

T. WEISS  
RENÉE WEISS

# Contemporary Poetry

*A Retrospective from the Quarterly*  
Review of Literature



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# **Contemporary Poetry**

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A Retrospective from the *Quarterly Review of Literature*

## **The Quarterly Review of Literature**

This Princeton Paperback was originally published as the *Poetry Retrospective* issue of the *Quarterly Review of Literature*, the first of three special issues celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of that distinguished publication, edited since its founding by Theodore and Renée Weiss. Two other anniversary issues are being published by QRL, a *Prose Retrospective* and a *Criticism Retrospective*. Cloth editions of the special issues and information regarding subscriptions may be obtained from *Quarterly Review of Literature*, 26 Haslet Avenue, Princeton, New Jersey 08540.

# Contemporary Poetry

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A Retrospective from the  
*Quarterly Review of Literature*

**Edited by T. Weiss and Renée Weiss**

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## IN RETROSPECT

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The QRL was launched, in a most generous spirit of expectation, by Warren Carrier at the University of North Carolina in 1943. At that time publishing was difficult, paper scarce, money limited, and the age itself sufficiently turmoiled—clear signs that a literary magazine was needed. And happy, youthful innocence of the cost and the work involved assured us we were the ones to satisfy that need. Though Warren and I were new friends, he invited me to assist him in the editing. My interest then was (and has continued to be) mainly in writing, not in publishing, but I accepted his invitation. And when, after a year, Warren left for Europe and the War, I found myself sole proprietor. At that point my wife joined me as co-editor and general manager; and, for better or for worse, we have been the staff ever since. At first the magazine resembled, in format and content, already established academic publications; it printed the customary fare: poems, fiction, essays, and reviews. It differed however—inclining here to the little mag—in its independence of any support, its carefree publication schedule, and its greater emphasis on creative work. Despite its university location it was very much a private enterprise. And unlike its fellow periodicals it was set on stimulation and innovation rather than on consolidation, evaluation, and scholarly taste-making. It was proud to participate in the vigorous pioneering of masters like Cummings, Stevens, Williams, to enjoy their support, and to foster new developments by printing young writers like Merrill, Dickey, Merwin, Wright, and a host of others.

As the academic was not our interest, so the overtly political and the social were not. We believed (and still believe) that a time is literarily best served by the most vital, most realized artistic work it produces, often despite or against that time. Only as the individual is attended to does the community prosper. Were the term aesthetic not usually so narrowly defined, we might offer it, the aesthetic via the intelligence it requires, as the word closest to any program—better, intention—we might have had. Imaginative writing, it seemed to us, should not be fettered

by fashions or political considerations. Such work, we felt, in its challenge and refreshment, its all-out attempt at being honest to itself and its material, was more than political and social enough.

Obviously we did not intend to champion the popular, either in writing or in audience. We considered it our business to provide space—so help to keep alive—what in a mass democratic society too easily gets neglected—genuine, substantial writing that is not spectacular. We were bent on assisting new writers but also on sustaining able, developing, non-self-advertising writers in the middle—that most difficult place—of their artistic careers. We have always regarded ourselves as part of the great “modernist” movement. But the mainstream, whatever and wherever that may be, is, we are convinced, not to be tidily channeled. At the same time we have not been preoccupied with discovery and “firsts” except as they involve the best writing we can find.

We also set out to resist the modern American obsession with and intimidation by numbers, relevancy, timeliness. Few of us, apparently, can withstand the notion that quality is immediately quantifiable, that a work's worth is reflected by its “success.” At times we have fantasized that we might require our subscribers to meet *our* specifications, and so we would keep our subscription list humanly small. (In this we think we have been fairly successful!) We respect our audience, actual and potential, too much not to expect the best of it. We were confident that, even in a time as crushing politically and in its mass media as ours, a group of kindred individuals could make their presence felt, could constitute a community effective beyond itself.

So too we wished to eschew “schools” and coteries in behalf of ardent disinterestedness, a desire to be as receptive as possible to any specimen of good writing that was convincing in its own terms, whether its fundamental attitudes coincided with our personal tastes in literature or not. When QRL started, New Criticism had reached its apogee. We were much indebted to it, appreciative of the revolution it represented, the important,

new emphasis it had brought to the reading and teaching of literature, and we printed articles related to it. But gradually we began to chafe at its exclusiveness, especially in the university, and its domineering influence on young writers. And at our fourth volume's completion in 1949 we initiated a basic change of policy. In our announcement's words:

Disturbed by the growing assumption that this, a non-creative period, is best devoted to criticism, the QRL feels it of prime urgency, precisely if this assumption be espoused, to do what it can to encourage creative work, especially among young writers. We intend, therefore, to devote our pages to poetry, drama, and fiction.

In one respect, however, we continued to print criticism: in our special issues featuring one writer. We had already published an all-Kafka and an all-Valéry number. Various motives prompted them. We thought it one of our primary functions to make significant writing of the world at large available; we wished to counteract the provincialism inevitable in all countries. Out of our sense that one of America's greatest strengths resides in its democratic absorption of all cultures, we were eager to carry on this counteraction. Then too we wanted to satisfy our own curiosity, to further our education and to share it with others. Accordingly, when we became aware of some major writer, especially one we judged inadequately known or understood, we proceeded to enlarge that awareness. With a guest editor or alone we planned an issue that, concentrating on one author (we did publish an all-English writers issue, mostly poets, and we often gave over large sections of the magazine to *groups of foreign writers: Japanese poets, Dutch, and others*), presented some of his key work, in translation if foreign, usually for the first time in English, accompanied by essays focused on that work but also on his fundamental, distinctive qualities. Thus we devoted issues to Marianne Moore, Ezra Pound, Leopardi, Kenneth Rexroth (an early long poem), and Hölderlin. We did not persist in this enterprise, in part because of an eventual change of format (the publishing of two large double issues a year, one poetry, one prose) and in part because later magazines took on such total issues as their chief occupation. Sim-

ilarly, though we had already printed large groups of poems by our poets, full-length plays, and long stories—we have always believed that a writer (and his reader) is best served by an ample display of his work that enables him to exhibit his idiom and the variety of his absorptions—in our announcement we officially established such policy.

Finally, the announcement said, "To encourage creativity, we expect, as we have done in the past, to present work which may not be as finished as some of our critics require, but which may contain some of the struggling vigor and excitement recent accepted work has often lacked." Having grown up in the Pound and Williams era, we naturally favored experimental work. And the magazine has continued to do so. However, it has been our practice, instinctive and otherwise, to veer away from what becomes established or fashionable. Victories that are too complete in the arts, we feel, after their first flush of conquest, tend to rigidify, become, as they exact of their adherents a limiting conformity, dangerously exclusive and self-defeating. Poetry is surely always larger than any one, even the most gifted, of its practitioners. And though that poet and his followers may have to regard themselves as the all-in-all, a magazine of our kind, we are convinced, cannot afford such narrowness. Consequently, as the Pound and Williams attitude became widespread, habitual, and even pious among its heirs, we had to admit, if reluctantly, that experiment in itself was not inevitably and automatically a good.

Under its increasingly tattered banner the avant-garde and free (if not shapeless) versifiers overran the terrain, and their instantly recognizable uniform became obligatory. What was generally forgotten was that when Pound uttered the motto, sacrosanct to so many, "Make it new," he also meant make it well. Nor is the new circumscribed by time alone. No one urged more strongly than Pound, with his internationalism of time as well as of place, the reviving of the best parts of the past, often the newest thing we have. Appreciating this good sense, we have printed exemplary writers, American and European, of earlier times in translation or with work not available before. And once

more we have stressed open hospitality to any work that reflects a dedication to ultimately painstaking art.

Our reservations do not intend, however, to depreciate the extraordinary, unmatched wealth of poetry produced in America in the last few decades; almost more poets, one is tempted to conclude, than readers. We may have no Yeats or Eliot in our midst, no spectacular Alps looming high above the other hills; but we do enjoy a most impressive nation-wide range. If, for the immense increase of people writing, the muck has been bound to increase, so has the fund of dedicated poets. And whatever buffeting it has meant to try to make one's way through this turbulent, crammed stream, QRL has been happy to participate in it, happy to do what it could to support the stream's liveliest stock. Our greatest regret in preparing our two anthologies, one of poetry and one of prose, is the pruning we have had to practice, the frustration at being obliged to bypass many excellent writers altogether and to limit our selection usually to a fraction of a writer's printed work. We are eager to express our gratitude to all our contributors for their generosity and to dedicate these anthologies to them; and to thank The Ingram Merrill Foundation, which in recent years has made payment possible. Private venture that QRL has always been, a barely supportable portable, wherever we have gone it has trundled after. In Wallace Stevens' words, "You carry the *Quarterly Review* around with you the way a Chinaman carries his bird." An itinerant nest for many migratory birds, it has found roosting place first at Chapel Hill, North Carolina, then in New Haven and Bard College, and most recently at Princeton. The magazine, though still independent, is affiliated with Princeton University's Program in Creative Writing, and we are thankful to the University and the English Department for various favors.

These anthologies will, we hope, provide a record not only of one magazine's history but, to some considerable degree, of the poetry and fiction that period produced. At the same time we have a higher hope that much of the work reprinted will convince the reader, as it does us, that, whatever its reliance on its

time for style and subject matter, it has escaped the contingencies time and place amount to and has converted its material by passion, gift, and honesty into something more, a lasting accomplishment that deserves our grateful attention now.

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# **Contemporary Poetry**

A Retrospective from the *Quarterly Review of Literature*

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Volume I

**E. E. CUMMINGS**

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## Poem

of all the blessings which to man  
kind progress doth impart  
one stands supreme i mean the an  
imal without a heart.

Huge this collective pseudobeast  
( sans either pain or joy )  
does nothing except preexist  
its hoi in its polloi

and if sometimes he's prodded forth  
to exercise her vote  
( or made by threats of something worth  
than death to change their coat

—which something as you'll never guess  
in fifty thousand years  
equals the quote and unquote loss  
of liberty my dears—

or even is compelled to fight  
itself from tame to teem )  
still doth our hero contemplate  
in raptures of undream

that strictly (and how) scienti  
fic land of supernod  
where freedom is compulsory  
and only man is god.

Without a heart the animal  
is very very kind  
so kind it wouldn't like a soul  
and couldn't use a mind

**JORGE CARRERA ANDRADE**

*Translated by Muna Lee*

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**Nothing Is Ours**

Every day the same tree surrounded  
by its murmurous green family.  
Every day the throb of an infant time  
which the pendulum rocks in the shadow.

The river deals without haste its transparent card.  
*Silence journeys toward an imminent sound.*  
With its small tender fingers  
The seed tears apart its swaddlings of mud.

Nobody knows why the birds exist  
nor your cask of wine, full moon,  
nor the poppy which burns itself alive,  
nor the woman of the harp, happy prisoner.

And one must clothe oneself with water, with docile webs,  
with things invisible and cordial  
and adorn oneself with frail spoil of doves,  
of rainbows, and of angels.

And must lave day's scanty gold  
counting its nuggets when the wounded sunset  
burns all its ships and night approaches  
captaining his dark tribes.

Then you speak, sky ;  
your lofty nocturnal city lights up.  
Your multitude with torches passes  
and gazes at us in silence.

All vain terrestrial forms :  
the youth who tends a statue in his bed,  
the woman with two bird-hearts,  
clandestine death disguised as an insect.

You cover the whole earth, dead man, fallen  
like a broken cage  
or a split shell  
or a monstrous spider's house of lime.

The dead are monks of the Order  
of subterranean anchorites.  
Is death utmost poverty  
or the original kingdom regained?

Man nourished on years and bodies of women :  
when god spurs you, you kneel,  
and only the memory of things  
lays a warmth now useless in your empty hands.

## Mined Zone

Your tresses are death in the tropics, the giant ants.  
Your voracious tresses like conflagration or shipwreck  
on the shores of your countenance with fruits and cool water.  
Your throat is an arbiter  
which separates two nude athletes.  
Your arms are two shivering swimmers  
and in your hands move two patrols that escort and serve you.  
In your breast a balance trembles.  
In the roundness of your belly sleeps a backwater  
gyrating toward the whirlpool of your navel.  
There is a gazelle in your waist.  
In your hips, a horse.  
In your thighs, two swords and two stretching tigers.  
Your legs are two routes leading  
to twin plazas,  
and in your feet ten archers line up  
and there are two fish, two mosses, and two tongues.

4 · JORGE CARRERA ANDRADE

You bring an odor of islands  
or of monstrous flora with hairy spiders.  
Your voice draws along a river which winds among boulders  
and in your eyes howls a bitch in heat.  
Your body is disturbing as a harsh liquor  
—strong legs with fleece soft and alive,  
isthmus of your waist hung between two gulfs—  
your body modulated like a long shriek.  
From heel to forehead the tropic rises  
weighting large fruits in agile scales.  
Your clandestine presence impels me  
to the struggle of man with his ghost.

You are profound as weeping or conflagration,  
or the body of a beef skinned alive;  
or the defenseless back of the crazed traveller  
devoured by ants,  
or fever, or beasts that couple amid cactus,  
or blood racing in hot tumult,  
or the breathing of the carnation crushed  
by a huge bare foot.

I fulfill the secret  
will of the earth,  
forever shut within your sealed prison  
where dwell together guileless birds, a panther,  
and some hairy, secret beings  
that with wild herbs of the islands prepare  
the sweats and thistles  
of my thirsty daily death.

**THOMAS J. MERTON**

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## **Ariadne**

All through the blazing afternoon  
The hand drums talk together like locusts ;  
The flute pours out its endless, thin stream,  
Threading it in and out the clatter of sticks upon wood-blocks.  
Drums and bells exchange handfuls of bright coins,  
Drums and bells scatter their music, like pennies, all over the air,  
And see, the lutanist's thin hand  
Rapidly picks the spangling notes off from his wires  
And throws them about like drops of water.

Behind the bamboo blinds,  
Behind the palms,  
In the green, sundappled apartments of her palace  
Redslippered Ariadne, with a tiny yawn,  
Tosses a ball upon her roulette wheel.

Suddenly, dead north,  
A Greek ship leaps over the horizon, skips like a colt, paws the foam.  
The ship courses through the pasture of bright amethysts  
And whinnies at the jetty.  
The whole city runs to see :  
Quick as closing your hand  
The racing sail's down.  
Then the drums are stunned, and the crowd, exalted, cries :  
O Theseus ! O Grecian hero !

Like a thought through the mind  
Ariadne moves to the window.  
Arrows of light, in every direction,  
Leap from the armor of the black-eyed captain.  
Arrows of light  
Resound within her like the strings of a guitar.

## The Greek Women

The ladies in red capes and golden bracelets  
Walk like reeds and talk like rivers,  
And sigh like Vichy water in the doorways ;

And looks run down the land like colts,  
Race with the wind, (the mares', their mothers', lover)  
Down to the empty harbor.

All spine and sandal stand the willow women ;  
They shake their silver bangles  
In the olive light of clouds and windows,  
Talking, among themselves, like violins ;

And, opening their eyes wide as horizons,  
Seem to await the navy home from Troy.

No longer stand together, widow women !  
Give your glad ornaments to the poor,  
Make run the waterspeech of beads between your fingers :  
For Troy is burned, and Greece is cursed,  
The plague comes like a cloud,  
And all your men are sleeping in the alien earth  
But one.

And Clytemnestra, walking like a sleeper, stares.  
Beads and bracelets gently knifeclash all about her,  
Because the conqueror, the homecome hero,  
The soldier, Agamemnon,  
Bleeds in her conscience, twisting like a root.

## Some Bloody Mutiny

Some bloody mutiny opens up our earth  
With bitten furrow, and the share's deep drive;  
And in the breezy glitter of the sod,  
We're sown, like snapshots, by the sun.

Tackle of nerve and vein  
Sews tight the soul to our experimental flesh:  
Blood and lymph, the body's tailors,  
Display their zebra natures in our zoo of skin.

See where the pretty children curse the sea,  
Trading their pennies for the sun,  
Ripping the rind of Eden, monkey-handed!

Grown murderers rewind  
The manners of the firmament to fit  
Tricks of our clockwork treachery.  
We time our Easters by the rumpus  
In our dancehall arteries.

"The world's my photograph.  
The tick in my heart is not my brother's keeper."  
Says the radio in the throat:  
"The war's my mirror, and there's no Good Friday."

Yet heaven is given  
To ingrow in this flimsy cage of structures,  
Battle the ravage of our ordinary marrow,  
And flower for us  
Upon the bonebranch we made dead.

## The Regret

When cold November sits among the reeds like an unlucky fisher  
And ducks drum up as sudden as the wind  
Out of the rushy river,  
We slowly come, robbed of our rod and gun,  
Walking amid the stricken cages of the trees.

The stormy weeks have all gone home like drunken hunters,  
Leaving the gates of the grey world wide open to December.  
But now there is no speech of branches in these broken jails.  
Acorns lie over the earth, no less neglected  
Than our unrecognisable regret:  
And here we stand as senseless as the oaks,  
As dumb as elms.  
And though we seem as grave as jailers, yet we did not come to  
wonder  
Who picked the locks of the past days, and stole our summer.  
(We are no longer listeners for curious saws, and secret keys!)  
We are indifferent to seasons,  
And stand like hills, deaf.  
And never hear the last of the escaping year  
Go ducking through the bended branches like a leaf.

WALLACE STEVENS

---

# Repetitions of a Young Captain

## I

A tempest cracked on the theatre. Quickly,  
The wind beat in the roof and half the walls.  
The ruin stood still in an external world.

It had been real. It was something overseas  
That I remembered, something that I remembered  
Overseas, that stood in an external world.

It had been real. It was not now. The rip  
Of the wind and the glittering were real now,  
In the spectacle of a new reality.

## II

The people sat in the theatre, in the ruin,  
As if nothing had happened. The dim actor spoke.  
His hands became his feelings. His thick shape  
Issued thin seconds glibly gapering.  
Then faintly encrusted, a tissue of the moon  
Walked toward him on the stage and they embraced.

They polished the embracings of a pair  
Born old, familiar with the depths of the heart,  
Like a machine left running, and running down.

It was a blue scene washing white in the rain,  
Like something I remembered overseas.  
It was something overseas that I remembered.

III

Millions of major men against their like  
Make more than thunder's rural rumbling. They make  
The giants that each one of them becomes

In a calculated chaos: he that takes form  
From the others, being larger than he was,  
Accoutred in a little of the strength

That sweats the sun up on its morning way  
To giant red, sweats up a giant sense  
To the make-matter, matter-nothing mind,

Until this matter-makes in years of war,  
This being in a reality beyond  
The finikin spectres in the memory,

This elevation, in which he seems to be tall,  
Makes him rise above the houses, looking down.  
His route lies through an image in his mind:

My route lies through an image in my mind,  
It is the route that milky millions find,  
An image that leaves nothing much behind.

IV

If these were only words that I am speaking  
Indifferent sounds and not the heraldic-ho  
Of the clear sovereign that is reality,

Of the clearest reality that is sovereign,  
How should I repeat them, keep repeating them,  
As if they were desperate with a know-and-know,

Central responses to a central fear,  
The abode of the angels? Constantly,  
At the railway station, a soldier steps away,

Sees a familiar building drenched in cloud  
 And goes to an external world, having  
 Nothing of place. There is no change of place

Nor of time. The departing soldier is as he is,  
 Yet in that form will not return. But does  
 He find another? The giant of sense remains

A giant without a body. If, as giant,  
 He shares a gigantic life, it is because  
 The gigantic has a reality of its own.

## V

On a few words of what is real in the world  
 I nourish myself. I defend myself against  
 Whatever remains. Of what is real I say,

Is it the old, the roseate parent or  
 The bride come jingling, kissed and cupped, or else  
 The spirit and all ensigns of the self?

A few words, a memorandum voluble  
 Of the giant sense, the enormous harnesses  
 And writhing wheels of this world's business,

The drivers in the wind-blows cracking whips,  
 The pulling into the sky and the setting there  
 Of the expanses that are mountainous rock and sea;

And beyond the days, beyond the slow-foot litters  
 Of the nights, the actual, universal strength,  
 Without a word of rhetoric—there it is.

A memorandum of the people sprung  
 From that strength, whose armies set their own expanses.  
 A few words of what is real or may be

Or of glistening reference to what is real,  
 The universe that supplements the manqué,  
 The soldier seeking his point between the two,

The organic consolation, the complete  
 Society of the spirit when it is  
 Alone, the half-arc hanging in mid-air

Composed, appropriate to the incomplete,  
 Supported by a half-arc in mid-earth.  
 Millions of instances of which I am one.

## VI

And if it be theatre for theatre,  
 The powdered personals against the giants' rage,  
 Blue and its deep inversions in the moon

Against gold whipped reddened in big-shadowed black,  
 Her vague "Secrete me from reality",  
 His "That reality secret itself",

The choice is made. Green is the orator  
 Of our passionate height. He wears a tufted green,  
 And tosses green for those for whom green speaks.

Secrete us in reality. It is there  
 My orator. Let this giantness fall down  
 And come to nothing. Let the rainy arcs

And pathetic magnificences dry in the sky.  
 Secrete us in reality. Discover  
 A civil nakedness in which to be,

In which to bear with the exactest force  
 The precisions of fate, nothing fobbed off, nor changed  
 In a beau language without a drop of blood.

**JEAN GARRIGUE**

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**Old Haven**

Directions that you left  
Which told me how I could  
Amid those cultured streets describe  
My rude impulse to you,  
Now turn within my head,  
Signs tangled while I sought  
Good milkmen who could set me straight.

As those on bicycles  
Who asked me was I lost  
And moldy houses that concurred  
With cornices to bless,  
All proved such lesson of  
Love's reassuring depths.

The churches of the place  
And dear pastured squares  
Like museum objects borrowed  
An ancient air to please  
And dim old gentlemen  
Like robin goodmen winked  
Till unicorns were sprightly dogs.

Now absent from you, dear,  
My fatuous joy declares  
How love may change a city, give  
Glee to horses pulling  
Loads, to gutters virtue  
And to salesmen, grace.

For smile so sweetly those  
Tottering cupolas, old  
Curbs in my enamoured thought (where  
Spongy Florida steals  
The stale New England air),  
I ponder on love's strength,

So cunning when direct,  
So roguish when sincere!  
If dogs may charm because you're there,  
Drugstores infatuate,  
And meanest citizens  
Like saints from niches step  
To guide me to your goodness and to luck.

## JOHN MALCOLM BRINNIN

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### Among Old Letters

These folios of artless recollection  
 Fall from my hands as easily as days:  
 The fractions of an outlived time  
 That makes fine motives seem mere transiciencies . . .  
 Though postmark:love and postmark:death endure,  
 In the letters of dead friends, no purpose holds  
 More than their dearest emphasis  
 To make mere signature the gift of worth.

A broken generation knows its death  
 By letters in a box: by summers spent  
 On coasts of war among the predatory birds  
 Whose lesson, like a conqueror's descent,  
 Outspoke the extravagant anger of the logic  
 That wanted time to live, yet knew a way to die.

"From the first we were excellent and clear"—the words  
 Apologetic in their vehemence  
 Remind me classic heads speak from a dust  
 In whose corruption pride is the least  
 Of ornament. I would not for their remembrance  
 Cut stone nor figured stick, nor trace on air  
 The metaphysics of nostalgia.  
 The tribute of their being cancels grief  
 Whose breath in wise astonishment  
 Sang at the end for life,  
 As though, among the choices of belief,  
 Vision and object wedded finally,  
 They might for the courage of looking backward see  
 Mortality is immortality.

As music in another room instructs  
The careless listener, their absence makes  
Peripheral echoes of such constancy  
My actions are enjoined though nothing speaks  
To answer or approve but stark estrangement.  
Involved with individual darkness now  
These fragments from their summery passage show  
Conviction lifts even the hand long spent.

Another day, another doubt, impales  
Survivors in a new astonishment  
Where in the fables of the dead, rock-face  
And jutting finger lecture to the clouds;  
Impoverished as the symbols of this time,  
The noble stance will not redeem  
Ambitions in the letters of our dead,  
Nor fine distinctions among crooked stones  
Give public character to private bones.  
Death is that contribution read  
Where the various hand, the common signature,  
Chalk blueprints on the mountains  
Of one face whose knowledge is the world.

Volume II

**RAFAEL ALBERTI**

*Translated by Lloyd Mallan*

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## **Chaplin's Sad Speech**

My gloves and cravat!

Cravat, please, and gloves!

A butterfly ignores the death of tailors,  
the drift of sea along shop windows.

Gentlemen, I'm 900,000 years of age.

Oh!

I was a child before the fish were functioning,  
when geese said no mass,

nor the snail assailed the cat,

We play at cat and mouse, young lady.

Sir, the saddest thing on earth are clocks:

11, 12, 1, 2 o'clock.

A passerby will die at 3 exactly.

You, moon, are you not scared?

You, moon, of the long late taxis,

soot-black firemen's moon.

The skyline of the city is burning,

a suit similar to my own lies loathed alone along  
the countryside.

Suddenly, my age is 25.

Because it's snowing, snowing

and my body becomes a driftwood hovel

into which I invite you to rest, wind,

though it is now too late to sup of stars.

But we can dance, lost tree.

A waltz for the wolves,

for the dream of the hen  
    without claws of cunning.  
But now my cane has strayed from me.  
How sad to think of it alone in all the world.  
My cane!

My hat, my cuffs!  
My gloves and shoes!

The sorriest bone, my love, is the clock:  
11, 12, 1, 2 o'clock.

Exactly 3—  
evaporates a naked corpse inside the pharmacy.

## Goodbye to the Lost Lights

If it is the whistling of a young lad making the branches shine  
and reviving from dream those balconies by a swallow improvised  
    to instrument the airs,  
those airs buried in harps that the soft rains suddenly bring forth,  
then from skies that seek and never find let my death deliberately  
    be discharged.

Who was it deceived me inflaming his soul upon the heights where  
    voices now are flutterings of a submerged bird?

While all these nights drown in repentance for having devised frozen  
    phantoms.

Bid me adieu three times from the darkest places.

That's all that I ask.

Because I am not quite sure if I knew you beneath the water,  
or if she was awakened by the click of a stone against the hooves  
    of horses,  
or if she was given life by mirrors that discover the frost of scratched-  
    out eyes.

I forget—

oblivion and tears for the lights now believed to be definitively lost.

## Madrigal to a Streetcar Token

You are where the dauntless wind in rebellion  
     raises towers of light against my blood—  
 token, fresh flower,  
     cut from the balconies of streetcar.

Straight away you slip, justly smooth,  
     your petal latent in name and place,  
 to that center cut and closed by compromise.

And the rose burns not within you, nor in you  
     prevails the dead carnation,  
 the living contemporary violet itself  
 from the book that journeys in somebody's jacket.

## Song

Sucking milk from a pastoral poem,  
 the little bull was sucking.

As flowers blossomed the eyes of the bull  
 becoming the eyes of a maiden.

Now that you're a bull, my child,  
 slash at me with your little horns.

You'll find somewhere within me  
 another bull unborn.

(Then turned into grass the mother  
 while the bull became a bull of water.)

**WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS**

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**The Words Lying Idle**

## Summary of a Year's Verse

The fields parched, the leaves  
 drying on the maples, the birds' beaks  
 gaping! if it would rain,  
 if it would only rain! Clouds come up,  
 move from the west and from the south  
 but they bring no rain, heat and dry winds  
 — the grass is curled, brown and brittle underfoot.  
 the foot leaves it broken. The roads are dust.

But the mind is dust also  
 and the eyes burn from it. They burn more  
 from restless nights, from the full moon shining  
 on a dry earth than from lack of rain.  
 But the rain, if it fell, would ease the mind  
 more than the grass, the mind would  
 be somewhat appeased against this dryness  
 and the death implied.

**The Bitter World of Spring**

On a wet pavement the white sky recedes  
 mottled black by the inverted  
 pillars of the red elms,  
 in perspective, that lift the tangled

net of their desire hard into  
 the falling rain. And brown smoke  
 is driven down, running like  
 water over the roof of the bridge-

keeper's cubicle. And, as usual,  
 the fight as to the nature of poetry —  
 Shall the philosophers capture it? —  
 is on. And, casting an eye

down into the water, there, announced  
 by the silence of a white  
 bush in flower, close  
 under the bridge, the shad ascend,

midway between the surface and the mud,  
 and you can see their bodies  
 red-finned in the dark  
 water headed unrelenting, upstream.

## Lament

What face, in the water,  
 distinct  
 yet washed by an obscurity?

The willow supplants its own  
 straggling rafters  
 (of winter branches)

by a green radiance. Is it  
 old or young?  
 But what this face

reflected beyond the bare structures  
 of a face  
 shining from the creaseless

water? A face  
overlaid with evil, brown water;  
the good insecure, the evil

sure beyond the buried sun. Lift  
it. Turn away.  
There was beside you

but now another face,  
with long nose and clear blue eyes,  
secure . . .

## To a Lovely Old Bitch

Sappho, Sappho, Sappho! initiate,  
hand-matron to Astarte,  
you praised delicate flowers

and likened them  
to virgins of your acquaintance.  
Let them grow, thank God!  
outside the cemetery barrier —

Burials for cash,  
the shares ample security  
against — ?

The Painted Admiral  
on a milkweed cluster,  
untrampled,  
keep you company. And pale  
blue chickory, frilled  
petals —

Butter and eggs,  
lady's slipper, close beside  
the rust of the dump-heap.

Rust, broken fruit-baskets  
and bits of plaster,  
painted on one side,

from dismantled bedrooms.

## The Dish of Fruit

The table describes  
nothing: four legs, by which  
it becomes a table. Four lines  
by which it becomes a quatrain,

the poem that lifts the dish  
of fruit, if we say it is like  
a table — how will it describe  
the content of the poem?

## A History of Love

1.

And would you gather turds  
for your grandmother's garden?  
Out with you then, dust-pan and broom;  
she has seen the horse passing!

Out you go, bold again  
as you promise always to be.  
Stick your tongue out at the neighbors  
that her flowers may grow.

2.

Let me stress your loveliness  
and its gravity

its counter-hell: Reading  
finds you on the page

where sight enlarges  
to confound the mind and only

a child is frightened  
by its father's headgear

while a bird jigs and old Bunk  
Johnson blows his horn.

3.

With the mind and with the hand,  
by moral turn and prestidigitation  
fan the smoldering flame of love  
which in the dull coals is all but gone.

Between one and the other transpose  
wrong and rouse  
the banished smile that used to spring  
at once at meeting!

Rewaken love, again, again! to warm  
the chilly heart and bring fresh flowers.  
For flowers are not, as we are not  
of that stuff whence we both are got.

## The Goat

Having in the mind thought  
to have died,  
to that celebrant  
among trees, aging (with the season)  
foreign to sight —

in a field a goat, befouled,  
shagbellied, indifferent to  
the mind's ecstasies,  
flutters its blunt tail

and turns a vacant face  
lop-eared, sleepy-eyed to stare,  
unblinking, meditant —  
listless  
in its assured sanctity.

## Sunflowers

There's a sort of  
multibranching sunflower  
blooms hereabouts  
when the leaves begin  
first to fall. Their  
heads lean in the rain  
about an old man who,  
stumbling a little,  
solicitously carries in  
his tomatoes from

the fallen vines, green  
in one basket and, in  
the other shining reds.

## Address

The tree lay down  
on the garage roof  
and stretched, You  
have your heaven,  
it said, go to it.

## The Mirrors

Is Germany's bestiality, in detail  
like certain racial traits,  
any more than a reflection of the world's

evil? Take a negative, take Ezra Pound  
for example and see  
how the world has impressed itself

there. It is as when with infra-red  
searching a landscape  
obscured to the unaided eye one discloses

the sea. The world is at its worst the  
positive to these foils,  
imaged there as on the eyes of a fly.

## Threnody

The Christian Coin —  
embossed with a dove and sword —  
is not wasted by war,

rather it thrives on it  
 and should be tossed  
 into the sea for the fish  
 to eye it as it falls  
 past the clutching fingers  
 of children —  
 for them to eye it  
 and sing, join in a choir  
 to rival the land and set  
 coral branches swaying:  
 Peace, peace to the oceans,  
 the dread hurricane die,  
 ice melt at the poles  
 and sharks be at rest!  
 as it drops, lost, to its grave.

## The Rare Gist

The young German poked his head  
 in at the door, handed me  
 an advertising leaflet for some  
*drug manufacturer and left,*

*coloring furiously, after a few  
 thickly spoken words. My  
 attention was sharply roused.  
 It seemed a mind well worth*

*looking into. And beneath that,  
 another layer, Phoenix  
 like. It was almost, I confess,  
 as though I envied him.*

## The Clouds II

Where are the good minds of past days, the unshorn?  
Villon, to be sure, with his  
saw-toothed will and testament? Erasmus  
who praised folly and

Shakespeare who wrote so that  
no schoolman or churchman could sanction him without  
revealing his own imbecility? Aristotle,  
shrewd and alone, an herb peddler?

They all, like Aristophanes, knew the clouds and  
said next to nothing of the soul's flight  
but kept their heads and died —  
like Socrates, Plato's better self, unmoved.

Where? They live today in their old state because  
of the pace they kept that keeps  
them now fresh in our thoughts, their  
relics, ourselves: Toulouse-Lautrec, the

deformed who lived in a brothel and painted  
the beauty of whores. These were  
the truth-tellers of whom we are the sole heirs  
beneath the clouds that bring

shadow and darkness full of thought deepened  
by rain against the clatter  
of an empty sky. But anything to escape humanity!  
Now it's spiritualism — again,

as if the certainty of a future life  
were any solution to our dilemma: how to get

published not what we write but what we would write were  
it not for the laws against libelous truth.

The poor brain unwilling to own the obtrusive body  
would crawl from it like a crab and  
because it succeeds, at times, in doffing that,  
by its wiles of drugs or other "ecstasies," thinks

at last that it is quite free — exulted, scurrying to  
some slightly larger shell some snail  
has lost (where it will live). And so, thinking,  
pretends a mystery! an unbodied

thing that would still be a brain — but no body,  
something that does not eat but flies by the propulsions  
of pure — what? into the sun itself, illimitably  
and exists so forever, blest, washed, purged

and at ease in non-representational bursts  
of shapeless flame, sentient (naturally!) — and keeps  
touch with the earth (by former works) at least.  
The intellect leads, leads still! Beyond the clouds.

## The Clouds III

(SCHERZO)

I came upon a priest once at St. Andrew's  
in Amalfi in crimson and gold brocade riding  
the clouds of his belief.

It happened that we tourists had intervened  
at some mid-moment of the ritual —  
tipped the sacristan or whatever it was.

No one else was there — porphyry and alabaster,  
the light flooding in scented  
with sandalwood — but this holy man

jiggling upon his buttocks to the litany  
chanted, in response, by two kneeling altar boys!  
I was amazed and stared in such manner

that he, caught half off the earth  
in his ecstasy — though without losing a beat —  
turned and grinned at me from his cloud.

## The Clouds IV

With each, dies a piece of the old life, which he carries,  
a precious burden, beyond! Thus each  
is valued by what he carries and that is his soul —  
diminishing the bins by that much  
unless replenished.

It is that which is the brotherhood:  
the old life, treasured. But if they live?  
What then?

The clouds remain  
— the disordered heavens, ragged, ripped by winds  
or dormant, a caligraphy of scaly dragons and bright moths,  
of straining thought, bulbous or smooth,  
ornate, the flesh itself (in which  
the poet foretells his own death); convoluted, lunging upon  
a pismire, a conflagration, a . . . . .

## KENNETH REXROTH

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### Two Poems

A fervor parches you sometimes  
 And you hunch over it, silent,  
 Cruel, and timid; and sometimes  
 You are frightened with wantonness.  
 And give me your desperation.  
 Mostly we lurk in our coverts,  
 Protecting our spleens, pretending  
 That our bandages are our wounds.  
 But sometimes the wheel of change stops;  
 Illusion vanishes in peace;  
 And suddenly pride lights your flesh —  
 Lucid as diamond, wise as pearl —  
 And your face, remote, absolute,  
 Perfect and final like a beast's.  
 It is wonderful to watch you,  
 A living woman in a room  
 Full of frantic, sterile people,  
 And think of your naked buttocks  
 Under your velvet evening dress,  
 And the beautiful fire spreading  
 From your sex, burning flesh and bone,  
 The unbelievably complex  
 Tissues of your brain all alive  
 Under your coiling, splendid hair.

\* \* \*

I like to think of you naked.  
 I put your naked body  
 Between myself alone and death.  
 If I go into my brain  
 And set fire to your sweet nipples,

To the tendons beneath your knees,  
 I can see far before me.  
 It is empty there where I look,  
 But at least it is lighted.  
 I know how your shoulders glisten,  
 How your face sinks into trance,  
 And your eyes like a sleepwalker's,  
 And your lips of a woman  
 Cruel to herself.

I like to  
 Think of you clothed, your body  
 Shut to the world and self contained,  
 Its wonderful arrogance  
 That makes all women envy you.  
 I can remember every dress,  
 Each more proud than a naked nun.  
 When I go to sleep my eyes  
 Close in a mesh of memory.  
 Its cloud of intimate odor  
 Dreams instead of myself.

#### FEBRUARY 1944

Yvor Winters' book arrives on the anniversary of the day Marie and I met each other. We read it aloud in the evening, while troop trains move in the railroad yard beneath our hill.

Today the Giant Weapon came,  
 Fresh from the press, and fresh  
 From fifteen years' growth and decay —  
 The annual sweet flesh  
 Of plums in the stunning summer,  
 Tightening each powdered line;  
 The sterile heat of autumn;  
 Lashing rain and sharp wine  
 And talk above disordered books

In winter evenings;  
 The long, wet, forgetful walks  
 Under the swallows' wings,  
 Trillium past the orchard's edge;  
 Dogs drifting to old age;  
 Youth sifting over the children;  
 Time yellowing the page.  
 The Giant Weapon? The pattern?  
 The mind? The obdurate  
 Flesh? Or is it perhaps Janet  
 And you, consecrate  
 In the duality Plato said  
 Was the creative source  
 Of the many? — weapon or tool —  
 The wielded sovran force  
 Waste nor ruin shall overcome.  
 Flesh dead in lethal rain;  
 And the vain mind dissolved in hate;  
 Kisses at the dark train;  
 And children born of dead fathers;  
 And pressed flowers and blood  
 Stained snapshots — the creative will  
 Stirs the seed from the mud —  
 And the lost world we hunted, each  
 In proud flesh or tough mind,  
 Found, in doubled vision no cost  
 Of time or death shall blind.

**NORMAN MACLEOD**

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**Remembrance of the Szeks, Paris, 1932**

The green light sent to prison, the peril-lettered  
Pernod and reef of blood, yellowed her eyelid:  
She was strict to reason — for Szek had gone  
Across the Belgian lines from Austria betrayed  
To the gray shores, England, and windy surf of waves.

The news traveled, stiff papers filed in proof  
Of treason's million-wedded the torn tongue speechless  
And bloody foot that would not take pain's walk  
Ever in Europe's forever headless spring again.

Counting her stern stitch in the canvas sheet  
and breaking saltless bread like lifted rock,  
Thought of the spastic mother in whose care  
Police dogs nosed and sleep. The gray moat's garden.  
Regaled their shelter with the sawed-off snarl  
That cut beyond the nineteenth century night  
Whenever gendarmes outside struck the street.

Szek wrote from Cairo in his pinched Sanskrit  
Signed X, and airplanes pricked or surfaced  
In hurry broken with splintered wing—  
British, and another wounded war remake  
In umbrage at its last impenitent remark.

The secret British service and French police  
Ever around them and within their grief:  
She trembled in yellow lamplight of her wine  
That was reaching up and down the father's vein  
Whose war would come again from dark to dark.