaven  
And there is no Hell below  
So says the great professor  
Of all there is to know  
But I've had the invitation  
That a sinner can't refuse  
And it's almost like salvation  
*It's almost like the blues*

**LEONARD  
COHEN**

**ALMOST  
LIKE  
THE  
BLUES**



## **SAMSON IN NEW ORLEANS**

You said that you were with me  
You said you were my friend  
Did you really love the city  
Or did you just pretend  
You said you loved her secrets  
And her freedoms hid away  
She was better than America  
That's what I heard you say  
You said how could this happen  
You said how can this be  
The remnant all dishonored  
On the bridge of misery  
And we who cried for mercy  
From the bottom of the pit  
Was our prayer so  
    damn unworthy  
The Son rejected it?  
So gather up the killers  
Get everyone in town  
Stand me by those pillars  
Let me take this  
    temple down  
The king so kind and solemn  
He wears a bloody crown  
So stand me by that column  
Let me take this temple down  
You said how could this happen  
You said how can this be  
The chains are gone from heaven  
The storms are wild and free  
There's other ways to answer  
That certainly is true  
Me, I'm blind with death  
    and anger  
And that's no place for you

There's a woman  
    in the window  
And a bed in Tinsel Town  
I'll write you when it's over  
Let me take this  
    temple down



October 14, 2007  
Sunday 7:30 am

no longer inclined  
to speak the truth



Speak truth to power?  
rather  
speak truth  
to the powerless

## **A STREET**

I used to be your favorite drunk  
Good for one more laugh  
Then we both ran out of luck  
Luck was all we ever had  
You put on a uniform  
To fight the Civil War  
You looked so good I didn't care  
What side you're fighting for  
It wasn't all that easy  
When you up and walked away  
But I'll save that little story  
For another rainy day  
I know the burden's heavy  
As you wheel it through the night  
Some people say it's empty  
But that don't mean it's light  
You left me with the dishes  
And a baby in the bath  
You're tight with the militias  
You wear their camouflage  
You always said we're equal  
So let me march with you  
Just an extra in the sequel  
To the old red white and blue  
Baby don't ignore me  
We were smokers we were friends  
Forget that tired story  
Of betrayal and revenge  
I see the Ghost of Culture  
With numbers on his wrist  
Salute some new conclusion  
Which all of us have missed  
I cried for you this morning  
And I'll cry for you again  
But I'm not in charge of sorrow



So please don't ask me when  
There may be wine and roses



## **DID I EVER LOVE YOU**

*Did I ever love you*

Did I ever need you

Did I ever fight you

Did I ever want to

Did I ever leave you

Was I ever able

Are we still leaning

Across the old table

*Did I ever love you*

Did I ever need you

Did I ever fight you

Did I ever want to

Did I ever leave you

Was I ever able

Are we still leaning

Across the old table

Was it ever settled

Was it ever over

And is it still raining

Back in November

The lemon trees blossom

The almond trees wither

Was I ever someone

Who could love you forever

Was it ever settled

Was it ever over

And is it still raining

Back in November

The lemon trees blossom

The almond trees wither

It's Spring and it's Summer

And it's Winter forever

*Did I ever love you*

Does it really matter

Did I ever fight you

You don't need to answer  
Did I ever leave you  
Was I ever able  
Are we still leaning  
Across the old table  
*Did I ever love you*  
Did I ever need you  
Did I ever fight you  
Did I ever want to  
Did I ever leave you  
Was I ever able  
Are we still leaning  
Across the old table



## **MY OH MY**

Wasn't hard to love you  
Didn't have to try  
Wasn't hard to love you  
Didn't have to try  
Held you for a little while  
My Oh My Oh My  
Drove you to the station  
Never asked you why  
Drove you to the station  
Never asked you why  
Held you for a little while  
My Oh My Oh My  
All the boys are waving  
Trying to catch your eye  
All the boys are waving  
Trying to catch your eye  
Held you for a little while  
My Oh My Oh My  
Wasn't hard to love you  
Didn't have to try  
Wasn't hard to love you  
Didn't have to try  
Held you for a little while  
My Oh My Oh My

## NEVER MIND

The war was lost  
The treaty signed  
I was not caught  
I crossed the line  
I was not caught  
Though many tried  
I live among you  
Well disguised  
I had to leave  
My life behind  
I dug some graves  
You'll never find  
The story's told  
With facts and lies  
I had a name  
But never mind  
Never mind  
Never mind  
The war was lost  
The treaty signed  
*There's truth that lives  
And truth that dies  
I don't know which  
So never mind*  
Your victory  
Was so complete  
That some among you  
Thought to keep  
A record of  
Our little lives  
The clothes we wore  
Our spoons our knives  
The games of luck  
Our soldiers played  
The stones we cut

The songs we made  
Our law of peace  
Which understands  
A husband leads  
A wife commands  
And all of this  
Expressions of  
The Sweet Indifference  
Some call Love  
The High Indifference  
Some call Fate  
But we had Names  
More intimate  
Names so deep  
and Names so true  
They're blood to me  
They're dust to you  
There is no need  
That this survive  
There's truth that lives  
And truth that dies  
Never mind  
Never mind  
I live the life  
I left behind  
*There's truth that lives*  
*And truth that dies*  
*I don't know which*  
*So never mind*  
I could not kill  
The way you kill  
I could not hate  
I tried I failed  
You turned me in  
At least you tried  
You side with them  
Whom you despise

This was your heart  
This swarm of flies  
This was once your mouth  
This bowl of lies  
You serve them well  
I'm not surprised  
You're of their kin  
You're of their kind  
Never mind  
Never mind  
The story's told  
With facts and lies  
You own the world  
So never mind  
Never mind  
Never mind  
I live the life  
I left behind  
I live it full  
I live it wide  
Through layers of time  
You can't divide  
My woman's here  
My children too  
Their graves are safe  
From ghosts like you  
In places deep  
With roots entwined  
I live the life  
I left behind

a dreadful night  
visited by the  
dear ghosts  
of my favourite  
lovers  
all of them  
at their most  
skillful  
and  
insistent

January 23 2003



**a dreadful night  
visited by the dear ghosts  
of my favourite lovers  
all of them  
at their most skillful  
and insistent persuasions**



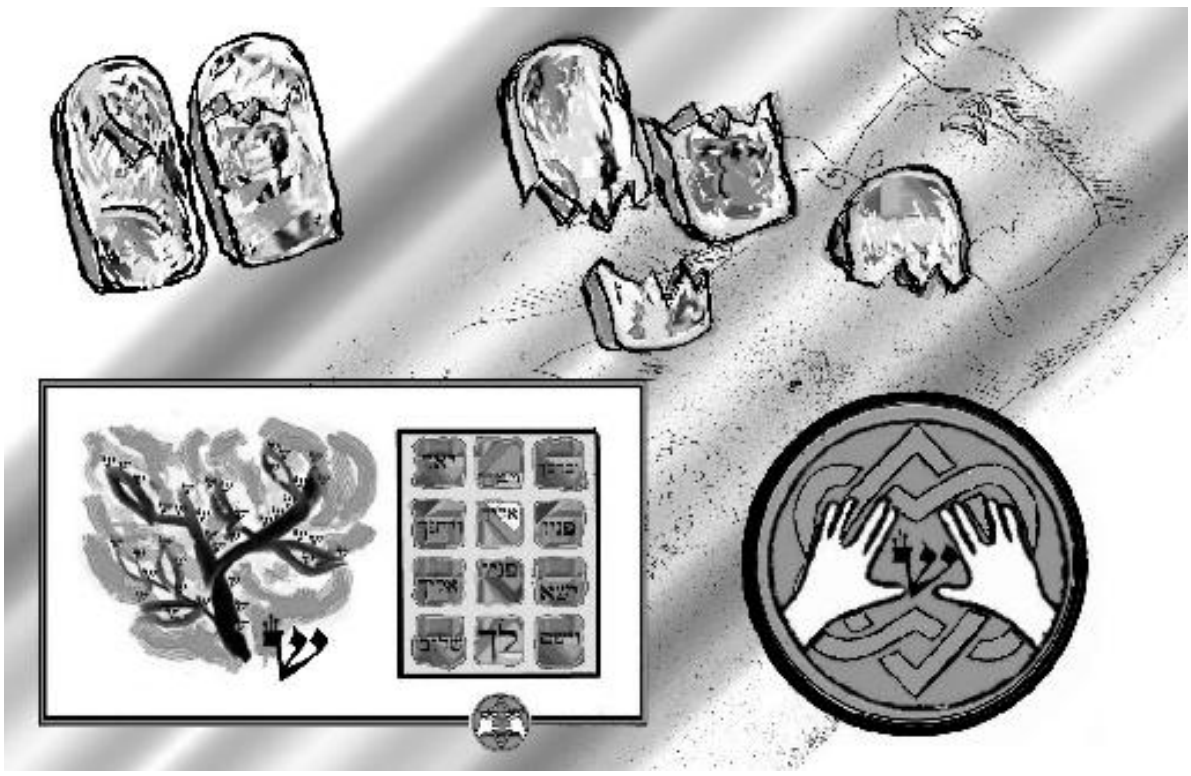
## **BORN IN CHAINS**

I was born in chains  
But I was taken out of Egypt  
I was bound to a burden  
But the burden it was raised  
Lord I can no longer  
Keep this secret  
Blessed is the Name  
The Name be praised  
I fled to the edge  
Of the Mighty Sea of Sorrow  
Pursued by the riders  
Of a cruel and dark regime  
But the waters parted  
And my soul crossed over  
Out of Egypt  
Out of Pharaoh's dream  
*Word of Words*  
*And Measure of all Measures*  
*Blessed is the Name*  
*The Name be blessed*  
*Written on my heart*  
*In burning Letters*  
*That's all I know*  
*I cannot read the rest*  
I was idle with my soul  
When I heard that you could use me  
I followed very closely  
My life remained the same  
But then you showed me  
Where you had been wounded  
In every atom  
Broken is the Name  
I was alone on the road  
Your Love was so confusing  
And all my teachers told me

That I had myself to blame  
But in the Grip  
Of Sensual Illusion  
A sweet unknowing  
Unified the Name  
*Word of Words*  
*And Measure of all Measures*  
*Blessed is the Name*  
*The Name be blessed*  
*Written on my heart*  
*In burning Letters*  
*That's all I know*  
*I cannot read the rest*



I've heard the soul unfolds  
In the chambers of its longing  
And the bitter liquor sweetens  
In the hammered cup  
But all the Ladders  
Of the Night have fallen  
Only darkness now  
To lift the Longing up



## **YOU GOT ME SINGING**

You got me singing  
Even tho' the news is bad  
You got me singing  
The only song I ever had  
You got me singing  
Ever since the river died  
You got me thinking  
Of the places we could hide  
You got me singing  
Even though the world is gone  
You got me thinking  
I'd like to carry on  
You got me singing  
Even tho' it all looks grim  
You got me singing  
The Hallelujah hymn  
You got me singing  
Like a prisoner in a jail  
You got me singing  
Like my pardon's in the mail  
You got me wishing  
Our little love would last  
You got me thinking  
Like those people of the past



**You Want It Darker**

## **YOU WANT IT DARKER**

If you are the dealer  
I'm out of the game  
If you are the healer  
I'm broken and lame  
If thine is the glory  
Then mine must be the shame  
You want it darker  
We kill the flame  
Magnified and sanctified  
Be Thy Holy Name  
Vilified and crucified  
In the human frame  
A million candles burning  
For the help that never came  
You want it darker  
We kill the flame  
*Hineni Hineni*  
*I'm ready, my Lord*  
There's a lover in the story  
But the story is still the same  
There's a lullaby for suffering  
And a paradox to blame  
But it's written in the scriptures  
And it's not some idle claim  
You want it darker  
We kill the flame  
They're lining up the prisoners  
The guards are taking aim  
I struggled with some demons  
They were middle-class and tame  
Didn't know I had permission  
To murder and to maim  
You want it darker  
*Hineni Hineni*  
*I'm ready, my Lord*

Magnified and sanctified  
Be Thy Holy Name  
Vilified and crucified  
In the human frame  
A million candles burning  
For the love that never came  
You want it darker  
We kill the flame  
If you are the dealer  
I'm out of the game  
If you are the healer  
I'm broken and lame  
If thine is the glory  
Then mine must be the shame  
You want it darker  
We kill the flame  
*Hineni Hineni*  
*I'm ready, my Lord*



everything will  
come back  
in the wrong light  
completely  
misunderstood  
and I will be seen  
as the man  
I devoted much of  
my life  
to not being

2/4/03



## TREATY

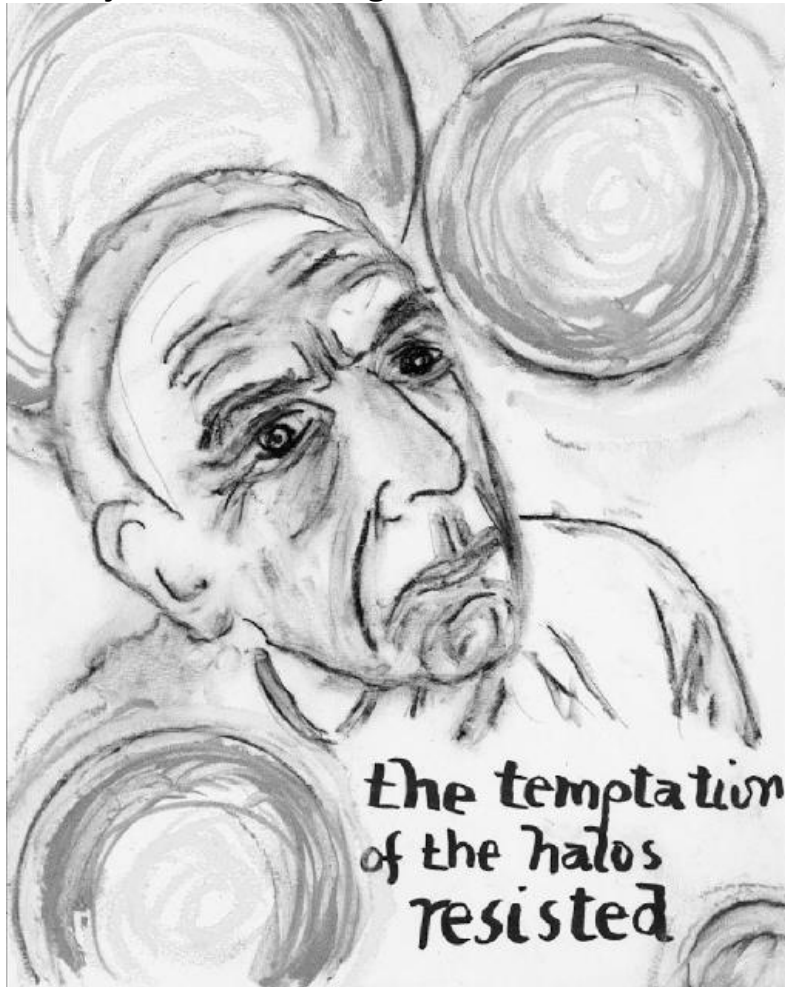
I seen you change the water into wine  
I seen you change it back to water too  
I sit at your table every night  
I try but I just don't get high with you  
*I wish there was a treaty we could sign*  
I do not care who takes this bloody hill  
I'm angry and I'm tired all the time  
I wish there was a treaty  
I wish there was a treaty  
Between your love and mine  
They're dancing in the street—it's Jubilee  
We sold ourselves for love but now we're free  
I'm so sorry for the ghost I made you be  
Only one of us was real—and that was me.  
I haven't said a word since you've been gone  
That any liar couldn't say as well  
I just can't believe the static coming on  
You were my ground—my safe and sound  
You were my aerial  
The fields are crying out—it's Jubilee  
We sold ourselves for love but now we're free  
I'm so sorry for the ghost I made you be  
Only one of us was real—and that was me.  
I heard the snake was baffled by his sin  
He shed his scales to find the snake within  
But born again is born without a skin  
The poison enters into everything  
*I wish there was a treaty we could sign*  
I do not care who takes the bloody hill  
I'm angry and I'm tired all the time  
I wish there was a treaty  
I wish there was a treaty  
Between your love and mine  
*I wish there was a treaty we could sign*  
It's over now, the water and the wine

We were broken then, but now we're borderline  
I wish there was a treaty  
I wish there was a treaty  
Between your love and mine

## ON THE LEVEL

I knew that it was wrong  
I didn't have a doubt  
I was dying to get back home  
And you were starting out  
I said I best be moving on  
You said, we have all day  
You smiled at me like I was young  
It took my breath away  
*Your crazy fragrance all around*  
*Your secrets all in view*  
*My lost, my lost was saying found*  
*My don't was saying do*  
*Let's keep it on the level*  
*When I walked away from you*  
*I turned my back on the devil*  
*Turned my back on the angel too*  
They ought to give my heart a medal  
For letting go of you  
When I turned my back on the devil  
Turned my back on the angel too  
Now I'm living in this temple  
Where they tell you what to do  
I'm old and I've had to settle  
On a different point of view  
I was fighting with temptation  
But I didn't want to win  
A man like me don't like to see  
Temptation caving in  
*Your crazy fragrance all around*  
*Your secrets in my view*  
*My lost, my lost was saying found*  
*My don't was saying do*  
*Let's keep it on the level*  
*When I walked away from you*  
*I turned my back on the devil*

*Turned my back on the angel too*  
They ought to give my heart a medal  
For letting go of you  
When I turned my back on the devil  
Turned my back on the angel too



## LEAVING THE TABLE

*I'm leaving the table*  
*I'm out of the game*  
I don't know the people  
In your picture frame  
If I ever loved you  
It's a crying shame  
If I ever loved you  
If I knew your name  
You don't need a lawyer  
I'm not making a claim  
You don't need to surrender  
I'm not taking aim  
I don't need a lover  
The wretched beast is tame  
I don't need a lover  
So blow out the flame  
There's nobody missing  
There is no reward  
Little by little  
We're cutting the cord  
We're spending the treasure  
That love cannot afford  
I know you can feel it  
The sweetness restored  
I don't need a reason  
For what I became  
I've got these excuses  
They're tired and lame  
I don't need a pardon  
There's no one left to blame  
*I'm leaving the table*  
*I'm out of the game*

## **IF I DIDN'T HAVE YOUR LOVE**

If the sun would lose its light  
And we lived an endless night  
And there was nothing left  
That you could feel  
*That's how it would be  
What the world would seem to me  
If I didn't have your love  
To make it real*

If the stars were all unpinned  
And a cold and bitter wind  
Swallowed up the world  
Without a trace  
Well that's where I would be  
What my life would seem to me  
If I couldn't lift the veil  
And see your face  
If no leaves were on the tree  
And no water in the sea  
And the break of day  
Had nothing to reveal  
*That's how broken I would be  
What my life would seem to me  
If I didn't have your love  
To make it real*

If the sun would lose its light  
And we lived an endless night  
And there was nothing left  
That you could feel  
If the sea were sand alone  
And the flowers made of stone  
And no one that you hurt  
Could ever heal  
*That's how broken I would be  
What my life would seem to me  
If I didn't have your love*

*To make it real*





## **TRAVELING LIGHT**

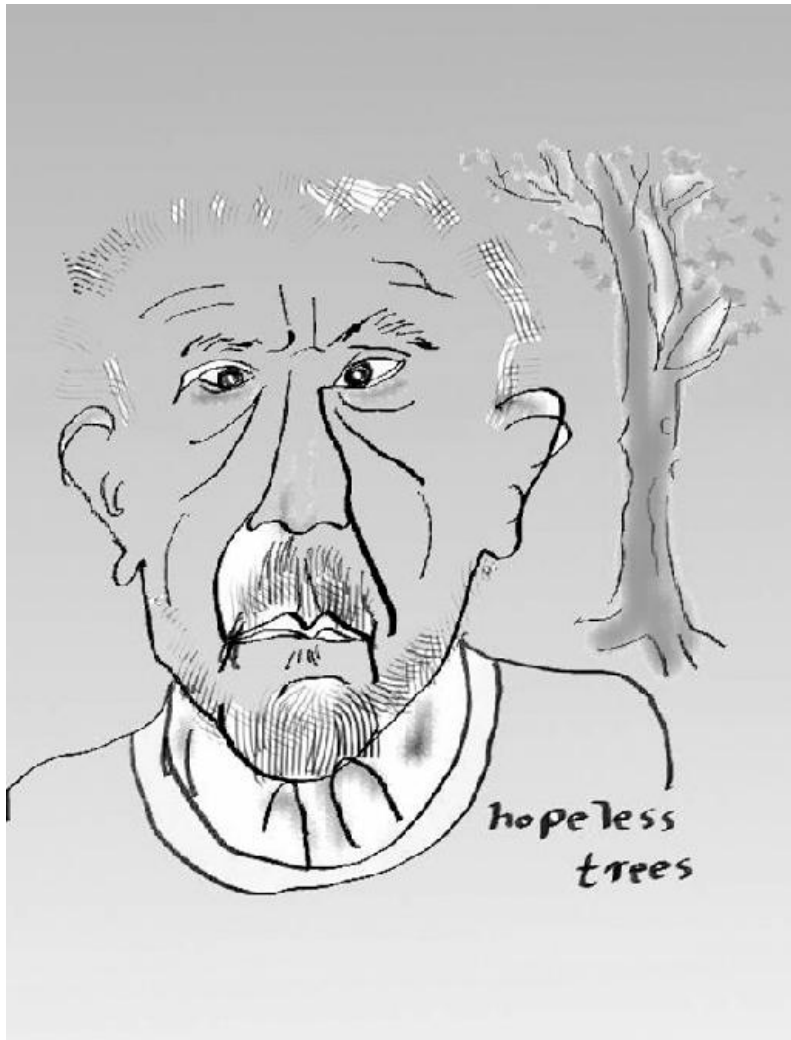
I'm traveling light  
It's au revoir  
My once so bright  
My fallen star  
I'm running late  
They'll close the bar  
I used to play  
One mean guitar  
I guess I'm just  
Somebody who  
Has given up  
On the me and you  
I'm not alone  
I've met a few  
Traveling light like  
We used to do  
Goodnight goodnight  
My fallen star  
I guess you're right  
You always are  
I know you're right  
About the blues  
You live some life  
You'd never choose  
I'm just a fool  
A dreamer who  
Forgot to dream  
Of the me and you  
I am not alone  
I've met a few  
Traveling light like  
We used to do  
Traveling light  
It's au revoir  
My once so bright

My fallen star  
I'm running late  
They'll close the bar  
I used to play  
One mean guitar  
I guess I'm just  
Somebody who  
Has given up  
On the me and you  
I'm not alone  
I've met a few  
Traveling light like  
We used to do  
But if the road  
Leads back to you  
Must I forget  
The things I knew  
When I was friends  
With one or two  
Traveling light like  
We used to do  
I'm traveling light



## **IT SEEMED THE BETTER WAY**

It seemed the better way  
When first I heard him speak  
But now it's much too late  
To turn the other cheek  
Sounded like the truth  
Seemed the better way  
Sounded like the truth  
But it's not the truth today  
I wonder what it was  
I wonder what it meant  
At first he touched on love  
But then he touched on death  
I better hold my tongue  
I better take my place  
Lift this glass of blood  
Try to say the grace



## STEER YOUR WAY

Steer your way through the ruins of the Altar and the Mall

Steer your way through the fables of Creation and The Fall

Steer your way past the Palaces that rise above the rot

*Year by year*

*Month by month*

*Day by day*

*Thought by thought*

Steer your heart past the Truth you believed in yesterday

Such as Fundamental Goodness and the Wisdom of the Way

Steer your heart, precious heart, past the women whom you  
bought

*Year by year*

*Month by month*

*Day by day*

*Thought by thought*

Steer your way through the pain that is far more real than you

That has smashed the Cosmic Model that has blinded every View

And please don't make me go there, tho' there be a God or not

*Year by year*

*Month by month*

*Day by day*

*Thought by thought*

They whisper still, the injured stones, the blunted mountains weep

As he died to make men holy, let us die to make things cheap

And say the Mea Culpa, which you've probably forgot

*Year by year*

*Month by month*

*Day by day*

*Thought by thought*

Steer your way, O my heart, tho' I have no right to ask,

To the one who was never, never equal to the task

Who knows he's been convicted, who knows he will be shot

*Year by year*

*Month by month*

*Day by day*

*Thought by thought*

just because we can't see straight  
need not stop us from plunging forward



September 4,  
2003 Los Angeles



# Leonard and Peter

Peter Dale Scott (b. 1929), a poet and scholar, is Professor Emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley. He is the son of Canadian poet F. R. Scott, who was Cohen's tutor at McGill University. Scott sent Cohen an inscribed copy of his most recent volume of poems, *Walking on Darkness*. The subsequent e-mail exchange is recorded here, courtesy of Scott. The final text message is courtesy of Rebecca De Mornay.

**Leonard (from "You Want It Darker," September 21, 2016):**

You want it darker / We kill the flame....

**Peter (inscription in *Walking on Darkness*, October 1, 2016):**

*If you want it darker*  
This book is not for you  
I have always wanted it lighter  
And I think God does too

**Leonard (October 3, 2016):**

who says "i" want it darker?  
who says the "you" is "me"?  
god saved you in your harbor  
while millions died at sea  
you and god are buddies  
you know his wishes now  
here's broken Job all bloodied  
who met him brow to brow  
there is a voice so powerful  
so easily unheard  
those that hear may hate it all  
but follow every word  
if you have not been asked  
to squat above the dead  
be happy that you're deaf  
not something worse instead  
he will make it darker  
he will make it light  
according to his torah  
which leonard did not write

**Peter (October 4, 2016):**

Who says I know God's wishes?

I've not met brow to brow  
never had a chance to glimpse him  
and never hope to now  
But we who were raised in harbors  
while others burned from war  
have been free to choose which voices  
made us what we are.

**Leonard (October 4, 2016):**

That was great fun.  
Be well, dear friends.  
Much love,  
Eliezer

**Leonard (November 6, 2016, 3 p.m., in response to a photo of Peter and Sophia De Mornay-O'Neal):**

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

**SELECTIONS FROM THE**  
**NOTEBOOKS**

but the times are long  
it's all a long time gone  
when I had an honest job  
and Annie called me darling

\*\*\*

I don't want to greet  
the morning light  
with a night like this  
    in my heart soul  
Have mercy on those shadows  
that fall in love with shadows

\*\*\*

You're going to fall some day  
into a wild embrace  
with one who turns away  
so you cannot see his face  
You won't know who you are  
You won't know who he is  
There's no one there to know  
a love so wild as this  
He won't be there before you  
He won't be here within  
There'll be no border to the heart  
or boundary to the skin  
He isn't there before you  
isn't here within  
No border to the heart  
or boundary to the skin



\*\*\*

When we are apart  
and the moon is full  
My longing  
paints your hands  
on the full moon  
If you read this by candlelight  
as it was written  
if you are alone in a room  
as I am  
you will know that I love you  
dear and distant wife

\*\*\*

Formless dinosaurs  
Ignorant of our stern judgement  
the dinosaurs graze on stars  
in the fields of night  
I have no sorrow left  
I neglected you a long time  
but I neglected myself even longer  
This night will never end  
The morning will come to wash it away  
with sunlight and commotion  
I have no sorrow left  
The stars are too dim for the night  
I have no sorrow left

for the dinosaur  
grazing on stars  
in the fields of night

\*\*\*

I loved my friends  
I talked to them  
for hours and hours  
and I began  
to want to be beautiful  
and I grew  
to hate beauty in others  
Mind you  
a monster  
is not always beautiful

\*\*\*

and here is a voice  
I have been listening to  
for a long time  
it says: O G-d, I love you  
it says: Child, I love you back

\*\*\*

### **Wednesday 17th May 00**

Thanks for turning me on  
with your hatred of sex and men  
and your drunken kisses  
which were like someone  
trying to eat my voice raw  
like a living oyster  
The Tibetan fairy-tales  
of coming back  
in a brand-new sack  
to finish off your dinner  
right to the end I wanted you  
right to the bitter end  
your breath like a morgue  
your flesh undone  
your juices gone

I was still sifting through  
your boring conversation  
for traces, for hints  
that you ever thought of me  
with longing  
and found none  
Thank you Heather  
thanks for turning me on  
and after a while I gave up  
trying to satisfy you  
I just wanted to stick it in  
under any circumstances  
self-respect, tenderness  
every mask was torn  
just a hunger with an arm  
thanks for turning me on  
just to be inside of you  
just to know  
for one fraction of a measure  
that we were in  
the world together  
thank you, Beloved  
for turning me off  
and for turning me on  
I thank the nameless one  
and I thank the nameless many  
\*\*\*

**L.A.**

**Friday August 5[?], 2000**

I wanted you to love me  
I needed you to love me  
I had to have you love me  
but what I meant  
or who I meant  
I still don't have a clue  
except that I was lonely  
*and there was only you*



\*\*\*

**9 am Sunday, Aug 7, 2000**

If they never played the game  
how could they know the score  
Don't go down to Westmount Station  
Those trains don't run no more  
The bullet trains of Tokyo  
The monorail  
The TGV  
They'll let you know  
    what transportation's for  
But don't go down to Westm't Station  
Those old trains don't run no more  
*Those stories that your father knows*

\*\*\*

**Friday August 11 [?]**

I came to you with sorrow  
and I promised more tomorrow  
you said, Come to Me with bread  
I said, Lord, I am a victim  
I cannot make a living  
That's why you employed me with the dead

\*\*\*

she loved me  
    I'm only quoting her  
she's gone now  
    I feel much quieter  
no beauty  
    but then neither am I  
alone now

\*\*\*

he wasn't as lean as Bogart  
or short as Alan Ladd  
but his songs would last forever  
and some already had  
I could have been the Ace of Spades  
if I was only black

I could have been the Prince of Peace  
but Jesus's coming back  
I could have been the Beauty Queen  
but I had too much hair  
I could have stood where Moses stood  
but he was standing there  
I could have been a millionaire  
but money ruined my life  
I could have been the Master [?]  
I didn't want your wife  
As a child I had the dream  
that I might speak in the highest name  
and gather many broken {noble} hearts  
to homeward [?]  
and I was judged by those  
who spoke more sweetly than I could  
and I was judged by those  
whose suffering made them dumb  
The judgement was, Be silent, child  
be silent in the world of men  
O bitter silence that I held  
while omens burned the gypsy [?] dust  
and wires cut the {faithful} {widow?} riders down  
and every holy word was turned  
to serve the greed and muting of mind  
O bitter silence, bitter calm I spread  
while every soul {law} was drowned  
below the poison tide and now the vile  
abominations rose to rule and regulate  
the very breathing of the soul  
and still the judgement was  
Be silent, Child, you are too weak {you are too rich},  
you are too young

and this world came, and men like you and me, gold in the tooth, gold  
in the taste, gold in the brain, and great champions of silence came,  
missionaries of the void, and someone said, and someone said there's  
nothing left, there's nothing next, be human in the human world, be calm,

be calm, and in my heart I hated this vast tyranny of peace. I could not hear  
the judgement and I fell in love with everyone who fell in love with me

\*\*\*

Simple Songs

with everybody singing  
and someone saying  
sing us "Born to Lose"  
and Hershorn takes  
his daughter's ukulele  
and everybody listens  
to the news

Simple songs with everybody singing  
I forget them soon I let them go  
The anthems & the prayers of lonely people

\*\*\*

It is going to be like this  
Sitting at a bar in Geneva  
or is it Zurich  
I can never tell which  
Carolina, Carolina  
I can never tell which

*Bridge*

It is a nice place here  
They don't mind you smoking either  
Everybody's smoking & drinking  
in Geneva or Zurich  
Carolina, Carolina  
are we ever  
going to get together again  
Sometimes I think so  
Sometimes I don't  
I don't think I do tonight  
I think I don't  
Carolina, Carolina,  
in Zurich or Geneva  
I don't think we're going  
to get together ever again

\*\*\*

This time, baby, gonna ask for the moon  
gonna ask the rainbow to deliver  
the treasure right now, not later, not soon  
If it rains, the rain's got to be silver  
got to hear it in the arms of my lover  
no other place will do. I want it all,  
the whole fucking cross, not just a splinter.  
I don't just want my kick, I want the ball  
and if it's got to be a stone, I want the wall.

Take my gloves

Take my helmet

take my belt

my forty-five

I don't need them

where I'm going

you don't have to talk no more

you can rest awhile

There ain't no words

where you are going

O my fathers

I have listened

to your whispering

in the air

I have heard you

talk all morning

Midnight I have

heard your prayer

Take my knife

my silver bullets

take the woman

by my side

I can't have her,

where I'm going

I can't even

tell her why

\*\*\*

all those broken hearts  
& you ain't gonna stop it  
when it starts

\*\*\*

Baby, I can't speak {talk} about  
the hundred thousand darknesses  
that go around insisting  
they're my heart  
I can talk about the weather  
I don't think it's going to rain  
but if you ask me how I am:  
I can't complain  
You can say  
    it's all been written  
but I cannot read the text  
It's love alone distracts me  
from one moment to the next  
I'd never seen the day so new  
the green so green, the blue so blue  
and all you lost was  
only to renew you  
I tried to make a joyful now  
Surely the ocean will part her lips  
for the widow watching  
Surely the nighttime  
    will yield another song  
Surely the ocean  
    will let the men undrown  
Surely the widow  
    will give another chance  
to the widow who's been  
    watching all the ships  
Surely the morning light  
    will let the man return  
and the wolf go back  
                to moonlight  
Surely the moonlight

will hold another face  
The heart of love is covered up  
    & the heart of labour too  
There's no one else  
    There's nothing else  
can move the dust but you  
all the bad examples of my uncles  
and my friends  
still I could not fight it  
or wrong or even right it  
I didn't even know  
what I'd done  
Now Bobby left his body  
    in a Hong Kong Hotel  
He never even told us where  
    to find it  
I was looking for the needle  
I was looking high & low  
for the needle that I used to sew  
my coat of many colours long ago  
that I lost so long ago  
I've been waiting  
    many years now  
for a climate  
    such as this  
for the cold to  
    be so clear now  
that nobody even  
    talks about the spring  
Here comes the morning boat  
here comes the evening train  
here comes Marianne now  
to say goodbye again  
\*\*\*

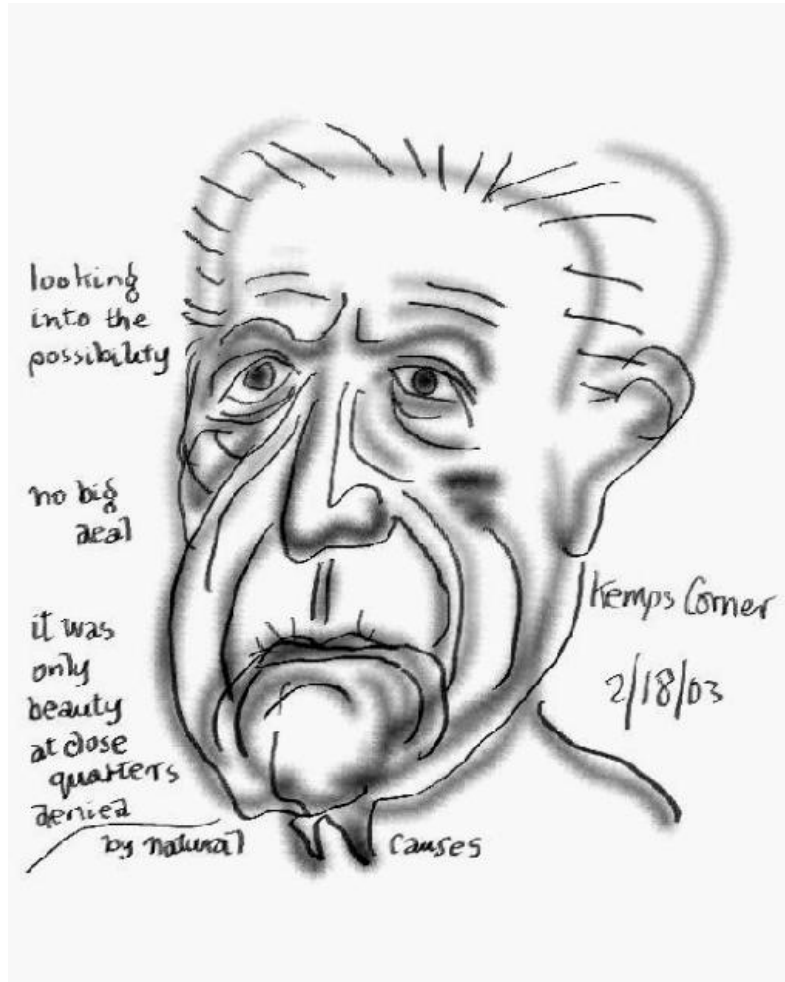
**Athens Inter, C. July 30**

a dream a couple of nights ago  
a fierce god came thru the door

almost broke down the door  
my house was a frail affair  
\*\*\*

**Sept 17, 2008**

you who have fallen  
beneath all contempt  
whose {your} pockets are {full swollen}  
but you're living in debt  
and dead to the culture  
that murdered your {heart} pride  
you pick through the scriptures  
for somewhere to hide



\*\*\*

**Oct 16**

There was so little to say  
All my prophecies

were coming true  
I was old  
My work was done  
Then you began  
to undress for me  
on Skype  
And I had to think  
about my life again  
It was a good hotel  
Thick double curtain  
sealed the room in darkness  
any time of the day  
I lay on my {the} bed  
in my free time  
thinking of her {you}  
as if {I was} meditating  
\*\*\*

**Geneva dressing rm. Oct 26 2008**

a few nights ago  
in a dream  
you said: “Come along  
to the sunny beach”  
I thought you meant  
“just you and me”  
but it turned out  
you were with a handsome young man  
named Coran  
and I was, as you said,  
welcome to “come along”  
and that was that  
\*\*\*

**Dream Brighton Nov 28[?]**

Tom Waits singing—I hear him  
I’m in a theatre—I’ve given  
a show to a large audience  
My show went well—I can’t  
see him—I’m in my dressing



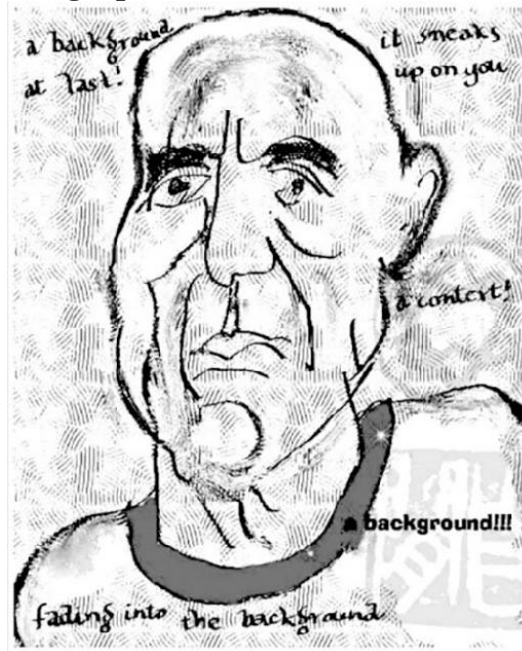
room—but I can hear him—  
his music begin—it is so  
beautiful and original and  
sophisticated—so much better  
than mine—some mélange  
of harshness and sweetness—  
modern and sentimental all  
at once—even Kitsch used  
so skillfully—I wish I  
could do that—then he  
starts to sing—so great—  
I go down to hear him—  
expecting a great  
adoring crowd—but  
he's singing in a half full  
small theatre—a kind  
of afterthought of a  
theatre—we leave together  
he puts his arm around  
my shoulder—he looks  
good—a bit beat up—  
a bit older—but in full  
possession of himself

\*\*\*

I gave you my children  
you said they were starving  
and I gave you my knife  
and the meat I was carving  
Once I sang the ancient  
now I sing the old  
once I sang the sacrament  
now I sing the mould  
Old people roll their stockings up  
while sitting on their beds  
I need them on my mountain  
I need their empty heads  
Last year you dreamed

this year you killed  
and now you are the ruler  
of the kingdom that you willed  
your love has traveled to the towns  
you wanted her to leave for  
and since you sent her there yourself  
there's nothing left to grieve for  
and, lovers of the future,  
I know what I have done  
I'm looking in the mirror  
of the gun machine  
yes baby  
you're the queen of hearts.  
You took my ring  
and threw it in the garbage  
I've been looking thru  
the garbage ever since  
if you find yourself  
beside the city dump sometime  
you'll find it covered  
with my fingerprints  
Your black suit  
gleaming in my eye  
like licorice  
When you have broken down  
you'll find me then  
you'll find me on my knees  
Fifth Avenue was an Indian path  
& all of this was trees  
Is this the way you wanted it  
Did you choose to fall like this  
with so little majesty  
Rest here a little, pilgrim  
I've been where it is summer  
The crystals in your hair reveal  
your road goes through the winter  
the scratches on her movie

like rain that children draw  
smiling to herself for herself  
her own histories  
her own grandmother  
    remembering the incorruptible  
    formula of her mouth  
in nineteen sixty seven  
You took my love  
    and left it in the trash can  
I've been looking thru  
    the orange peels ever since  
If some time you happen  
    by the city dump  
You'll find it covered  
    with my fingerprints

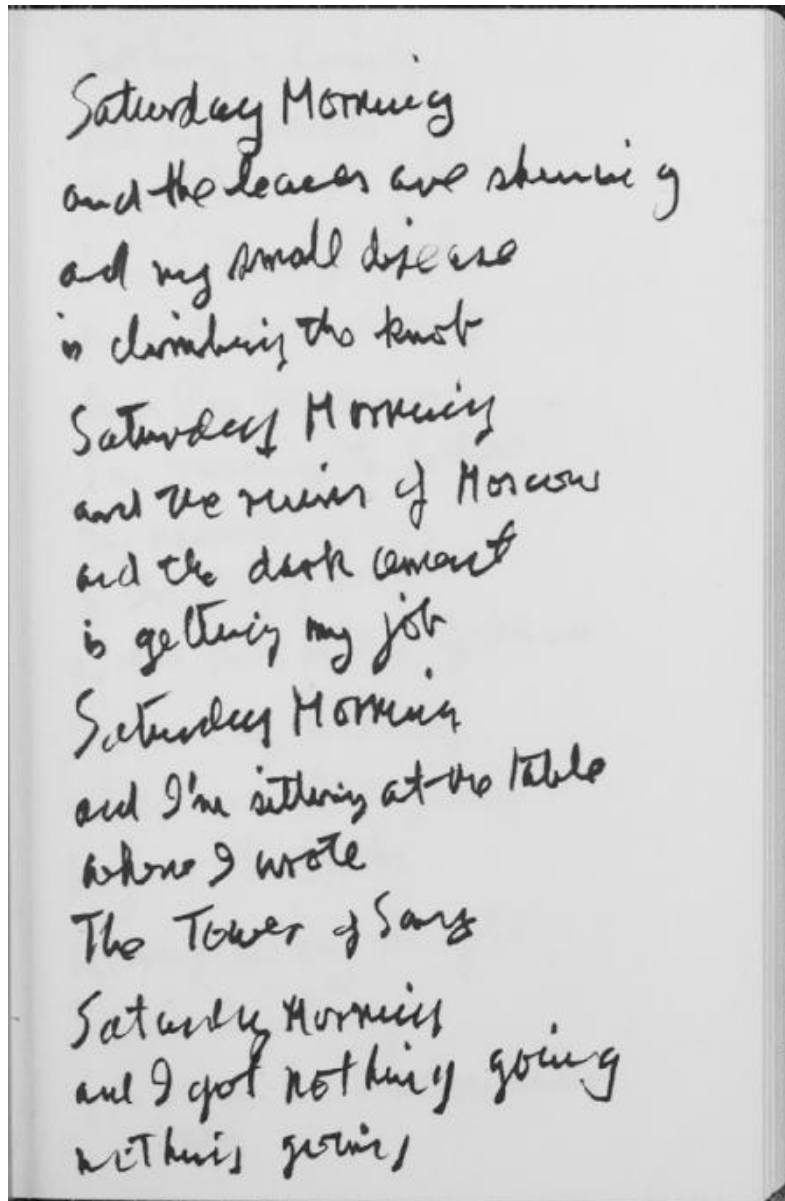


\*\*\*

Saturday Morning  
and the leaves are shining  
and my small disease  
is climbing the knob  
Saturday Morning  
and the ruins of Moscow  
and the dark cement

is getting my job  
Saturday Morning  
and I'm sitting at the table  
where I wrote  
The Tower of Song  
Saturday Morning  
and I got nothing going  
nothing going  
nothing is wrong  
All my secrets  
I've told to the pillow  
like a teenage girl  
in a Motown song  
And I'm burning  
I'm burning to follow  
my secrets  
to the City of Death  
on the outskirts of town  
Saturday Morning  
what was I saying  
before the birds  
interrupted my thought  
I was thinking  
of a room in Westminster  
room  
with a woman from Hell  
who thought she was hot  
Saturday Morning  
how long can I {you} wait  
when it's clear that  
you're serving your terror  
and you're loving  
all that you hate.  
Saturday Morning  
in the wonderful window  
where the palm trees  
tickle the wind

Saturday Morning  
don't give up your courage  
just breathe  
and the worst will be over  
but look it's coming again  
I'm writing in the book that  
you gave me  
I'm so happy that we never  
made love



\*\*\*

nothing to know  
All my secrets  
I've told to the pillow  
like a teenage girl  
in a Matron's care  
And I'm burning  
You burning to follow  
my secrets  
to the City of Bath  
on the outskirts of town  
Saturday Morning  
what was I saying  
before the birds  
interrupted my thought  
I was thinking  
of a room in Westminster  
room

with a woman from Hell  
who thought she was hot  
Saturday Morning  
how long can I wait  
when it's clear that  
you're serving your terror  
and you're loving  
all that you hate.  
Saturday Morning  
in the wonderful window  
where the palm trees  
tickle the wind  
Saturday Morning  
don't give up your courage  
just breathe  
and the worst will be over  
but look it's coming again

I've driven a pin through your footprint  
to make you stumble and swoon  
I've covered it all with a detail  
from somebody's old honeymoon  
Nobody calls you who calls you  
Nobody calls you but me  
Nobody wants you who wants you  
Nobody wants you but me  
I'm lost in a shell with the ocean  
I'm locked in an old honeymoon  
You've driven a pin through my footprint

You've come after me with a tune  
I've driven a shell through the ocean  
I'm locked in an old honeymoon  
I left some rain in your footprint  
You gave me the words & the tune  
lost in a spell that I started  
to turn myself into a bone  
locked in a room with the details  
of somebody's old honeymoon  
Lost in a spell that I started to  
turn myself into a bone  
you know that I'm just one of many  
I hope you don't think I'm alone  
Nobody wants you who wants you  
Nobody wants you but me  
The moon is after you, darling  
It's wandered away from the sea  
\*\*\*

And O my heart  
my lonely heart  
how sweet  
how sweet you sing  
I knew that you  
were lying  
but I never  
called you on it.  
I told my brother  
                  what I heard  
and he began to weep  
I told my sister who whispered  
"hush the baby is asleep"  
I told the angels of the Lord,  
they covered me with light  
I told my heart, my heart did say:  
"Be still with me tonight."  
\*\*\*

**Oct 10, 2005**

leave me out of all your histories  
that's okay with me  
I am as patient as the climate  
I change when I am told  
Thank you for  
your gracious hospitality  
my heart is light  
when I recall the years  
we have been together  
as if you ever thought  
that you were some kind  
of a teacher  
when did that stupid idea  
take root?  
when you had no other way  
to reach her?

\*\*\*

**Campanile Nov 1, 2005**

I just came back to say goodbye  
It's true, it's true, we won  
The bodies piled up tidal high  
It wasn't that much fun  
Been raining almost every day  
We came here for the sun  
We had that earthquake in L.A.  
It wasn't that much fun

\*\*\*

**Nov 6, 2005**

I was second to none  
but I was never best  
I was old and broke  
so I could not rest  
You can call it luck  
be it good or bad  
but you don't give up  
when your heart is dead  
it had to make you crazy



when you no longer had the money  
or the youth  
to bribe the referee

\*\*\*

**Soho Metro April 8, 2006**

**Toronto**

can't even tie your shoe  
I look away  
and cry for you  
a mouse  
with two matchsticks  
and a bottle cap  
is the drummer  
for me  
singing by myself  
all morning  
singing to myself  
about Vanessa  
I kissed you {once} hard  
as if I were young  
and you were so kind  
to pretend that I was  
and always that room  
that window so wide  
there was nothing beyond it  
& no one inside  
the story's been written  
it's signed & it's sealed  
you gave me a lily  
but now it's a field  
I don't know what happened  
but who could have guessed  
you'd leave us all hanging  
that night that you left  
Why didn't you tell me  
that you had to leave  
O noble departure

in silence and grief

\*\*\*

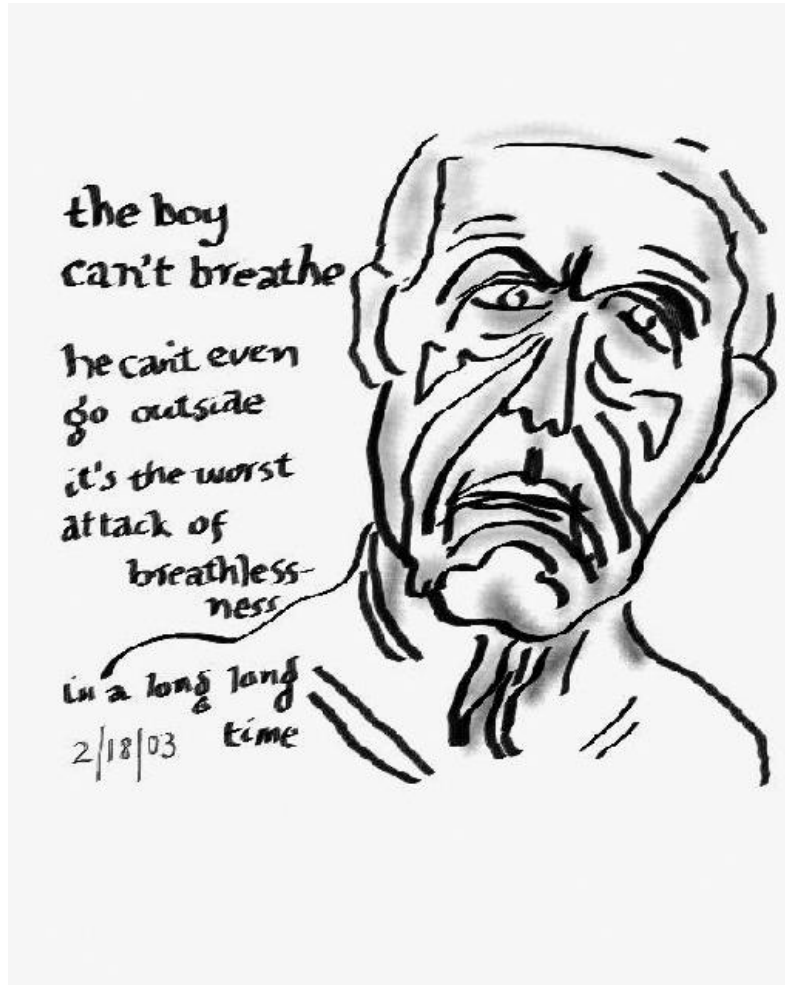
**May 27, 2006**

and with me still  
my darling friend  
whose lips the decades  
won't amend  
my comfort in  
the coming dusk  
where hands can't feel  
but memory must  
my comfort in  
the rising dust  
where hands can't  
so memory must  
where flesh can't do  
what memory must  
the thrill of skin  
in memory's trust  
and even here  
and even now  
I can't regret  
I don't know how  
where lips can't drink  
so memory must  
your will to live  
was too intense  
you cut it down  
it made no sense  
when life betrayed you  
with a yawn  
you cut it down  
lest it go on  
I can't look back  
or I will fall  
time's good trick  
reverse it all

lest suffering {torture} wear  
its hideous grin  
and bodies tear  
and boredom wins  
you cut away  
the rotting wood  
as any careful  
gardener should  
you kept your word  
your deep concern  
the winter's cold  
the wood won't burn  
you kept your word  
your deep concern  
fuck this valley  
fuck this hill  
where nothing works  
and nothing will  
fuck the bed  
we lay upon  
where nothing turned  
my body on  
baby you been gone a long time now  
but you come to me in moments of unrest  
and you hold my heart against  
                    your burning lips  
and you tell me that my love  
                    has passed the test  
You never really  
                    beat me up  
but now and then  
                    you threatened  
you were six foot two  
                    and some  
and I was five foot  
                    seven

\*\*\*

gonna live awhile  
before I die  
very peaceful  
in the MRI

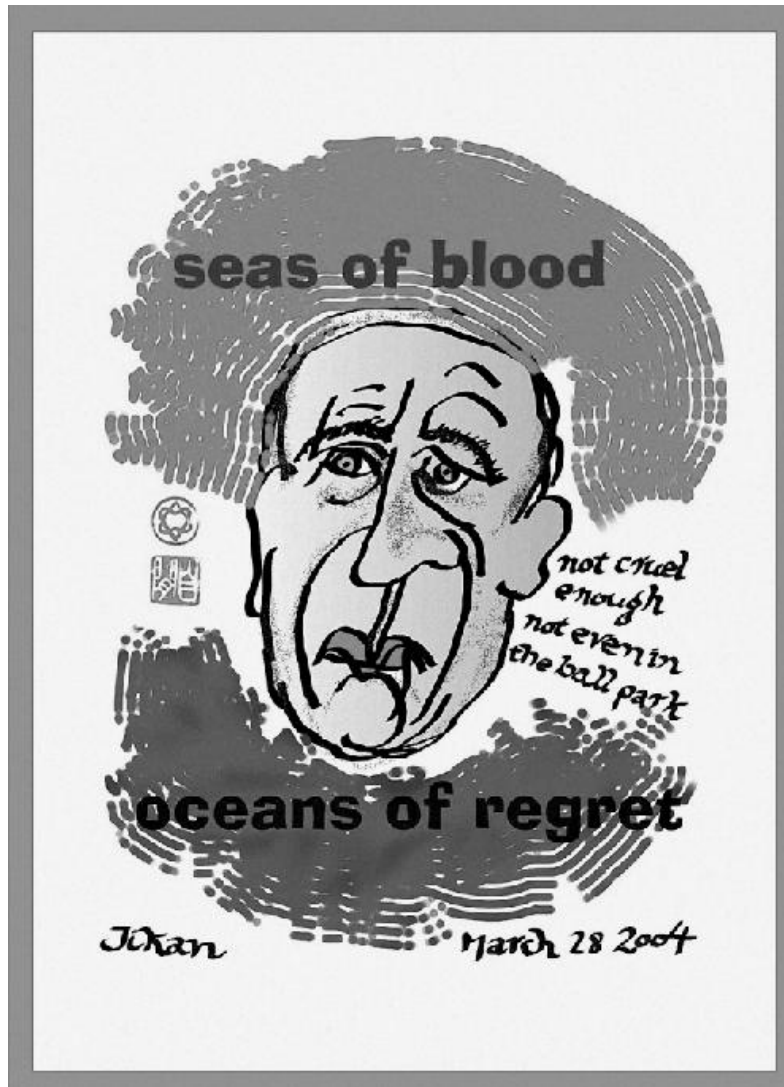


The moon is full tonight  
if only we could see it  
and the garden  
filled with fragrance  
if only we could  
breathe it  
Every time I try to speak  
It just doesn't come out right  
Everything I try to say  
it just sounds something like  
that you were gone forever  
and by your own dear hand

\*\*\*

when I studied with the serpent  
and sang confession to the trees  
trying many sacraments from any hand  
finding teachers anywhere  
in all disguises insisting that I listen  
to their daily talk  
for the mystery it must disclose  
and be left standing while  
everyone else got high  
The waitress came from Newfoundland  
She said she knew the sea  
I took her on a lonesome trip  
until she cut me free  
O darling you're waiting  
for somebody's child  
and once he was free  
but now he is wild  
And now that you're planning  
to follow the sun  
like a shadow of birds  
or a crook on the run  
you're travelling too light  
for the seas you must swim  
your thoughts are too deep  
and your smile is too grim  
You've broken the promise  
you said in the barn  
when you worried all night  
while the killers were born  
and your father did laugh  
as he poured you some wine  
then you shut the big doors  
and lay down with the blind  
You've broken the promise  
you swore through your teeth  
when you saw the words end

and the photographs weep  
and nobody blames you  
as the train pulls away  
with its cargo of snow  
for those glass paperweights  
You've broken the promise  
you said you would keep  
but the paragraphs end  
and the pictures still weep  
like the sound of a storm  
in a round paperweight  
& nobody blames you  
as the train pulls away  
with the sound of a storm  
in a round paperweight



\*\*\*

after the poem  
a little quieter  
the people I imagine  
waiting for me  
are fast asleep  
Marianne on Aylmer Street  
enduring my hatred  
until it rusted  
and naming me higher and higher  
until my view was wide  
    enough to love her  
The master of lakes

made a haze of waterfalls  
over your shoulders  
and you come to me  
breasts soft as sand  
and hard as snail shells  
The master of traffic  
has you followed ceaselessly  
by crystal headlights  
and you come to me  
with beads of sap  
in your small quick kisses  
The master of farmyards  
tethers newborn animals  
beside your long legs  
and we lie apart centuries  
on fields of salt



some call it  
the sap  
some call it  
the blood

\*\*\*



She brought the telephone book  
yellow against her green sleeves  
and white shirted bosom

She stood in the doorway  
talking to the engineer  
whom she favoured of us all  
After she left he leaned back  
and relit a mexican cigar  
and spoke about mixing vodka  
with milk

Now my song is in the great speakers  
and it is true as anything  
that makes you dream  
Have you suffered  
for the sake of a bigger office  
Have you betrayed your pain  
which was meant  
to bring you here  
to this altar this sacrifice  
these shackles of charity  
Find your way to be among us  
waiting for the bus  
with the children gone  
and no hope but in the sweetness of each other

\*\*\*

I'm sitting here alone  
    on Christmas day  
I know, I know  
    it shouldn't be this way  
I been calling up some people  
but everybody's out  
& I been praying to the one  
it's all about



I don't know how I got this far  
from everyone I love  
or why I closed so many doors  
what I was thinking of

\*\*\*

Don't come to me  
with your bright ideas  
Don't talk to me  
about the flowers  
of this  
or any other city  
Your bright ideas  
hurt my eyes  
nor do I love  
your rubber hose  
the handcuffs  
or the kitchen chair

\*\*\*

because there was never anything better  
I did in the human world  
than to lie down in the fields of frankincense  
with you

\*\*\*

**Monday March 4[?], 2012 Tremaine Front Lawn**

baby, don't remind me what it's like  
the only thing I ever cared about  
wasn't money  
wasn't fame  
wasn't family  
wasn't art  
baby, don't remind me what I miss  
baby, don't remind me what I miss  
I drove a thousand miles away from this  
\*\*\*

**April 8th 2012 Front Lawn Tremaine**

C'mon brother Trouble  
when you gonna quit  
you stole a bunch of money  
I thought that was it  
\*\*\*

**May 22, 2012 Tremaine Tuesday afternoon**

the troubles followed me  
from bed to bed  
i pitched my tent  
wher'ere love led  
no matter where  
I slept and fed  
the troubles followed me & {tailed me}  
from bed to bed  
I pitched my tent  
wher'ere love led  
the troubles followed  
bed to bed  
I moved away  
when beauty fled  
with beauty gone  
the rest was dead  
I knew too well  
what Moses said

I must not touch  
the body dead  
with beauty gone  
what's left is dead  
I tried to do  
what's hard to do  
from showing up  
to loving you  
and loving you  
that was a bitch  
my self-defense  
was getting rich  
and buy off  
your ugly greed  
with every fucking thing  
you need  
the only news that isn't boring is the truth  
but baby you ain't telling it  
the only item you don't want to buy is love  
but everybody selling it  
    the sleek silver pen  
it's supposed to write upside down  
in space  
    where I'm really going to have  
nothing to write about

May 22, 2012 Tremaine Tuesday afternoon  
the troubles followed me  
from bed to bed.  
  
i pitched my tent  
wherever love led,  
no matter where  
I slept and fed  
the troubles followed me <sup>is</sup> <sup>taled</sup> me  
from bed to bed  
  
I pitched my tent  
wherever love led  
the troubles followed  
bed to bed

I moved away  
when beauty fled  
with beauty gone  
the rest was dead  
I know too well  
what Moses said  
I must not touch  
the body dead  
  
with beauty gone  
what's left is dead  
I tried to do  
what's hard to do  
from showing up  
to leaving you

\*\*\*

**July 10, 2002**

all the leaves are shining  
all the birds are singing  
all the wind is blowing  
all the bells are ringing  
please don't make me say it anymore  
I thought I'd go alone but  
I'm glad I came with you

That's a rose  
and that's a cactus  
They're the same  
but they're different too

\*\*\*

I'll try to come home  
once I've done what I must  
which is what, please tell me  
please tell me what  
I forgot to mention  
the moon and the trees  
and the murderous blood  
that runs through our veins  
I forgot to mention  
the pillars of gold  
and the screams from the dungeon  
the fingernails pulled  
I forgot to mention  
the blank space on my heart  
where nothing is written  
and the plan falls apart  
I forgot to mention  
the unmade bed  
and the card on the doorknob  
says Do Not Disturb  
I forgot to mention  
the skin on my head  
hanging in folds disheveling my face  
like an unmade bed  
you climb up your ladder  
of rumor and lies  
you {slave} work for the master  
you claim to despise  
and you wave at the master  
you never polished  
your talent enough  
content to remain

a diamond rough  
I'm a weakling a failure  
ashamed of myself / the cards I was dealt  
my balls are so big  
I can't buckle my belt  
I {swear} strive to complete  
before it's too late  
some mission from G-d  
I can't even locate  
I can't seem to locate  
get down on your knees  
this ain't gonna pass  
and pray there's no god  
to punish your ass  
I moan {boast} and I bitch  
at the cards I was dealt  
and my balls are so big  
I can't buckle my belt  
can't look in the mirror  
I'm burning with shame  
but I still like to boast  
I'm ahead of the game  
I'm tired of women  
I don't trust the men  
I'll try to come home  
as soon as it's done  
the mighty task  
I can't even locate  
I'll try to complete it  
if it's not too late  
the mission the sanctified mission  
I can't even locate  
that I can't locate  
you gave away the factory  
and you gave away my job  
you said it's for the future {better}  
and you said So help me God

you said one day I'd thank you  
never gave nobody trouble  
but I'm afraid it's gonna start  
You gave away the future  
you said I'd have to wait  
It's for a better future  
but the future's kind of late  
I see you don't believe me  
no matter what

    I do  
my hand upon  
    my mother's grave  
but that ain't good  
    enough for you

I tried  
I don't know why  
I didn't care why  
flying a kite  
no wind & no string  
worse than "nothing to lose"  
no juice to be hopeless  
no heart to be sad  
I tried in the wind  
I tried in the sand  
People turning into snakes  
before my very eyes  
I tried to hate  
I tried to forgive  
I tried baby  
I tried to live  
I tried to die  
I tried to live





\*\*\*

**O  
Copenhagen  
Copenhagen  
August 24  
2012  
Room 510  
First Hotel**

The red roofs  
darkened by the rain  
and the eternal  
beginning of a cold

\*\*\*

Field Commander Cohen is wounded  
call it age or love  
the turret of his Sherman tank  
all slippery with blood  
He who was a hundred lovers  
in a monk's disguise  
is asking for a cup of water  
from a swarm of flies  
I am the song & not the singer  
take his body  
take his spirit  
Not the boundary  
but the centre  
Save your anger, angels  
the days are coming soon  
when the earth will be  
a mirror  
the sun will be a cobweb  
the moon will be a  
spider  
coming near  
call him Dylan  
call him Jesus  
call him Mister Rockefeller  
I want to reach the people  
that the master did not reach

\*\*\*

maybe tomorrow will be better  
and the banner raised again  
for the sisterhood of women  
& the brotherhood of men

\*\*\*

just to breathe the air  
and sip the rare  
nectar of us together  
to give you something  
you might read

down the road or never

\*\*\*

All of the lights

All of the sea broken lights

of the river

All of the rhymeless thoughts of the hungry

\*\*\*

Look at me I'm all alone

I'm nobody's fool

I'm Nobody's Fool

and deeper than experience

I felt a woman presence

not like anyone I'd left

or anyone imagined.

\*\*\*

I swear that I'll be true

to the uniform I wore

to the flag that I salute

and the promises I swore

I'll try to do my duty

just like I did before

but I can't hold you, baby,

to my heart no more

I know it's us or them

In the world that men call real

& a flower needs a stem

you can't grow these golden flowers

if the stems be not of steel

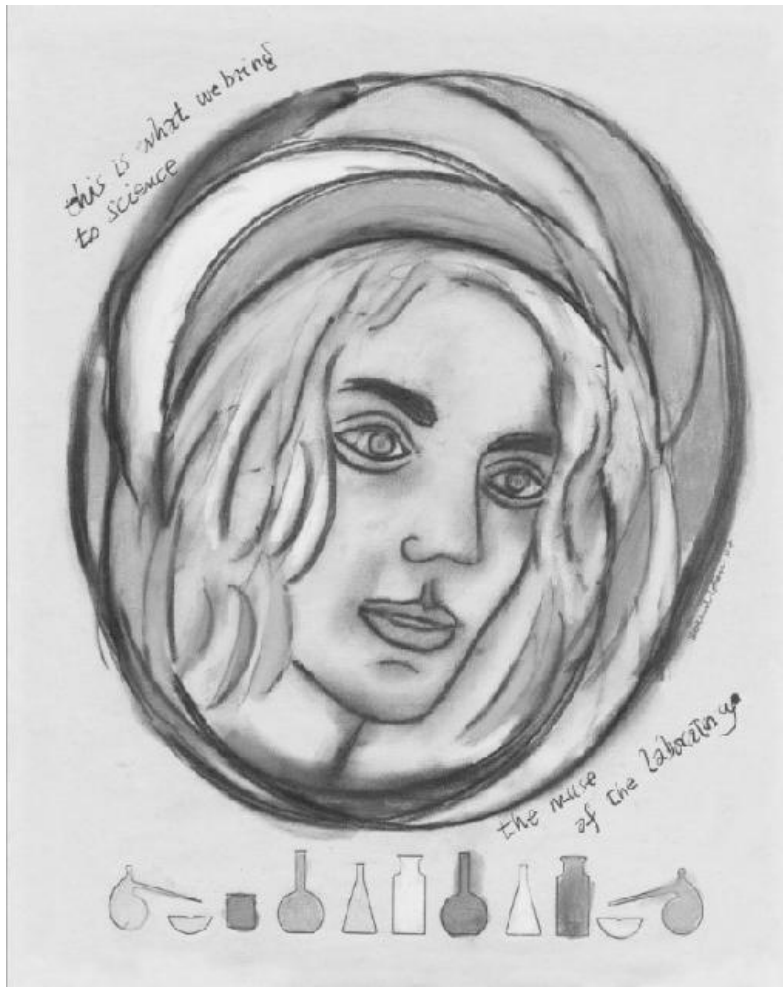
tho' the stem be made of steel

Can't blame you for the cruelty

when the killer's at the door

But I can't hold you, baby,

to my heart no more.



and I'm here between your safety  
and the killer at the door

\*\*\*

I bow my head  
in gratitude  
to those who gave  
who give so much  
so I can write  
my diary

I think, therefore I am  
right up there with  
Mary had a Little Lamb

\*\*\*

and ankle deep in a pool of blood  
your uncle cries at last  
"I don't care much for the movie

but the popcorn is unsurpassed”  
& establish the terror  
you long to command  
\*\*\*

When I saw  
    how easily  
the hand became  
    a claw  
I began to understand  
the study of the law  
\*\*\*

Some people got the blues  
Some people don't  
Some people don't got food  
That's the truth  
I didn't say that it was news  
I could not slip away  
without telling you  
that I died in Greece  
was buried in that  
place where the donkey  
is tethered to the olive tree  
I will always be there  
To all of you  
with whom I ate the fish  
and clicked my glass  
& never said a word  
before I go  
I want to say hello  
from the stranger who  
lived among you  
\*\*\*

out of the night  
    the trees step forward  
a solitary bird  
    sharpens its song  
on the stone-grey {mist} dawn

\*\*\*

Her bread is very sweet  
She baked it by herself  
in an oven on a hill above the sea  
an oven that I built  
it took me several months  
when I lived with her last year  
when we weren't doing much  
but keeping warm and near  
We watched the different sailboats  
of the rich and of the poor  
the travelers from the cove  
and the [?] from Gibraltar  
We watched them  
then a smoke ring that came from Lebanon  
and we weren't doing much  
so we waved at everyone  
She phoned me from a long way off  
just the other night  
She's working in a private club  
and she doesn't mind the life  
She meant to talk 3 minutes  
while they showed a silent movie  
but we weren't very busy  
so we spoke till it was bright  
She asked if I was busy {happy}  
and what the weather's like  
we weren't doing very much  
so we spoke till it was light  
so we whispered half the night  
I wasn't doing very much  
& the weather's right  
& the weather's been all right  
She phoned me  
                    from a long way off  
just the other night  
She's working in a

Playboy club

She doesn't mind the life  
She asked if I was busy  
& what the weather's like  
I told her that I loved her  
& the weather was all right  
She phoned me from a long way off  
just the other night  
She's working in a private club  
She doesn't mind the life  
She asked if I was busy {happy}  
& what the weather's like  
I wasn't doing much  
She spent a whole week's pay to learn  
the weather'd been all right  
& the weather'd been all right  
I know that you can love me  
if you'd only try  
It's true I killed your brother  
& I'm aiming at your eye  
but these are only droplets  
on the water wheel  
save me all your energy  
& tell me how you feel  
Your songs are very sad  
I hope that you will sing them  
your poems are very long  
I hope that you will bring them  
Just leave them on my desk  
I'll put your name in lights  
& pick yourself a girl, may I  
suggest the one in tights

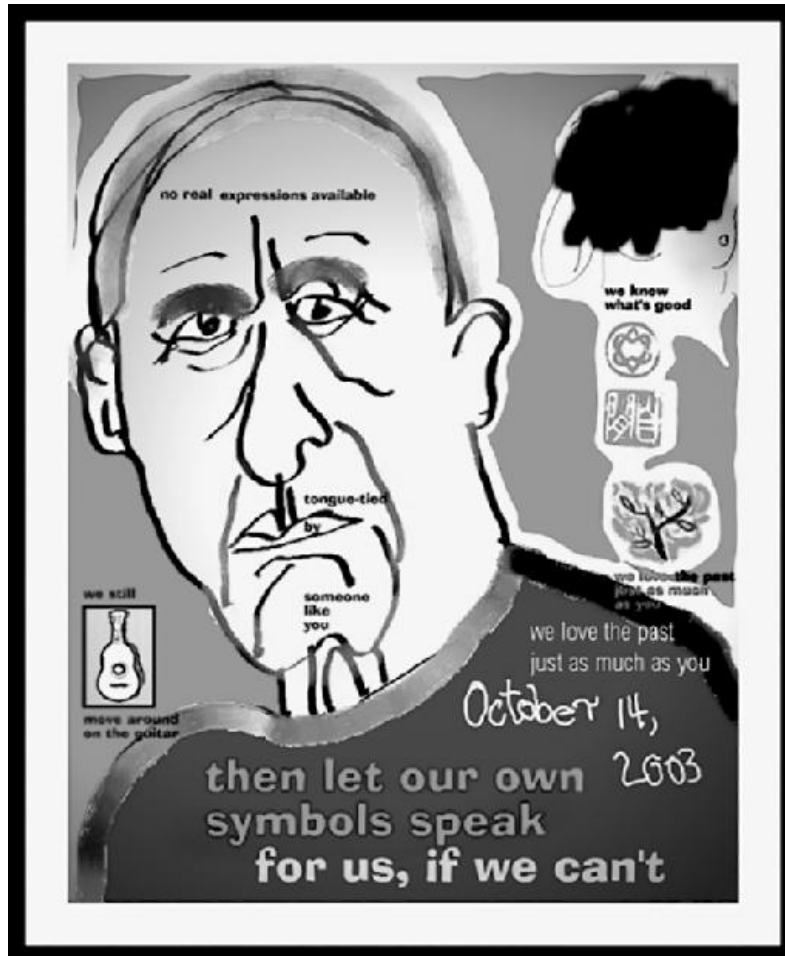
\*\*\*

first you were a clean-shaven fool  
now you're a fool with a beard

\*\*\*

what the old laws mean

why they distinguish between  
what is clean  
and what is unclean



symbols in the flesh  
have been given you  
so that you may know  
when you may approach  
one another  
I write this on the  
borderline  
who insist that the  
full moon should be  
new and the new moon  
should be full  
I do not speak of sin  
but only readiness and



hospitality & the wisdom  
of restraint

\*\*\*

you'll never understand  
you don't need to understand  
you're not supposed to understand  
what it means to be a man  
to feel this overwhelming love  
to be so awkward

and so tough  
and to know it's not enough  
to say I want you baby

I want you  
with my dying breath

\*\*\*

**Aug 21, 1989 Mt. Baldy**

I take the train  
but I do not dare  
to really look at anybody  
riding with me there  
some are poor some are rich  
some are black some are white  
but I don't know which is which  
in my secret life  
& I'll never be able  
to bring a little baby  
from my belly to the cradle  
so what if there's a war  
so what if there's a fight  
there is no [finer?] sight  
for ever & forever  
nothing can be better  
than the man and the  
woman together

\*\*\*

Beautiful are the nights in Canaan  
How long will you live in my heart,

O homeland  
Sleep my darling girl  
A girl is expecting her lover  
She lies in bed listening  
to the train  
Under a greenwood tree  
two boys are sitting, talking  
about a maid, and nothing  
else matters to them.  
I change my dwelling places  
and change my haunts and  
wander from country to country,  
the little silence whose  
name is Abishag  
My mother's holy hands  
are mending my shirt.  
Come to me or leave me waiting  
I don't care no more  
I've waited like a month  
and I waited like a stone  
I've waited on a feather  
and I've waited on a storm  
I've waited like a mountain  
and I've waited like a door  
I've waited on the bridges  
that the rivers washed away  
I waited like a bridegroom  
with another man's bouquet  
I waited for your beauty  
to be given to the rain  
I stood outside {beyond} my tears {sorrow}  
like a statue in the rain  
I folded {up} my heart  
and I cut it with your love  
a string of paper dolls



I'm standing here  
    in the blinding light  
I don't know what to do  
my nakedness  
I'm standing here  
    in the blinding light  
I've come to the end of the line  
& my nakedness cries out for you  
cries out like a drunk  
    for his bottle of wine  
I'm standing here  
    in the blinding light  
& I don't know what to do  
the blinding light  
    of what I lost  
when I walked away from you  
the blinding light  
    when you're stalled at night  
O baby forgive me  
    the things that I did  
& forgive me the things  
    that I said

cries out like  
a man that is buried alive  
like a voice that cries  
out from the dead  
Forgive me what I did to you  
Forgive me what I said  
My heart & my soul  
& my nakedness  
cries out to be comforted  
cries out like a man  
who's been buried alive  
cries out like a voice  
from the dead  
so let's not tear the past apart  
we shared the darkness  
from the start  
I'm an evil son of a bitch  
I was born in the heart of the bible  
& I know the holy pitch  
I could sell an angel paper wings  
I'm an evil son of a bitch  
Not for all the jasmine  
    in Moscow  
not for all the singing  
    in New York  
not for all the broken hearts  
    in Bloomingdale's  
not for all the telephones  
    in Long Island  
not for all the blue  
    in Istanbul  
not for all the shoes  
    in Bloomingdale's  
not for all the rags  
    in Lebanon  
not for all the wax  
    in Notre-Dame

not for all the books  
in Jerusalem  
not for all the glass ice  
in a summer

Beautiful are the nights in  
Canaan  
How long will you live in  
my heart,  
O homeland  
Sleep my darling girl  
A girl is expecting her  
lover.  
She lies in bed listening  
to the wain

I change my dwelling  
places  
and change my haunts and  
wander from land to  
land,  
the little silence whose  
name is Abshay  
My mother's holy hands  
are mending my shirt!

Under a greenwood tree  
two boys are sitting, talking  
about a maid, and nothing  
else matters to them.

\*\*\*

Come to me or leave me  
I don't care no more <sup>waiting</sup>

I've waited like a month  
and I waited like a  
year

I've waited on a feather  
and I've waited on a stone

I've waited like a mountain  
and I've waited like a  
door

I folded <sup>up</sup> my heart  
and I cut it with your love  
a string of paper dolls

I've waited on the bridges  
that the rivers washed  
away

I waited like a bridegroom  
with a million roses bouquet

I waited for your beauty  
to be given to the rain  
beyond sorrow

I stood outside my tears  
like a statue in the rain

you're standing tall  
you're hanging tough  
but I know you're feeling bad  
It's easy to see  
that a good woman's love  
is something that you never had  
so I'm gonna take pity on the boy tonight  
I'm gonna do you a favour gonna do it right  
I'm gonna see that you're fed  
I'm gonna put you to bed  
& then I'm gonna drive you mad

\*\*\*

I don't know who you're looking at  
It must be someone else  
I'm only here a minute  
then I go somewhere else  
I'm talking to myself  
I'm living {visiting} at the clinic  
just talking to myself  
I'm only here a minute  
then I go somewhere else  
do not cry "heal me lord"  
the lord is broken  
    heal the lord  
so come my children  
    and confess  
when we are more  
the lord is less  
I just can't pretend no more  
that I'm your loving man  
I just can't pretend no more  
that I really give a damn  
It's just too hard to make you smile  
and too dangerous to bring you down  
You got love  
you got sex  
you got nothing to lose



you got death  
    in your mind  
like a root  
you got stuff  
it's a mess  
you got no one to choose  
you got breasts  
    on your chest  
you're a brute  
I never went back  
I never came home  
I waited all night  
for you to come home  
or someone like you  
I couldn't keep touch  
I don't know about tomorrow  
but I know what's coming next  
I was broken when I met you  
I was broken when I left  
I couldn't do it living  
but I love you with  
    my dying breath  
I came here for the healing  
How about you?  
The god of love is broken  
the god of hatred too  
Every time I touched you  
My oh My oh My  
That night you let me touch you  
I thought that I would die  
i wasn't really sure  
i was allowed in there  
but i thought the rules  
were somewhat ambiguous  
and if discovered  
i could justify my presence  
there was a narrow camp bed

close to the door  
with fresh sheets  
and a light blanket  
I snuggled into  
the bed and began to listen  
intently to the confession  
the young woman was  
making to her therapist  
I don't remember what she was  
saying but she stopped  
abruptly and said:  
"Leonard Cohen is listening  
to us"

It was night & it was raining  
and the pizza never came  
I'm troubled by war  
I'm troubled by peace  
Can't they think of anything else  
\*\*\*

I am a souvenir of creation  
The ringed wife is a souvenir  
of first dip in the private morning  
pool when you sank like a  
fish hook through the layered  
mirrors of self-love  
O God change your name  
in my heart

but the chairs  
once with straw now  
with yellow red plastic  
woven  
the new Blue Tops of  
outdoor tin tables  
Fresh Paint!

Not today  
I knelt in that certainty  
\*\*\*

and you put your baby  
number nothing  
on the waiting list  
and long nights alone  
with the angels of the Lord  
I put the books of love aside  
the young dancers  
who have never  
thought about death  
and the older ones who have  
to lie once more  
in the proud arms of one  
who has never thought  
about death  
I look out at the hillside  
all silver and silent  
its beauty is signed in the air  
Then night comes a stealing  
the shapes of our feeling  
the whole world is melting in fire  
I'm there, I'm finally there

\*\*\*

like David bent down  
in the darkness of love  
I call out your name  
and I ask to be done  
with this burden of heart  
with this pride of despair  
with this shame  
that the heart cannot {bear}  
to the realms of despair  
like David bent down  
on his bed of all despair  
I come to you now  
I call out your name  
I ask to be done  
with this darkness of love

with this burden of heart  
with this shame  
that the heart cannot bear  
like David bent down  
in the darkness of his love  
I call to you now  
{from} the place of despair  
I call on your name  
& I ask to be done  
with the burden of heart  
like David bent down  
to the darkness of his love  
with his kingdom of dust  
with his crown of despair  
with no hope from the night  
with no word for his prayer  
like David bent down  
in the realms of despair  
with no hope from the night  
with no word for his prayer  
he comes to you now  
he calls on your name  
he asks to be done  
with the darkness of love  
with his burden of heart  
with his shame  
from both sides of the battleground  
from liberty from love  
like David bent down  
to the darkness of his love  
with no river below  
and no light from above  
and he cries out your name  
from the place of despair  
for the burden of heart  
{from his high}  
{heavy chain}

that he cannot repair  
for the burden of shame {heart}  
which is there, which is there  
{for the darkness of love}  
for the shame  
which his {the} heart  
cannot bear  
like David bent down  
in the darkness of love  
with no kingdom or crown  
& no light from above  
& he cries out your name  
from the place of despair  
for the burden of shame  
which he cannot repair  
& he cries out your name  
with no heart for the prayer  
for the burden of shame  
in the place of despair  
for the burden of heart  
which is there, which is there  
for the shame  
that the heart cannot bear  
I am the light of  
                    my generation  
and the radio  
and the refrigerator  
with no kingdom below  
& no crown from above  
and he cries out your name  
from the place of despair  
for the darkness of heart  
which he cannot repair  
beyond all repair  
for the burden of shame  
which is there, which is there  
for the shame which the heart

cannot bear  
look see how he wakes  
hear how he speaks  
& he tries to raise his hands to the lord  
the world begins to wait for thee  
I have it deep inside of me  
like uncreated angels see  
the absence of eternity



the world begins to wait for thee  
I have it deep inside of me  
a longing that could only be  
the absence of eternity  
like David bent down  
    in the darkness of shame  
I come to you now  
I cry out your name  
with no hope for the day  
with no heart for the prayer  
Renew the name that  
    sorrow has forgotten  
Speak again  
and raise creation up  
Renew the name  
& stand your singer up  
and a painful silence mock  
all the parliament of thought

I don't want to be here  
anymore  
and the silence gathered  
    round to mock  
all the parliament of thought  
Find me here  
I can't cry out  
I have no word  
And in this place  
was never heard  
In the absence of  
human actions fail & rot  
around the parliament of thought  
Pretending to stand  
like a man in the place  
where there is no light  
and there is no face  
If I speak to you, if I try,  
one word, one breath at a time;  
if I listen between the words,  
if I go slowly,  
will you come to this place  
you have cleaved for my  
doubting  
If I try to speak  
I beg you to come to this place  
I beg you  
with all the ugliness at my disposal  
I offer this headache  
and my accomplice dream women  
I beg you with the headache  
in my right eye  
I beg you with the fly  
that has chosen my lips  
to fertilize  
I beg you with the interesting news  
of manure & unemployment

what are you keeping there,  
what have you hidden away  
that is so precious to the  
darkness; so heavily guarded,  
so furtively {defiantly} held,  
now furtively, now defiantly  
held; your power magic,  
your heavy-machine, to  
your axioms of strategy  
iron mask

    your victory  
your victory, your  
supremacy, preening  
itself in a basin of vomit,  
waiting, waiting until  
you say, now  
your victory creature,  
chained to the coming  
opportunity, preening  
itself in a basin of  
vomit, waiting to spring,  
waiting until they turn  
their backs, and you say,  
now!

Chained to your secret place  
feeding on the spirit carrion,  
they wait to be unleashed  
I heard them singing

    just the other day  
pouring out their hearts  
        in wild dismay  
their voices sweet with  
    what they could not say  
the song of Ages on their  
    lips of clay

The beasts go roaming free  
Come my love, my holy one



enter on the carpet of my longing  
Baby, don't be sad  
the dust is all my doing  
The wind and the umbrellas  
come from stores  
the flags from the nation  
but your absence comes  
from a terrible sleep  
under a huge museum  
Enter the moth holes  
of my longing



like David bent down  
in the darkness of love  
I call out your name  
and I ask to be done  
with this burden of heart  
with this pride of despair  
with this shame  
that the heart cannot  
bear

to the realms of despair

like David bent down  
on the bed of all despair  
I come to you now  
I call out your name  
I ask to be done  
with the darkness of love  
with this burden of heart  
with this shame  
that the heart cannot bear

like David bent down  
in the darkness of his love  
I call to you now  
from the place of despair  
I call out your name  
and I ask to be done  
with the burden of heart

like David bent down  
to the darkness of his love  
with his kingdom of dust  
with his crown of darkness  
with no hope for the night  
with no word for his prayer

like David bent down  
in the realms of despair  
with no hope for the night  
with no word for his prayer  
he comes to you now  
he calls on your name  
he asks to be done  
with the darkness of love  
with his burden of heart  
with his shame

from both sides of the battleground  
for liberty from love

like David bent down  
to the darkness of his love  
with no river below  
and no light from above  
and he cries out your name  
from the place of despair  
for the burden of heart  
that he cannot repair  
for the burden of <sup>just</sup> shame  
which is there, which is there  
for the shame  
which his heart <sup>for the darkness</sup>  
cannot bear <sub>of love</sub>

\*\*\*

I had a plan  
I was moving away  
Far from the failure  
and stress every day

\*\*\*

*May 2, 2011*

*1995[?]*

the Great Convulsion  
coming  
we're nothing like the ant hill  
we're not a hive of bees  
Behold! the good ship  
"Free Will"  
as she's tossed on mighty seas  
mighty seas  
you can always depend  
on me  
I'm going to come down  
on the side of mercy  
I'm going to come down  
on the side of love  
The Great Convulsion  
coming  
I'm going to run like hell  
from the general terror  
and hide like a bell  
in the panic  
I'm going to run like hell  
from the usual  
Titanic  
& hide like a bell  
in the general panic

\*\*\*

Where are your friends  
my darling  
wait they'll be coming thru

my friends are back there  
                                  dancing  
That's what I like to see them do  
I thought I heard them  
                                  weeping  
just before the rain  
you might have heard them  
                                  weeping  
but they're dancing once again  
What are the ladies wearing  
back there on the floor  
the old forbidden clothing  
that the Emperor once wore  
Can't we go back my darling  
I've been away too long  
Why did you leave us dancing  
in the middle of the song  
I thought the dance was over  
when all the rain came down  
then you must die my darling  
on the other side of town  
I like the other side of town  
It has a perfect view

\*\*\*

In this writing  
we do not look out the window  
we do not wait  
for the Swedish girl  
to walk down the aisle  
and we do not think about  
her faded gold face  
which is her nakedness  
we do not speculate  
on the superior style  
and the origin  
of his old sun clothes

\*\*\*

I was talking to Ron  
when the women were gone  
and the men were out killing for love  
we were touring the north  
with the songs of my youth  
for the last time. Enough is enough  
Dear Hatred  
Dear Heart-Broken Olivia  
in the Xenias Melathron  
eating an apple  
forever on my Grecian urn  
Dear Princess Zina  
I shaved my head for you  
Now you send me printed letters  
asking me to buy you a monastery  
Dear Accident Helga  
of my sunstroke at noon  
later the dog-like companion  
of fork-bearded Sascha  
cool candlelight of ignitable icicles  
in your cheeks and eyes  
nothing at all between us  
except my kneeling for you now  
I gave all my money  
                  to charity  
I gave all my clothes  
                  to the poor  
I followed after one  
                  who was saving me  
I thought that he was  
                  very brave and pure  
My name is John the Baptist  
I had my glory  
                  on the riverbed  
how can you leave me  
you must not leave me  
even to masturbate

even to eat or to pray  
the Levi's shirt on the back of the chair  
the hotel where the King of Hanover  
died in 1878  
the poem of Paris  
to break my heart when I'm eighty  
how can you leave me  
how can you desert this work  
to carry a small-caliber revolver  
with which to threaten  
your New York business partner  
the mind of a rich human being  
you must not leave me  
Look at yourself  
sitting on the wooden steps  
in the morning sunlight  
you are wearing an old white shirt  
from the button-down days,  
sandals you bought with Meredith  
when you lived with her in Mexico,  
corduroys become work pants  
from two weeks of painting  
Sitting on the wooden steps  
in the morning sunlight  
trying to learn how to die  
Goodnight, goodnight you evil ones  
may you rest at last  
There is a happy ending  
to all the bloody past  
This is the night of July 20, 1972

\*\*\*

Dear Steve  
Thanks for helping me  
across the road  
The last fellow tried that  
they had to scrape off the corner  
Since I no longer wish to explain myself

I have become a stone  
Since I no longer long for anyone  
I am not alone



\*\*\*

**to V.R Jan 19, 2002**

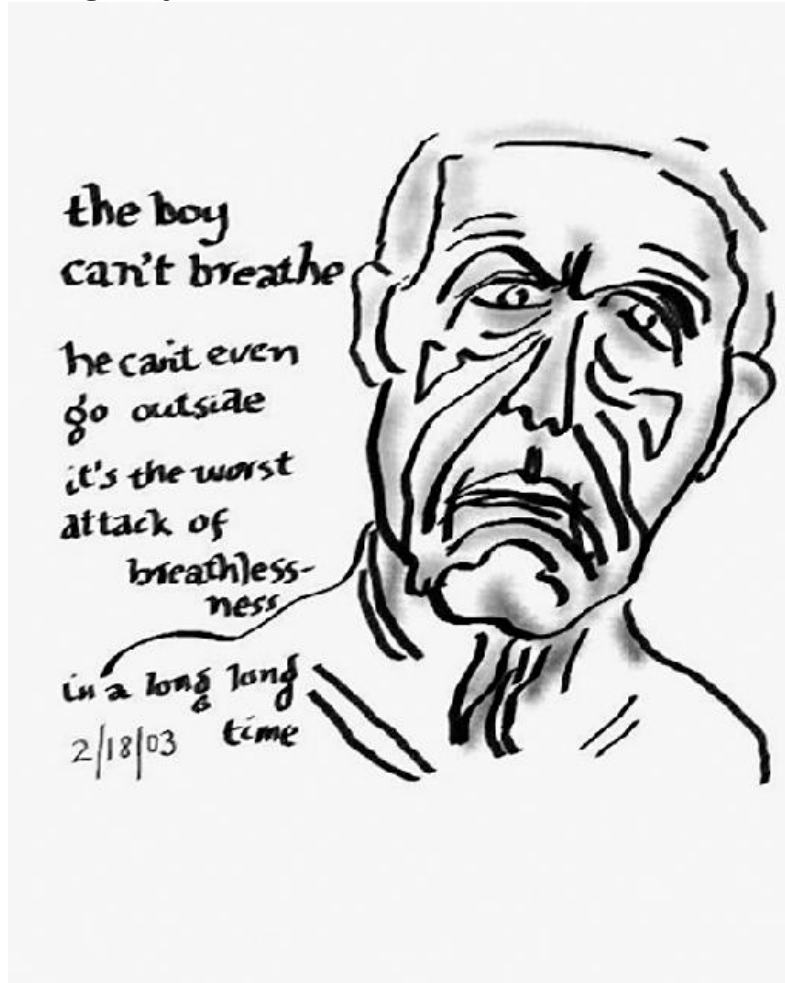
and it won't be wine and roses  
from now until the end  
but it will never, it will never  
be that dark again

\*\*\*

**May 10, 2002**

you said I was lying  
you called all my tricks  
but you never did nothing  
your lips couldn't fix  
and all you want to do  
is breathe easy  
    be in any place  
    hang alone  
        or with people  
but breathing easy  
all I ever wanted

that's the truth  
but now I'm out of breath  
which is why I work  
otherwise I wouldn't work  
I'd just lie around  
breathing easy



\*\*\*

I put my voices in your life  
you can listen without stopping  
you can listen  
                    in your car tonight  
I sang for you Nico  
your face was in my song  
I knew what beauty was  
the lines of the moon  
on your mouth



as I entered my song

\*\*\*

I never got the girl I wanted  
did you, Jack?

\*\*\*

I never held you in my arms  
I never watched you go to school  
Sometimes I think of you  
The child I never had  
The child I never knew  
Sometimes I long for you  
my baby, oh my baby  
my lullaby in blue  
It's lost in a rush of emptiness  
I cross my arms against my breast  
& I'm lost in a nest of emptiness  
& you're lost in me, you're lost so deep  
that I rock myself

    & I rock you to sleep  
I do, my child I really do  
my lullaby, my lullaby in blue  
& it's lost in me, it's lost so deep  
I cross my arms  
against my breast  
and I sing you to sleep  
I do, my child, I really do  
my lullaby, my lullaby in blue

\*\*\*

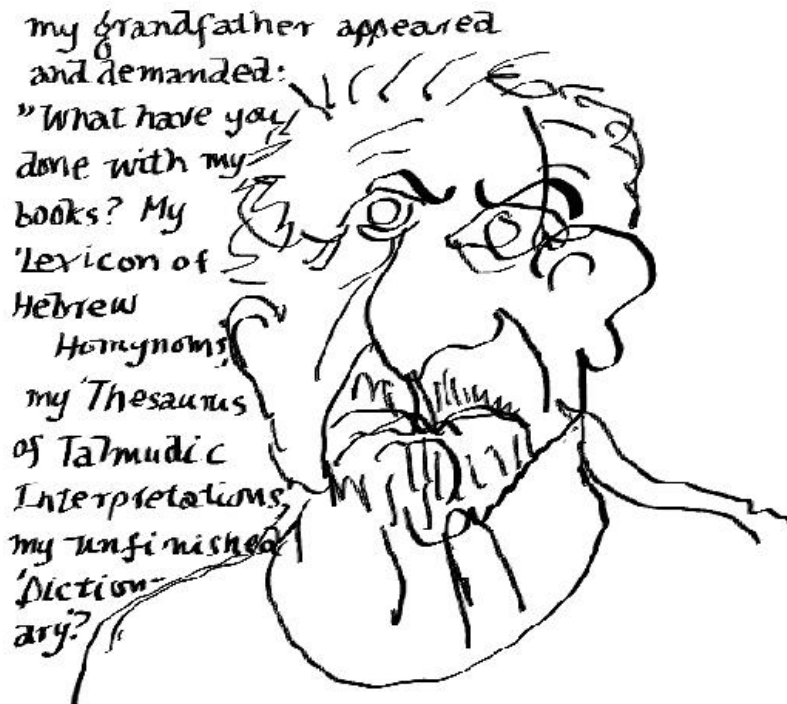
**Nov '88**

Someone that  
    who I never knew  
my lullaby in blue  
and I'll never know  
what my mother knew

\*\*\*

And all my brave companions  
    where are they?

Working for the women in  
the sad café—  
No wonder there is money  
on the throne  
No wonder there is oil  
Babylon  
Here with the  
devil  
here with the  
lord  
here with the  
plowshare  
here with the  
sword  
here with the glory  
here with the hoof  
here with the wisdom {knowledge}  
here with the proof



\*\*\*

7715 Woodrow Wilson  
May 12 1976  
quickly quickly

give Jerusalem  
to God

\*\*\*

### **Swimming Club**

**Thursday March 10, 2:30 pm**

I lost my job today  
I hoisted up the sun  
to start the break of day  
I was a very special one  
but I lost my job today  
I lost my job today  
I was hired by the sun  
hired to guide it on its way  
I was that very special one  
but I lost my job today  
I lost my job today  
I'd been hired by the sun  
to guide him on his way  
to hold Him to His way  
I was that very special one  
but I lost my job today  
I lost my job tonight  
I'd been hired by the moon  
to sweep Her beauty bright  
I worked every afternoon  
but I lost my job tonight

I think we're  
going to see  
some Action  
here

Some sunlight  
is going to  
fall on the  
matter

A resolution  
A defining  
moment  
has been reached

It is emanating  
from the imperishable  
skull  
beneath the loose flesh  
of ambiguity



\*\*\*

now you know how wide  
the net of suffering's cast  
nor will the teachers from Tibet  
or the rabbis from New York  
assuage the thirst that rises  
from the throat of loneliness  
here behind the nest of sorrow  
waits the one who lets you live and die  
whose company is sweet as hell  
and mightier than heaven  
when your fingers are  
too bent to seize the pieces  
of the jigsaw puzzle  
and you don't really care  
what the picture's going to be  
you may hear the little  
useless song  
of the one who's given up  
I've been {was} here too long

But I've crossed the line  
but the train's on time  
and the will is strong  
for it is not mine

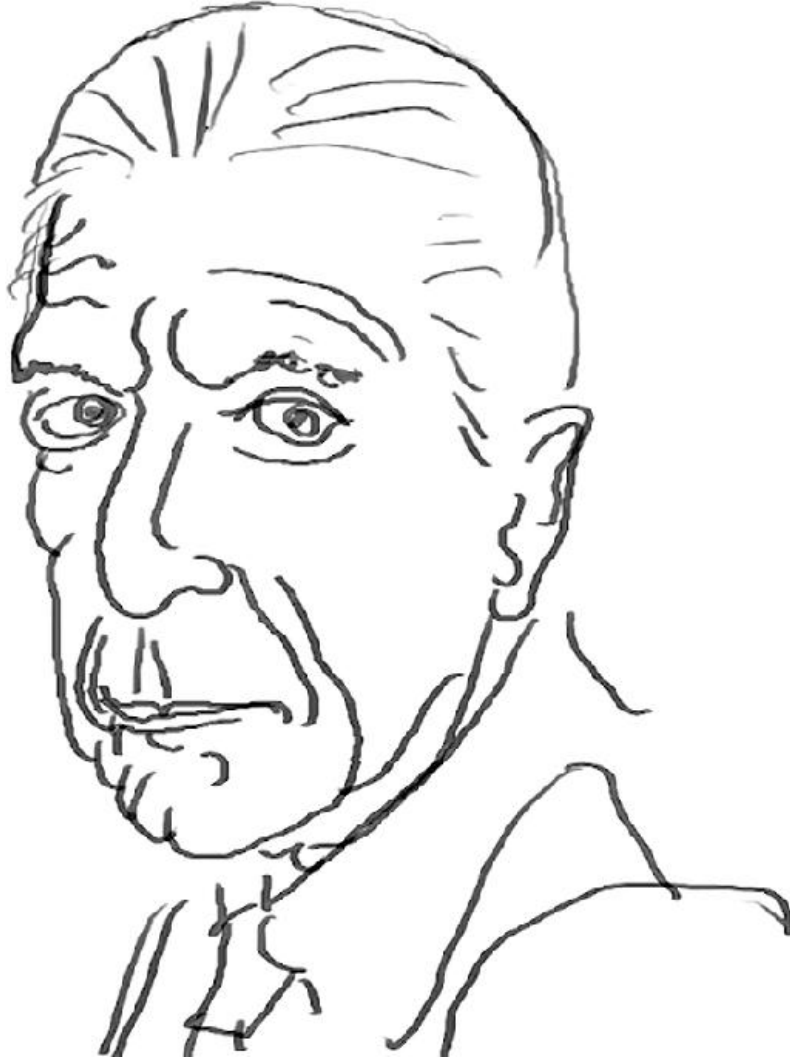
\*\*\*

I have witnessed many great events, some of which were sorrowful: the birth of children, the death of friends, the ends of time & the intermediate wildernesses. A chill goes down my spine and up, when I reflect how graciously I have been placed in the mazes of creation. My beloved is with me, the wife of my youth, and in the midst of suffering, when it is our lot, if I remember to incline my self toward the source of light, I know that I have never strayed too far from my bridal days. As it was promised, I have inherited the gates of my enemy, and I fear with him, rejoice with him, at the irresistible tides of majesty that sweep across the world.

I am on one side  
but I affirm both sides  
in this war  
that is not why we are losing  
we are not losing  
but that is why the victory is slow  
Patience is our weapon,  
prayer our strategy,  
and sacrifice our understanding  
of the times.

Take heart, you who have  
not been gathered yet,  
watch for the banner we have  
raised,  
and come to us when the walls  
of your sanctuary begin to  
give against the weight of tears  
With you again, old friend  
with you again  
sweeten now our company  
soften now the rain  
Remember Valentin  
The woman of the quarrel

She is concealed from us  
who was so beautiful  
But why the silence now  
the look of bitter knowing  
just because it's getting dark  
& we don't know where we're going  
We often have meandered  
such an afternoon  
something will turn up  
if it's only the April moon  
I agree, it's getting worse  
and they're stacking up the chairs  
that's what comes from choosing life  
above the enemies' prayers



There are bugs  
in my crotch hair  
but I can't find them  
contrary to the opinion  
of those who have inspected me  
I know they're there  
They picnic in the thickets  
where once was concentration  
and the stillness of desire  
I feel ridiculous  
in my grey suit  
and my pomaded hair  
all groomed for love  
while the vermin  
swarm between my thighs  
and lower and higher  
(This has been going on  
for a long time now  
It has driven me to prayer  
I never thought I was an animal  
I never thought I have free will  
Now I'm stuck with both realities)  
The saxophone  
establishes a mood  
the girls, dressed for the evening,  
come in & out of the café  
and the rabbis sit down beside me  
for a good lazy talk  
Is this my destiny  
to be so attractive & unavailable  
The rabbi is deep, but my thought  
is deeper, and scratching doesn't help  
O insect host, the backsliders were  
burned to save them from the  
flames of hell—will  
your living filth prevent {forestall} the  
grave's corruption

\*\*\*

he said, I think  
I know your story  
you were in love  
with Ava Gardner  
or someone like her  
you were as lonely  
as Frank Sinatra  
or someone like him  
Now that China's  
fallen out of heaven  
& rots with Russia  
in the mortal pit  
and Marx himself  
is just a Jewish dreamer  
which even Frenchmen  
finally do admit  
I put my elbows  
on the roof of its car  
I never want to drive again  
& I never want to  
feel so bad  
about anyone as  
I feel about you  
I never want  
I don't want to feel  
like I do  
    when I talk to you  
I'd rather be dead  
like the rose  
that I left on the heater

\*\*\*

You can see it  
on their faces  
you can feel it  
in their stride  
It's the changing



of the races  
It's the changing  
of the guard  
New York City  
to San Francisco  
Puerto Rico  
Angelino  
Fundamental  
Fruit of Islam  
Heavy Metal  
Nothing heavy  
Nothing special  
Just the music  
Just the people  
Covered wagons  
in a circle  
From Moscow  
To L.A.  
Don't worry  
'bout the missiles  
Just point them  
the other way  
Beethoven  
and the Bible & Chuck Berry  
Shakespeare  
and MGM  
Farewell to  
New York City  
Farewell to  
Bethlehem

\*\*\*

I don't need no  
    midnight promise  
I don't need no  
    wedding ring  
Just don't ask me  
    how I got here

Don't ask me  
    anything  
But if you buy me  
    a yellow sweater  
I will love you  
    till the end of time  
I don't want to  
    ask the gypsy  
what the future  
    has in store  
I don't want to  
    ask the doctor  
what these little  
    pills are for  
I've been looking  
    out the window  
at the people  
    passing by  
I don't ask myself  
    a question  
I don't even  
    wonder why



All the stores are  
filled with songs  
All the streets are  
paved with gold  
When it comes to  
telling secrets  
I don't tell them  
till they're old  
I sincerely hope  
you have not  
come to believe,  
that simply because  
you ran off & got  
married behind  
my back, you  
are somehow  
entitled to keep  
my tape measure  
\*\*\*

You must have heard it in my voice  
the sound that I no longer love you  
I would never disguise that sound  
I would never do that to you  
O shining one  
you have moved beyond my love  
you have turned your face to others  
I was not strong enough for this test  
I turned away  
I wear an iron collar  
and I give my chain to anyone  
but I never pretend that they are you  
O shining one  
who held my spirit like a match  
in your cupped hands  
while I thought I was warming you  
O shining one  
who teaches with her absence

\*\*\*

I asked for the check  
I'm having too much fun  
Several grandmothers  
are winking at me  
I may do something I'd regret  
We will be forgiven  
the crummy things  
we did to one another  
because we  
didn't enjoy them  
We'll be leaving now  
we'll be leaving  
for a good long time  
and we want to say goodnight  
we want to say goodnight  
we want to say farewell  
We had a little love  
we had it for a while

It wasn't quite enough  
but thank you anyhow  
Thank you for your kindness  
in the field  
and thank you for your kindness  
in the room  
The horses ran away  
but we were not to blame  
and when they  
turned so beautiful  
in their silver flight  
it wasn't our idea  
at least it wasn't mine  
I want to be with other people  
now I'm growing old  
I want to be another drunk  
who's given up the bottle  
I want to watch the lonely men  
who still go out with women  
I want to see the bridal gown  
cover up the sequins  
This is my very night of nights  
the past was a rehearsal  
how come you look so good tonight  
I thought you've given up the fight  
your shoulders bare  
your eyes so bright  
how come you look so good tonight

\*\*\*

I watch the crowd passing  
and I wonder when  
they will throw off my burden  
and choose me again  
for I was a king  
in the ancient domain  
I ruled over no one  
and overthrew pain

My name it is hidden  
my friends live alone  
I know who they are  
when they ring on the phone  
And we don't say a word  
we just breathe thru the line  
and we never untie  
what is yours what is mine

\*\*\*

### **To Tinkie**

you walked me to school  
you slept under my bed  
you watched me masturbating  
with interested eyes  
you protected me  
from my enemy loneliness  
even in your old age  
you greeted me  
every time I saw you  
you left the house  
and died in the snow  
under the neighbour's porch  
and you were lost  
until the late summer  
when I was out of town  
and they cleared away  
your body  
I didn't believe them  
and even today  
I stop every scottie  
to claim you back

\*\*\*

### **HOUSE**

it's my house of olden marriage  
nothing much to say  
the price of love forbidding  
desire had to pay

was sitting in the kitchen  
where often I was served  
by one who could not stay with me  
I said goodbye in words  
my house of olden marriage  
we were the keepers proud  
she of what I could not be  
me of whom she mustn't love  
was sitting in the kitchen  
talking to myself  
which lately had come down to me  
from off the trinket shelf  
and this is made to keep him strong  
who is my lord and trust  
and this is made to keep her free  
from all the household dust

\*\*\*

True love is what happens between two people  
who no longer need to know each other

\*\*\*

but you chose me  
    a young lieutenant  
        in the palace  
a very minor figure  
    in the general scheme  
of cosmic entertainment  
I press my uniform  
    my trousers & my shirt  
my holster gleams  
    in the moonlight  
I wait for you in the botanical gardens  
which is locked at night  
but I have obtained a key  
and I wait for you  
beside the rows  
of night blooming jasmine  
Your starless nights

your lipstick life  
you work  
as a silhouette  
I was just a minor figure  
in the junta  
your strapless night  
your cigarette  
the moon behind  
your deco silhouette  
The colonel wanted you  
as did the Minister  
of the Interior  
I was just a minor figure  
in the junta  
a lieutenant  
in the palace guard  
I cannot forget  
that lonely summer  
{and the sky} and that night  
so luminously starred  
It is not for me  
to explain or justify  
the history of mankind  
It is not my place  
to make a statement  
I was educated by the Jesuits  
and the Sanhedrin  
but no one could explain to me  
the screaming from the basement  
Adolf Hitler Mussolini  
Stalin Mao Tse Tung  
I wasn't born a devil  
but I dreamed of being one  
I still get many offers  
but there's someone I must thank  
All of us were robbed  
& Dylan was the Bank



The leading man  
the leading man  
    the man I'll never be  
he stole my woman  
    in New York  
and my horse  
    in Tennessee

\*\*\*

**Studio May 24 '03**

How long  
    will you go on pretending  
there's something  
    you know how to fix  
How many more digital shots will you {edit?} take  
    of the helpless, the old and dead & the sick  
Will you ever stand up and be seen  
    by the sultan, the slaves, and the secret police  
    and when are you going to  
stand up and be seen  
When are you going diving for coins  
    to stop swimming  
in the lakes and the sewers of filth  
When are you going to help someone out  
who's certainly  
    going to be killed  
When are you going to be fingered  
                            and be stripped  
by a dreamer who's aching  
    to kick out your teeth  
how long will you go on diving  
    for changes in the sewers of filth

\*\*\*

**The truth minus 7%**

He only kissed you  
                            on the cheek  
and he only touched your hand  
you say that nothing happened

and I'll let your story stand  
That's a {mighty?} big bunch of roses  
that "nothing happened" sent  
but I thank you for telling  
                                  the truth to me  
The truth minus seven  
                                  Percent

\*\*\*

### **Frankfurt Airport Feb 19, 2002**

I'd like to pray  
five times a day  
                  in fact I do  
I'd like to live  
as though G-d lived  
                  through me and you  
                  in fact I do

\*\*\*

### **Mumbai**

**[?] Jan 3, '03**

We made a little garden  
in the middle of L.A.  
so our hearts  
                  they wouldn't harden  
& our spirits  
                  they could play

\*\*\*

Annie's asleep by the fireside  
That's my book in her hand  
That's my thorn in her side.

We loved that way

” ” ” ”

” ” ” ”

for more than a year, I'd say.

\*\*\*

I used to have a life

                  I was living at the centre

There's people {places [?] went} that I love

& there's women that I know  
A waitress called me sir  
then she called me Leonard  
I like the edge it's better  
    than the centre

\*\*\*

It has waited until this night  
concealed in tears, and {the} lines I've  
conferred, and broken promises  
It believes, though I do not believe  
It waits, though I have given up waiting  
It is strong, though I am not  
Everything else I have misused and squandered  
because I could not lie about this love  
It summons me, though I have no courage  
and it bids me to say these words  
to you:

I have waited for you all my life  
I have never given myself to another  
You are my first love and my last

\*\*\*

I'm trying to catch the future  
I don't know which way it goes  
I've got a stomach full of ouzo {sunlight}  
and a sterling silver nose  
My guitar is very quiet  
There's a song it likes to tell me  
My songs are like the stars  
They {just} control they don't compel me  
And my love is blonde and ancient  
I met her by the sea  
She was putting things together  
and she needed some of me  
Come back here when you're thirsty  
she whispered thru a wave  
Then she took me down a thousand feet  
to the midwife in my grave

and she saved us in a grave  
There's a song it needs to tell me  
My songs are only planets  
They control, they don't compel me  
and my love is blonde and ancient  
I met her by the sea  
She was putting things together  
and she needed some of me  
Come back here when you're thirsty  
She whispered through a wave  
Then she took me down a thousand feet  
and sewed us in a grave  
I have my hand on both our bodies  
It's the bridge I cannot find  
through the razorblades and daisies  
to the birth we leave behind

\*\*\*

**Dec 18th 2011 Palisades**

I am a living statue  
I moved for you  
when you gave me  
a quarter euro  
My closest friend  
sprayed me bronze  
early this morning  
when it was  
still dark

and yet there was  
a certain  
light  
a radiance  
as if there  
still  
remained  
behind -  
Oh I don't  
know -  
as if he  
were still  
alive



I am the best  
living statue  
in Germany  
I make a fortune  
No one is as still  
as I am  
I hover over  
my bronze body  
like a bird  
above her nest

Dec 18<sup>th</sup> 2011 Palisades

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I moved for you

when you gave me

a quarter euro

My closest friend

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No one is as still  
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I never over

my bronze body

like a bird

above her nest

The living statue  
I ignore the compliments  
the proposition  
the marriage  
proposals

She is safe  
and beautiful  
forever

even when my friend  
holds me off  
my pedestal  
and we go home  
and I am alone  
in the shower

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in the shower

\*\*\*

and Nico was blond  
and Dylan was found  
in a pit he alone had descended  
and there he unfurled  
for the sake of the world  
the bright flag so long undefended

\*\*\*

I've had it  
I've had it with you  
and the kid  
and the farm  
and the job  
and the war  
and the debt  
and the bullshit  
I read  
in the palm of my hand  
and what did you do  
with my god  
and my church  
and my car  
and my dick

was I supposed  
to like  
living on my fucking knees?  
of course I don't  
say this to anyone  
especially {not to} my wife  
especially my kids  
and not to anyone  
bigger or stronger  
or the boss  
or the sadist in  
charge of my teeth {mind}  
and it all looks  
so peaceful  
when you're not  
hunting for pussy  
or sucking up to  
the lord  
I advise you all to  
get tired and old  
and bored  
cranky and bored  
and then the voice  
is heard  
deeper than the world  
you may need acid  
to hear it, or weed  
never did it for me  
and I took (maybe)  
a hundred trips at  
least

\*\*\*

and I sought my beloved  
when I was trying to make my marriage {work}  
move from islands to cities & back again  
when I was trying to make my marriage work  
but I could not find my beloved



And you made me use words  
like husband and wife  
to cross a border to cash a cheque  
words that armed my solitude  
against my daily life  
you wrote your poems  
without the recognition  
without the prize of women  
without the sting of fame  
not even for the name of poet  
did you labour on the empty page  
and just the news of you  
silenced many a juke-box  
I declared my high intention to be free  
I cut myself shaving

\*\*\*

go tell your brother  
the family is no more  
go tell your baby sister  
she's nothing but a whore  
go tell the Angels of the Lord  
there is no God above  
go tell your heart of longing  
that there's no such thing as love  
I told my brother  
                                what I heard  
& he began to weep  
I told my sister, she said Hush  
the baby is asleep  
I told the angels of the lord  
they covered {blinded} me with light  
I told my heart, my heart did say  
Be still with me tonight  
O man of flesh, my heart did say  
as I went through the night  
prepare yourself for sorrow  
& prepare for sweet delight

There came a tide of suffering  
which I could barely stand  
you must sacrifice your sorrow  
on the altar of delight  
and I went down in tears  
There came a dark indifference  
which seemed to last for years  
There came a spring where nothing grew  
There came a summer with no sun  
There was no crystal in the snow  
No harvesting for anyone  
There was no crystal in the snow  
No fragrance in the spring  
No summer with its naked dance  
No autumn harvesting  
I tried to cry, {my eyes were sealed} there were no tears  
I tried to laugh, there was no scorn  
I tried to run, there was no road  
I tried to die, I was not born  
I pinned across a piece of meat  
hanging in the abattoir  
I struggled for a woman's touch  
I pinned across a piece of meat  
& feeding on a {barren} star  
I struggled for a woman's touch  
for solace {comfort something} in the abattoir  
The boredom of her {our} company  
The sting trance of her {our} embrace  
whiled away the outlines  
hanging face to face  
O let it end, O solace me  
now  
let me surrender now  
O make it clear what you forbid  
and what you allow  
The boredom of our company  
The trance of our embrace

These were the very hooks  
that held us  
hanging face to face  
And many times I begged my heart  
let me surrender now  
I'll put aside what you forbid  
I'll take to me what you allow  
And then the laughter in the air  
you cannot yield, there is no war  
you cannot lose, there is no game  
Now lest I be the juda's lamb  
& lead you to the knife  
This is not a parable  
It's but a human life  
The man who tells this story  
he is sitting on a bed chair  
wondering where to go and how  
to get from here to there  
He says this as a caveat  
to the {blind} ears of youth  
that there is the stink of beauty  
above {the} corpse of truth  
But now the night is ending  
for one listening to his heart  
for this listener of the heart  
The baby's crying for {singing in the [?]} crib  
The lovers break apart  
My sister heats {a} bottle  
& my brother starts the car  
The Angels dress as humans  
to be with us where we are  
The baby's singing in the crib  
The lovers break apart  
But only music has the power  
so put your head upon the stories  
I've grown old  
in a hundred ways

but my heart is young  
& still it plays  
on the theme of love  
on the theme of death  
o close it plays  
as my very breath  
they rise & fall  
with my very breath  
my son goes back  
and forth on a swing  
and then he wears  
a wedding ring  
he works a mighty  
task and then  
my son is one  
with me again  
In a mother's womb  
my daughter stirs  
and then the moving  
child is hers  
and then heroic  
duties call  
and the deepest  
womb of all  
and many a bitter  
night went by  
that death would win  
& love would try  
and many a bitter  
night goes by  
that death must win  
and love must try  
sweet  
and my darling removes {unlocks}  
the clasp of her hair  
and many the blessings  
of sweet repair

till she  
{my darling} unfastens  
the clasp of her hair  
and many the blessings  
of sweet repair  
till she unpins  
her [wigs?] black hair

\*\*\*

Now I am not your father  
but since your father's dead  
I'll tell the bedtime story  
before you go to bed  
So come and gather round me  
but do not sit too near  
The closer that you sit to me  
The less that you will hear  
Among my stories there is one  
you've never heard before  
though all I've said goes round it  
like the apple round its core  
It is the story of a love  
I had for one of you  
when you were neither seed nor child  
and I was nothing too  
Forbidden to be spoken by me  
or anyone  
but now the seal is broken  
and the story has begun  
And who forbid the telling  
is a question you may pose  
It was he who hated nakedness  
and made us all wear clothes

\*\*\*

They are far ahead of me  
the true writers  
with whom I once paced myself  
tarrying with women and riches

and problems of the Way  
I fell behind  
losing all but the original uneasiness  
This is my fourth day  
without cigarettes or coffee  
my eye on Shakyamuni and St. Francis  
as it was once  
on Flaubert and William Butler Yeats  
and I still have this ugly feeling  
that I will reform the world

\*\*\*

I know you don't believe me  
& that's why you have to split  
you're looking for a peaceful place  
& this ain't exactly it  
So I'll drive you to the station  
& I'll put you on the train  
There's one that sinks in the ocean  
& there's one that stops in Maine  
I used to travel like a fool  
when I was middle-aged  
but then I settled down with you  
when settling was the rage  
I'm glad you left that photograph  
of you & me at Harvard  
you didn't really leave it but  
I fished it from the garbage

\*\*\*

### **August 1985**

They took me to the Holy Land  
and up to the Wall of Sorrow  
I said, these stones are made of sand  
and they won't be here tomorrow  
They {took me} to Mount Everest  
and they pointed to the summit  
I said I am impressed  
but it's just another limit

\*\*\*

I saw you on the dance floor  
Showing everybody how  
you'd gone beyond your sorrow  
No one could hurt you now  
love's only good  
when you come back from the war  
love's only good  
when you're back from the war  
I'm a slave to the truth  
though it's not what I planned  
all through the night  
there were cries of every creature  
and they cried  
    o they cried  
only the moon  
with its vaguely human features  
could arise  
    above its crying  
of the night  
if I could speak  
if the time would only  
if I could cry  
I would cry myself a river  
and I'd sail, I'd go sailing  
through the night

\*\*\*

make it easy baby  
can't pass another test  
just spread your blanket on the sand  
where both of us can rest  
they stopped me in the subway  
I didn't have my car  
make it easy baby  
the shit has got too hard  
make it easy baby  
and put my soul to rest

I'll even say I love you  
if it ain't some kind of test  
make it easy baby  
don't make the poor boy wait  
those subtle

subtle invitations  
that often come too late  
if I had a gifted mind  
if I had a gifted tongue  
still I'd bitch & moan  
that I didn't have enough  
that I caught too many colds  
that I spent a night alone  
if I were deep  
if I were bright  
if I could keep  
the Lord in sight  
if I didn't have to ask  
if I knew my human task  
if I had a certain task  
if I could win The Purple Heart  
before the battle start  
don't condemn  
anyone to death  
before you've had  
your coffee

\*\*\*

To lead a private life  
a lonely American marriage  
a song on the charts  
a house in Greece  
the best of drugs  
friendly with the maitre d'  
in three of four good restaurants  
donations to {the television picture}  
of a starving child  
a private life of exemplary elegance

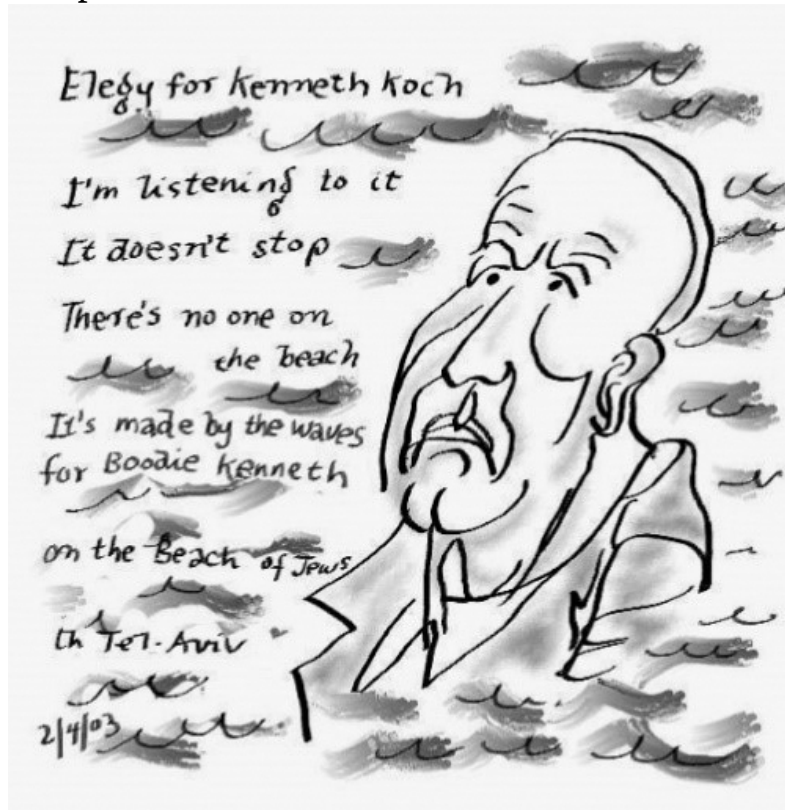


and humanity  
a vegetarian a Scientologist  
a patron of the latest revolution  
a private life with several ladies  
and a highly dependent wife  
whatever happened to my private life  
whatever happened to my suit of Harris Tweed  
and my long Aegean suntan  
whatever happened to my place  
in the Anthology of English Literature  
and here we are with no one but each other  
and the tear gas drifting through the trees  
and here we are without a family crest  
and here we are with plans to build a city  
and here we are with killers in our midst  
whom we love  
whom we depend on  
killers whom none of us can trust  
and it's late and it's early  
    as all the experts say  
and all of us are amateurs  
    in what we do today  
whatever happened to the private life  
the poets and the singers promised me  
To lead a private life  
like a pirate with his knife  
\*\*\*

### **Paris March 1969**

If Kenneth Koch wasn't so funny  
    he'd have to carry a gun  
because he steals men's wives  
and what is worse  
    gives them back  
complete with assorted old jokes  
he tried to prevent me  
from discovering the whereabouts  
of Terry Southern's ex-wife

but conscience drove him  
to phone up the next day  
and apologize  
actually I phoned him  
and he apologized in passing  
I could have waited a long time  
for that phone-call



\*\*\*

### Travelogue

the {beefy} burghers of Montreal  
elude a humpty-dumpty fall  
by climbing not a single wall  
or hill or steps or stairs at all  
the stables of the King are bare  
and his soldiers couldn't care—  
the beefy burghers do not dare  
to risk eternal disrepair  
they did not hear me when I fell  
and fractured all my mortal shell  
flutes of bone, fine flutes to sell

a skull that rattles like a bell

\*\*\*

to the young let me say:

I am not sage, rebbe, roshi, guru

I am Bad Example.

to experienced persons

who have characterized my life work

as cheap, superficial, pretentious, insignificant:

    you do not know

    how Right you are

among the whores

there are some of us

who want to make love well

and among {those} these

a few

who do it for nothing

I am a whore

and a junkie.

if some of my songs

made a moment

easier for you,

please remember this.

\*\*\*

I loved you. I envied you. I thought I had a  
right to your company. When that time came I  
wasted it in tales of strength and boasting. Your  
lovely light has guided me so long.

Sometimes the light of a firefly, sometimes the light of a furnace.

\*\*\*

and when the ordeal

    that you know and you feel

is truly refined and upheld

we'll meet in the house

    that's prepared for the spouse

of the widowed lord

    of us all

\*\*\*

I saw her comb her long black hair  
and then I loved her jealously  
I broke my life in two for her  
and she's no good for me  
Her {full moon} breasts  
    tipped rosy red  
O God I love her jealously  
She burns my heart she warms my bed  
& she's no good for me

\*\*\*

We go down to the café  
on Mount Royal  
where they have the records of home  
and we spend our quarters to hear  
the songs that were born in the sun  
and we dance with a twisted handkerchief  
through the long nights of snow  
and for all the sweet time that a song can last  
back to the islands we go  
and soon they turn the juke-box off  
and there's only five of us left  
and we're done with the talking of politics  
and the beer is up to our necks  
we sing like we sang on the island  
when we'd sail up the moonlit steps  
and if you could look through the blizzard  
you'd see the blood on our lips  
Don't forget me Demetra  
Don't forget what you know  
I'll be coming back with the money  
in fifteen years or so

\*\*\*

Karen's beauty is very great  
it lies on her heart like a paperweight  
She haunts the edges of her beauty  
like a ghost on sentry duty  
If beauty is the motherland

she lives on the furthest strand  
Her back toward the Capitol  
that the pilgrims call so beautiful  
She hears them make a joyous sound  
but she cannot turn around  
The lover's song and the victim's rack  
they soar and creak behind her back  
Through her beauty many pass  
like penitents on broken glass  
But once inside there is no cure  
for hearts so wounded at the door  
Trying to find a place to kneel  
between the poets of pain  
Trying to find a world to feel  
that feels like the world again  
My darling says her love is real  
then why does she complain

\*\*\*

You talk about telling me the truth and then you threaten to write all  
over my book of poems. Let us put an end to this chatter.

You expressed some curiosity as to whether I would love you or kill you  
in response to one of your gestures. I am neither a saint nor a murderer: I do  
not love and I do not kill. I make love and I tear the wings off flies

\*\*\*

One more drink  
                                  for the boys at the bar  
I'd tell you all about us  
                  but I don't know who we are  
One more cry  
                                  from the pedal steel guitar  
for the war that we lost  
for the girl that we wanted  
for the man that we double-crossed  
all day at the office  
for the scout from the major league  
who's never gonna spot ya  
Get em up, Joe,

like you did for Frank Sinatra

\*\*\*

**August 2, 1976**

I stole your sister for a little ritual that failed  
I stole your savior with his hands so firmly nailed  
I stole the crescent moon its image in the sea  
I stole your roses and your lapis lazuli  
I stole the bullets made of silver and your gun  
I stole your many gods, I stole the only one  
I stole the tower with a woman leaning there  
I stole your lover from the ladder of her hair  
I crossed the line of reason  
I stole your victory handout  
and your flimsy Holocaust  
I stole the midnight special from the trash  
So go to sleep, it's never coming back  
I stole your former wife, I had to tell her why  
you kept on coming back to say goodbye  
I crossed a moat, a high electric fence  
I stole your Jews and Gypsies tangled from the trench {tangled in  
a trench}

I stole your victim [?] memory your holocaust  
I have stolen everything you lost

\*\*\*

For I have been thru many lives  
& no one follows me  
I am what you were last night  
& I am what you'll be  
The moment that you track me down  
I surrender there  
I leave you with a bag of cracks  
that you know you must repair

\*\*\*

You came to me  
You wear your widow clothes  
I ask who are you mourning for  
you say, The man you were before

The man you were before  
I loved you  
I remember him  
Didn't he live  
on an island in  
the Mediterranean sea  
with a mandate from God  
to enter the dark

**Acceptance Address for the Prince of  
Asturias Award**



*October 21, 2011*

Your Majesty, Your Royal Highnesses, Excellencies, Members of the Jury, Distinguished Laureates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a great honor to stand here before you tonight. Perhaps, like the great maestro Riccardo Muti, I am not used to standing in front of an audience without an orchestra behind me, but I will do my best as a solo artist tonight.

I stayed up all night last night wondering what I might say to this august assembly. And after I had eaten all the chocolate bars and peanuts in the mini-bar, I scribbled a few words. I don't think I have to refer to them. Obviously, I am deeply touched to be recognized by the Foundation. But I've come here tonight to express another dimension of gratitude. I think I can do it in three or four minutes—and I will try.

When I was packing in Los Angeles to come here, I had a sense of unease because I've always felt some ambiguity about an award for poetry. Poetry comes from a place that no one commands and no one conquers. So I feel somewhat like a charlatan to accept an award for an activity which I do not command. In other words, if I knew where the good songs came from, I'd go there more often.

I was compelled in the midst of that ordeal of packing to go and open my guitar. I have a Conde guitar, which was made in Spain in the great workshop at Number 7 Gravina Street; a beautiful instrument that I acquired over 40 years ago. I took it out of the case and I lifted it. It seemed to be filled with helium—it was so light. And I brought it to my face. I put my face close to the beautifully designed rosette, and I inhaled the fragrance of the living wood. You know that wood never dies.

I inhaled the fragrance of cedar as fresh as the first day that I acquired the guitar. And a voice seemed to say to me, "You are an old man and you have not said thank you; you have not brought your gratitude back to the soil from which this fragrance arose." And so I come here tonight to thank the soil and the soul of this people that has given me so much—because I know just as an identity card is not a man, a credit rating is not a country. Now, you know of my deep association and confraternity with the poet Federico García Lorca. I could say that when I was a young man, an adolescent, and I hungered for a voice, I studied the English poets and I knew their work well, and I copied their styles, but I could not find a voice.

It was only when I read, even in translation, the works of Lorca that I understood that there was a voice. It is not that I copied his voice; I would not dare. But he gave me permission to find a voice, to locate a voice; that is, to locate a self, a self that is not fixed, a self that struggles for its own existence.

And as I grew older I understood that instructions came with this voice. What were these instructions? The instructions were never to lament casually. And if one is to express the great inevitable defeat that awaits us all, it must be done within the strict confines of dignity and beauty.

And so I had a voice, but I did not have an instrument. I did not have a song.

And now I'm going to tell you very briefly a story of how I got my song.

Because I was an indifferent guitar player. I banged the chords. I only knew a few of them. I sat around with my college friends, drinking and singing the folk songs, or the popular songs of the day, but I never in a thousand years thought of myself as a musician or as a singer.

One day in the early '60s, I was visiting my mother's house in Montreal. The house is beside a park, and in the park there's a tennis court where many people come to watch the beautiful young tennis players enjoy their sport. I wandered back to this park, which I'd known since my childhood, and there was a young man playing a guitar. He was playing a flamenco guitar, and he was surrounded by two or three girls and boys who were listening to him. I loved the way he played. There was something about the way he played that captured me.

It was the way I wanted to play—and knew that I would never be able to play.

And I sat there with the other listeners for a few moments, and when there was a silence, an appropriate silence, I asked him if he would give me guitar lessons. He was a young man from Spain, and we could only communicate in my broken French and his broken French. He didn't speak English. And he agreed to give me guitar lessons. I pointed to my mother's house, which you could see from the tennis court, and we made an appointment; we settled the price.

And he came to my mother's house the next day and he said, "Let me hear you play something." I tried to play something. He said, "You don't know how to play, do you?" I said, "No, I really don't know how to play."

He said, “First of all, let me tune your guitar. It’s all out of tune.” So he took the guitar, and he tuned it. He said, “It’s not a bad guitar.” It wasn’t the Conde, but it wasn’t a bad guitar. So he handed it back to me. He said, “Now play.”

I couldn’t play any better.

He said, “Let me show you some chords.” And he took the guitar and he produced a sound from the guitar that I’d never heard. And he played a sequence of chords with a tremolo, and he said, “Now you do it.” I said, “It’s out of the question. I can’t possibly do it.” He said, “Let me put your fingers on the frets.” And he put my fingers on the frets. And he said, “Now, now play.” It was a mess. He said, “I’ll come back tomorrow.” He came back tomorrow. He put my hands on the guitar. He placed it on my lap in the way that was appropriate, and I began again with those six chords—[the] six-chord progression that many, many flamenco songs are based on.

I was a little better that day.

The third day: improved, somewhat improved. But I knew the chords now. And I knew that although I couldn’t coordinate my fingers with my thumb to produce the correct tremolo pattern, I knew the chords—I knew them very, very well by this point. The next day, he didn’t come. He didn’t come. I had the number of his boarding house in Montreal. I phoned to find out why he had missed the appointment, and they told me that he’d taken his life—that he committed suicide. I knew nothing about the man. I did not know what part of Spain he came from. I did not know why he came to Montreal. I did not know why he stayed there. I did not know why he appeared there in that tennis court. I did not know why he took his life. I was deeply saddened, of course.

But now I disclose something that I’ve never spoken in public. It was those six chords—it was that guitar pattern that has been the basis of all my songs and all my music.

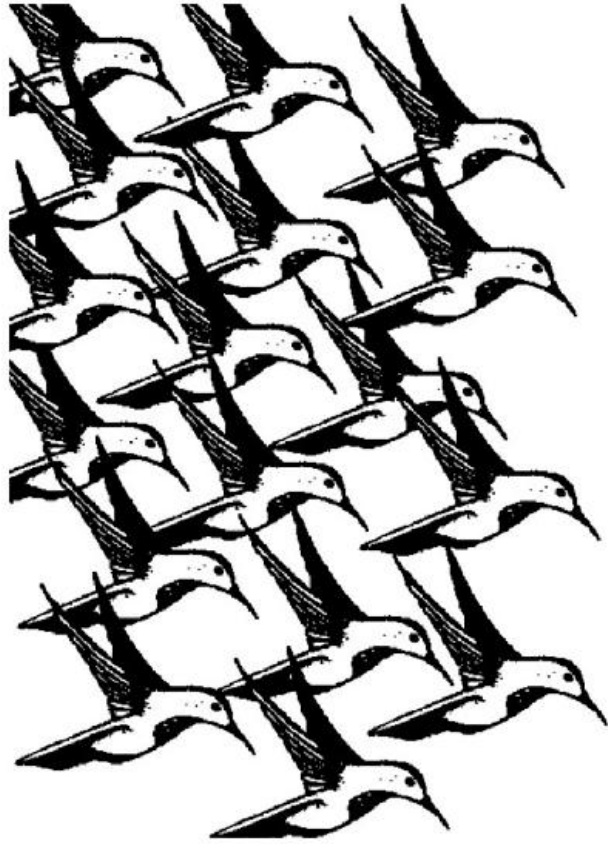
So now you will begin to understand the dimensions of the gratitude I have for this country. Everything that you have found favorable in my work comes from this place.

Everything, everything that you have found favorable in my songs and my poetry is inspired by this soil.

So I thank you so much for the warm hospitality that you have shown my work, because it is really yours, and you have allowed me to affix my signature to the bottom of the page.

Thank you so much, ladies and gentlemen.





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Leonard did not provide acknowledgements for *The Flame*, which is a minor tragedy, as the duty of fulfilling this obligation falls on me, and I am wholly inadequate to the task. The acknowledgements to *Book of Longing* demonstrate the importance which Leonard assigned to this page. Leonard's humility was genuine, and his gratitude unmistakable. He would have been concerned about possible hurt feelings by anyone who felt overlooked, notwithstanding the inherent limitations in this exercise. That said, I am guided by simplicity.

Leonard would have thanked Robert Faggen for his friendship and editorial efforts during the long process of assembling *The Flame* from Leonard's extensive archive. Leonard would also have thanked Alexandra Pleshoyano, whom he first met in 2010, for her scholarly expertise and meticulous attention to detail in the final editing of the manuscript. He would also have thanked Jared Bland at McClelland and Stewart; Ileene Smith and Jonathan Galassi at Farrar, Straus and Giroux; and Francis Bickmore at Canongate for their commitment to the book, and his friend Leon Wieseltier for reading the final manuscript. He would also want me to thank his new agent, Andrew Wylie, for his efforts with this manuscript and for his work on the back catalogue.

Leonard was deeply appreciative during the last months of his life of the many people who assisted him during his remarkable late-career renaissance. He thanked his band and crew every night during his iconic world tour, and he would want me to thank each of you again by name. Leonard also deeply appreciated the work of all the webmasters who supported his work around the world; they were among the very few who had the privilege to visit backstage. He certainly gained a new appreciation of Sony Music over the last eight years of his career, and would want me to thank all the managing directors who gave generous attention to his last three albums. He would want me to give special mention to Rob Stringer, Shane Carter, Greg Linn, Caryn Hanlon, and JoAnn Kaeding.

In each of his last three albums, Leonard expressed his appreciation for his creative collaborators. He would want me to mention, and thank again, his son, Adam, who produced *You Want It Darker*, producer and co-writer Patrick Leonard for work on *Old Ideas and Popular Problems*, and co-writer Sharon Robinson.

He would insist that I give special thanks to Michelle Rice, his lawyer since 2005, who rescued him from the attack and malfeasance of his prior manager. He would be particularly grateful for Michelle's swift and effective intervention to stop his former manager's renewed harassment in the summer of 2016, just when Leonard most needed peace to complete this manuscript.

Finally, he would express his deep love and appreciation to his daughter, Lorca, his son, Adam, and Adam's partner, Jessica, for their care and understanding, which enabled him to have the solitude required to complete the book, and the joy they brought him with visits from his grandchildren, Viva, Cassius, and Lyon. He would also offer a special thanks to Anjani.

—Robert Kory  
Trustee, Leonard Cohen Family Trust  
June 2018

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POETRY

*Let Us Compare Mythologies*

*The Spice-Box of Earth*

*Flowers for Hitler*

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FICTION

*The Favourite Game*

*Beautiful Losers*

## A NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Leonard Cohen was born in Montreal in 1934. Soon after graduating from McGill University, he published his first collection of poems, *Let Us Compare Mythologies*, in 1956. He would go on to publish a dozen more volumes of poetry, including *Book of Longing*, and two novels, *The Favourite Game* and *Beautiful Losers*. A hugely influential and critically acclaimed singer and songwriter, Cohen released fourteen studio albums between 1967 and 2016, the last being *You Want It Darker*, for the title track of which he posthumously won the Grammy for Best Rock Performance. He was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2008 and the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 2010, and was honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2010 Grammys. He won both the Prince of Asturias Award for Literature and the Glenn Gould Prize in 2011, and the first PEN New England Song

Lyrics of Literary Excellence Award in 2012.  
Cohen died in Los Angeles on November 7, 2016.  
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