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SEXUALLY DANGEROUS POET



Walta Borawski

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY



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*The Good
Gay Poets*

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For Michael Bronski & Charley Shively

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FF 19ms91

CHEERS, CHEERS FOR OLD CHA CHA ASS

*Cheers, cheers for old Patchogue High;
You bring the whiskey, I'll bring the rye;
When we yell We yell like hell*

Acne, puberty, dry heaves each pre-school morning were not bad enough:

At Patchogue High a circle of charming boys called me *Cha Cha Ass Borawski*.

*Hey, look at Walter, he cha chas when he walks.
He cha chas when he tries to hit a ball.
He probably cha chas while he shits: Let's watch.*

(I'm in a toilet stall, making up god.
O lord god let me
kiss your boot do you
think you could
disguise me?)

*Hey, look, Jayne Mansfield's in Borawski's gym suit.
Hey, Jayne, what's happened to your tits?
If Walter had Mansfield's tits I'd screw him.
If Walter had Mansfield's tits we'd ALL screw him.*

*Ha ha ha. Cha cha cha. Ha ha Ha Cha
Cha cha Until*

shots called are one's own shots
they are ugly, & must be muffled.

I said *No* to their tenth year reunion,
I added a sketch, I threw in a poem:

Cha Cha Ass Borawski will not be there.
He don't mind the name anymore. He's

thinking of legally adopting it. It's
his only legal thought these days. But

now he meringues when he walks, he
dreams up the devil while he shits.

Trying to Write a Love Poem

For M. Bronski

Since most of my words go to describe
loves that fail, tricks who come & go,
it's no surprise I have no poems for you.

Shall I, trying to write one, say: You
are the man who stole white lilacs from
Harvard to help me find spring in a

dull season? Or that three years ago we
met in a bath house in New York City, strangers
making love in the shelter of sauna & steam?

Would it be too silly to say I like to think
we're Leonard & Virginia Woolf? Don't worry —
I'll not tell which of us is Virginia. But

if I suffer a total breakdown after trying
to write you this poem — & if you
drop all work on your next essay to

put me together, take care of my cat, they'll
know. Meanwhile, you should know that
when I see aged couples clutching each

other, walking quick as they can from
muggers & death — I see us. & that if you
die first, someone will have to, like they

would a cat without hope or home, put me to
as it's sometimes called, sleep; & though you
don't believe in heaven, & taught me how empty

& odd my own plan for it was, I imagine we've
already known it — at the baths, in your
loft bed; in stolen lilacs, in each stroke you

give my cat, my cock; & though I'm agnostic
now, I never question why the archangel who
sent down the devil is called Saint Michael.

Wool-gathering

We let go. We
go so far, & then
we let go. I
see it in the way I
stay up long after
Michael's gone to
bed; hear it
in silences
between
what my mother
says & I think
over the long-
distance phone.

My cat died, turned
hard. When Terry
kisses I'm first
to pull away. Stephen
outstares me, everyone
outstays. I am first,
after Neil, to say
Goodnight. And he's
getting set to say
Goodbye.

Michael
moans in his sleep, throws
arms childlike: out,
trusting. If I could match
the stance, answer
the invitation! But I'm
inside, only smoke
from my cigarettes
gets out. I caress
my poems, proof I
go on. I

make the barriers now, I
avert the eyes. Bruce goes

far as he can without
kissing me. Others go
that far. Others,
further. When Peter says
Shucks as we separate
for night, I know
what he means. And I want
to hold him, I want
to hold on. I want those
funky sounds of first-time
love. I want echoes that
resound, friendship that
makes it make sense, brings
it forward, makes it
continue. I

cover my eyes, forget
my heart, ignore my
cock with its strange
life of its own. But
my mind goes on: white
heat lights each cigarette.

I went to see a doctor once
about it. She said:
"Long as you have Michael,
long as you can sleep, wake
up, you got it good. But if
it goes feel free
to come see me again." I

feel free sometimes, not with her, but
at the ocean, &
over & over in Michael's
arms, in Terry's
eyes, & sitting up
all night long with
Peter. Yet
I know hunger no house meal
satisfies.

*We let go. We
go so far, & then
we let go.*

For Michael, on the brink of depression & war.

How long will we be allowed
14 windows onto Harvard land?
How long will we afford
five rooms to roam in?
How long to tote around
the great books, the dyke/faggot muses?
How long to care for two cats,
pregnant guppies, dying plants,
each other?

Howling winds shake 14 windows,
the moon rises full each night,
even a snowless winter requires
kisses, my movements
restrict themselves as if already
I inhabited smaller space. Whatever
the quality of life diminishes to I
am your lover, we are our home.

The Autobiographies of Utensils

When it comes to loving I am
a colander. You
can pour your water
all over me, you'll
drain my noodles but
your love will
disappear.
And the butter of your love,
another story,
will
drip
through my aluminum or
ceramic sides, get lost
in the sink.

You don't want it!

When it comes to loving you are
an omelette pan, seasoned & trust-
worthy. You warm evenly,
don't get stuck

This poem is for Howie, who told me
I've a lovely ass, & fine-featured
face, then stood me in front of a
full-length mirror to say:

"Now look at your pants — they're
very New York, sure, but
they don't show your body;
& this shirt — great
plaid, but
with that hairy chest you
should always have at least
three buttons doing
absolutely nothing — even in
this weather. Those longjohns
have to go! Now
look at this hair — too much of it,
& *Loving Care* could color that gray;
never say *dye*, it's got
bad connotations. That beard — that
beard! I feel a fine face
under it — no wrinkles at all; just
a moustache would do you fine.
The glasses are awful — but
what glasses aren't. Have you
tried contacts?"

This poem
is for Howie, who showed me
his cat Rebekah, though he
had to run through nine rooms
naked to find her — past his
mother, sixty-six & asleep somewhere
in that split-level home.

Howie,
who cuts hair for his living &
has lived on Long Island too long.

Train left station; she was
waving at all the windows, so
was my father — though I
had asked them, for my sake,
to leave; the windows
were filthy, not to be
seen through; my face
was clean, showing

visit fatigue.

Stupidly I figured

they'd left

simply because I wanted it. But
the train pulled out, leaving
familiar forms. I found
clearer windows, saw her
waving; him too; me —

gone already;

they waved at the next car down.

Back in my seat, almost invisible
by contrast; unknown to
other passengers; special
back there only; here, finally,
free, weeping —

**ON SEEING ONE'S SELF, YEARS LATER,
IN AN INEXPENSIVE RESTAURANT**

You study! You pass! You show them you can do it!

Your father talks like
my father, so I change my seat
at the Friendly Eatery I
want to watch you. He

is wearing, your father, one
of those jackets that says
his name is Tony & has
a map of Japan on the
back. I suspect your
mother's been keeping it
clean & pressed since
World War II. She

wears a worn grey sweater I
can't see her skirt. Sometimes
women of the educated
classes dress like your
mother to be comfortable.
Sometimes men of the educated
classes dress like your
father for sportswatching
or fishing trips. But they do not

wear these clothes for pre-
graduation dinners nor do they
slap each other's tired fabric.
Even so, you yourself, long-
haired & high schooley in your
tired, unfashionable, clothes,
do not look happy. You look out
the window when there is silence
at your table, just like
other people. Your mother

has long dark wavy hair,
she shakes it & looks out
too I wish I could see her
face maybe she is my mother &
maybe your father, bringing
the pizza back to the counter to
demand more oil is my father, though
he never took us out even for
pizza, & he served in Germany.

Don't study! Don't pass! Don't show them!
I want to say, It will take you years
before or maybe you will never again
enjoy pizza with your folks if you do.

Role Model

Father says I should try harder to be
more like Rory Calhoun I still intend

to be Elizabeth Taylor. Though Mother has
never fully forgiven her — even after the

near-fatal tracheotomy — for stealing
Eddie Fisher from Debbie Reynolds I imagine

myself in violet dresses with violet contact
lenses & the largest diamonds outside the

Tower of London, jewelry box to that other,
lesser, Liz. I too would toss 39 carats

like à stereotypical cheerleader her steady's
class ring: loosely, on a vulgar chain: tick

tock: expensive pendulum as I pass by, oggled;
heavily insured. They would say I'm too fat.

I'd say: *So what's Twiggy's last name?* I'd
keep frightfully well-framed renderings of

my seven husbands, hard-ons, nude on
the piano Barbara Cook would giggle when she

came round to sing songs they'd never let me
record simply because my voice could not

possibly match my face. Even my pets would be
exotic: ocelots, unchained tigers, talking

birds with vocabularies unexpectedly salty as
my own: for what is fantasy but the stroke of

fate, of face, that leaves one person taking
orders in a pizza joint — another — a queen.

My Mother was a Seamstress

& when we went for Sunday drives
Dad would condescend to drive us
rainy Sundays his golf game gone soggy

I'd content myself back seat solo with a picnic
basket: in it my coloring books & my regular books,
a stuffed monkey crayons & marking pens,

the paper pencil-box I referred to as my
travelling set, all kept secure
in what I insisted was my sewing-box.

I don't care if I kill the three of us
Dad sure hated these drives, & Mother
would turn up the radio, knew all the songs,

sang loud as she had to. I'd hide in the
sewing-box, between the crayons, prop the monkey
in my place, say: *You take it! I won't!*

If you draw me make me purple & red
put me in a kaftan reclined on a bed!
Madame Recamier or naked if you've

a sense for miniatures an El Greco cartoon
would be divine. Exaggerate the ear-ring,
eliminate the socks somewhere in the picture

I want my sewing box.

FROM A WINTER'S NOTEBOOK

11 November 80

He's always using
that mouth. If he isn't smoking he's drinking if he
isn't he's talking if he's not he's humming along

or making faces but all with his
mouth, he's making mouths. God he must be
good in bed: I twitch just to look at

that mouth.

30 November 80

He was the son of a butcher but he
talked Foucault in living rooms with art on the walls.
When he smoked cigarettes he wondered, *Am I killing*

the Intellectual or the Working Class? Am I

killing the homosexual? *Christians, Cigarettes,
Placebos.*

1 December 80

Bob says my hair's too long for me
to be sexually attractive. Donny doesn't say that but

when I turned around he said: With that beret and
those long grey curls coming from underneath from the back you
could pass for 45.

Michael loves me with short or long hair. My mother doesn't.
If I visit her during Christmas & my hair's still
this long
it will ruin her holiday. If I stay here to hide the fact
it is so long that will ruin her holiday too. If I corn-row

my curls that will be politically incorrect. If I put it
under a Rootie Kazootie cap discerning queens will say:

How tired! Early Barbra drag.

1 December 80

His mother had taken to
synthetic fabrics *Everything must be
washable* But he remembers a time when she

wore chiffon and lace, dresses with impractical buttons
Such a nuisance! He'd help her how he loved
those phony gleams: black plastic onyx,
paste diamonds plastic
mother of pearl —

She made rags of the fabric but she saved
the rags & the buttons deep in a box they still
wink at him on visits home while she sits

stiffly in a chair *In & out of the machine,*
she says, *Every time, looks like new. Feel it.*

He doesn't like to feel it, he prefers
remembering her in flowered silk, fingering
for bargains when there were bargains

8 December 80

Michael said that hearing Tova play cello from the next room reminded him of a Bergman film, but Walta as he watched her in the same room his room that night of rehearsal thought the French or English directors might better

depict the scene: the familiar art & book-lined room, with Tova in a straight-backed chair brought in from the kitchen, playing what sounded to his ears classical but turned out to be impromptu. How

did she do this? How many centuries of music flowed through her head to produce these sounds? And was it

semi-surreal to him because she is a woman, and in his room? If Donny played cello & played it

in his room would it still have resembled a movie?

27 January 81

Did he ever truly honor his feelings, or did he sort of humor them? He never danced them to death, like Electra; but almost dead. He hadn't

trusted his face for years now. Once he feared it was too naked, now he knew there were all these costumes he hadn't bought, & wouldn't recognize.

No meeting ground,
he worried. Alison was at the door in a new coat, wanting to be reassured. And he said he deplored the buttons! *Too brassy!* he said: but did he mean Alison's barging into his afternoon-with-book; or his own behavior? Was it not hostile, these defenses mercilessly laid up in reserve for minor invasions?

The buttons *were* brassy, but this was no reason to snap so. *Maybe they'll tarnish,* said Michael. How had Michael stood him all these years? The buttons were muted & tasteful, next to him.

22

27 January 81

He was annoyed Bruce didn't drop in more often but he never climbed the stairs to Bruce. On the landing they shared he left notes,

he left gifts. At dinner at mutual friend Terry's he'd drop: Haven't seen Bruce for *days*: annoyed. And yet who

was more reclusive than he? Garbo didn't count — no one he knew knew her story — but in his circle several knew more than enough of his.

11 March 81

It is a serene landscape, colorless & sprawling. From the bend in the river to the straightness of the highway, all his

but for now & then runners. How he loves to pretend it's England, walking along with a borrowed dog. Were he

totally alone he might feel he'd no reason to be there. He needs reasons to be places, he doesn't "hang out."

He enjoys walking to and from work because the direction is questionless. But

on weekends he can't get himself out of the house unless it's for shopping trips planned in advance. He'll buy records & flowers but he won't go looking

for a sexual partner, that's too vague. He'd like to know if someone stopped him — a cop; his mother — he'd be able to tell the errand — & be allowed to go on with it.

23

St. Theresa of Hemenway Street

For Terry Tobin

St. Theresa of Hemenway goes
down to the co-op, buys
vegetables & checks out
men. St. Theresa's mv
sister, we hunt witch
together, prefer diamonds
to souls. *See the diamond*

in my ear? says St. Theresa; I
say: *See the manbone in
mine?* We

go walking. St. Theresa passes
playgrounds, has a boy in one
of them. He thinks he is a
super-hero, he's called
Tyrannosaurus Rex. St. Theresa

worries he's male-identified:
power, largeness, eats his
(almost) vegetarian ma & me. *How*

did this happen, asks St. Theresa,
*with you for his aunt, & his
father gay, too.*

Time to picnic,
shouts St. Theresa; lays a
blanket near the Charles, brings
white wine & fried chicken wings:
no vegetarian, St. Theresa today:
*We all put flesh in our mouths
in times of plenty.*

St. Theresa had a steady lover,
lost him to a law school. Sometimes
the phone rings, he's there, she's
there too: *But in the night,*
says St. Theresa.

To get out of this bumper St. Theresa
plays Simon & Garfunkel, re-
members the Sixties. Men
had long hair, crooned
Beatle tune titles in her ear;
her bosom buttoned over
With *End-the-war*.

St. Theresa reads
Hemingway, says: *There were
& are men worse than that. He
had thirty cats.*

St. Theresa reads night hours
away; with Tyrannosaurus Rex
in bed she can. She plays
jazz records low. Puts out

her light, & cats crawl
up, a lap rug, fur between
fingers for St. Theresa. *It
may be just cats, she
says, but it's not
super-heroes & it's not
going to law school.*

St. Theresa has a headache,
says her glasses are
too strong: longs
to see without them, takes
them off, depends on me
to cruise the runners: *The ones
in white shorts, when sweat
makes men see-through. . .*

*St. Theresa says there's too much
distance: between: friends; between
smiles on the street; between men who
love you all night & stay in
the morning for coffee
& cranberry buns. St. Theresa
looks at the river, says:
What would we do if it would not flow?*

After Doing Coke at Steve's Goodbye Party

Two week old white spider chrysanthemums
no breezeway on the house Mother always

regretted that but blue slates descended
from kitchen door to rock garden back

yard the smell of City Service Gas
Station & chrysanthemums not spider

but sturdier, shorter & by time they
bloomed it was too late to sit cross-

legged near them Mother didn't work
or leave the house she'd watch out

the back windows & say Walter you'll
catch your death Get off that grass

Come home & live with me she says now
but snorting coke in her memory-insulated

attic is hardly incentive for
doing that though of course it would

help: She'd be on Scotch & we'd both
be hyper & silent at intervals, separately

going off to the kitchen sink cupboard or
the mattress with the teddybear amidst

Mouseketeer books to gather flowers
we'd come back to each other with flowers,

flushed faces flowers the sturdy smells
of transformed petals

Valentine's Day 1981

A cannister of chocolate kisses
with Asians in black red & gold:
all those kisses! In Hershey Pennsylvania

I've been told even streetlamps look
like chocolate kisses the streetwalkers
lick the poles look how erect they

stand in moonlight leaning against
each other *How erect they stand
in moonlight leaning against each other.*

We stare across the table, drinking
Colombian coffee & talking about
El Salvador Neither of us has

had much love lately We've been
buying records, expensively tinned
candied mints Individually wrapped

THREE POEMS FROM THE POMPEII EXHIBIT

For Greg Parks

Cicada in Rock Crystal

It is little, oblong, & very clear.
It stopped living long ago. *Right now*
I want you: I'm odd, long, &
sounding loudly.

 You look
at the Labors of Hercules
in relief, on a silver bowl.
Naked men chasing each other
out in the open, *out in the open!*
nineteen hundred years ago.
"What a coffee cup it'd make,"
you say, "What a thing
to rub your fingers against
first thing in the morning."

I know no relief, I don't live
on a silver bowl. I'll not keep
this secret for hundreds of years,
or even this odd spring season. I
rub my leg backs together, & every-
where you run you'll hear cicada
cracking through crystal: no rock
crystal encases the shrill call
of my need, no museum houses
my whore's voice yet.

Priapus Past & Present

At the Boston Museum there's a flying penis
made of shiny bronze — black, & looking heavy
under glass

 Three bells hang below it; no sound
ejaculates now.

"*Bronze tintinnabulum with three hanging bells,*"
says the plastic card beneath. We're museum-
goers, we move on.

 "*Flying fuck, with tinkle,*"
is on my tongue, but
there's a kid at my elbow, another
at my knee, & their father's
already pushing them quickly
past the fossil facts of life.

In the same glass case, but made of clay,
is "*Dwarf Riding*" — a stern little man, bearded,
burdened with a penis long as he is tall.

Burdened, I said, knowing the weight of a small one.

The dwarf rides nowhere. Nineteen hundred years ago
ash came down, left him & his big earthen prick
museum pieces.

 In a cold city, in
asexual museum air, we
get to see them, for a buck-seventy-five, as
they were: driven nowhere on lust, flying
with silent bells.

 You're
not made of bronze, though you picked up sun somewhere,
& glow to me.

 I
don't know if you have three bells, but I
mean to ring the ones I find. I

don't want it to be long as you are tall,
I know the length of a short one, inside.

Yet, for a simple plastic label, care-
fully worded to tell me you want me, I'd
shove all these relics aside, sit on you
under glass lest ash fall down again, & plastic cards
tell other people different things
in a warm city, hundreds of years from now.

Rehearsing for a Satyr Play

On the museum wall a woman
crouches doglike before

her lover. It's Pompeii,
these things

happened. "*You'd think*

*they'd hang it above
the heads of children,*"

says a lady braving
inner-city Boston
for the sake of
this exhibit.

I push
my ash against
your priapus; am glad
to be flesh, not a
fresco: We lose
interest in history
& art, go home
with only that
woman's pose
in mind.

Aborted Adonis

For Bruce Goodchild

Waking in a storm, pre-night
dark, thinking

I could run !

find my jock, my
shoes; push floor,

sit up,
see the cactus blooming
on the sill.

How

nice. Naked buttocks
kiss wood, press hair;
press the door frame,
it flows, the force

reminds.

Beginning again
to clothe my body, put
limbs in shorts & shirt & hooded
jacket, *can't ride
without a helmet,*
& I'm

down

the
stairs

searching for keys,
safety-
pinned; they'll
kill me one day

coming unpinned.
I lose my wind,

don't find it. Fault
the storm, the
steps. I climb,
do not undress,

do not fly.

Normal as Two Ships in the Night

For Alison Pirie

After a while, in the larger cities, we
do not talk or think of normal. The young
student, blond, clipped, whistling

the allegro of Sibelius' violin concerto
is not normal; his lips
are too tight, his soul

is not in this frenetic tooting,
only his fear, flared-up, it is

his lighthouse & his horn as we pass self
to self in Harvard Yard. We pass quickly

in Harvard Yard, I am hiding in the dark
funk of a Laura Nyro tune, we know we're

incompatible, but grateful we will
probably not mug or harm or murder

but unknowing, imagining, we pass

quickly in Harvard Yard, In Harvard
Square, in Copley Plaza, in America

we do not talk of normal, we whistle
odd snatches of song, violent passions
composed for solo instruments.

bez tytutu ★

I move through crowds un-
noticed, even in my
black cape, jewels
clasped at the nape
of my neck: scape-
goat diamonds.

I think
my skin
transparent,
think my thoughts
dreams: crystal balloons,

& they float, & I go by,
unnoticed. Would you

be fooled, if I tiptoed
or danced within reach —
if I was not twirling,
or flying with the help
of strings or would

you put out a hand
to stop my crazy motion?

★ Polish: *untitled*.

Gentility

For David Roberts

A large woman on Fifth Avenue, im-
patient with the hot dog man catering
to her & to her grandchildren points him
to me, says: *There's a gentleman behind*
you, waiting to be served. At the corner
of Lenox Av & 116th Street a young woman
waits with me until a bus comes to
remove me from
her neighborhood. In Central Park
an androgynous figure in clown suit
alternately crawls for change & dances
blithely before cross-town cars,
assuming
they'll stop.

29 May 79
New York City

Traveling in the Wrong Century

For Joan Doyle

Hotels we stay in
have no flowers left by management,
we manage without
writing tables set discreetly
off-lobby; no chandeliers
cast dancing rainbows 'cross
our faces as our feet
take rich baby steps
into deep carpet. There are no
potted palms, no old world
charm, no bell boys, damn
near no fantasy. If shoes
are left in the hall they're
polished off by morning.

Power of One

I am the sole homosexual
in Wilton, New Hampshire, & I

was imported only this afternoon
Rafts of whirligigs scatter

as I approach by canoe: cut-
worms devour potatoes,

raccoons split wood houses,
scoop, eat, birds inside,

are hunted & shot in turn
by shadowed dogs, & hunters.

Mining insects leave striations
'cross leaves of water lilies,

beavers topple trees, water
rises, raises mosquitoes, fleas.

Grey, white, black, yellow
birches dwarf blueberries;

no safe spot, no refrain. Hurri-
cane David yanks branches

from fruit trees. Japanese
beetles make lettuce artless lace,

porcupines pierce the tongues
of hunters' dogs — all because

there's a faggot in New Hampshire.

Live Free or Die

Here in New Hampshire the ghost
of a gay man who never knew love

stops me in the meadow, leads me
by web-chain to his lean-to, rot

& mice dung. Points to my penis,
wants me to piss on his rusted

bed springs, lay naked down on
wet coils.

My own bed has its own stains.
Spotless he walks before me,

points out the *bottled gentian*:
not poisonous, but purplish-blue,

lovelier than Venetian glass;

genetically programmed
never to open.

Travel Fatigue #2

For Orolin John

On the way to lovers
we drove thru Cincinnati,

Arkansas & Stockholm.

On the way cars
broke down, tears

shattered windshield.

On the way Debussy
brought clouds

from notes, & lovers

left us. On the
way to lovers

we paid toll,

tires flattened, & we found
even air costs money.

On the way to lovers
we became landscape

resembling tv shows;

we stole books
to repair engines,

lost looks, lost
motor oil, love became

expensive, travel

ridiculous. On the way
to lovers the radio

crackled country,
western, Ravi Shankar,

opera, Streisand, jazz

ways to ride on
waves without & during

love. On the way
to lovers we found

substitutes, refreshment
stands, endless

repetition.

Tired Song-&-Dance Act

Tired of promiscuity,
tired of abstinence,
tired of the presence,
of the absence.

I'm wearing my black
bandana: on my head:
central; symbolizing:
too queenie for you!

Don't touch me, I'm
tired, dancing
in the market
for a one-to-one man.

My Perfect Poetry Reading

In my head a famous poet
Arrives places. Handsome graduate students
greet him at gangplanks settle him in

snazzy hotel rooms. *Can you be comfortable,
Sir, Is there anything more I
can do for you?*

They've always called ahead to ask my mother
my favorite food: lobster lobster in salads
lobster they crack the shells they'd cook

them themselves they dip chunks in
butter laced with garlic
Is there anything more?

Disregarding garlic breath they kiss me they unfold
beds to ascertain second sheets
were not forgotten

they pull down the shades
on borrowed windows unless
I say I love the view

They escort me to the reading they announce me
lovingly, awkwardly, for that's how I love
them best: all lips & feet & verbal confusion

I do my act for them my college
educated working class paid-for mouth I
get paid enormously for these displays

of ego & after another dinner they
take me back
*I hear you drink cognac,
I hear you blow dope, I sip*

& I suck with them: intake time we sit
cross-legged on the floor 'til our joints
loosen up they'll never forget, they say
anally penetrating a living legend

Some of Us Are Stretched Tighter Than Others

He says all the birds are flying
south this year, & I

am too intense to sleep with.
It's warmer, that's why they

go, kissing me is
kissing February, it stretches you

out & then sticks in the tongue,
the icicle tongue.

I
only wanted warmth myself,
didn't feel like flying

for it; & these eyes —
my mother's side of the family

has them. These feathers —
how I've plucked for them!
And you
want things easy, you

want to fly without
greasing up the engine,
without
twisting up the rubber
band.

God, the unplucked notes.

1

He brought me here, told me to love
no one. I complied. He told me

to remove my clothes, & often
kneel, I'm still

naked on my knees.

 He told me
to open wide, catch flies —

I'm full now, wings
flap in my stomach;
the oddest songs
escape me.

2

& so you don't find me
sexually attractive. I sit

I wait for your mind-change.
I have this alternative:

changing my own mind,
not finding *you*

attractive. I've tried this —

I've tried changing tires;
I've tried suicide.

42

3

In an ideal society
John would not love me, he'd

be turned on to someone
who'd see him & dance

steps leading
each to each. In an

ideal society I'd have seen
the signs: DANGER —
 DON'T WALK —
 DEAF CHILDREN —

We are here. It is no
ideal society. I've seen you

& I want —; *I want*

*[Never to know
never to know
never to know*

*your body. I'm
not good at it.]*

In an ideal society I'd suck
those big, glorious nipples;

open your green button fly, my
teeth not tired by
biting words. How I'd

give you head
in an ideal society.

43

4

*He brought me here, he told me
to love no one. I lied. I've*

never tried naked
never tried *tied*, but

here, from this leash, leather
or irises I extend to you

this improbable connection

until we touch
I itch

5

Notice how this first icy rain
makes these twigs glisten, so

snap-able. Like wire I

stretch out before you, not about
to break but put across

your resonant chest how
I'd play with you —
melodies! —

Denied here, I sit
patient, silent;
there is no symphony
from unplucked notes.

9-13 Nov. 79
Cambridge.

44

Direct or Indirect Rebound Tenderness

For Jim Gleason

It is not when you poke me that hurts,
rather when you

take your fingers away,
& where they were

or inches beyond,
within, bowels start throbbing.

And it is like that
when you put on
your knit hat, you unravel me.
It is not

the gesture itself: hand holding hat,
down motion, *it's on*, but

that the hat's the final thing I see
leaves me
bruised again, *invisibly*.

45

Surprising Kisses

For Malcolm

You were my first S&M man, you showed me the ropes, though we had to imagine them, in the dorm at the St. Mark's Baths

*Don't move
one wrist from the other, you
ordered, Now lick me all over.*

And like a tired
or drunken ballet dancer my tongue
twirled, passion without form,
taking your pleasure moans for
applause, & flowers.

Now & then
I'd *plie* at your closed
mouth, lick your clipped beard &
tight lips;

now & then, on cues
very much your own you'd
open your mouth, & give mine
surprising kisses: How odd,
how more desirable these
than those given freely,
in uncategorized love, as if kisses
are just commodities, obeying
the law of supply & demand.

Later you
worried that my hair, wet all the while
from whirlpool & sauna, steambath & love-
sweat, would catch me cold. You offered me
taxi fare home. Surprising concern,
surprising kisses: But like men of
less choreographed fantasy you
said *Goodbye*, & *Good knowing you*, & I

danced uptown unbound.

Hunger

Paralyzed in heat
the man stroking
his cock does not
see the toilet door
is open or men
entering, not
entering; he
dream-strokes;
he's needing
a hole to
come in, a
hole beyond
his fingers but

doors open, doors
close: hasty
steps, none
toward him.

The man is not *my type*.
He is no pirate. He is
no hippyhunk, bearded
& bandana-ed. He is not
a hard hat on his lunch
break. He is not well-
contoured, there is no
color come-on in his
clothes. I go to my
knees before him, he
does not notice until
contact, wet lips
wake him, partly,

& he comes, giving
in, giving his
extraordinary
hunger to me.

Sociologically Challenged

I have a hard cock, you
have a hard cock, *every-*
thing else is broken How
the parts howl at us. We

will not reach each other's
hard-ons : *broken eyeballs*
broken grasps;

We will not hear each
other's lips smack

: *broken ear-drums*
broken thoughts.

If we could crawl —
but we can't —

If we could grunt —

If we believed in
each other's ass holes —
mouths — finger-stumps —

Numb to altruism & even
sex we roll
individually

onto our stomachs & we

push & we pull & we
imagine the other, or
another

& we come: You come,
I come —

semen might have
calmed our cuts & sore spots

—How they howl at us!
from our stomachs,
from the hard wood floor.

For Emily Dickinson & Charley Shively:

I saw two men — and wanted both —
but neither — wanted me —
and that — is the extent — of my —
Promiscuity.

Perversity

I know my holding onto
a book of poems by Ezra Pound
separates Sylvia Plath
from Adrienne Rich
on one shelf in America
but I keep it there.

I know my lust feelings
for my lover's boyfriend
are illicit — not even smart;
but I do like the man, I do
like the man, I do, & I never
was much good at *platonic*.

Many men women & children
would call me, christians
would call me, shrinks &
my mother & right wingers
everywhere would call me
perverse but very likely
for wrong reasons.

Salome

How many times have I wanted to stand
moonlit, my veils damp & tired,

his head on a plate, delivered me
from depths of desire & a cistern, slippery

with his blood, *he d never let me suck it*
while he was alive, & I was

alive, & wanting him. *I want him now,*
I have him now, I kiss him —

Who wouldn't dance
for the death of a man

who will not take you in as you
take him, call his name before him:

Master, Sir; will not kiss you
even when the moon's obscured

by clouds & no one would see
the kiss. How I wanted

his lips on my body; how that body
danced!

Against Sex

For Peter Tenney

If it's followed by depression,
a *sense of something missing*,
& depression leads to premature
departure, *why do it?*

If it's going to disco
bars to be lulled to be
deafened to be dulled, do
regimented, fascist steps &
call it *dancing* why do it?

If it's reduced to mundane, fucked-up
masculine matters of *I put it*
in you OR *You put it in me*
OR

I can do it only with men who
are not fat, not femme, are
professional, have less than
30 years' experience; don't do
drugs, or S&M *why do it?*

If it's kneeling to married men,
who want cake, who want to be
eaten: who live *respectable* but
let queer creeps, commie
faggot weirdos blow them
in the dark *why do it?*

If it's the bringing together
of two with separate politics
[& yet only semen is swapped]
: if the man is hot but
works with poison gas, believes
in the future of nuclear
power, supports a government
in whose eyes he is an out-
law, *why do it?*

Warm bed, shelter-bush, thirst of mind;
hunger of body to eat of its kind;
arms that hold what needs to be held;
fingers that move in, further in; *I*
know why I do it, hoping always
to once find a *man* who
does not like the word, gropes
for renewal & a new name.

If it's the bringing together
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[& yet only semen is swapped]
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to once find a *man* who
does not like the word, gropes
for renewal & a new name.

IT'S EARTH WARS WORRY ME

1

*Exterminate homosexuals? Walta you are so paranoid!
Blond & young he glared at me*

Incredulous. I with no patience to explain
Nazis preceded the American Party for Manhood &

before then & after them & right now Dean
Wycoff the Moral Majority Christians to burn us

as witches. They see us
& with hard-ons tied
between their legs
say *we* should die
for being kinky.

*These walls.
No apples fall
over them. We
can't make love
here: lights & guns.*

2

*Dead faces, gaping holes: history.
Rats in the catacombs: prediction.*

54

3

MIT's Pi Lambda Phi frat marches through
Harvard Square demanding death for gays:

*A Joke, they tell reporters.
There are no accidents, says Andrea.
And there are no jokes,
just straight people.*

*Anne Frank didn't need a diary, wrote
Charley Shively years ago, she
needed a hand grenade.*

4

Archaic Catholics call their
ancestors angels call us
occasions of sin. Our

promiscuous faces our
lascivious eyes invite them
to sin, sin. We are our own

icons We are faggots they want faggots
to burn.

55

If San Francisco slides into the sea Dean
Wycoff will say it was because so many gay
people were allowed to live there & people
who lose property in that slide will not
want it to happen again. Gays are

expected to let things happen again, the Church
burns us, we rise: Hitler exterminates the gays
of Europe, they rise. With losses unremembered,
with contributions masked (*O Emily was an odd
spinster, Old Walt was a bit weird*) We rise We rise
We rise

If I Ran Harvard University. . . .

The football team the rowing team
all the teams & the men who belong^{er}

to private dining clubs would become
the building & grounds crews, only

they'd not get to wear green work
clothes, just jockstraps & collars

& the men who work buildings & grounds now
who understandably mutter as they pick up

refuse of the rich would lord it over
the aforementioned with whips & studded

belts WHACK on those fine white asses
Let's see those wide butts move! & when

their fathers came visiting in limousines
how surprised & secretly pleased they'd be

by their sons' marks

**I am not Billie Holiday but I look good
in my dress & my running shoes.**

Sometimes in the living room between the speakers I pretend to be Billie Holiday singing "These Foolish Things Remind Me of You." The song does not take much range, good for me & maybe, by then, why she picked it too. I find it increasingly hard, not being Billie Holiday. No-voiced, I don't know what to do with all these songs.

At other times I am Barbra Streisand. It is an integral part of my survival, why & how I am still here, being now & then, Barbra Streisand. I steel myself up on my heels, I turn chiffon into armor, I send every word of displeasure disappointment & hurt out to counterattack. I'm unable to forgive, today. This works when the stance is enhanced by talent. I cannot sing. I bring borrowed intelligence & fury & phrasing & weight to the words. I am a mimic. But I copy the greats.

The fish tank is comforting. Life has even greater limitations. I commiserate. I leave for work Monday morning but: *Would I stay in a warm bed. Would I prefer being wrapped in arms. Would I choose to be alone over a second cup of tea, a second cigarette?* No one did well at work on Monday. The smoking room was filled all morning, the coffee ran out by ten, elongated faces settled in corners: mine too. I was Billie Holiday eight hours ago, I stood alone between the speakers, between inverted obelisk black jet earrings, I smelled the gardenia behind my ear, I felt my silk dress *from the inside*, I felt this rustle, I heard this drum, I moved my notes like a saxophone, like a cello, leave me alone now.

Eleven people were crushed & otherwise battered to death on their way into a rock concert last night, The Who in Cincinnati went on. Where would the energy of 18,000 expectants go if the music, if the show, did not go on? I imagine being on acid, stepped to death, I imagine being part of a crowd, the word *Stop* lost from my vocabulary, the word *Help* beyond my understanding.

When I am making love when I am having sex & there is pain or there is nonenjoyment or my mood goes from red to dark gray I stop the action, I pull away. I have never had to slap a hand. If I wanted the tit-clamps off, if I wanted symmetrical pain stopped, they were off, it stopped, I continued. In Fenway orgies, fucked suddenly too often, too eagerly, I have pulled my pants up, I have walked away. I have never heard The Who. I love the rhythms of rock & of fucking. I love the abruptness of *Stop*, the potential of *Help*.

On tv last night, a nationwide insidious show called the 700 club, Pat Robertson hiding behind Christ's name subtly strung together homosexuality, black witchcraft and the dismemberment of teenage bodies.

I always wear running shoes, even though boots go better with my leather jacket, sandals better with my flowing shirts. I fear wearing color. I've put my earrings in a soapstone box, I hide that behind books. I consider myself, women & men like me, an endangered species. *Survival* is a word I do not feel cozy with, it has concentration camps on the other side of it. This is why I listen not to The Who, who keep on, after all, rocking, but to Billie Holiday. This is why I smoke cigarettes & sing against midnight & try so very hard to become her.

**Indexing Judy Garland's Life: A Found Poem,
from Gerold Frank's Bio.**

Birth
childhood
stage debut
training
changes name

death of father
early love affairs
drug use
poetry

remarriage of mother
in love with Artie Shaw
romance with David Rose
marriage with Rose
health problems

divorce from Rose
in love with Joe Mankiewicz
psychological problems
psychiatric treatment

weight problem
marriage with Minnelli
birth of Liza
drug dependence

suicide attempts
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402, 427, 525, 534, 541].
suspended by MGM
financial problems
contract terminated

relationship with Luft
separation & divorce from Minnelli
marriage with Luft
birth of Lorna

death of mother
loss of Oscar
birth of Joey
drinking habits
TV debut

conflicts with Luft
reunited
battle of custody of children
illness (overdose) in London
divorce from Luft
quarrel with sisters
TV series

legal problems
marriage with Herron
marriage with Mickey Deans
death
funeral

Sullivan

[August 1971 — July 1981]

Suddenly crippled, dragging his
hind legs about he who sprang
from back stairs to front porch like

Supercat: black, moving thru Rousseau-
like abundance of leaves spookily laced
by green eyes

He still cleans himself, &
gulps his food. But he pulls those
so recently powerful legs
angrily

Begs to die? To live?
As before?

25 June 81

If whole cats sleeping chase
rabbits on the run, their

paws aquiver Do crippled cats remember
their flying limbs?

25 June 81

Sullivan fell asleep
I imagined he dreamed he was
not crippled because when he
woke up he tried to sit up
in the old, proud, Egyptian way
& was annoyed he could not
& surprised.

8 July 81

All he knew was that I was
killing him, & that he
had the disadvantage of being crippled, & I
the advantage of chloroform.

10 July 81.

Things Are Still Sudden & Wonderful

Once it was 1962 & somebody
kissed you you freaked he

held you down pressed his
15-yr.-old football team thighs hard

against yr. thin-kid-with-glasses
legs It was like a Lana Turner movie

; you decided to be gay. In 1982 yr. lover
puts you down on all fours & masturbates

you sometimes you come with a leash on
in more than one room. You've

not forgotten the football player's name

\$5



The poems are truthful, snappy, plenty of low life & local detail, sparky mind of the young poet sassing & observing his environment, gay & grim, still romantic. Who doesn't love romance? Lots of intelligence in the line, mindful measure of spoken speech music.

Allen Ginsberg

*The Gay
Poets*

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