

from **Arse Poetic**

iv

These are the spirits of the dead
who disavow us when we kick
or spit or throw sharp stones.
These are the children of hunger
who swell against the moonlit glass.
These thicken the air with meaning.
These stretch the membrane thin
humming *Peace Peace Come to us*.
These are voices in mountain streams,
shapes in trees, faces in smoke.
These pull down the sun and moon,
waste green leaves, harden grain,
knock soft fruit to the ground
humming *Peace Peace Come to us*.
These are husbands in the earth
who quicken the seed all winter
who wet the root all summer long
who sell their favor for cups of blood
your real body not your soul
humming *Peace Peace Come to us*.

vi

Divide me as the wind divides
Cold from its barking tree
Cold that beats its wings
In a net of branches, chased
And shiny-eyed, shivering, up
To its utmost limb

Divide me as the wind divides
Into leaf and sky the icy cold
To stutter, squawk, bust out
Of season, at the first shot
Splash fire and glass, leave
Salt on raw tongues

So divide me and I will blow
On your nautilus belly full
Passages of fruited flesh
Until its whole note feathers
Out of even you to canticle
In exorbitant sun.

viii

Silently riding his hooves his eyes
brute him past the sheerest trunks
of forest night to where she kneels
in a pond of leaves under the oak,
a basket of fruit or yarn beside her
embroidered lap. He knows she knows
but she does not lift her eyes to his.
With grace she smooths the figured gown
about her thighs, lays her hands
cupped in themselves to her breast.
His clumsy hooves, his awkward knees.
An ocean timbrels in his ears, bells
touch the wind against his flank
until he feels her heart impaled
between his hard head and the tree.
He opens his eyes: she is oak
rough bark and gnarled hands.
A red tiercel screams in her hair.
The air is dark, full of hounds.

xii

Still sixteen when she learned
that pollen, dust and kitten fur
weren't all her skin erupted to.
Still sixteen some years later
when, lowering a thin washcloth,
she saw among the usual powder
and things the inside of her face
caught in her hands. Her friends remark
her clear complexion, but maintain
when pressed she had a weird smile.

xv

Don't you think I feel you growing virgin
each time you come to bed? Disgusting.
Writhe green then refuse me, act asleep.
Don't you think I see your eyes turn pious,
your lips begin to twitch and moisten?
Go ahead. Have your sun brown you more
to my taste. But tell them up there this time
their pennycake songs that celebrate my love
for beauty aren't quite true; and say, this
time, how your appetites are mine, that you

begged the savage fruit, panted to stay
just as you pant for their filthy scythes
and hooks and wheels. I'm sick of all these rape
stories; you were the one who wanted out
of the ideal. Not that you don't rage still.
Go, Bitch. I'll entertain this drunk boy
who, done with dreaming, knows at last that women
up there, mouths full of guts and slime, are good
only for death: stupidity stalking myths.
We'll wait until you want to come again.
Take your time. Be sure you're dead.

xvi

And how will sunday find you find you
shaking among your artifacts
dry fingers both of you.
And how will monday monday trace your dust
blown appetite in the lines
flesh wrote on all your faces.
And how the carousel bank
the epileptic monkey on a string
the careful ruin of elephants
in paper hats will be counted who
can tell; or how you left them
terrified of the dark box, the sudden
vault of your hands, dumb show
of your chest, the parrot in your knees.
There is no music in the tin bank.
The acrobatic beasts stand unwound
on their track. The monkey screams
as he falls down and up the pole.

xix

You play poet just so long
it comes off in your hand.
So you squirt away from faces
to a clatter of tin trees
where wind has no corners.

You don't feel changed
but the fear is:
each dervish that lifts
your rags show dusty women.
You wonder will they just giggle.

So you stay disgustedly hanging
because you love your hand, not
what is in it, what comes and goes,
because you know and they could not
it's your fault they are not you.

xx

No secrets he said. Honesty. Love. So I told him.
Bitch he said. Get out you bitch he said.
So I went into the head and locked the door
and cut off my prick. Then his. As I lay hands full
I heard him at the door. Go to hell I said.
Scratch scratch he said. I flushed the toilet.
Too late I said. Whimper he said. Sob. Too late I said.
In the morning two with shades and white trenchcoats
and blue plastic straws suck my blood from the tub.
My hands scrawl across the porcelain trying
to hide the slit at their wrists. Too late I said.
Outside the door cracked was my bowl of meat.

xxi

I think of Agamemnon now on the barren rock
the cup to fill with blood the fires to set
and Abram with his scrawny arm upraised
obedient to his voices as water to the moon.
I think of all the exposed children not come back
to kill their fathers or have their mothers
of all the twins hamstrung and left to feed
the darkness, the girls deliberately drowned.
I hear the toilets flushing generation
after generation: here is your son floating
with the rest of the garbage, here is your daughter
lovely among the turds. Not one destroyed in fury
the way Medea slew her sons, not one with honor
the way Cuchulainn killed his in bloody free for all
but with an analytic pin or dissociated pill
some scientific apparatus designed to kill
with premeditation for the good of the state
for the peace of our minds at some future date.
God damn the doctors and their psychologic crew
for they are trained to do as they do.
God have mercy on those who also feel
for they understand that damnation is real.

xxii

So small, especially mornings
children ring outside. Light
split from time, from air:

useless lock and drapes:
swelling against the glass
like a thick balloon. Coffee.

It wasn't only in autumn
he hiked to the far woodrow
where she met him small

as he in the length and breadth
and depth and silence, her hand
so small it went away in his.

All those leaves. Alternatives
to washing the cat, the dishes,
the windows, to spring, summer

and cleaning last night out
of the fireplace before dark.
The kids are tunneling

the afternoon they found raked
at their curb. If they knew
how huge that tree is. Loud

as trash can siren squeal of jets
tall as television strong as soap
the kids next door surround my lot

loop their age in the branches
and burn the intersection, burn
the street, fence, burn the lawn

the lawn, dancing joking nudging
elbows into each other My God
will she never get back?

xxiv

You touch my arm as if it were not connected
by sinews longer than you feel to hell.
Pigs and satyrs dancing there howl rejected
farrow down the tune of my plucked soul:

the elastic of my nerves is infected
with length, length not yet disaffected
from its short rule of rub, wet, hope.
Length is worms, no matter how perfected.
When you touch my arm you touch filth.

xxv

Draw the skin back wide.
Lay the nerve open to light
so strange it soon forgets
to transmute pestering steel,
sound and air to pain.
*This fish struggling on deck
deepsea eyes coming unbuttoned*
The voice in frontal section
knuckled white and rubbery
strung from curious points,
dangling among the cords
let out from their revealed
organs. *Shall we throw her
back? No use in that*
The tip of the tongue smooths,
the root of the tongue swells
darkly in the gasping throat.
*Fish don't have tongues
You think too much
This one's no good to eat*
The membrane arches against
the attack of lockjaw tight
as a frog's sac in rut
*We can't just leave her here
She's already starting to stink*

xxvi

Having not eaten for days long
my stomach's fingers articulate
each other to new obscenities.
I eat you, dear pot roast,
to stop the words.

xxx

Through one shell shock after another
on the rippling back of the earth owl
under my knees flying apart ripping me
past the dying bodies of my friends

whose blood lies between us, whose eyes
run with tracers of false red dawn;
without the thump and whine with which
muscle and mind talk to each other
I come for you, Love, feet first, borne
on a slab of wind dry as a pit blown
into powdered rock. This was my right eye,
this was my nose, and now here I am
loose as the lower mouth of time,
blind as the bones that line the toe
that works the nail into the chest.
This heart I feel you at: take it
slowly as you will. There is no hurry now.
All the darkness long nibble it and gnaw.
Until the night is gone knead it in your paws.
What it left at dawn take it in your jaws.
Carry it home like a children's song.