



**Versuche: 20**

**Early Papers: Juvenilia  
[1984-1990]**

# Part One



## Temple

Temple, my son, why do you  
sit like so?

arms crossed

body limp...

I know I really should help

you but

your little waist fits so well

within the light confines of the seat

and I have no desire to disrupt perfection.

Temple, you are perfection!

O apparition of my past!

## **The First Morning**

Shadows trembling, silent cries,  
Mystic goblin steals my clothes,  
I escape into the corner,  
Try to shield my tortured eyes,  
Try to warm my freezing toes.

Pleasure echoes, silent call,  
Bird of passion careless flies  
I soon spy you in the center,  
Curled into a naked ball,  
Lonely, luring, sapphire eyes.

\*

Darting glances, silent kiss,  
Shred of light breaks through the floor,  
We collide inside the armor,  
Jointed fire, moment's bliss,  
Escapes and burns the iron door.

Ancient highway, silent wing,  
Griffin rises, waters glow,  
I fall soft into your cushion,  
Skin awakens, bodies sing,  
Mouths can speak and fingers grow.

Stars maneuver, silent climb,  
Rubber trees are by winds blown,  
We soon melt into the moisture,  
Breaths sustain and motions rhyme,  
The sky and hell a monotone.

Ivory heaven, silent cry,  
Ocean seeks a word in vain,  
We retire into the vapor,

Speeding through the violent sky,  
Pelted by the stagnant rain.

Stark confusion, silent fall,  
Waxes freeze and candles die,  
We try hard to run together,  
Legs entangle, falter, fall,  
Upon the ice and gravel lie.

\*

Drowning thunder, silent fight,  
Ill-bred creatures gasp and wheeze,  
I try hard to break the metal,  
Meet the walls in starless night,  
Rivers bleed from hands and knees.

Passions slumber, silent night,  
Drafts and roaches scurry, run,  
I awake without your presence,  
Grounded, now a skyless kite,  
Longing for the winds of one.

## **Little Governments**

little governments  
are her attractive blue eyes –  
sapphire confusion

## These Crying Streets

*"Petals on a wet, black bough" - Ezra Pound*

I'm pretty sure that it was music I heard  
while slowly wandering down  
these naked midnight streets  
and I 'm pretty sure that if this had happened earlier  
when there was no need for streetlights  
and no time for dreaming  
that I would never have sensed it

– somewhere in this city  
he lies down and eyes  
the four walls of his room  
the place he was so proud of  
when he was so young  
and he wonders why he hasn't yet moved

– somewhere in this city  
she scolds the ancient  
typewriter as if it  
is the devil that's keeping her  
from her prospective nimbus  
and she wonders if she 's dead already

– somewhere in this city  
he examines the razor  
intently as if he  
expects the blade to respond  
to his questioning gaze  
and he wonders what he will see next

– somewhere in this city  
she waits within the  
confines of her sheets  
for his figure to appear

at the bedroom door  
and she wonders if he really exists

and though I 'm not too sure what one would call it  
whether or not it was jazz  
or something more classical  
I do know that something echoed beautifully that night  
throughout the cluttered alleys  
and over the tortured streets  
and I'm pretty sure that it was music

– and somewhere in this city  
he walks a crooked  
line down a lonely  
side street babbling about  
some stupid song

but he never really wonders about tomorrow

these crying streets are his only concern

## **Beside the Trestle**

Inside my head no thoughts will wrestle,  
Inside my hand will lie the flower,  
It will be great beside the trestle.

And from my purple lips, a whistle  
Will taint my final breath, so dour,  
Inside my head no thoughts will wrestle.

Around me crowds will twist and bustle,  
Catch a glimpse, then away they 'll cower,  
It will be great beside the trestle.

The crowd won't find a smoking pistol,  
Just passions turned a yellow sour,  
Inside my head no thoughts will wrestle.

Inside my palm, a poison thistle  
Will keep the tale of my last hour,  
It will be great beside the trestle.

The eyes will miss the grand epistle,  
As the roots hang dry from the brittle flower,  
Inside my head no thoughts will wrestle,  
It will be great beside the trestle.



## Four Years, “The Age Demanded”

### I. TRENCHES

Blood, blood,  
The fire's on the front line,  
But they all fought in any case,

And !myriads of them fell to pass,  
(They never wanted it that way).

To the trenches! A bitter draft,  
Though all their eyes did search the land,  
Few did know to where it was,  
To whom it was their guns were aiming,  
To where it was  
    this road they're paving  
Would leave them;  
                                  if there was an end,  
And if this end was still worth saving.

Blood, blood,  
There was blood on the front line,  
But the blood caked thick  
    in the smoke-filled trenches  
And the grass did make its way.

(Their eyes could never hope to catch  
The crook that took their last.)

## II. THE FAT MAN SPEAKS

The Fat Man adjusted his seat again  
And spoke this time with fierce intent:

“Fear, fear is what splits the rocks  
And time, time is the carver’s tool!  
Create the seed, but make it aware  
That it, the ‘moment’s monument’  
Should be a growing being, intent  
To strong take sprout, take to the air;  
That it should yearn to rule the sky  
As it does believe no other seed dare!

“Yes, fear, fear should be the hand  
That lifts the branches to the sky;  
The fear of an arid seed should be  
The fuel that assures its potency;  
Fear and you won’t sleep too well  
But nothing you say will meet regret;  
Fear, with fear, and all you said  
Will become a ‘moment’s monument’.”

Sp spake the corpulent being, content  
Till he twisted his aching rump again.

### III . TWO POEMS

Red, red, a verbal intensity  
Flows from your mouth like juice, like wine,  
Pounds the ground until the framework shakes,  
Tortures the bricks until dust dribbles down.

Limp, limp, you abuse your crutches  
Your complex words, for all that they're worth;  
Polysyllabic, your rhetorical thunder  
Is painted prattle, a starved man's verse.

Down, down, thus I can't admire  
Your proud creation, your opaque front,  
For your roots, as impressive as they are in numbers,  
Are composed of wax, lost to the sun.

\* \* \*

You always speak with fragments of knowledge,  
Of genius! I see it fill your eyes, ·  
But disordered, your train never fails to falter,  
Crashes! Littering the mountainside.

But working quick, your fingers, your hands  
Collected, could turn this rail-side death;  
Pieced, glued, and properly jointed,  
Your creation could breath as the sun itself.

So lose your breath, but spend it well,  
Then time won't make such bitter bounds;  
Your speed shouldn't mar your smooth progression,  
Create! The balance is in the clouds .



## V. THE POET'S CORNER

Once again they enter my shop,  
The old poets, to read from their “works”,  
To mumble from behind the podium.

I see the actors,  
    freezing outside the window,  
Waiting for the bus, trying hard  
To blow warmth into their hands.

The sight of the actors  
    becomes most unbearable  
As the poets take their seats.

*I strike the nail and am not idle;  
My kin I lay to rest.*

The sunlight shifts on the flowerpot  
And my attention is drawn  
    once again to the window.  
Square jaws, bright eyes – the actors’ discussion;  
Trying desperately to forget  
    this part of the plan,  
Waiting, as the poets each take turn  
To mumble from behind the podium;  
Mumble until the language  
Is not English anymore.

*I strike the nail and am not idle;  
My kin I lay to rest.*

A sea, a sea it is  
That drowns me. My ears  
Are lost among the voices of the poets,  
And my eyes among the fingerprints  
Slowly reproducing on the glass.

But the poets are always

invited to here  
To read of their conceits.

*I strike the nail and am not idle;  
My kin I lay to rest.*

I still feel arrogant  
among these beaten poets  
But only until  
The old bus leaves.

*The sky retires to the fold,  
This night I can't repress.  
Rage! Rage! I strike the nail!  
My kin I lay to rest.*

VI. ENVOI

Sleep, sleep,  
The sky is starting to smear,  
Leave me with my pillow.

Leave me lying on the floor,  
(I never wanted it this way).

Blue, blue,  
The eyes you hold so dear,  
She's waiting for you  
    on the steps of the cornerhouse,  
That great old house the sings when it rocks  
Whenever a hard wind blows.

Sleep, sleep,  
And she will soon come near.

## Sweetest

I really hated it when  
    she called me sweetest  
her mind was so elaborate  
    and I had neither the tools  
    nor the ability  
    to decipher it  
and so I really hated it when  
    she called me sweetest  
    (sweetest until then)

little birds laugh in the rafters  
    sing and lead  
    me high up  
    into the frame

little birds  
    perched on a crossbar  
    peck at the pillars

little birds  
    sing and  
    destroy  
the crystal fabric

sweetest sing  
the little birds



## Composed by the Waterfall

I felt the prostitute's cold dark hand  
move down my chest. In fury, in a heated rush,  
I struck her, the sight of her body  
so becoming inhuman, inescapable,  
I needed assurance. The rust on the bed,  
the angry gray of the walls, the street  
and streetlights, I  
was not of the elements. I  
was the conflict in case.  
Motion was my escape.

\* \* \*

By the waterfall it seems so far away,  
that incident, and yet  
correcting the time as it happens,  
as common as these actions are,  
creates no less than a scar, a blood vessel broken  
and never mended. I think of an image of Yeats,  
and how no sooner had I entered the room  
reflection! And memory  
bled into reality. Matter  
bled into matter. and once again  
the falcon couldn't hear the falconer.

Two histories for one second,  
and a whirlpool won't let me forget.

## Part Two



### Salutation

Nymphs, centaurs, fauns  
and other strange forms, danced on his forehead  
*and tickled the yarns, and tickled the yarns*  
until whiteness bled into the midnight  
and crawled alone until dawn.

And the horses galloped among the spires  
of black forest, on a dark promontory  
and the maiden sang, only whispers – sweet conspiracy!  
– this charming flesh, but beyond his grasp  
thus down to Kimmerian seas.

And what was this that had caught him there?  
but lunar intimations, piercing the evening air  
like red whips, that scarred in starless sleep?  
– the wail of raging oceans through the walls  
that had set his blood fire deep?

Or was it but whispers from the other room  
– that soul shuffling candles in his shadowless head  
needlessly thanking for compliments,  
tut then settling down to an exile's sleep  
but pleased, or should be, having ramped with the dead?

Then pondered further in his quivering bed  
– *or was it the sinner who weighed his breast?*  
but this fell short, unrealized  
for never before had ever met his eyes  
the vision to support such a lofty head!

Or was it the sinner who weighed his breast?  
– but missed, thought quite the opposite  
having never experienced what kind Phidias wrought  
in measurement, thus betrayed his thought  
of the finest song, but in its simplest caught:

*The winter scans its imperious skies  
it its thirst for blood and its bandit eyes  
– winter scolds, and the vulture cries!*  
Thus, thus inflicted by a cultured wound  
he pays faulty heed to the draw of the muse!

## **Wallflowers**

### **1. Dancers in Costume**

We saw the purple, red and gold  
flesh, that was  
profundity, through colored goggles.

## 2. Poem

*for Bob Myers*

Three pieces of crisp brown paper  
rest on your forehead. Fly, say to them,  
that they take to the sky, blind men.

This is autumn too. Once writ,  
the leaves may shuffle cross ground like ashes.

Though the moisture of our woman's breast  
may someday take them back again.

### 3. “Le Mot Juste”

1.

The gay tomcat poled  
ferry music, its hind  
legs the attraction.

2.

These furry limbs, once  
of mistresses, now  
of distant children.

3.

The boat escaped, around  
one corner, patiently  
the town realigned.

## Jessica

Jessica wheels around, not  
through air, through memory.  
This decaying surface rests on my mind  
troublesome, as if growing.  
This growth is in recognition  
until all is decayed, then it's gone.

What have you, that a lonely dancer  
slowly cuts plains, until light  
free in space, and time, instant  
and then drawn out, is subtracted.  
Crawling along, the desert is  
hard, quiet, but not lacking.

Tease, and then weave, into memory.  
The cloud is a white sheet – silhouette  
of body, dance at will! softly.  
In a second, fear hinders, don't  
worry! in the absence, ignorance.  
In decline, beauty snaps her reigns.

## **A Resurrection**

I

Crows feet set with the nail through it.

II

The bramble so thick,  
one could almost see eyes.



## **One Man**

Yellow bags of green light  
appreciated

The dog is dead, only  
uninviting

## Poem

The ego  
makes-insects  
of humans,  
                  the  
tiny legs, play at my forehead  
  
like lover's tips, rattling  
  
two frozen stars, in a burnt out walnut shell.

## Otter

*for Andrea Steinbusch*

I

If there were asps, I  
wouldn't see  
white dresses,  
cannons, not  
cloud  
their naive pursuit.

II

In an eye's pace, could  
be caught  
an otter.

Among stones, slick  
among,  
this form

would be there, and all ways  
dumb.



## Defense of a Mystic

“Trees? no  
government was built on  
these,” so  
said,  
        whv  
snakes inhibit passing?

...it  
circled the chandelier, played  
nostalgia on the piano,  
                                coaxed  
mediums,  
        was  
perhaps green?

        “Clay nails, the light  
bends through this ocean;  
and escaped the light, discovers  
no current  
sensation,  
        thus  
forward.”  
Tease in the

wind,  
banished the night to relics, brought  
room to mean, then  
no room.

Huddled under tight.

## Fragments

What pretty sand. Stay by me,  
I've crossed my hands across my chest,

in April. Kyongchon  
told me I was pretty. In Korea,

I am not in Korea.  
Walking on the beach with you Heather.

Chowder house, we passed it up.  
Frail bird. Sneeze. That was Ezra  
Pound. Where are we?

Drew Gardner, wearing ratty white  
sneakers suddenly  
appears from around the chowder

house. That Asian boy  
told me I was pretty. Korean boy told me  
I was pretty.

green mist. Lisa

Steal. That's how the poem  
ends! That was Ezra Pound. Bird.  
Drew is carving an orange

for Heather.

Jungle, the low  
green mist. Toucans' colors

in my cereal  
ball! End

fact. Try religion?  
Drew appears from behind the chowder

house. He hums.  
Imagine Drew humming.

Gods float.

## Seaside Heights, New Jersey – 1957

This presents, after a particular growth:

Charging, sea-wise, the fragrance of life,  
She, content, a new understanding,  
The sky, caught, above the lighthouse green,  
The sands, a service on this cold estate,

Her slippers, worn from seagull watching...

She could now sees families slumbering on the beach  
Twelve weeks ago when winter was away...

Her eyes, hollow and dry, and gray,  
And the wind through the reeds only whistling.



*from* **The Aeneid**

Aurora rose in the meantime;  
surging, she left Ocean.

Through the gates

the forms of the select youths, bathed  
in light, went

with thick nets, and tipped spears, and  
then

the Massylian horsemen! the sharp-nosed strength

of hounds! All forth  
in a straight rush.

The queen

dallies

in her chamber.

The foremost of chieftains of Carthage, those first

men, await

her

at her doorstep, and

arrogant in gold and scarlet, foaming at  
the chain bit, kicking dust, her steed

also stands.

Finally, before the  
hot crowd, the queen makes her entrance.

Enclosed in Sidonian cloak, with colored  
fringe, her hair

is bound in gold;

she wears a golden quiver,

and a golden brooch holds fast

a purple cape.

With like pride,  
beside her Asanius goes, bouncing with big glee,

beside him the towering  
Phrygian cohorts, and  
in that group, he most splendid,

before other most graceful  
Aeneas, who comes

with his line of troops, which he joins to hers  
an ally.

Just as

Apollo, when he deserts Lycia, in winter  
Xanthus'  
floods

frost over-ridden. Just as

that god, who visits the land of his mother  
Delos;  
just as he churns the chorus, just as he sparks

the dance! Cretans and Dryopes  
take part in this dance!

the Agythyrsi

with painted flesh! round  
the alters. Just as

Apollo, who walks

in silence

the high ridges of Cynthus, and bands  
his hair, with twisting



perhaps

a great blond lion from the mountain.

## Part Three



### **Pierrot: an entertainment**

*A creative writing class. Pierrot is among the students, as is Maria, and Rob Fuller. There are six other students, three girls, three boys.*

Teacher (intimidated): Pierrot,  
the lines you submit...  
let me be more subtle with it.  
I am not able to understand  
the relation of a Thanksgiving turkey  
to Genghis Khan's conquering of China, true  
the footnote here clears  
"I am the phosphorescent appleseed of North New Jersey,"  
from its obscurity, eh...  
What I mean is, eh...to start  
from something simpler yet, eh...Are you  
in love? Let's start with that.

Maria: Yes,  
he's in love.

Pierrot: Love!  
What do you know of love! And you,  
what do you know of poetry!  
(pause)  
I should not be required to explain myself.  
(pause)  
What was dealt from my unconscious is what you sensed.  
(pause)  
A poet isn't required to "clarify" it!  
(finally)  
I am insulted, to say the least, by this academic

insolence.

Teacher: I am sorry.

I was just wondering, innocently,  
whether you could explain the text to me,  
that I enjoy it more! My wife and I  
have taken to enjoying your texts,  
the recurring motif of the phosphorescence,  
it has us berating our ears  
that we cannot hear you better,  
in our years. Don't provide us  
with the clues  
if you don't think you must.  
If the pleasure is in this purest state  
unadulterated, unfootnoted, pure, and  
as you say  
straight from the unconscious, well, then ...  
I do like your unconscious, Pierrot!  
(I don't say that often about men, you know.)

Pierrot: Thank you, sir.

Maria (aside): What a lot of bullshit!

Teacher (sensing her chagrin): Yes, and...

Mr. Fuller has something  
to offer, a monologue in formal iambs, concerning  
the library in Alexandria, I believe,  
and its burning?

Rob (nervous): There is a little Greek in it.  
"Toyos ubumbos" it means "burning hair"

The building housed upon the Nile  
not books, but papyrus  
intended to run the centuries' mile  
and bring the classics to us

upon which teacher and student smile  
knowing the wisdom carried thus.

But storms are oft in Egypt now  
as then, and once a gust  
betrayed the spine of a palm, and down  
the tree fell, as it must  
leveling man and many a cow,  
kicking up a whole mess of dust.

And there for days did lay the tree.  
One day it did combust,  
left out, so far from liquid sea,  
so dead and dry it was,  
burned down the whole damn library:  
Apollo, Athena, Mercury, Zeus.

The elders, when they saw it burn  
created quite a fuss:  
“Why,” they struggled then to learn,  
are the gods so mad at us?”  
Till one should raise his voice, discern  
the truth of it: toyos ubumbos.

Teacher (nervously, looking to the class):  
Refreshing, er, in its ...humor?

Student 1: The juxtaposition  
of Nile imagery to Greek mythology,  
the dialects of two national regions  
wedded in such a text as this,  
the ending, which recalls  
Mauberley, the Wasteland, what else?  
The rhythm, which swoops down and takes  
the reader, as in an ecstatic, living monsoon!  
Not very  
modern though,

is it?

Student 2: Three Chinese  
laundrymen giving  
paper tea cups  
to children.

Student 3: Recalls  
Auden in a fashion most commendable.

Student 4 (obviously in love with Rob): I liked it, too.

Student 3: The coupling  
of ancient motifs with modern concerns is a lot like  
Auden!

Student 4: Yeah.

Student 3: The meter...the meter... Have you ever read  
“The Unknown Citizen”, a poem I believe  
written by W.H.  
Auden?

Rob: No.

Student 4: No?

Students 5 and 6 (suddenly, in unison):  
Ooooooh. I don't know.  
It's nice. Hee hee hee hee.

Teacher (baffled): Well,  
thank you Mr. Fuller.  
Eh, Pierrot, you  
look as you have  
something to say.



Pierrot: There being no fine line here  
between idiots and dingbats  
I would like to offer my suggestions  
as to the improvement of this poem.  
Seeing as you have... not a tender subject,  
not something one should be too wishy-washy about,  
not something one should even have to be too subtle about,  
why not, hmmm...  
in the interest of a better aesthetic product,  
a poem one could, in a sense, read,  
why not, hmmm.... Why not make it  
shorter! You see,  
I understand poetry  
to be something someone says quick, as if  
in a scream! Something  
curt,  
digestible...quickly,  
expansive  
in the moment, an object, even,  
in space. Eh... Why not  
the last two  
verses. Lop 'em off!  
The poem would be the better for it.  
(suddenly)  
You'd have two for the price of one, too!  
(then, as if defeated)  
I'd do it.

Rob (slowly convinced): Hmmm...yes,  
an idea.  
(growing excited)  
I can see this poem turned  
into something even more sincere!

Pierrot: You are quite a good poet.

There is a long pause here, the other students quite stunned. Then, en masse, they begin to complement Rob and Pierrot, timidly at first, then excessively.

Alone, Maria observes. As the noise dies down, she delivers her final, disgusted, aside...

Sad shit.

...at which all action freezes, and the chorus begins.

“Three, it’s a magic number...”