



Versuche: 20

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

Set 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 .

IV. Rats

We are as rats, meant to stock
The bitter morsels left behind
By a day's worth of constant journey. We are meant

To escape to a corner, a soundless
Lightless nest, and then to fill our stomachs
Until rendered immobile. We are meant

To fear the tracks. The tracks ! The cool
Gray steel of the railroad tracks,
The given enemy, given to us

When we were pink and ignorant.
 But I can see.
I can see my father, leaping out of the darkness.
He knew, "No answer

Is no answer," and it was he
That braved the tracks, kissed
The tracks, leapt

Until it felt like hell. Until it felt
"Real." He, the light of Prometheus' torch
Feared the corners as much as the steel.

We are as rats, meant to bite the darkness,
Meant to bite the bitter darkness –
Ash that cakes at our lips .

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.

Set 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.

Elegy

Emaciated dog, circling

raging, what

 bowel seeks
to spoil the earth?

Caught through morning's veil.

And there,

 desperate for sun.
picking flowers, and then
 holding them,
 what
god knows it?

What

god in the hayfields, hunting
viands?

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 petty.

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.

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

fingers, in green fronds
 (though his spears
make chatter on his shoulder):
 just so goes

Aeneas:
nimble as that god, with like glory on his face.

And when they have gained
 their mount
on the height of the peaks, in pathless thicket:

Behold! the
 she-goat jumps down
with the ease of falling stone,
 behold!

the stag, who bears a great weight,
kicking a trail
 of dust! across

the field,
 crossing the troops, rolling
together in concord, forsaking the

mountains.
 Ascanius,
high on a fierce steed, cuts down the middle

passes these, the she-goat! then
 the stag;
with prayers, he then begs

that in this slothful herd, a beast with spirit
be found, a wild
 foaming boar! or

perhaps

a great blond lion from the mountain.

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.

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...”