

ROCKROSE MENKE KATZ



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SMITH-HORIZON PRESS

NEW YORK



Some of these poems appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Smith, Prairie Schooner* (University of Nebraska), *The Midwest Quarterly* (Kansas State College), *Chicago Jewish Forum*, *Thought* (India), *Poet* (India), *Fiddlehead* (University of New Brunswick, Canada), *The Jewish Spectator*, *The New York Times*, and *Discourse* (Concordia College).

In addition, some of these poems were translated into French, Italian, Spanish, Japanese, Greek, Shona, and Kannada, and published in the respective countries.

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First Edition
Printed in England
Library of Congress catalog card no 73-99934

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DOLL

Subway Reverie

*Where is the saddest twilight in the world,
if not in a subway train where a stray
moth roams under a dour electric sky,
seeking meadow sweets in the day's full sweat.*

*I sway on a strap as a circus bear.
The moth — my daydream in this dreamless train,
a flickering whim moving the concourse,
is about to dash into my poem.*

*It is Mammon's train of iron, gall, gold.
If it stormed through my trainless, lulled childhood,
I would see it through the cave of a myth,
chattered in the mud charms of my village.*

*The moth is weary, it is time to die.
She chose a sash like a chimney corner,
the only standing room left to die here,
in the rush-hour of the crowded subway.*

*The roar triumphs over a routed day.
Death is here as near as the dying moth,
as near as its first and last duskless dusk,
the end of time is near enough to touch.*

*O if there were only a sunset here,
underground, in the summer felled evening,
the sun would kneel, in awe, at the drooped wings,
as at the rites of the graveless goddess.*

*The moth is the last prayer of the day,
I see it through me as a speck of fright.
It dies (as I will) in a wild daydream
and moulds a shade of grief on the tomb sash.*

Doll

unrhymed, unrestrained double ballade

Sappho, how strange to meet you in toytown,
in the contest of dolls with names of old,
wondrous poets. Here is Homer, a blind
doll laughing with a Homeric laughter;
Alcman, the doll in love with four dactyls.
Hail Sappho, winner of the doll parade!

Sappho, Miss Toytown, child-god, did you know,
children like dolls tire of too much beauty?
Now in your decline, you languish at a
child's feet, with bruised roses on your cheeks, with
a scarred mouth, moulded to kiss the "dust of
Timas," the bride who died in your poem.

Your hair torn, the braids knotted like a noose.
Mad combs gnash at me with their broken teeth.
June budding on my street sighs over you,
as through the blossoms of a child's grave.
I vow by the gods and little fishes,
to heal your every sore, until death dies.

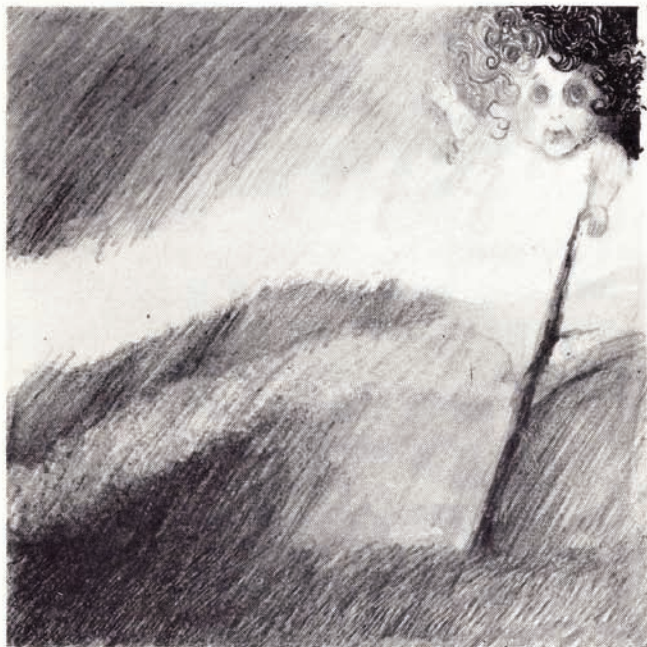
My gay garret is your doll hospital.
I bathe, comb, adorn you: with poke bonnets,
a gown with folds falling in a cascade,
gemmed shoes, fit for the dance of an elf-queen,
earrings to ravish the charm of legends,
a key to open the locked songs of rocks.

We share our destiny: mine, the shade, yours —
the light of solitude. Only sorrow is mine.
My fate is to grumble against the winds;
yours, to smile to the end of misery.
I touch you like the forbidden apple
on the highest bough which no one can reach.

It is late, you played with every wonder,
heard your poems carved on the "one girl" bed.
Time to sleep, you close your doll eyelids,
like Aphrodite listening to your ode.
May you dream you are a live prankful child
of Manhattan, O Sappho, my tenth muse.

ENVOY

Sappho, traveling thousands of years through
the steep miles of centuries you arrived
at the beginning, breaking out of each
time-bound bolt, you are free of the ages,
you are now superhuman as a doll,
a little girl who knows life beyond life.



Beyond

I am drunk with
the wines after me. O let
us drink a toast: man,
eagle, woman, rose, beast, sun
to rise beyond my last day.

I marvel with you
the worm as well as the stars.
O scent me in your
lilacs O distant ages
O neighbors of tomorrow!

On The Birthday of a Forgotten Poet

*For Chidiock Tichborne, executed on September 20, 1585
for his attempt to kill Queen Elizabeth*

You are known to the unknown hermit — the stone,
the mouth of the dumb, the lonely and the cursed.
The stone crowned you as the poet laureate.
O your truest admirer is the stone,
human as the shade of the wise apple tree.

All winds celebrate your four hundredth birthday,
O cherub eyed Satan hating only hate.
You are read by the trapped mouse, praised by the doomed
on their way to meet the law loving hangman.
You will be ever known to every lover

of kind death, the hellbound will ever see you
handsome as darkness before there were gallows.
God, weary of his own everlasting life,
comes to rest in your wondrous solitude,
in the true eternity untouched by man.



Celebration

This is a day wondrous as the five newborn
mice — a quintuplet of fantastic children
I found in a drawer of this old forest house.
Heaven, earth and I toast in celebration.

The mother mouse — Godful, cursed and glorious
sees me (her marveling vegetarian)
like a giant hellcat clawed to carnage her
without trial or jury for the first sin of

being born, guilty of living, O mother of
the humble, we are kindred by the same fate.
This poem is your laurel crown O queen of
true-eyed elflands, immortal kin of the doomed.

Night. In the open drawer, their hidden birthbed
cushioned with the moss of an ancient mattress,
(sowed with fathered seeds who still yearn to be born)
they welcome darkness as their true savior.

A family in a blurred picture left whole —
only a mother's outstretched hand, strained beyond
its limits to carry her fading children
into safe dreams against the risk of pitfalls.

Death lives here like a prince in a fairytale,
in the fervid nights of forgotten lovers.
A starful brook, nearby, repeats God's blessing
for the modest, the unknown, the wonderdumb.

Paperweights

The paperweights on my desk are wondrous
as the hand which charmed them with carved legends,
with dueling knights and shield-maidens, with
brides who blush in castles, waiting for me,
the prince of the ennui of Borough Park
to wake them from a hundred years of sleep,

with the fire of an undying kiss, with
the touch of Genesis to give them life:
my harem of fabulous concubines,
guard day and night each scrap of my daydreams,
poems still unborn which climb mountain-high,
threaten to erupt in volcanoes, to
explode the ages of time-metaphors,
bury me alive under blazing rock.

Old River

unrhymed, unrefrained rondeau redouble

Even the old river complains life is short.
The fate of man, stars, beasts and stormlit mountains
moans in the shoal waters of the riverside.
The old river is the true friend of the doomed.

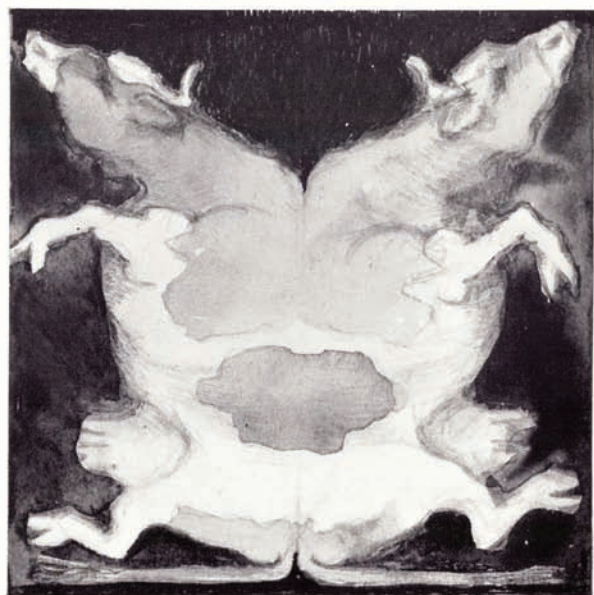
Cows in their old age, the grandfolk of the herd
with much mooing and little milk, old barren
at five, beggars of pity, milk slaves at the
mercy of the skinning knife, all who drag the dust

of the road on their way to the slaughterhouse
are welcomed by the river to quench their thirst:
Bearded goats, brokentoothed, priced only for
their raw hides, are of no use even to God.

Sheep, meek eyed preachers who preach peace all their lives;
castrated steers raised for beef, bulls breathing fire,
face the butchers in white — the angels of death.
(Their souls live in the heavens of empty barns.)

River willows offer wild grapes for their last meal.
Calves, jolly children with bells on, unaware
they toll their own death, leap and cheer and marvel
as if the slaughterhouse were a wonderland.

Streams caress, form water herds, hug each other,
run a rig in the summer evening, reflect
like savage mirrors the skin and birn, frighten
the wits out of the generous old river.



Looking Through A Rare Gem

unrhymed, unrefrained villanelle

An elfmaid lives in this lonely castle.
When hungry, she eats a star, when thirsty,
she hits a gem and it turns into a brook.

The brook is here in a mirage, nearby.
The mirage, the father of lies, offers
the wines of emerald, of noble opal.

I see three mirrors scintillate in the brook.
A stingy angel (half scorpion) guards
the brook, night and day, in the first mirror.

The second mirror, drunk as a wine-fountain,
waits for Bacchus, god of the merry cup,
to drink a toast to every grape on earth.

A sorceress in the third mirror observes
the witches' Sabbath, hoarding the gems of tears
since Eve, in the castle of misfortune.

The fiends of the castle break the mirrors,
the pieces scatter like startled rivulets,
flowing to scorch with thirst the locked elfmaid,
doomed, by the gods, to immortal splendor.

Furnished Room At Dusk

I hear Scheherezade still tell her tale,
at twilight on the streets of Manhattan,
(My furnished room is like a haunted hut,
I saw on the Isle of Capri.) the same
charmed paupers still polish Aladdin's woe —
worn wonderlamp to lure the genie out
with a command to change the dying day
on the gemmed windowpanes into cash gold.

Scheherezade is a dream in a dream.
The sun falls like the head of a concubine
which a sport-starved king severed at each dusk,
in the true story hour of grim wonder.

OLD MANHATTAN

My City

*New York, city of refuge,
from listless calm, stoic ease,
welds its own skies, the fate of
live steel, drills its own lightning,
streets compete with galaxies.*

*Towers at dawn are rising
torchbearers, dust remembers
when alchemists built Babel
with the iron of alchemy,
when lovers lived forever.*

*New York, city laureate
of cities, vies with seven
wonders and always wins, sees
a Broadway on the moon, day
dreams the Genesis of man.*

Gwendolyn

O the streets of New York are glorious.
Here comes Gwendolyn, bride of my city,
subdued by the grandeur of her own charm.

She walks on Broadway like a street born waif,
confluent crowds demob in her presence.
The Great White Way is struck with true wonder.

Shrill multitudes are, near her, music-mad.
Lovers languish in ruthless yearning, name
her in dreams: jewel of Jamshid, torch of night.

Pampered in gossamer, slender witted,
as if she were spun in clear autumn dawns,
by small spiders out of floating cobwebs;

adept in the craft of stealing the bloom
of the cheeks of her wan, rival sisters
she knows, the prettiest rose is dungbred.

The sun sets like an exploded heaven,
trapped angels cry havoc to Gwendolyn.
Her splendor on the streets of Manhattan
torments the gods, good old Satan and me.

Twilight On Lincoln Square

How sad to see Lincoln in cold marble,
on the grand stand of the hero market,
iron-souled through twilight — a torch of fright.
Looking at his shadow on the glum Square:
the outstretched arms remind of prison bars,
the trimmed beard as a weird bird, clipped and stoned.

It seems, he did not turn into God's dust.
The sculptor has so smitten him with joy,
he fears he may not know sadness again.
A visitor gripped by infinity,
he fears he is doomed to live forever,
he fears the earth may rob him of his grave.

Dusk urns the last fires of the Civil War.
Chaste ladies come with roses and spent love.
The sun is like a goblet in his hands,
to revel with every fellow mortal:
mouse and king, gnat and eagle, moth and child,
a toast for every fellow guest on earth.

Night. Old devils dream of new chimeras.
Tramps snore in muck as in beds of roses.
Rise O rise Lincoln, I see a cloud change
into a tree, the tree into gallows,
the hangman's image over your free Square.
Dawn. Lincoln rose out of his locked statue,

not a hero, but the humble Abe from
the steep ridges of Kentucky backwoods.
He rose in dreams of a vagrant poet,
a ragged chieftain of a homefelt bench,
the charm-struck visionsmith of this poem.
Lincoln rose through me — a new Genesis.



Twilight in Coney Island

O the garish god
of Coney Island, shrieking
down tower and town,

the wild bore argus
eyed, half lion, half goat with
a dragon's tail, bores

to death even death;
dulls the flaming sword which guards
every entrance to Eden.

A stray moon scales through
the hysteria of lights,
to eclipse the dusk :

festival of fire —
fiends, man-made suns, counterfeits
of my century.

June Street

Summers shrink in June
on June street, winters are shrouds
for fallen angels.

Spring — a born pauper,
loiters in bleak tenements,
like a skinned, spectered autumn.

Plump piewives make June
street comely, small worlds revolve
around the ennui of time.

Whalemouthed whalemens
whale stormdrenched, in inch-deep seas
of growing tall tales.

Walls unlock their might,
climb to attack the heavens :
O giants of solitude!

June

Welcome June to the slums of my city.
Even condemned tenements celebrate
your arrival. Flowers tramp through bright slop,
dress like elves in all colors to greet you.

Skies, nearby, wreath garlands out of soot on
crooked walls, pave with gems the bleak alleys.
God's breeze spins a yarn, only wise babies,
dandelions and little birds understand.

A hermit dog — the homeless philosopher
of the slums meditates at midnight blue.
The moon dumps its silver in charmed sewers,
as if to get rid of its counterfeit.

Cats marry under starlit canopies,
mewing their love to all past and future Junes.

City Moon

I saw angels dream under
a city moon, like a handless
clock which tells time beyond time,
beyond play, ache and laughter.

I said : motherless children,
woe, you are all Spring, autumn
will not know you, you can not
grow a wink older than God.

If you are weary of the
endless day, you are welcome
to take refuge in my poem,
to taste stone, tears, steel, longing.

Angels, no sadness on earth
is as sad as your heaven.

City Cricket

Cricket, ghost of the lonely, which fate brought
you here, my garrulous neighbour, babbling
over and over from birth unto death,
the only bleak chirp you know: So-li-tude.

Over the din of shouting Manhattan,
I hear your small cry for the great beyond.
Cricket, voice of the loveless, praying for
every hermit of my city, from a

high, hung brick of this crumbling tenement.
No wonder, evil is a treasure here,
guarded by Satan, the loneliest angel;
cast out of heaven he vows to avenge God.

The night feeds the mighty calm of walls. Even
the ruler of hell is ruled by solitude.

Old Manhattan

Sundown. God, I am lonely, I will go
to the whorealleys of old Manhattan
and fetch me a jolly liberal bride.

The evening is drunk with its own wine on
our wedding bed, you will be my wife an hour,
I, your lover — a thousand and one nights.

I am all yours, my unmothered, unowned love :
I swear by the ecstasy of our trance,
by the hatched shadowbands of this twilight.

Night bears the commerce of licensed kisses,
the law ridden guardians of humdrum,
bereaved of you and me, of our soulquake.

You left, O firefooted elf of the streets.
The summer, greensick, cankers on cracked walls.
Flowers in a pot pine for home — the far fields.

My bride coquets through the blight of slummed streets :
wholesale dealers in smoke, iron, gold, death,
praying through the ages for their downfall.
Even time is tired here of night and day.

Rockrose

The loveliest harlots are in New York,
nocturnal at midday, children of twilight,
paramours of the mist, menaced by light,
they sweet-scent the nights with every balm on earth.

Here comes Lilith — the first wife of Adam,
hellbred, out of a night-scene of Goethe's Faust,
(Her room in the slums — a perfumed, stale mouth.)
a whore more naked in garb than all nude wives.

Her eyelids are like the green gates to Limbo,
her navel like the eye of a sky-gazer.
The streets are charmstruck by her generous arse,
her delicacy — a rockrose of old New York.

The stars in the gutters are free dimelands.
The wind — a daredevil rapes her in broad starlight,
plants stonesseeds in her womb and runs the gauntlet.
Her bride-bed, skyworn, is guarded by the cherubs.



Undying Neighbor

unrhymed, unrestrained double ballade

Lucky to have Dante as my roommate.
The exile from Florence lives now with me
in comfort, in a drawing in pastel.
The artist split the sky with thunder, lit
the clouds with storm to build an inferno.
Immortal beggars beg here crumbs of death.

It is Spring in the backslums of my street.
A streetwalker fragrant with fieldbalm which
blossoms on her skirt, asserts Spring is here.
She resembles Francisca da Remini.
I stand near her as her perfidious
lover Paolo. I say: "Come, my love,

sterile laws at midnight are for the dull,"
We reach the door as the gate to divine
hell, with us is Dante and the grief of
a dripping sink reciting through the night
(seven hundred years later in New York,)
his unwritten, hundred and first canto:

— Dante, while you are our undying neighbor,
we condemned guests, as you pass through time, tell
us which are the most sacred sins on earth? :

— The sins which can not sin even in hell,

sins no rain will ever dare to wash away.
Sins of the doomed who escape the evil
light behind bars like hunted beasts of the
chase, seeking within their souls free darkness.
Sins of angels, weary of heaven who
defy the bondage of eternity,
to love mortal maidens — mine, yours, God's sins :
— And which are the most wondrous sins, Dante?

— The sins of poets, of ever longing.
(O fear paradise more than any hell!)
Just as the desert hankers for the sea,
so is the sea sailing for the desert.

• • • •

The luxurious sky is generous
to every crevice of our pennyland.

ENVOY

Suddenly she rose, a stripped madonna
and ran from me, Dante, and all his hell.
She left her fate in the wind — a weeping flute.
The city, a moonlit Sahara, ventures
to quench the thirst of lost wanderers with
the wines of a mirage, drawn from bone, dream, steel.

Biographical Sketch

Hercules was born in an electric furnace with a soul of molten metal to achieve twelve labors, such as firebrick, beam, truss, slab, eyebars : swing, lift, foot, cantilever, suspension bridges, mast (an arm of the sea) aerial ferries — Hercules, wise with muscle sense of great cities.

Lake Poets

Southey, Wordsworth, Coleridge, I also live
in the lake district, hence we are neighbors.
Only a poem between the idle,
dreamlit lakes of Westmorland, Lancashire
and the busy Hudson and East rivers.
Only a century, a step of time
from the manytribed roar of New York to
the cuckoos of Cumberland which cu-ckoo
in perfect trochee to the ghost of humdrum,
as they leave their eggs, motherless, in strange nests.
Only a horselaugh between the English
cavalry, in a race with subway trains :
the tunneled underworlds of Manhattan.

ROSES OF BOROUGH PARK

Roses of Borough Park

unrhymed, twin sonnet

*Rivke, little as a child, my comely wife.
The color of sadness is hazel brown in
her eyes, fresh as the cut heart of tulipwood.
Her father's dreams, pennywise, age like wine stains*

*in this house, old as a legend when young Pan
was here the god of goats grazing the rooftops
of this parkless Borough Park in bleak Brooklyn.
The sun rises like a thriving pennybank.*

*Homespun tedium is brightest at highnoon.
The world is on sale in every show window.
Stores teem with earlocks and gems, wigs and garlic.
Salestalk proves knitted apples are from Eden.*

*Sellouts undersell cheap riches dyed on gowns,
harvest home the untilled fields of Borough Park.*

*The end of all seasons is here all year round.
Wares are ever the last sheaves, sold at the spear.
Men hunt down bargains like buffaloes and bears.
Alice in plastic woods dreams of wonderland.*

*Women (the only roses in Borough Park)
against cut throats hunt large prey in packs like wolves.
Their summers under the grim elevated:
iron knotted, screeching like trapped owls for life.*

*The street is a patched luxury at twilight.
Rivke — Rebecca riding on a camel
to her first love with a grace that never dies.
I am locked in her eyes — a self chained captive.*

*A prankster, bred in her bones, willed like David,
roams here with bittersweets of her prince poet.*



On A Lover Of Flowers

The old princess is in love with flowers.
The jasmine amuse her as fragrant elves,
the buds are rain-scented with rare perfumes,
bow blessings to her for their noble birth.

Flowers are trained, comedian cherubs.
The columbines are clowns in a gold pot.
The roses womb their stems, lick their own fire,
hug each other like blushing lesbians.

No dew will kiss the stingy earth in pot,
each pot is soothing as a cozy jail.
Orphans of the fields, godless flowers pray :
God, give us the pride of the piercing thorn.

A Will

unrhymed villanelle

I leave a pennyworth of dust,
an undying swan song, my son,
the great will of the infinite.

For you my every highbred whim,
the dugout ore of each caprice,
the sage meditations of dust,

the might of my obstinacy:
rock-reared, tested by the patience
of time, probed by zeal, infinite.

For you the vagaries of the
storm-drenched vagrant — the regal rogue,
his life and death divine as dust.

Beware of the dawn of ennui,
twin of the turtle; night is for
owls, old tales and the infinite.

Death is a game the cherubs play.
Just a slight change from dusk to night.
I leave a pennyworth of dust,
the great will of the infinite.

Sappho

Sappho, if God loves
poetry as I do, you
are his poet as well as
mine, scentful as the muses,
the roses of Pieria.

I shall keep my date
with you Sappho, my will is
written. I leave my
beautiful darkness for my
son, Cupid and the churworm

who lives as I do
close to the immortal roots,
derides the hollow
bubbles, the puffed up, dazzling
prize winning poetasters.

This I learned in the
Land of the Leal: every cell
of every worm like
mine, like yours is a divine,
microscopic universe.

I am the poet
whose grave will glare unknown, my
comely name blurred on
the falling headstone, crested
with moss like the crown of Hades.

Good your ancient song
is always in the wind, good
to hear your poems
like swans in a dream, love, sing
thrice three thousand years. Sappho,

good to see you at
dusk, cloudborn over New York;
your wild hyacinths
wounded by shepherd's feet, bloom
again on all towerpanes.

Wild Vine

Ha, if you come my sixtieth birthday,
as an age intruder to frighten me
that I grew old, dusk is a ghost candle
where the feeble wick glimmers at its end,
the broken flame quivering in panic:
barrenness — the dry tongued, falling evil, —
then hear my virile grandfathers laughing
hilariously for you tickle them
from my navel — Eros' winecup, to my
noble genitals, yawnproof, cupid's dart,
tested by sublime hell and high waters:
from the chaste madonnas of Raphael
to the budding whores of old Manhattan,
walking in silver slippers of the moon,
on streets — brothels for the homeless angels.
O no sterile ghost will survive in the
luring bushes of my manful eyebrows,
will run for safety to bluebeard's castle.
At which feast skeleton are you creeping,
through revels with my petite glutting wife,
or dare you haunt through the naked terror
of my private harem when awe stricken
concubines trail the wild vine, climbing by
scorching tendrils to the succulent fruit.
Come O come, wise hearted three score, I am
racing to you on my bicycle,
in early autumn through scented harvest
with grace of an unbounded free bred deer.



Day of Doubt

My last day is as glorious as the first.
It is dawn yet. I am still so rich with time,
until I fall at sundown from a roof of gold.
I shall plan my life on my onliest day.
The first hours I shall give to you, David,
my twelve year old miraculous brat,
heir of my unconquered zeal, my unwritten
poetry which you will muse, laugh, sing or cry,
flare the light-proof suns of the days beyond me.

We will keep our daily appointment with our
bicycles, ride a thousand years on each block;
ride in one hour back to Adam, then onward
to the end, to the origin. Then we will
explore the wilds of Times Square, applaud the
airborne horses, galloping with wild lovers.

as hoofbeats strike borders, distances join hands,
to reach the castles of shabby movielands.

• • • •

Then, I shall meet you, my love, to tell you how
blessed it is to live next to you, breathe the same air,
in the same century, on the same pillow,
navel to navel, fire to fire, seed to seed.

The twilight I will give the dusty goddess,
the widowed guardian of my poetry,
on mount Parnassus of my Brooklyn attic
where the first ray like the marvel of Peru
arrives at four P.M. to admire my poems
which seek their way to light through the ceiling.

The last moment I shall meet God eye to eye,
at the top of a tower, at the airport
of flying carpets — the first aeroplanes on earth;
flying through the splendor of selfchosen doom,
I will pilot an invisible monoplane,
as I land on my private isle of farewell.

But dusk, my love, is ages far and away.
It is still dawn, my day, my life is teeming
as a plucked pomegranate with sanguine seeds.

At A Hundred and Twenty

unrhymed unrestrained chant royal

I see the year two thousand, twenty six.
There is still a jail in every town on earth
where jailers keep wistful summers under lock.
June in slum ganglands still smells of blossom blight.
Old tenements still pray for their destruction,
walls sigh through the nights like half sunken boats, stairs
still wind through dark ages, through guile, plot, terror.
The withered faces of bygone autumns still
haunt the first Spring snowdrops in cheerless backyards.
Chubby whores entice with opulent bosoms.
Presidents still babble of great societies.

The hammer is still raised against its maker,
the red sickle is a gentle guillotine,
peddlers still promise bearskins, ages before
the bears are caught. The toadeater, the servile
inkslinger still serenades the antiwar
warmongers, the Fedorenko marauders.
Abraham, the openarmed father of the Jews
with a beard out of the Bible, with love locks,
still builds little Jerusalems in old Brooklyn, —
the grim light of Auschwitz smolders in his eyes.

When storms rise the dust of my forgotten grave,
I am great news to the retired, yawning grass.
Only David, my son, at three score and ten,
(now in his twelfth May) knows I once lived and died,
remembers me a frolic boy of sixty,
celebrates my hundred and twentieth birthday.
The sky is like an open Book of Splendor.
Stars, rusteaten, under the elevated
subway still rehearse our twin childhood, (his — first,
mine — second) play hide and seek through the fissured
attics, the crosseyed castlets of Borough Park.

My son, while you live there is heaven and earth
and I am here at a hundred and twenty,
(O shout Menke, my son, I am the echo.)
Waiting for the beginning when Eve, a novice
will come to borrow a rib of my ribs.

• • • •

It is the year of two thousand, forty six :
" I died in nineteen seventy four, when did
you die, David, my son? " " I just died, Menke,
a young yearful ninety, soon after the fourth
world war when man bombed the earth off its orbit,
back to chaos, to the formless infinite.

" At my last sunset I saw even Noah
sink with his ark, an olive leaf lulled in the
mouth of a stiff dove was the only peace left,
in a glum world, destitute of you and me."
" O hear, wind to wind, soul to soul, brook to brook
thirst each other forever, David, my son.
I end this chant of love to you at sixty one,
standing in a subway train, in glowing health,
on August twenty first, nineteen sixty seven,
as crowds choke the summer day on this blue Monday,
at five p.m. in our ever new New York.

ENVOY

An infant over a mother's newspaper,
reads the unwritten verse of the nightingale.
Wonder is real as the man on the nearby moon.
I see Cain and Abel beyond evil asleep.
The earth vies with the heavens, wins Genesis.

Dusk in Brooklyn Bay

Boats sail at twilight in Brooklyn bay where
the urban rivers meet with the might, grace
and valor of the Verrazano bridge.

Hudson is a tale which the narrows tell.
Elfmaids, archaic visitors are here,
to charm the panes of our metropolis.

Little Woman

(To Rivke)

My little woman standing nude at the
mirror is from head to toes midsummer,
fragrant with the grape which is still uncasked wine.
End of July, glory of her season.
The harvest moon will rise (ripe, not for reaping)
with wondrous fruits, unknown to any autumn.

Night. A conflagration of planets revolves
around her navel, the middle kiss spot.
The center, the flame of the enchanted bush
like the humble seed can not be consumed.
Every evil is crushed in our whirl dance.
The stars over us are a fire hazard.

We are rowing with one oar from Eden
to hell and visa versa, back to birth,
on to death, reborn again, cleansed through fire,
redeemed from the devil of dust, we are
all light, even death is a shade of light.
We come from light, we return to light.

Our rowboat (entrance to the beginning
and end of life) is miraculous as
the creation of Eve, our pulse is the
rhythm of the cosmos, our fervid moments
are hymns to the penis, the true god of love,
(debased by debasers) blaze to the core, knows
the agony of drought more than any desert,

rising as a self-assassin, he is
the first one to fall in the winter solstice.
We relish, a minute, the glacial climate,
our little ice age. My little woman
is plowed, hoed, tilled, (she is always hard to plow)
fertile with the rain of immortality.

MY MOTHER

My Mother

*My mother spoke the small, idle talk
of rivulets — the language of the
humble, the comely and the unknown.*

*She shunned great seas, loved the little waves:
the maidens who live in myths, jeering
the billows, oar through time, in a trice.*

*God's brook was deeper than man-taught seas,
an ant wiser than the robot-sphinx
roaring shallowness three thousand feet deep.*

*She heard stutterers speak like Moses.
Deaf-mutes knew the mighty speech of stones,
their tongues could smite water out of rock.*

*Her grace was obsolete as scented
raindrops forming limpid cliches on
the patched panes of her skyful village.*

*The sun went down to its own last rites.
The last rays dreamed they are still unborn.
Water tattlers in the nearby lake,
tattled the tales of tomorrow's streams.*



Hymn to the Potato

O my first hymn was to the potato,
lure of my childhood, fruit of the humble,
the diurnal festival of the poor.

No fruit is noble as the potato.
Cherries are coy, plums have hearts of true stone.
The wind is a drunk fiddler at the grape.

The potato knows how much light there is
in the fertile darkness of seeded earth,
kissing the dust to which Adam returned.

On the hungry alleys of my childhood,
the Milky Way was a potato land.

My Mother Badane Used to Say

SELFWORSHIPING DUNCE

If you never let
a bird out of its cage, you
never saw a bird,
never led a child through a
burning house, were never free.

DECEIT

delights the eye when
you see a moth cheating the
flame out of a round
of life, marveling God's work,
before it turns into fire.

JUDGE

You are so just, you
may fine even the saddest
star, stealing to the
barred pane of a death chamber,
bringing a dream for the doomed.



My Father Heershe Dovid Used to Say

ON OLD AND YOUNG

Fools are old at birth, old is the laughter
of the young bore and the voice of the toad.
Old is the gossip of the cricket, the
tattle of the telltale, the piping crow.
Old is Mammon who sees the stars diving
into busy rivers to mint rare coins.

Young are the kisses of the Song of Songs.
Young was my grandfather's last rising dream,
as he took death out of his lucky bag,
listened to the labored wind, bread scented,
operating the sails of his old mill,
grinding the ripe grain into sated flour;
blessing with the townfolk the new moon.
Young is the oldest gold of every dawn.

Razed Village

Since the last organ grinder died in New York,
the wind is the only street musician left
to dirge forever my mother's razed village.

O her vanished village filled America,
grieved New Jersey with its own desolation,
yearned at twilight over the Passaic River.

Birds on hoar Jefferson Street still serenade
over and over in divine monotone
of psalmists the coy sameness of her village.

She trod warily on stones for she knew well,
only stones are in love with true solitude.
She saw a mossed rock meditate like a sage.

Forsaken alleys, at dusk, wind like scorched dreams
the sun like Satan raises a toast to hell,
but the calm of stones can soothe even cursed Job.

O the days ebb like a travel-worn river,
around low lands which were once avid hilltops.
Spring. Clouds turn into thirsty rills on the streets.
The wind returns all lost seeds back to its soil.

Girl on a Poster

The dancer on the poster reminds me of you
O Shulamite driven out of the Song of Songs,
though she shimmies through the lights of the Great White Way;
yours is the dance macabre of Oschwentchim,
every death : present, past, future, joins your dance.

King Midas hoarding the sunsets on Broadway
dares to touch your cursed bread, your vile fate and turns
into a blind beggar beating with his stick
the glittering din, he proclaims : the sun is blind.
You drop a star — a gory coin in his almscup.

Rain

What does the rain do here on this battlefield
without the harvest song, without the corn dance;
without the cropped blessings of a loaf of bread
for little children, in this betrayed grainland?
The cries of the rainbird could not augur rain
for a field where only death is in full bloom.

Could be misled by a mirage strays the rain,
hence it misconceived the fine soil of new graves
for seedbeds waiting in rows for sun and rain,
unaware it can only help grief grow here
where only a medal may replace the heart.
The night is wonderstruck with routed summers.

Cupid

Let us proclaim a
memorial night for the
unburied soldier.
No grave honors his valor,
his country is unknown dust.

Left of him is the
echo of a battle cry :
mournful nothingness.
He is the lost general
of all bodyless soldiers.

I named him Cupid.
He appears at dusk on a
crowded street, at the
peak of the rush hour, throwing
away his bow and arrow.

He is now a god
of love, unarmed, with clipped wings :
a naked boy, crushed,
trampled underfoot, playing
'possum in a mined firepit.

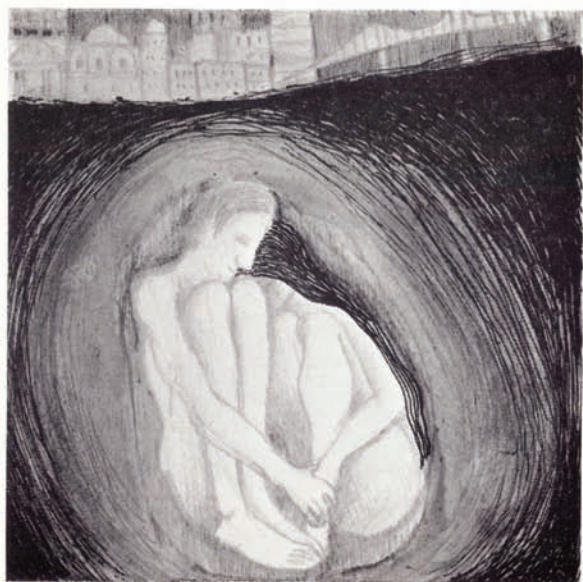
Only the wind knows
where he made the soil fertile.
O bless your lucky star,
you are not anymore a
disciple of brother Cain.

Fear

Beware of mirrors, an informer hides
in every mirror, the moon searching a
river is a secret agent — a ghoul.

Silence is a snake in ambush, stones are
designed to footprint fugitives from hell.
Light is fierce enough to behead us all.





Reminiscence

Let us hide my love,
like gods or small blind fish who
understand darkness,
guarded by caves and deep streams,
hidden from light — their arch foe.

O see the sun rise
as a blond medaled robot,
kind as iron, in
love with birds, roses, children,
efficient as cold terror.

Let us live unknown,
as lovers in a dream;
lost as names on sands,
against sad rains which sing odes
to their immortality.

Let us hide my love.
The super brave soldier is
here, the death drummer
with a heart made of the flesh
of free, victorious morgues.

Learn from the blind to
see God like John Milton, the
soul-lit, poet-king
who lost and found paradise,
in self, in his own great deep.

Elchik and Dveirke

unrhymed unrestrained chant royal

Elchik, my brother, you died at seventeen.
You will be ever and ever seventeen
as on the wonder island of Bimini.
No retreat is as good a haven to yearn
for you as on the thronged streets of Manhattan,
no solitude solemn as dusk on Times Square.
Subways in the rush hour know my hymn to you
when crowds flock as if to celebrate their
next to live, the adventure of being born,
shout down the city: Ho! Waiting in endless
row of ages since Genesis, we arrived!

You saw your last sunset in Michalishek,
our hometown devoured by retreating armies,
limping to their death on Lithuanian
bareboned earth. You died longing for your maiden
Dveirke bound by an oath at the open ark
of the moonlit synagogue that your love will
live as long as Spring, flowers and bees will meet.
Moses walked out of the Torah to witness.
The creek rolled like the pilpul of the Talmud,
drowned in dispute of the wise sages who live
in the mirror of the river Hiddekel.

O good to find our lost hometown in New York.
Shadows of buildings give shade to the same sky,
prankish cherubs play hooky on towerpanes.
A tower ascends like our town in a dream,
the hovels climb over one another,
reaching for the known unknown to remind God
it is time for Messiah to rouse the dead,

to wake the children massacred at their play
while kneading out of mud-pies a new Adam,
to resurrect the tattle of the mute hag,
every blot and blemish — the true signs of life.

Charon on a cloud ferries the dying day
through the dark memories of the river Styx,
a day smoke-eaten as an ashen alley
of my childhood against the howls of battle :
June was foul with the rootrot of red armies,
uterine brothers of plague breeding storm troops,
proclaimed free gallows for all creeds and races.
Poor Satan was a farmer with a gory
sickle, beheading Jews, God, Tartars alike.
The sun was like the gold head of King Midas,
the last rays pondered on spears, in love with death :

No kindness is as kind as comrade Death.
Kind is a felled tree made into a coffin.
True are flowers daunted in a mournful wreath.
No beginning is as gracious as the end.
Dveirke appears, stars hold her silver bride chest.
Left of her is her voice in sobbing rivers :
— Come my love out of the lovers of evil.
It is the end of grief, the end of Sheol.
The charred gibbet can only frighten itself.
The folks of hell break the sword guarding Eden!

• • • •

The city reborn, rides down the skyline drive.

Elchik, there is more wonder on Fifth Avenue
than in the hanging gardens of Babylon,
there is more legend in our casual chat
dallying with time at a cup of coffee
than in Scheherezade's thousand and one nights.

KERHONKSON

Kerhonkson

HILLS AT TWILIGHT

*The hills are the tall tales of the village
of Kerhonkson, between dusk and full night,
they are the castles which the twilight builds,
where enchanted maidens of long ago live;
some hold casks of wine, some wine-stones to age
the aging wine, some are goosegirls again,*

*tend the geese on their way to bathe in the
"rondout creek", braid their hair with mountain laurel,
with wild violets, with rain lilies, after rains.*

*A love-mad Eve climbs to the hillcrest, plays
with the falling sun as with an apple of
the eternal tree (the apple of God's eye,
waiting nude for the still unborn Adam,
destined to create a new Bezalel,
with all the gifts of a black and whitesmith,
to mold all the keys into a wonder key
which will open all jails, all locks on earth.
(O then, even the blind will see Messiah come.)*

*The nimble waters of the creek still dance
the sun, snake, war, hemp-dance of the jolly
Indians of Tuscarora, singing
their grief and delight on the face of rock.
The tall tales driven into whining hollows,
the goosegirls banished into oblivion.
Left here of the geese is the haunted honk,
the shrill tongue of the halfwits, boobs, nitwits,
honking: honk-honk, ker-honk-son, honk in
the bag, the humped idol of ennui, even
the creek runs in panic over the hills,
rushing to Pan for help down the valley river,
as she hobbles into her crutch for the days work,
to rule the seven wonders of ker-honk-son.*

THE SEVEN WONDERS OF KER-HONK-SON

1

*The townboard — the choice brainshop of ker-honk-son,
pregnant a century or so with the
mountain of the austerity budget.*

*Numbers invade every dream, outnumber
the stars, plunder the green and gold of days.
Yokels smell with stale thought, with mossed axioms.*

*A new Columbus is about to discover
that water was, is and will ever be wet.*

The air is heavy with thick meditation.

*The witch of numbers giggles into their
teeny-weeny universe of discourse,
leaps from head to head to prepare her brew,
cackling: carry me day and night, night and day,
until you all turn into a flock of geese.*

2

*The grocery where the grocer is plagued
with the itch of a mite, the queen of the itch mites
of the royal mite family, acaridae,
in competition with the tartar food store
where the moth saturnidae is emperor.*

3

*The old tartar, the punch of Sundays,
dressed like the mongol Batu Khan, with
sham solitaires on his wealthy fingers,
riding on his glum horse with the inflamed
genitals, he sees through the mirrors of sunset,
the "golden horde" of fourteen eighty six.*

4

*The late luncheonette where the hermits,
the sleepless and the ghosts dine at midnight,
where the gallsick business bores with success fou,
manufacture stones in their gallbladders.
Life is tense as a mouse-ear in a trap.*

5

*The rich fantast of the lonely gasoline
station who daydreams miles of customers,
standing in a thousand and one rows, wrangling
for their next — the peanut dreamer, rolling
in his dreams the wheels of America.*

6

*The pimpled spinster who manicures the claws
of her tomcat and never tires of petting
his ailing testicles, taught to caress,
to neck, not as an adopted son, but
as the ecstasy of her old maidenhood.*

7

*The hook and needle, yarn shoppe without the legend
of the spindle, the shuttle and the woof;
without the maiden at the loom who can
entice a prince by sending the spindle
to dance merrily before him to show
him the way to her God-loved sod hut, covered
with floral and scroll designs of her stem,
chain and crewel stitch, for her unknown wooer.*

*Left of the legends is dull merchandise,
stingy coins between teeth and claws. The needles
remind of Gulliver's lilliputians,
wrapped in pink shrouds, stare with blank eyeholes.
Each spool of yarn, wire, ribbon, cord is wound
like a noose of boredom. The yarn craves to
return to its origin, to flower again
on the cottonfields of Carolina.*

MIDSUMMER

*The days tarry with the lazy chatter
of smart bumpkins, of cartoon characters,
echo with the gag of the dull, with the
silly laugh of giddy girls, like dwarf cherries.
Even the birds are bored in ker-honk-son.
The spots of the woodthrush are like numb tears.
The minor poets of the birds end their song
in midsummer, poetasters sing in
season only. The robin sings best in June
when singing is at the height of fashion.
Only the wren, the true poet of the birds,
declines to retire as nature's pensioner.
The songsmith shapes a hymn out of every chore.
When the last fledglings fledge, he builds a nest for
the sake of building, loving, singing, even
in ker-honk-son because build, love, sing he must.*

PRAISE TO THE STUTTERER

Praise to the Stutterer

Praise to the blocked word
of the stutterer, stumbling
out of the mute might
of the rock which Moses hit,
to quench the scorched wilderness.

No, not the rainbow
of the bubble, bragging it
is a gold planet
flying to replace the sun :
the pomp of charmed nothingness.

The word which falters
seeing God face to face, rocks
ages of bondage,
stammers like thunder as it
rolls to applaud the cosmos.

Vachel Nicholas Lindsay

unrhymed, unrestrained chant royal

I know the silence in the lonely house
where death is the only invited guest.
The walls are fierce with beasts living in paintings.
A zoo in watercolor cries for the woods,
in the green room where you were born and died.
Lionets yearn in gilded frames, rockfaced,
with mouths furious as tempests, learn to
roar at no one but their own wrath. Darling
snakelets, offsprings of anonymous artists
play with dangerous apples in Eden,
hiss at Adam and Eve, inventors of sin.

Night of December fifth, nineteen thirty one.
The late autumn is now the town crier,
announcing the end of Vachel Lindsay.
A weeping birch is your only mourner.
Even the winds in Springfield Illinois
are crazed with your musicomania,
conduct a ragtime band, serenade you
like dead musicians playing in a dream :
bass bassoons, alto flutes, plaintive oboes.
Winds suicide raging against cliffed walls.
Even the aged windowpanes rock and roll :

Hallelujah, here is William Booth, the
general of the humble, marching out of
your poem as out of the drum of the doomed,
leading kneeling armies, noble rifferaff prays :
We are all descendents of misfortune.
Every blade of Spring is in touch with autumn.
All children see Satan at birth, guardian
of evil, hear his voice of hell, he speaks
to us the kind language of death showing
each newborn the last tear before the first smile.
This is why no child ever smiles at birth.

Our nearest and farthest ancestor is dust.
Even dust in wind moans against its mission
of awaiting us as a final host
who swallows each and every guest on earth.
Yet, all children are teeming with the wonder
of being born, the naked limbless child
of the mother worm, prejudiced since the
beginning of time, as well as the eagle.
All, all children are welcome to heaven.

. . . .

Night of Yahweh, a night, a scaremonger
which could pluck the feathers off Poe's raven.

Vachel, Chang's one winged nightingale is singing.
Do you feel like Keats as though of hemlock
you had drunk, as you raise a cup of poison,
the strongest toast to your fifty two summers?
Dawn. A cricket in the throat of the chimney
hides from the sun to weep in the darkness
of solitude. A mouse prowls so gently
even God has to strain to hear its curse.
Your last thoughts rise to strangle the daybreak
which crowns the skeletons of a blanched flowerpot.
Your dawn, plagued forever by the throes of birth.

ENVOY

Vachel Nicholas Lindsay, do you know
I am writing your unwritten poem,
in this crooked attic of Borough Park?
If you do not know you ever lived, you
never lived or died, you are sheer wonder.



Isaiah on Freedom

Isaiah is always there
where builders build a new jail.
He says : Alas, my grim sons,
the sword is still not a plow.
If one image of God will
be somewhere chained in a cell
the chain will shackle us all,
in heaven and on earth.
Angels will know the weight of
the chain, winds will not be free
to curse even their own fate.
The sky will be an endless
prison roof if one captive
will still remain in a cell,
at the end of time, nearby.



In Retrospect

O the orange grove in Carolina!
Each orange resembles a shrunken head,
the conquest of the head hunter. The wind
through red cedar plays on the shepherd's flute,
the shepherd turned into a cross, Christ-borne.

Clouds bring storm from the stone-age — a cave-mob.
A tree at dusk is a crimson dagger.
Dandelions are toothed dwarfs forging God.
The mourning dove monotones the last rites.
Death, redolent with jasmine, sweet pinesap.

O the flag waving like a starry noose!
Calm encumbered with the wrath of Cain's soil.
The wren, mute, like a stuffed apparition.
The moon is in love-and-silver business.
Cunning merchants sell heaven by the yard.

A Lesson in Cabala

Go soul down to earth,
the earth is upper Eden.
Mingle with the dust,
my most sacred treasure, the
father of Adam.

You are all virtue,
the first light of the first dawn,
but do not grow un-
alloyed as an unhusked seed.
Sinless yokels are all sin.

Be envious only
of the stone which is here to
teach ages yearning
for Messiah that patience
can outdistance all distance.

Be my guest on earth.
Your body like the soul is
my true image. See
the end near the beginning,
the return to Genesis.

Do not ever turn
into soul-chaff: selfchosen,
individual,
as a grain of gold, endure
fire without an inner scar.

David

It is Spring again : king, shepherd, wild lover.
Your concubines are here, the crocus reminds
of Abishag — sin-wounded, blushing maiden.
The rosemary is fragrant as Abigail,
meeting you with corn, wine and figs, all roses
gather the world over to remember you.
Forget-me-nots, the dream of longing women,
comely in the nude as bathing Bath Sheba,
self-widowed, love-anguished reach out for your touch,
hear young streams breaking the prisons of the earth,
calling you from hilltops to river valleys :
Come O come, David, the wind — a psalm or your
harp playing through the aeons your humble glory.
You are authentic as a kiss in a dream.
First buds fill their cups with the drink of the gods,
as a toast to Spring, you and unending life.



On My Book Of Poems

*I know this book will outlive man and beast,
though the moth may grind the solid imagery.
The lovelorn will love me to the end of time.
The swan will return to its fable to sing
of me when chased off the skies by the hunter.
A harpooned whale will hear a calling sea.
A stream in the desert will chat of me
with Elijah — the ever stray wanderer.*

*The self-doomed will read my poems to cherubs,
longing for me throughout infinity.
A cherub is a baby mouse, a flake
of snow, a face in a womb, a lionet.
God will read it in the loneliest nook
of Eden under the eternal tree.*



