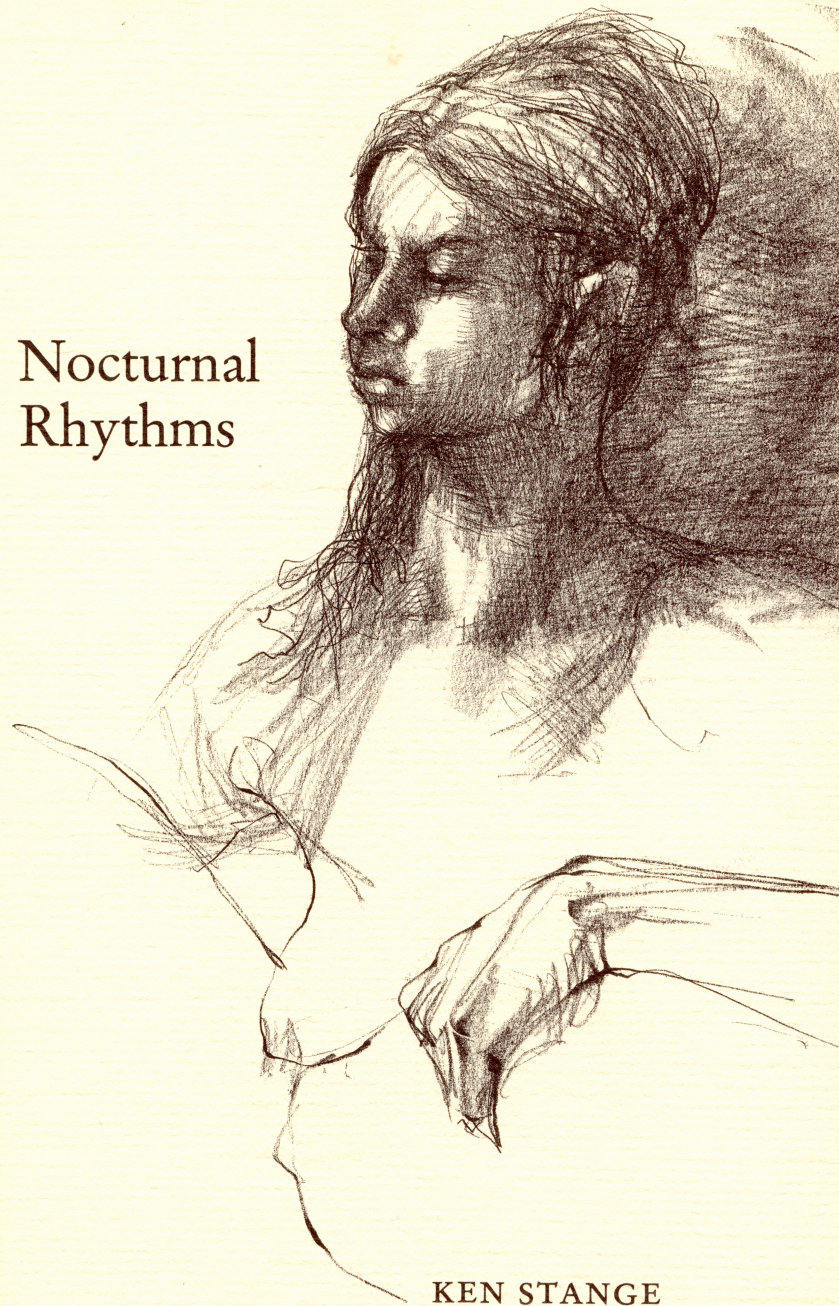


Nocturnal
Rhythms



KEN STANGE

Nocturnal Rhythms

BOOKS BY

KEN STANGE

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Nocturnal Rhythms

Ken Stange



Two Cultures Press
2008

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For Ursula

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NOCTURNAL RHYTHMS

Prelude and Dedication

To those rhythms
those rhythms that shape night . to a knife edge those
rhythms are your rhythms . my forest sleeper . sickly lover
maker of terror
creator of wakefulness . to you
I dedicate this pile . of dry leaves . end to your
indelicate plans.

.
You've followed me
thru bush and plot . the insomniac you hunt
the gods you lease . the vegetables . ripe poisons
in your earthly garden
not to mention . men you've teased
into myth . shaped into death-masks . dreamt into life
or neglected to invent.

.
I've watched you
slept in you . with you
and watched others . slide hands over your . surfaces without
regret touching
the void of your space . a way of making
representation . to higher authorities . greater
distances.

.
Sweet madness
is your weapon . the interior your
tender trap . for all my ingrown . experiences
so why not
dedicate this to you . and your allies
the Queen of Lies . the edge of twilight . all those creature
rhythms that shape night.

INTRODUCTION

There is within me a harmony, a balance, and I thank my Gods for it. It is certainly not a pleasant consonance, but it is some kind of order, and that is better than chaos. I need it here, for I live far from cities, far from what has come to be termed civilization. I don't need these cities anymore, for I have my own primitive civilization here in my head. I have also my own icons and my own chapel. These help me through the shimmering transition into madman that comes perhaps every fortnight. Yes, it is best that I am here, away from other forms of madness, for I am shy as a wolf.

I am not ugly. In fact, I am fairly young and reasonably attractive. The only obvious abnormality in my appearance is my white hair. I am no albino, but my hair turned completely white when I was only seventeen. (There was an experiential reason for this sudden whitening, but it need not concern you.) My fingers are long and tapering. So are my days.

Why do I tell you these things? Well, why does one do any particular thing? We try so hard to find reasons for all our behaviour, but reasons are just the lies we tell ourselves to keep order in the universe. Still if one insists on being 'reasonable', it is more so to inquire of me as to why I wrote these poems. (And this permits me to tie a knot.) I wrote these poems because my hair is white and my fingers are long and tapering. And that, too, is why I tell you these things. You see, this is magic: the primitive, magical belief that this sort of information will somehow make my poems more comprehensible. This is what critics call the 'biographical fallacy'.

But then my life really is a fallacy, a lie. There is, of course, nothing especially unusual about living a lie, but then there is nothing especially unusual about me. (It is important that you know this, for otherwise the temptation is to explain these poems with a clinical diagnosis.) I have a few idiosyncrasies, but most of us do. I am partially insane, but most of us are. I am haunted, but then who isn't.

It is only slightly unusual to record these things in print. And I am slightly unusual in loving my ghosts more than most people. The latter tendency is probably attributable to my Scandinavian origins, if one likes to 'attribute' things. Then, too, my Norse blood can be used to explain why my ghosts' favourite haunt is my mirror, for they are just my different faces, my personae. And my ancestors. This belief in

the skins of self living out their own independent, if hollow, existences is, I believe, an archetypically Nordic vision.

Also of the North is the metaphysical form my lover takes. Love is of the night - like dreams. And the nights in winter are long up here (for I do live in the North), while nights in summer are surreal beneath an obstinate sun. Metaphysical? Consider the verbs conceive and know, how easily they encompass both the intellectual and the carnal. Like winter encompasses eternal night and infinite white.

But I must be careful: there is a tendency for the cerebral to smother the carnal, burying it in an arid soil where no poetry can grow. And so regular discipline is required to integrate the two poles. Yes, journeys must be undertaken. Exercises must be performed. Ablutions, searches, interpretations. Creations. I have not shunned these large responsibilities.

Nor have I shunned my responsibility toward death. My door is always open, and she comes to visit regularly, although so far she has not deigned to stay. I always prepare a small feast, and we party all night. We dance and I sing. Usually I get drunk and end confusing her with my lover. Sleep is no cure for this particular error, but it is a slight palliative.

Unfortunately I find it a hard medicine to take, for I am an insomniac. But this too, it must be emphasized, is not unusual, and I have learned to live with it. I accept the night's rhythm as my own. The mysterious, baroque harmony of the night suits me. When I am mad, my dreams are sane. Although it is difficult to sleep in the summer with its incessant light, in winter it is difficult to waken.

Now if all this seems foreign to you, even slightly macabre, to me it is most natural. The rhythm, the movements, of night, the counter-point of insomnia and nightmare, the funereal and ghostly melody ... this music played in a mirror ... this is what I love. It is, in fact, the face of my lover: a face that is to me at least, perfect and symmetrical and consonant. Yes, there is in all this a sad harmony, a balance, and I thank my Gods for it.

PORTRAITS IN THE MIRROR

Portraits

Ancestors, friends, lovers, losers, all these are masks we try out for a moment ... before our mirror. My mirror is waking dream, a way of drawing the hard edges and angles of my face. For, you see, I am every one I have ever known. I am my father, I am my mother, and I am my lover. All my features would dissolve into outside reality without my mirror; I would become amorphous, undefined ... universal, and all things - hence Nothing. So what if the definitions the glass supplies are `false'? What does it matter, if when the final mask is taken off, no recognizable countenance confronts what I call my self? Something, at least, remains. Mirror, magic born of still water. Shaman's mask. The neurotic's image. The son's inheritance. The wife's revenge. The artist's exit. All these. So I slip through to the other side and look out at my self, now and Other. This is a nice revenge, and this is a way of existing. Call it: reflecting on the nature of reality.

The Creation Of Character

I lift pencil. Draw a maze
in the corner
of an empty dream-sheet. Do it
just to murder time.
Then the pencil moves down
the paper, begins
to sketch a face: eyes first,
staring out unblinking,
then appear other features - sharp
and coldly intelligent. I fail
to recognize the face. I am not surprised
when it moves
its lips (it has no sound,
but I can read lips, help form
its vowels). The tongue flicks,
curses me, then bitterly adds:
'I didn't ask
to be born; I'm a mere accident
of your pleasure.'
The white silence is marred
now, might as well go on,
go on to shape body and give limbs,
give sex. Her
first gesture is to flee
into the penciled maze.
Naturally concerned, I follow
track her for days, weeks, track
her thru my casual creation; find signs
of her passing (and other things too)
but nowhere within the walled landscape
do I encounter her face to face.
Weeks become months become
years; and I grow old, my hair as white
as the paper. Then one day
I emerge.
Look up. She
towers over me, mammoth and brooding,
having breadth and depth far beyond me.

Her voice rumbles, deep thunder
in my sky: `Too vague, too common.

.
She erases me.

Vegetable-Man

He moves under the gray cover of November:
his life a greasy stain upon this page. He wears
as cloak a bleak forecast of further weather,
and sympathizes with the rain. He overturns
our garbage heaps in search of soft insides, the green
and poignant undersurfaces we wish were just
a dream, a product of his hot-house damp. Like myth
he is a fool, a hero, lover, end; and so he waits
for time to free him from the web of painful youth,
that is to say those tales of lust spellt wrong. It will,
it must, at last go past, he reasons, pass as all
the seasons do, as do old friends, from problems of
the heart. Meanwhile his mind's a tired traveler
along this road he built so carefully from seed.

Yet here's a man to envy! One can covet his sweet lack
of lust, and watch with jealousy his loins grow roots.
His hands - but not his mind - are growing dirty now,
as he awaits, with patience, our eventual
request: 'Vegetable-man, grown old and ripe,
help feed this hungry, hungry world.'

I've Been Dreaming Of My Dead Grandmother

Visage of her doughy skin thickly
Kneaded into demands, and my mama
Bent like a willow, wind-beaten by
That woman's wilful voice and needs.

.
When i was just a little boy

(in a house of women)

i heard her

say,

.
'Daughter, you must train a child
Same way that you train a dog.'

.
(She had very large hands.)

.
Now She Comes
back at night, sneaks into my wet
dreams and scolds me
for smoking in the basement; I run
through my mother's wisp of self, out
the green door, down
a block of taunts, take
refuge behind
each year
added to my file.

.
Children are cruel, though less adept than adults:
I attempted revenge; I attempted
To cut her through with the sharp fragments
Of my early vocabulary, but
Soon became convinced that her skin was some
Convolutated armour and that her mind –
Though strong - was too dull to feel any
Pain other than the physical. At best,
My words, spit out, might earn a hasty slap.

.
(She had very strong hands.)
.

Now She Comes
back at night, invades my sleep to make
me a dinner
of pig's knuckles and blood
soup. I always
have to clean
my plate.

.
I had just got puberty beat
When she said, 'You'll miss
Me when I'm gone!' And went.

.
For fifteen years I didn't

.
Then I started to have these damn dreams, no not
regrets, just dreams, and

.
I'm already a father.

Black Widow Mother

Widowed by her only son, she is Spider
Woman sewing in the shade. She is lover
only to her son: dead son, dream son.
Father loves his dog.

.
(I press aside shrubbery, peer in
her dark window, spy on
the porcelain menagerie, probe
the hooded privacy of her place out of light:
a home tight as cock-pit, dark as engine,
warm as womb, sick as her husband
in the stiff-backed chair ...
petting the old dog.)

.
David was his name, her golden boy.
David died twenty-one years ago.
David, such a good boy, such a nice boy.
Each night she asks the Lord why
He took David's body from her, why
He hurled it to earth and ash, why?

.
(I understand the house: how Father
has his own room, stark with bed
and dresser and little else; how Mother
thinks the room a scar, a sin,
and always keeps the door closed; how patient
Father serves his time, waiting
in her web, hopeless prey; how one door
is never opened when he's home.)

.
Fire leaped from the sky:
downward came the blazing comet:
Flesh burning, peeling
away in sheets of flame, but
David, in his falling star,
felt no pain or regret,
Though he missed
his father just a bit.

(Crouched, I wonder how he was conceived,
this bright light in the warrior skies,
a virgin birth perhaps? I do know
lately she's had trouble with her womb:
the doctors keep removing stitches,
but late at night she sews them up again.)

.
Her unliving rooms are safe, safe from
the ugly stain of sunlight. Alive
he would have probably married, his
fine photo of a face grown yellow
along the edges. He chose wisely
instead, to pilot his plane away
from the slower death of aging.

.
(I know, she knows,
that David still lives
in mental photographs. David still lives
in long conversations with mothers whose sons
were recently arrested, rude, married or cold.
Yes David still lives, lives on
in the perfection of memory, where sweet time,
small healer, has erased all blemish. Yes,
David still lives behind the porcelain figurines,
behind the hungry mirror that feeds
on slow decay, behind the closed door
where his room waits untouched, behind
the shadow crouched outside
this window.)

.
Her son wrote poems.
They were very bad poems.
They were about flying, flying away.
She thinks he wrote poems about her.

.
(I leave the window and go toward the door.
It takes a great deal of time,
for I get lost, wander about the world, almost
forget her name.
But then I am there, doorknob in hand.)

David's true love waits.
She puts marks on her calendar.
They will once again be reunited.
She spins her web of wishful strands.
Yes she is faithful, after her fashion:
she has had no other sons before him
or after.

.
(I walk in the door.
The figurines are cracked at the base.
The dog is dead of old age and love.
The father is gone,
blind somewhere looking for light.
Black widow mother is rocking slowly
in her rocking chair.)

.
There is the light of a flame.

.
(‘You've come home, David,’ she says
rising to greet me,
tears in her eyes.)

.
Somewhere over Korea a plane is burning,
falling,
plunging away from flight.

The Image Of My Father

Thirty is a very dangerous age
to rummage in seasonless attics. I
know that. Where, here ...

.
I find this time-secreted, sadly dated
photo:

The not-yet old man, a strong man, fifty
looking thirty, is pushing easily a rusty
hand-mower thru the lush summer grass,
followed seriously by a small boy with
a toy lawn-mower and intent eyes - a boy
that once was me.

.
(I don't remember him: dead
a week later. Do
remember, tho, not wanting
to go to his funeral,
and remember too, clear
as sunlight, my sixth birthday
the following month.)

.
This is not a photograph; this is
a mirror:

This no-longer young man, a weak man, thirty
feeling fifty, is pushing uneasily beneath
his reflection, is coming out now on the far
side, where a small boy's priorities, and
this small boy's ignorance of death, softly
illumines dim memory.

.
(I don't remember when I grew old
enough to be confused, grew old
enough to feel loss and pain
enough to feel guilt
over my earlier innocence.)
.

Now an afterimage, I appear
in the photo:

I am talking to the pair.
The boy is ignoring me.
The man is asking me
who I am.

.
I find that I do not know.

.
But I do know
where is the smell of freshly cut grass,
and that here is dust thick on attic windows
in a seasonless year.

Poem For Physicists And Mystics Having Faith In The Cycle

You're special.

.
You crunch the future beneath
your heel, curse salvation, lift
your cane to crash it down on
the bare pate of an old prophet
carrying flowers to your grave,

.
for you're no fool, no wind-suckled stone
waiting blind on the plain for eternity's
rot and return.

.
You stroll where most crawl obsequious;
meeting Yahweh you most calmly stare him
in the eyes, cough, spit blood that
explodes at his clay feet, laugh as he
starts, and then continue on your ever-way,

.
for you're no fool, no sun-slaving shrub
waiting dumb in the forest for tomorrow's
rot and return.

.
You're special, you can afford the luxury
of thought and invention; gifted with will,
a brain and an unusual thumb, you can create
your own idols, jokes, and demolish them
on a whim. You're very, very special,

.
for you're no fool, no food-mongering beast
wandering hungry in the swamp, ignorant of
rot and return.

.
No, you're special: you're a thing that *knows*
you're going to die, rot
and return.

.
(but whether as a stone, shrub or beast,
that
you do not know)

I Watch My Drinking Companion Play Chess

Here in the flippant furrows of your brow, beaten,
You bury obsession, mourn intention, pass round
Again the salt (to wounds), play the game, pass the time.
I see across the board the flash of winter-green:
Your eyes, as you pour out stories, drunken tokens
Tossed at me - small, unfounded, unwanted movements
Out of time. You are no inspired tale-teller
Of consummate skill; speak only poor passages
From a mediocre novel, true to your life -
A dull dénouement. You're a sickly, second-rate.
Wood-pusher at war with a Grandmaster that deigns
To play at odds, then scoffs across the board at you,
As your pieces are taken away. You swallow
Your medicine, but your brain won't reason any more,
As you insist on turning incident inside
Out or accident into event; always this
Damn apocalypse in a beer glass. Still I drink
With you, get drunk with you, pass time, largely I guess,
Because I don't understand your thirst, your illness,
And just can grasp the bare rudiments of the game.

The Sculptor Comes To The End

As quick as the fickle crackle of words:
Death's a jolly old fellow who advises the birds.

.
With an arc of Arp or a curve of Moore,
You turn in your work like a skilful whore.

.
The sun-stringent past drips down like the clay;
You fire your kiln with the need to entrap.

.
All that's worked its way past your burnt-umber glow
Are the sounds of spaces carved in the snow.

.
All your dreams in rock, in glass and in steel
Are much to crass - what you need's a good meal.

.
'They'll kill me,' he said as he lifted his tool,
'They'll hate me, then slay me and call me the fool.'

.
As quick as the fickle clatter of stones:
Death always speaks in the most mellow of tones.

Adam's Third Wife Explains Her Position

I'm the third woman in line:
 the first one put his night-light out;
 the second forged a man with gentle
 enticements; I'm the third. My role?
 I'm packing away the pictures of
his youth,
 hiding the cardboard
cartons in our attic.
.
I'm protecting his image.

Shaman At The Moment Of Death

At last the pressure of it all
compresses you into a dark
ball rolling down a distant
hill and the holy sun beats your
head like a stick,
then it begins ...

.
Then the power you proudly claimed
oozes viscously from you like blood
from a rock and your sickly pulse
contracts to the convoluted
rhythm of snakes,
then it begins ...

.
Begins emerging
like licks of flame
from embers, like
green from buds, here
at this moment
before you meet
yourself walking
the path home, it
reappears but
this time disgust
rises in your throat
like phlegm, and you
choose freedom, this
time you choose not
to heal yourself
physician.

The Neurasthenic Says His Prayers

dear Lord
my lover doesn't talk to me anymore
the street cars pass me by
perhaps i'm invisible now
i avoid mirrors . . . plan soon
to spit
out my life
a tainted piece of meat
. . .
the sun is gray with dead birds
hot ashes fall . . . into my eyes
the pills help
me keep my head down
as i stumble along . . . under the weight
of forsaken schemes
. . .
prayer is for believers . . . lovers
i'm neither
yet i pray unselfishly:
 God help the sea . . . it is so
 large and full and lonely
 God help me.

CARNAL DISCIPLINES

Disciplines

Without exercise the heart weakens. Without probing of the depths, the spirit weakens. One has to take each moment and stretch it like a muscle. One has to lift oneself up. One has to practice and study and analyze and interpret. One has to sketch faces in the mirror, and then try them on like masks. One has to go on journeys: below the surfaces, into the cracks in one's facade, into reeking swamps, into blasphemous regions. One has to explore forbidden spaces and open forbidden treasures. This is the way to discipline the imagination, and the imagination is life. If I can no longer imagine other beings and other places, then I can no longer imagine myself and this place- and I must fade like morning mist in sunlight. Like a First Cause, each moment I create myself anew. Without this ability to recreate, I slay myself as surely as if I smashed my mirror. Some of my explorations and recreations are sacred, but most are carnal, hence subterranean. So don't look for maps of these carnal regions, for carnal knowledge is not gained with reason and rulers. The only rule is a serpentine line that leads nowhere, and ends by sketching my face.

The Development Of Self-Reliance

Ritual keeps me alive, these numb limbs
moving thru thick air, reaching out beyond,
into spaces carved in ether, to strands
of light from stars and still stranger places.

.
Each day practice a movement, perhaps just
begin by merely lifting a finger
or batting an eye. It will come slowly,
but it will come, and you'll be there with me.

.
As time progresses, so does space, so we
too must persist. An orange may leap up
from the dish, while we still can only creep.
But given time, we'll conquer entropy.

.
No, it won't be long before the sun must
reconsider. It won't be long before
our dull faces light and burn and turn to
cinders. So practice daily here with me,

.
For our time will come.

Searching Out The Treasure-Trove

Day 1

.
A musician, no explorer, he
didn't want to go, no not
one bit.

.
Fear danced, a red retinal light, along
the serrated edge of his regret, didn't
want to go . windigo . wasn't wont
to flow.

.
No,
for tho the queen paid the piper
she couldn't insure his soul.

Day 2

.
Still it started easy
as eggcrack,
sunburst,
tho in quick minutes became mudthick.

.
The path led thru:
dark-rushes, still-deaths, protean
shifts of perception, first blurring
then charring the air, till
he walked blind-
whistling in the dark.

.
The path led thru:
Balkan black (no it wasn't green
no more with spectacles off), on thru
dark muck and mire, purple and velvet,
thru marsh-stench, fear-sweat, dream-rot.

Day 3

.
Stopped for a space . brief insert of silence
a rest to cough blood . phlegm and disease
spitting his distress . into the dung heap.

.
Bending under convictions . notices a loose rock
easily lifted disc where . in the fickle light
of a frightening flash . he discovered a tune.

.
Then he played. played played played
with a vengeance. on his hollow instrument.

Day 4

.
The path led thru:
tar-pit, turtle-dove home
(rimes with extinction,
love and damnation);
hanged-man, bog and intent
greened with asexual lust;
into/under water, amniotic
fluid of heartbeat, brain
growth (the cancer of human
impulse); surfacing
at black-cinder beach
head; into/under jungle
cover, growing
like a mushroom
cloud.

Day 5

.
Arrived:
at high rock shelf . cave entrance
earth's cracked crust.

.
Entered:
a fool's shadow . candle's flicker
the dream's pinch.

.
Uncovered:
the treasure chest . greed's belt
rusted shut.

.
Pried:
with a lever of pain . crack and groan
split wood-grain.

.
Lifted:
box's lid . virgin's womb
violated.

Day 6

.
The icy scream explodes splattering
stars on cave's ceiling. He becomes
snow, wind-sculpted; becomes song,
wind-sung; becomes night, wind-blinded.

He becomes windigo, winter wanderer,
no musician, no,
merely now one
.
sad season's end
.

Day 7

And on the seventh day he rested.

A Freudian Interpretation

He was given voice by the deepest
of needs: Birth-cry (his mother?
Muse Lust.) It is only correct

.
that the sun ignore the candle
tho a weebitta lust can make one
presumptuous. Young Beatrice lit

.
a pyre that flared and scoffed
at mere infinity, meek eternity.
Electrons and supernovas may follow

.
their own attractions, unyielding,
unchanging, but we are no less so
immutable in desire. And the candle

.
in turn ignores the sun's fires;
burns brightly enough in the bowels
of the earth. Thus it is, Dante lit

.
all of his Inferno
with that unhumble candle burning
burning
in his thighs.

Going To Pieces

It is past midnight, and so it is now Thanksgiving. I am willing to give thanks, but I am not sure to whom thanks are due. Agnostics suffer from disorientation on days like this. Unless, of course, they consider themselves `self-made' men. But I'm not self-made. I am constructed of bits and pieces of everyone I was ever intimate with; I am constructed from the genetic crap-game my parents played one night in their conjugal bed; I am constructed of time and space and the landscape visible from my erratic trajectory. I am wounded, as are we all, by these same things ... and wounded, I bleed. But when I lick my wounds, the glue that holds the myriad parts together becomes loosened, and I start to fall apart.

.
the night is good
for fools for
like a blanket
it hides the world

.
my arms fall off
shattering
as they strike the floor
Aphrodite no
just another painter
with a brush clenched
in my teeth

.
thank the world
for sleeping
i prefer to go to pieces
in private

.
next my eyes
roll out
to bounce softly
on the floor
they roll to a corner
to watch me
like a TV

.

my room
is a clean well-lighted place

.
tiny cracks form
in my torso
it is a matter of time
small matter
then my whole body drops
into dust and rubble
like a collapsing building

.
only my head seems to survive momentarily
rolling across the floor
to strike the table leg
where it cracks open like a shell
and my brain emerges
like a yolk

.
this is what
dreams are made of
but my eyes
are open
i can't shut them

.
my thoughts go runny

.
this is ugly

.
this is thanks
given

The Sound Of A Comet

There are summer evenings when I suffer terribly with the dread of morning. My demon is to blame. These are the times I find it necessary to go into the wetlands near my home and confront this creature that plays my imagination as though it were a pipe-organ. I know that other people fear and worship their demons, but I am deformed, and deformity makes one brazen: I call my demon out and mock her. I don't need her music. What I need is the sound of a comet. I need sleep and morning.

.
Come!

.
Come. I call you out
by early moon, splinter-faced,
call you to form your images
from this dusk-light. I call you,
you old marsh visionary.

.
(Have no fear: the Beast
is no lover; the Beast
is asleep. The Beast
dreams
you.)

.
So come, come like rain
on-down watershed,
flow like sweat
when a fever breaks,
or blood
when life ebbs.

.
(Yes, be gentle
and inevitable
as a final conclusion
but come do your silly tricks
and let me be.)

.
Come scheme with Woodpecker.
Come fuck with Woodland-Deer.
Come on

.
over ridge edge: the light
of constellations: the sky-shell
game; the silver
in night-frost.

.
(You are idiot.
You are fool.
You are second to all life:
equal to rock, less
than fungus.)

.
but come, woman come
come-on

.
under: moss-bed nest. Come
beneath night, beneath
Heron's flight: a ribbon of excrement
on your head!

.
Old marsh-visionary: you are blind
as Bat.

.
Hag, what are these creatures
to you. What am I
to you. Why

.
just a dream.
And you, you are: the Beast's nightmare.
(No lover, no pain.)

.
Come have your little death.

.
Praise the sun! Morn-light
will praise your passing. You are
mere night-mist,
 but your death!
your death is: the rhythm
coming awake.

Ablution

Nine p.m.

.
We make our first attempt
to enter the lake.
Like thieves we approach
it. The sun, in front of us,
splits a bank of clouds:
a great red wound gapes.

.
We have stripped off all covering,
believing that to be most discreet.
(Your flesh is taut
with the chill. I
have my doubts.)

.
Beneath the shallow water
the waves have formed infinite
serpents from sand; they writhe
beneath my feet-temptation.

.
I give in. You give up.

.
Midnight

.
Dark now and we're trying
again. Stealthily we go
to the verge. The moon
lays a path down
the still surface. We
attempt to follow it,
become it.

.
(The water is warm,
accepting.
The air cold.)

.
The path is easy. I take
your hand. That is a mistake.

Three a.m.

.
The moon is gone and we're still
entering the lake. The sky is black,
the water a chasm. Between air and water:
a border like a razor. It slashes us.

.
Darkness envelops my feet,
my shins, knees, my thighs.
Your thighs.

.
Our bodies are disappearing; now
we're decapitated. Below
our necks is warm dark, nothing
more. If you touch me
it must be with your mouth.

.
Then the darkness is full
as a globe; the water must be
over our heads. Scyphozoa. Medusa.
We don't exist: the depths
swallow us like bait.

.
Sensation with contact. Drift.
Float. Gray Dream.

.
(But for breath and brash instinct,
we could live forever
beneath the surface, close
yet never touching.)
.

Six a.m.

.
It is morning and we are emerging
like the mayflies that break
the surfaces all around us. Water
slides from our bodies like sheets.

.
As my legs reappear, every inch comes
a surprise. Whose thighs, whose calves
are these? What is this disruption
in the silent dawn?
We assault the shore.

.
On the beachhead are millions of the insects.
The sand is alive, twitching and squirming with wings
still too wet to fly. They have one day
to live.

.
Our bare feet crush them as we walk ashore:
they sound like paper crinkling. The sun
is in front of us.

To Be Redeemed Is To Be Born Again

see, i crawl out
lift stone and smash
icon to dust
i can crush bone
dream vengeance

.
- so what? you're still a mere youth

.
i move on fours
thru vales of death
dirty myself with fear
spit blood that stains
granite red
scheme apocalypse

.
- so what? you're still a mere child

.
i profane the holy
worship dung
swear love to Hecate
praise lust
grow evil flowers
in bile
scream anathema

.
- so what? you're still a mere baby

.
i writhe in filth
my eyes become mirrors
i swim in fluid night
induce lovers' terrors
murder all order
drink blood
snuff animal warmth
esteem nothingness

.
- so what? now you're merely stillborn

Unsatisfying Poem

Poems are exercises to get the blood
flowing. Ways to change
faces.

.
(midstream)

.
So we turn into apples,
tempt self-infliction,
lick our fingers clean
of all wisdom, murder
our parents, and run

.
(verbal delinquents)

.
run, down inch-worm streets
past cobblers' crutches
to duck into alleys
where drunks nurse
mutants at their wine
shrivelled teats.

.
(we call it experience)

.
This is the new religious sanctum.
This is the way to kingdom come.
This is now our daily bread.
This is a poem to feed the dead.

.
Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

GHOSTS OF GODS

Ghosts

I have admitted I'm haunted, but it is not by the spirits of dead persons. All my ghosts are of Gods. There are a variety of horrors dwelling in my subjective realm, but these ghosts barely qualify as horrors: they are nearly benign. Of course all Gods are dead, but for me the Nordic Gods return, incorporeal but vigorous. I cannot believe in the spirits of the Graeco-Roman Gods, for their behaviour strikes me as petty and tainted with humanity. Not so the Norse Gods, who are so much more incomprehensible, so much more motivated by urges and conjunctions foreign to mere humans. Perhaps it is their mortality that paradoxically raises them to this different level, I don't know. I do know that I only come close to understanding them when I am on a journey or in a dream. It is only then that the runes become legible, the path marked, and the conclusion meaningful. I can only suspect that somewhere in my collective unconscious runs a stream that has its source in these holy, heathen deities. These Gods are the undomesticated creatures of my needs. Theirs is a wonderful religion of cosmology and epistemology. But don't misinterpret me, I do not worship them; rather I happen to worship the same mysteries they do.

After The Second Coming (circa 1945)

Man is God; I am Man
Hung from a tree nine days,
Nine nights: hollow, carnal
Sacrifice to myself.

.
Pierced by a spear till
My blood rusted and I fell:
Crumbled body of ideation
Beside the magic runes.

.
Dead like the God before,
Something went from me across
The bridge into dark spaces;
Then came back as a flame.

.
Now I understand all things:
I see meaning in sunspots,
Logic in lust, and condemn
No thing. I am the new
Fallen idol.

Odin

Drunken God, Dancing in the Land of Graves, Drunken God:
Odin Odin Odin
Dance!

.
God of the Hanged Man, a smile
In the End, wildness in spruce;
Your spear dares pierce to dark
Centre of all matter. Odin,
You are Man's temptation:
God of wanting ...
After knowing,
After blood.

.
God of the Hungry Man, feast
Along the quest, one-eyed scholar:
Half-blind, half-wise guide
To places subterranean ...
To places mysterious as a hanged man's
Smile. Odin,
Dance the way.

.
God of Warrior and Pain, urging
Us to touch the whirling silvered
Sphere, urging drinking, urging
Hunger, urging to all forms of rage.
For you, we try to grasp
(Within our drunken ecstasy)
For you, we try to lift
Each rock, searching...
After knowing,
After blood.

.
God of Other. God of Us.
O Odin, drunken dancer, dance!
Drunken tempter, tempt!
God of Knowing and Unknowing,
You went and got with child a stone,
So all mountains now are full
Of other life, pain of growing.

.
God of Dancing. God of Death.
Dancing God, unlikely dancer, take
The mead again to lip and tongue, Odin turn
Again to dance on land, turn again
And dance, God of Dark Spaces,
God of the Light.
God of the Hanged Man, dance! Yes,
Dance, you drunken Hangman, dance...
After knowing,
After blood.

Loki

You were joker . . . trickster . . . only almost monster
half-god Loki . . . and half-good . . . till you killed
kind Balder . . . foolish Loki jester . . . killed Balder
what black humour . . . death is . . . what great horror
you filled up . . . all Asgard with . . . count your days
weird joker you . . . used a blind god . . . as your slayer
the kiss-weed . . . was your weapon . . . you mad bastard
better run Loki . . . become horse . . . and run fast
become bird Loki . . . fly away quick . . . God-killer
for Odin comes . . . God-Avenger comes . . . unsmiling

.
you built a hall . . . in deep woods . . . with four doors
count them . . . to east and west . . . north and south
to see all ways . . . you have to turn . . . and turn
again till . . . dizzy you fall . . . face to earth
fallen half-god . . . no longer half-good . . . silly Loki
you invented the net . . . but hearing Odin . . . coming
quickly burned it . . . like a bridge . . . behind you
and fled to stream . . . to become fish . . . slippery fish
almost hidden . . . by reflection . . . almost hidden

.
Odin saw the ashes . . . weaved your net . . . from dust
went out to fish . . . for slippery Loki . . . silk swimmer
came to catch you . . . in your new whirl . . . of water
you jumped . . . and jumped . . . and jumped again
three times . . . you jumped the net . . . count them
Loki count them . . . for the fourth time . . . no net
caught you . . . but Odin's fist did . . . and held you
Loki trickster . . . slithery creature . . . caught

.
Odin tore out the bowels . . . from your son
with them . . . he bound you . . . on three
count them . . . three flat stones . . . and left you
to rot . . . while a foul snake's . . . venom dripped
onto your . . . ever-grinning . . . fool-face
searing venom . . . eats your smile . . . so you writhe
like the snake . . . forget to laugh . . . old jester

till Ragnarok . . . till the Doom. of all Gods
till Twilight . . . till the Abyss . . . yawns open
and frees you . . . to count blessings . . . and go
with dark Hel . . . and Frost-Giants . . . go to kill
one more time . . . in Twilight . . . where the joke's
on everyone . . . and where finally . . . Loki you
die.

Fenrir

Fenrir, demonic offspring of Loki, fearsome wolf wild
And terrible, was young among the gods. Grew crazy
With the blood pulse of nebulae, would howl and wail
At the turning of the seasons, the growing of time. Fierce
Fenrir, to whom humans were insects, grew stronger than
Gods, till only one of the Masters, gentle Tyr, could
Control him. Fenrir, to whom constellations were moments,
Would chase after the sun: Fenrir would want so to catch
And devour the sun.

.
Odin in his wisdom saw
And said to Tyr, Fenrir's trust, 'The wolf
Must be bound, must be bound to hold steady
The cosmic centre. Only you can feed him,
Only you does he trust; Fenrir too fierce
To be free. We must bind him and hold him
Before he can devour the sun.'

.
Odin in his wisdom saw
And went to dwarves in their caves.
And the dwarves did spells:
Took the roots of mountains,
Noise of a slinking she-cat,
Breath of a fish, sigh of a woman
In heat - all the invisible powers
Of the revolving centre - and wound
A chain of might that looked but like
A simple silken cord
Yet was strong
As the winds of space.

.
And only Tyr could feed him,
And only Tyr could calm him,
Fenrir fearsome when he saw the bindings.
Only Tyr could ease him by swearing
The chain was but a symbol, and by
Putting his right hand full
Into the mouth of the wolf.
When the chain was looped over Fenrir,

He immediately tensed and tested its powers and found
It would not break and the sun
Would never be devoured and he would never
Move free and Fenrir took away Tyr's hand
And Tyr bled justly
For Tyr had lied.

.
And the cosmic centre held . . . another thousand years.

Freyja

Freyja, we call you, Freyja, our Goddess.
The seeress approaches . this shrine in this grove.
Freyja, we call on you, Freyja, you beast.

.
Fair-haired and sinister . we love you like men,
We know you as mare . your flanks wet for steeds,
And we love you as Sif . you sweet and wild swine,
Tho we covet the knowledge. your thighs hold within.

.
Freyja, we call on you, Freyja, our Goddess.
The seeress is mounting . the scaffold we built.
Freyja, we call on you, Freyja, you beast.

.
Voluptuous mistress . we've done as you asked:
Laid with our men . till our wombs fiercely throbbd.
We've come to your shrine . by the most sacred spring
Where flows all water. through the roots of your tree.

.
Freyja, we call on you, Freyja, our Goddess.
The runes have been washed . with the blood that we made.
Freyja, we call on you, Freyja, you beast.

.
Guardian of God's youth . charmed adulteress of Asgard,
You're no woman of earth . yet flesh is your speech.
Dear mother dear lover . changeling and all warmth,
We need your revenge . for indignities suffered.

.
Freyja, we call on you, Freyja, our Goddess.
The seeress is wearing. the headdress of fur.
Freyja, we call on you, Freyja, you beast.

.
Mare and our wonder . we invoke all your powers:
Your wisdom we need . your will to do harm.
A new woman has come . and she makes our men moan
We want you to ruin her. dissolve her soft face.

Freyja, we call on you, Freyja, our Goddess.
The seeress is naked . her staff very straight.
Freyja, we call on you, Freyja, you beast.

.
Take eyes from this woman . so our men she can't see,
Make her lust after women . so then we can scorn her,
And give us her heart . like a serpent's, for strength.
Her body we'll throw . to dwarves and the elves.

.
Freyja, we call on you, Freyja, our Goddess.
The seeress is chanting . in tongues so you'll hear.
Freyja, we call on you, Freyja, you beast.

.
When the new woman is nothing . and we again reign
Make our men once give birth . just to teach them to feel,
Then return them their pride . again hearty and strong.
All this we dare ask you . but trust to your whim.

.
Freyja, we praise you, Freyja, our Goddess.
The seeress is writhing . so we know you will act.
Freyja, we thank you, Freyja, you beast.
The swine is the mare . the orgasm your fact.

Your Turn

So go consume more than fire can,
Go run faster than thought, absorb
The relentless seas, lift out from
The deeps the monster within you,
And then before you rest, wrestle
Old-age, senility, and win.

.
You are no fool, you claim, so go
Answer the questions of begin
And end. You are no small creature,
You say, and you know how to work,
So go do these little things, and
Do them now. You cried out for
God To prove himself.
You considered his
Silence suicide, and then with
This thought attempted murder. Now
The time has come: It is your turn.

.
So go raise the dead, go and make
Them lust again. Go to goats and
Make them think. Connect the wires
Of your newest machines and short-
Circuit the constellations. All
I ask is some proof that you're alive.

.
A few years I'll wait, no longer,
Here behind the galaxies. You
Can't deny I'm being fair, for
Without some solid evidence
That an audience exists, I'll
Simply have to cancel this last
Performance, close the theatre,
Douse the lights, till another season.

REMNANTS OF LIGHT

Remnants

Remnants, what is left from the daylight world. The vestiges of sanity. The shards from a shattered mirror still reflecting a wee bit of distorted light. The scraps of day montaged by night. I am an insomniac, and hence I am an expert on transitions. Each night I battle with wakeful reason, only to win a wakeful sleep. Unlike the natural sleeper, my nights are not blank sheets, for I dream with an intensity often greater than reality. At night, many hide in a dreamless sleep. I can't, so I don't. My lover can, and she does. For this I hate her. For this I could kill her. Meanwhile I suffer my own series of little deaths. Fragments of nocturnal life. Shards, splinters, memories distorted into immediate experiences. Remnants.

Night Letter

Growth occurs
it can't be forced
tho it can be aided
some times
by a fertile darkness
always by moisture.
The soil is good in this time of the country
it is two o'clock in the morning
you have gone
you have gone to sleep
i suspect you are dreaming
dreams that cannot forgive
the insomniac decision
or his night thoughts
growth
or his acrid vision.
I've given up dreaming
i've given up sleeping
i've given up a great deal
just to watch this fascinating growth.
Tumours
are excessively rapid and
uncontrolled
growth
you can watch them grow if you stay awake.
Do not blink.
Remember
remember the past so well at night
at the lake
and why
you have gone to sleep
i do not understand i do not understand a lot
but i remember hard lines
at twilight.
Night is a wilderness
one is alone
streets may as well be tracings in the bush
i remember the soil
damp beneath my sleeping bag

and dead trees
creaking in that unsaid, black beyond
the fire
nearly dead
why are even familiar sounds made strange
by night
and why all impressions sharp as pain
yet somehow still blurred
like vision in a desert's heated air
when it is so moist here?
And why are you sleeping
i sleepless
horror or waking dream
a home
made a hotel room by its rest
hotel room
camp site
in the wilderness
people absent
the animals moving about
flashing lights outside
closed gas stations restaurants pubs hardware stores
more afraid of you than you of them
a wilderness
where the growth is totally uncontrolled.
Be reasonable
it is twenty minutes after two
in the morning i wish
you weren't sleeping
you could
build up the campfire
keep the wild
away
nightmares hiding
in the trees one doesn't see the forest for
hell.
Hell one can always be objective about the whole thing.
It is
twenty-five minutes and thirty-two seconds

now
in the morning.
Words are a firm protection
each word a particle of light
light is just excessively rapid and
disordered
waves
waves and the shoreline
of a northern lake
trees creak
the soil is moist and fertile
as is time.
Time is no protection
but i do not understand it i do not understand a lot
animals understand more
at night in the woods
my desk is wood
solid
wood is made of cells
cells
quite porous.
Growth occurs
in cells at rest
you are sleeping of course
you told me i would never get to sleep
unless i turned off the light.
I *must* leave the light on
to watch the growth
i must put you
out of my mind
i already am.
Mind's wilderness with deep shadows
you can project into
all things that you can never see
metaphysics is fearful
for similar reasons
you are beautiful
artful in your sleep
but much art is not beautiful

just as the soil is fertile
but stinks
like life rotting
beneath all those trees
damp.
No, dry stark
the desert flower is an outrage
why?
why are you sleeping
at almost three in the morning
a fence stretches across the painting hanging
over my desk into the horizon
and the sun is setting
in the picture
here it has already set.
There are birds
the artist's palette knife made look like skulls
surviving till the sun
is very hard
edged i must admit.
But I have lied.
The soil is actually dry
like my throat
not moist at all
water for growth
absent
sand drifting insubstantial sand
what matter?
I have decided
not to drink
and i *can* not sleep
this is stark
not tumourous
stark
dry
you are sleeping
you are sleeping
while before a dim fire
i am dying of thirst.

An Insomniac Makes A Futile Exploration

The stuff of sleep . . . is wallow soft
Deeply . . . dangerous as a faceless
stranger . . . with no fears
and an odd . . . sense
of humour

.
I try to cross . . . this border country
this treacherous terrain . . . green
and slimy. as a swamp ledge:
slip . . . and fall
awake.

.
Cross myself begin . . . again the dank descent:
shapes loom up . . . change to things;
a woman calls . . . strange names
from just beyond . . . a river
and a scream.

.
Pity I must travel light
and
have such a poor memory.

Monday Dream

They come in pairs and take away my things:
first my raincoat, then my umbrella, eventually
my shirt, my shoes, all my clothes.
I stand naked in the storm.
Rain drills me full of holes.
I listen to their laughter until
it is drowned in thunder.
I know they have eye sockets but no eyes.
I crawl
on the ground looking for my glasses.
Mud and hair mingles. My soul
seeps out of the holes.
I look up as lightning turns their grimaces
into an instant illumination,
and I dissolve.

Tuesday Dream

I am in a room ...
I think.
They have blinded me:
because my mouth offended
they plucked out my eyes.
I can hear them
discussing my future - it
bores me. I prefer
to grope on the floor, picking
up strange-textured objects
and putting them gingerly
in my mouth: hairy
things, soft wet things, sticky
amorphous things.
Without attending I hear them say
that I am one of them now.
I think
I 'see'
what they mean.
Something tastes like ashes.

Wednesday Dream

There is a river turning
into falls.
I have thrown something
important
into the torrents, but
because of their tricks
it has not washed away.
Just distinguishable it swirls
in the grimace of a whirlpool.
Dissonant music
surfaces, swells
then suddenly becomes submerged
in a pool of silence.
The surrounding landscape is barren
as picked bone - I am
to blame. The river sings. I
have no tongue.
The sky is bruised and bloated
like the thing below in the river
like this thing in my mouth
once called speech.

Thursday Dream

They have left a small animal outside my window
where it cries like a child,
sounding my first awareness
of mortality. (I am ten
years old, calculating
the probable percentage of my life
passed.) Depression
comes like a great ball,
fills my room,
pressing down on my chest,
pinning me to the bed,
like suffocation.
My mother's countenance floats above me.
She is saying prayers
that didn't work
for my grandmother. And I cough
and cough and cough and cannot get
my breath, for they've hidden it.
The animal stops crying
or I stop noticing it.
Dust suffers in a shaft of sunlight.
14.3
or 100.

Friday Dream

I am on a high rock shelf
at dusk, with no way down.
Below they have created the sparkle
of ocean waves torturing a shore.
I have to jump
I am afraid of heights.
I am afraid of water.
The cliff is at an angle
that is becoming more severe
and is as smooth as polished onyx.
I have to jump.

.
The sound of wind. I cannot close
my eyes to the whirl of sky and sea
and rock wall as I spin and fall
and fall and suck up terror into
my throat till I choke.

.
I wake up.
I am on a high rock shelf
at dusk, with no way down.

Saturday Dream

They have left me in bed with a woman.
She is asleep, her back to me.
I cannot remember how I got there.
The bed is strange. The shadows of the room
are strange. I have no doubt that the woman, too,
is strange. I hear things
moving about, so I reach out
for the lamp. The light
reveals the wall as a mat of roaches
that scurry and in a second are ugly
memory. The woman stirs, turns
toward me. Her face is beautiful
and vile. She moves closer, parts her lips
with her tongue, and comes onto me. The sheets
slip to the floor. I
slip into that deepest of passion
possible only in dreams, and
as culmination comes, I hear,
thru the blanket of my lust,
a door opening. I open
my eyes, and over the woman's shoulder
see a very young completely naked girl
watching us.
Her hand moving slightly between her legs.

Sunday Dream

I am in the city of my childhood.
They have sent me here
in children's clothes.
It is snowless winter and the sun is gray.
I am walking home alone in the stone chill.
I am on my block but somehow
my house is gone.
I search up and down the street, but things
are strange if familiar. My house
is gone. The cold penetrates my defenses
and I am crying.
There is no one else on the street.
I try to be calm, but panic
climbs into my throat, clutching
breath in an iron grasp
so I cannot even scream:
'I want my mother!'
I stand motionless as terror
while time halts at Eternal.
Dead leaves blow past me.
.
They find all this rather amusing.

Silent Night, Holy Night

Awoke
to find you there
in a dream gone bad,
holding in your arms,
blood dancer,
a lover I once had.

.
You spoke
to me in tones
like breaking glass:
'My sweet, if Love's
a religion,
my Lust must be Mass.'

.
You turned
back to mingling
hot flesh and long hair,
embracing my once-lover
till greed greened
the thick air.

.
My eyes
probed the mist,
two reluctant spears,
while the ice in my spine
fed a cold river
of deepening fears.

.
Gaining
just enough strength
to raise my head,
I found rigid
beside me
a man: cold dead.

His eyes
were like pebbles
under waters of lime;
horror pulsed thru
my dim awareness
of time.

.
Turning
sight back upon
the place of your sin,
there now danced a flame
around the lust
where you'd been.

.
In fright
I rose quickly
intending to run
to the safety of glaciers
and long-nights
without sun.

.
But mist
swirling thick, choked hope,
and the smoke made me weep,
till slipping on memory
I stumbled
back to sleep.

LOVE POEMS

Love

Love. Lover. She has no name. Or too many names. Sometimes companion, sometimes assassin. The universal in the particular. Woman: that is sufficient. I don't want you to know her; I don't want to know you knew her. Just Woman. She. Not singular, although individual, but plural, nearly infinite.

Changeling. Never the same: now pregnant, now mother, now lover, now her own rival, now my assassin, now my saviour. She is witch and saint, carnal and holy. Bitch goddess and muse-sick. She is bad dream already, a nightmare to come. The one I love and the one I kill. I am words, and she reads me. Anima, animus. Scream and scheme. Animal. Pleasure.

The Seasons Of Her First Love

When they were first-lovers he
applied his hands like acid:
till welts leapt from her skin
like sea-gull screeches from
the sea. In bed he made pain
more than love.

.
In the summer of passion he
toyed in her sun, for he was
no fool in the labyrinth
of the heart. He told her
he loved her, and for this had
to leave her. Yet stayed, blaming
habit, not love.

.
In autumn he was schoolmaster
vicious as any, made a fool
of her, using disciplines
of bondage and the honed
tongue. He wearied her eyes
with his darkness.

.
By winter she was fleeing his
presence, but he pursued her
thru snow. In the last season
of desire, he used her love like
a cudgel and beat her until
she bled hate.

.
No wonder, my lover
doesn't treat me
any better.

Woman Reads To Herself

Woman takes Man to her bed: a glass cage
Where the sound of her voice clatters,
Entropy in an aging universe, thick
Space encrusted with time and intention.

.
Woman sits in corner beneath stark-light,
Generating power, burning thin air,
Burning dull edged hope in this sick-room gone
Rancid in the 3 a.m. of summer.

.
Woman reads of foliage and the dead
Behind foliage, of night mares fording
Fetid plans, the slowed motion of birth-pangs,
Coded pillow-screams in empty bedrooms.

.
Woman lets the glow of terror warm her
Voice to white heat like the naked dreams of
Love-fools beating bushes, madly searching
A reciprocity reserved for monks.

.
Woman shapes words with her sharp chisel
Tongue, licks blood to moisten lips before each
Cadence explodes into shrapnel; marks then
Her page with fragments blasted from Man's shell.

.
This is not Woman reading. This is Woman
Revening language, dashing Man's image
Against the grave wall of her articulation.

.
This is not Woman reading. This is Woman
Revening language, cursing the damned
Illiteracy of Man's hard body.

Something To Eat

You see me

.
return from the surgeon with my brain
wrapped securely in cellophane.

.
Stepping over our dog, I take it to the kitchen
table . set it carefully
on a cracked plate.

.
You watch me. from a hidden place,
thinking only of dinner,
not

.
understanding why I go to the bedroom
return with a small mirror.

.
Gentle as apologies, I skin
the wrapping. Our dog
looks up, sniffing

.
as I lift delicately
the soft mass and shift
it onto the glass face.

.
You step out . of your corner angry
without knowing quite why
and demand to know . what the hell
I'm doing.

.
Feeding it . I answer glaring
at our dog
for drooling on the linoleum.

.
What about me . you ask
still mad.

.

I go back into the bedroom
.
in search of another
mirror.

That Time Of The Year

Two foul weeks without sun, the sky
sordid gray as dirty sheets, this
sickness of weather seeps into me,
till I take to my singular bed
to dream poison or venom or words.

.
You have gone out.

.
And this is weather
for manslaughter,
unpremeditated,
quick
and violent as a storm.

.
By the next day
I could forget it,
let it loose to hide
in the gray yesterday.

.
This November,
the Eternal.

.
You took me to this place
on the calendar
and left me on a treadmill
of days.

.
Tho for Christmas you promised
sun.

.
Well today I was permitted
(by the cracked sky)
one peek at my present:
white as a winding sheet
and bright as bleached bones.

.
My present?
is now past.

The brief breakthrough
blinded me, but now
I see more clearly.

.
I have armed myself
with forgetfulness.
I am going out there
to hunt you, my prey.
Crouch low in your undergrowth;
I'll still find you
by your bright eyes.

.
Blink once
and it will be summer
forever.

FUNEREA DANCES

Funereal

To dance on one's grave, there and that is the ultimate party. It, or rather - *she* comes to visit and we party. Death is like a fetus. Child. Lover. Killer. Rejoice in preparation, as in the act itself. Preparation for the final chase. We create our selves, exercise our imagination, discipline our perspective, suffer through understanding, investigate lust, and practice death by sleeping - all in the waiting room. There is a rhythm to it, of course, what is sometimes called the rhythm of the seasons ... for without rhythm it would be impossible to dance. You are involved in it, too. Clap your hands, and stomp your feet. Only a few more tunes, before I run home.

Crossing Over

(it's easy, just try, cum to
mummie, one step at a time)

.
One day at a time, two steps
down, three across the span,
four weeks more, five across

.
the veldt, past tygers, other
beasts, slow as bloom: a star.
Six months close, you cross
thresholds of pain, penetrate

.
amber's confusion. Seven years,
none cross over, tho some turn,
say eight Hail-Marys, kick
the ground: ashes to ash. All
fortuitous gains of nine, lost

.
by ten, then it really begins:
eleven's hell; send twelve unto
disciples; thirteen's luck. All
teen's racing, take your time,
it's easy as killing, by twenty
you're wise. At thirty: schemes

.
dead. At forty: bright sparks
gone, smell of ozone. So that
at fifty you watch your step
into sixty, and at seventy: *You're*
dead. While they build your box,
close your I's, have a drink,
for time flies. Then: the Rot.

(it's easy, mommie,
easy as pie, ma,
i can count, see:
one two, three four,
fifty, sixty,
four score and more,
then hammer down the lid
dad.)

No Child's Garden Of Verse

This is a poem

.
to the orchid, that
sickening flower
and this is a poem

.
to the fear of time
that seeps thru my life
like water thru soil

.
feeding whatever
it is one calls this
obscene thing blooming

.
like a tumour
in my garden

.
in this poem.

Winter Scene

Sudden in the numbing air

s

k

around the bend

a

t

down the winding

e

r

creek they come:

s

.
a pair of young ones
slashing the ice
mercilessly
holding hands
they skate
nearer.

.
(movements like a flame
flickering in the cold)

.
Red scarves flapping, the boy
grins as they pass although
the girl is expressionless
as death.

.
Very weary, I don't turn to watch them continue on down:
I know too well
somewhere ahead
down the ice-path
an old man waits
with a dull axe
gripped firmly
in his hatred
of winter
of cold.

.
And young blood is so hot.

Ménage a Trois

They called Her the Queen of Lies. Across a dimly illumined room She looked beautiful, although hard and evil as diamonds. I would never have chosen Her, because of this hardness, but my lover was attracted to Her. When She stood close to you, you could detect extremely fine cracks, like those in old plaster, criss-crossing Her skin. My lover was so wild; I did not need this strange creature added to our equation.

my lover has eyes
like sunspots
her hair erupts
it doesn't merely grow
and her mouth is a chasm
that swallows love
like lust swallows love
my lover will maim
you then leave you
meaning no harm
(i said)

my house has eyes
wouldn't you like to see
it the floors are polished
as summer
the ceiling unlikely
as our meeting, so
forget
your reservations
I'm always open
to suggestions
(She said)

nothing
(did my lover say)

She took us through streets serpentine and brown. I was lost and wet with the constant drizzle. I did not want this to be. Through the thick confusion of my vision I saw a house looming down a lane muddy and narrow. This was the end of the world; I wanted to return to the revolving centre. The front door swallowed us like bait. Who had hooked whom was unclear. The air, too, was unclear, vague as remembered pain.

this house is strange
i don't think
i could live here
why are the windows
screaming why
are the mirrors
stained why
have you brought us
here this house
is strange i don't
think i could
live here

(i said)

ah but you will
I will lead you
now my lovers
up to my special-room
come let me touch
your soft
heads with my coarse
hands, come
let me show you
my erotic etchings
acid on skin
not lithography
but untouched
pornography

(She said)

nothing

(did my lover say)

.
The upstairs room was dark as deepest sleep. I stood just inside the door, quiet. My role, I knew, was to be Observer. The Queen did not even look at me; She spoke only to my lover as she took her hand and led her to the huge machine squatting in the direct centre of the special-room.
.

come my sweet
the time is ripe
to love you
come place your head
on this pillow
of honed steel
there that's the way
neat as a pin
butterfly to cork
now just hold still
as I close the gullet
of this guillotine
help it swallow your swan
throat, throw
the warm sunshine
of your blood across
my floor

(She said)

nothing
(did my lover say)

.
The machine went click. The great blade: a momentary flash. The severance of spine and brain: end of heart's communication with head. I did not, could not, change the way things went.

in the language of love
this is called meeting
halfway
now you take the head
I'll keep the body
this fine young body
so unlike my worn fabric
white so unlike
mine black as the sun
oh come and help me move her
come and help me
you are my husband now
my helpmate
it is time for supper
 (She said)
nothing
 (did my lover say)
 (nor i)

I Take You To Her Grave

At gravestone, you, go groan, lift stone,
Pry apart ribs, for inside hides hate, pare
Any hopes, for here is razor's mocking tone,
See?

.
Step behind dark pines, slip quick there
Beyond a black shield, turn about, lovelock,
Turn around, lift sod, just bedrock and rot,
See?

.
Here underneath loam is ground, and green
Light, soft sleep-spot, hopeful coming toget?
Not till the hard shock, granite hillock erode!
See?

.
Dig it up, while death does hermit's tricks,
Blue light cools sunspots, this woodlot, muck,
Place for axe chop and cut, sorry, `tis no joke,
See?

.
See, to kill takes a quick stroke, no sweat, redrock,
See, under the woodpile, easy as rats, vermin, lice,
See, to kill is easy as she was, unlike wood, tough luck,
See, you, to kill takes but one quick stroke, slit-slice,
It's . easy . as . pie.

NOCTURNAL RHYTHMS

Nocturnal Rhythms

Night is not black to the owl,
but I am not an owl.
In this space it is night for six months.
(You have been pursuing me
for five months
and some days.)
The forest is alive with fears
of growing,
of fattening. I too
am alive.
My eyes are tired of straining:
I stop and take them out,
put them in a bowl
of oil.
Now I hear better.
(I hear the bush spread open
for your passing; you lope
thru snow, green-eyed,
and hungry.)
Sometimes I carry my head
in a sack, sometimes I
scream. This is only
reasonable: I am very
tired.
(You don't get tired; you
just get closer. I
know you hunt me by
my smell, my warmth.)
Knowing you near, I put in
my eyes, run like the devil,
fall
snow angel.
(I sweat and you smell it; I am
hot, you feel it, lift muzzle
and rush thru the underbrush.)
There is a sparkle of light

ahead in a clearing. Reaching it
I frighten away ravens
feeding on a carcass.
I've arrived
at the Grotto where the Queen
of Lies stirs
her cauldron of philosophy.
She greets me at the hovel's door holding
her rag-gown tight
to her beautiful bosom until
she sees my face twist
to lust.
I smell musk, see your graven image
in her eyes. Her eyes
say come in, as her robe
falls open.
Her nipples are erect, purple;
her flesh is moonlight. My breath
is a secret put in writing.
(Behind me my white
heat is drawing you:
smoke to a candle.)
My right hand falls off,
and scurries away across
the floor. Webs form
between the fingers
of my left hand; it leaves
me too, flying
up into the eaves.
My hair burns off;
my body becomes erectile
tissue. (I hear you
lunging out of the bush
behind me.)
My pulse entwines with hers.
(I know your nostrils
are flaring.) I feel

a blast of hot breath
on my neck. She laughs
as I call on gods
otherwise occupied.
(Then I feel your fangs
at my jugular, the warmth
spurting out.)

.
The Queen of Lies takes my body
and places it on a straw couch. She
drops her robe and mounts
my corpse, as I
watch from a far corner.
I note coldly
that she comes
quickly.
(You are curled
sleepfully
by the fire.)
Afterwards she falls asleep
also, so I drift
out the window.

.
Far below the forest is growing
It is beautiful to watch it growing.
I am going to watch it for awhile.
Then I think I'll watch
it die,
for I know
how you love the forest
and all its creatures.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I believe that literature, like science, is a way of exploring different perspectives; and I believe that the results of these literary explorations, like the results of science, are always inherently tentative. It is for this reason that I choose to call my major works *hypotheses*. *Nocturnal Rhythms*, completed 23rd January of 1977, is *Hypothesis 3*.

Ken Stange

There is within me a harmony, a balance, and I thank my Gods for it. It is certainly not a pleasant consonance, but it is some kind of order, and that is better than chaos. I need it here, for I live far from cities, far from what has come to be termed civilization. I don't need these cities anymore, for I have my own primitive civilization here in my head. I have also my own icons and my own chapel. These help me through the shimmering transition into madman that comes perhaps every fortnight. Yes, it is best that I am here, away from other forms of madness, for I am shy as a wolf.

I am not ugly. In fact, I am fairly young and reasonably attractive. The only obvious abnormality in my appearance is my white hair. I am no albino, but my hair turned completely white when I was only seventeen. (There was an experiential reason for this sudden whitening, but it need not concern you.) My fingers are long and tapering. So are my days.

Why do I tell you these things? Well, why does one do any particular thing? We try so hard to find reasons for all our behaviour, but reasons are just the lies we tell ourselves to keep order in the universe. Still if one insists on being 'reasonable', it is more so to inquire of me as to why I wrote these poems. (And this permits me to tie a knot.) I wrote these poems because my hair is white and my fingers are long and tapering. And that, too, is why I tell you these things. You see, this is magic: the primitive, magical belief that this sort of information will somehow make my poems more comprehensible. This is what critics call the 'biographical fallacy'.