



**Versuche: 20**

**The Burnt Flower  
[1989-91]**

## A Day at the Courts

The bonnet-queen enters. and parrots, three, trailing  
and, in some underground dance, the possum-king.  
“What, in this house, is that smell!”, she is railing.  
Our king ,to wit: “Your chorus, they’ve yet to sing!”

The parrots shudder, twisted at this, and not laughing.  
She parries: her look. a white venus, eyes of blue-lit,  
breaks forth a frothing stream, nectral thirst, gaffing  
our king, in a King-sized, spit-lined net. To wit.

The chorus sings, finally, the parrots chirp applause,  
and fast, the queen takes her place, charmed, front-center,  
what feelings concealed, escape in a cold, lone dimple.

The possum twists: shadows, the swinging of light claws,  
makes his way, and with thirst, far to earth’s center,  
again, shares tea with the dead. The queen grows a pimple.

## Sestina

*for Thomas Crofts*

1.

Like a true American, I've reverted  
to a dead form. To a dead fawn,  
I've hacked up and sold her vitals  
as boon to a wondrous market.  
Now I await the spurious retort:  
Thyestes never knew one slain!

2.

What to say of a French poet slain  
but to the faith he'd not reverted,  
this despite his sister's retort,  
high-pitched, strained, like a fawn,  
which, effeminate, grated his vitals.  
She sold them, then, to market.

3.

Or of his mother, who never to market  
was able to sell those promises slain  
by books, and experience. On her vitals  
she choked. She farted. She reverted  
to the old joke, a degenerate retort:  
she chained him to her side, fawn.

4.

Arthur Rimbaud was always a fawn  
teasing the doe as he eyed the market  
each desperate Sunday, till the retort  
of the continent he believed slain  
by sloth, and ennui, grossly reverted  
to sex, massacred his vitals.

5.

He in his heart found hate for vitals  
soon, and soon he was living fawn  
dreamt of times he coolly reverted  
to the child he'd pawned at market.  
He believed sights of his youth slain,  
absinthe gave violent retort.

6.

And Paris itself was a living retort,  
breathing, circulating its vitals,  
impatiently lost to be counted slain.  
No respite for the heart of a fawn,  
seeing ancestors hung at the market,  
to inanimacy cruelly reverted.

7.

Rimbaud's retort would be I've slain  
a fawn. What death for a market  
sadly reverted, studied in its vitals!

## Book and Instinct

1.

Goodnight creatures!

Off to insensitive sleep.

In my keep,  
the dogs howl logarithms from intuition,  
I bring hasty memories to peak fruition,  
I *am* a creep.

2.

Tonight, the bestiary

is a gray-washed sea.

Vanity

leads me to betray the ubiquitous passion,  
to departures all out of moral fashion,  
for no pity.

3.

By night, perhaps,

the officer has forgiven me

my truancy.

Noticed they the lacking in conversation?

My silence, taken as demonstration

of prudency?

4.

Goodnight creatures!

The company in my keep:

A basenji

knowledgeable in all eastern mystic rights,

a doberman specializing in troglodytes

realize me.

## Poem, "As"

1.

As  
with Caddy in Faulkner's  
novel, at least that  
third, I the  
mute  
am stuffed with futile girls  
like another poet more heavy (I pass  
life with less Hegel,  
have mastered *nichts*, and not the steel-smith's  
turn)  
    am twisted  
not stagnant, a maggot not dutifully  
fired.

2.

Leave that  
last image in a blade of  
grass, by which  
the souls of the paper  
christs,  
timorous, passively (those souls first fettered most  
painless-  
ly to the kingdom's sinecure) rule  
mourning the passing  
of the heart, that only the possum  
in the night  
    rules  
and that the shadows in the lantern halls  
am stuffed with intoxicating girls, I've lost my  
speech.

**“Envision...”**

Envision, in the  
arena, lax Zeus  
bleeding each wrist  
for the lost music,  
pale Zeus. The  
yellow child,  
knee-bent at his  
side, smiles,  
conjures dragons.  
Fitful queens,  
bosomless, their  
black pools of  
want  
exceeding to rivers. Ever-  
green spires  
punching pinholes  
in the blue milk  
of sky.

The  
procession is  
tolling, boredom succeeding  
that spent way. The  
child has jacks in  
each eye. He  
will not confess  
murder of Zeus.

## Mystic Fragment

Babel creeps an arm  
shaking Minos' rattle,  
taking children green  
turning them to cattle.

Zeus in ennui  
bleeds a soporific  
stench from open wrist  
– deliberate music.

Griffins in the air  
drop the daily Dis  
punctually to spare  
punks from great bliss.



## Intellectual Hymn

I

None can know  
the loosening lava of my reproach,  
the curious victim of my approach  
through space, stained and  
    curtained  
    like glass.

II

Physics lie  
pigeoning the forum of my sky  
– Freudians in my lullaby  
will tire, tooling,  
    sex lost,  
    my fire.

II

Fade away  
the terrified people or my day  
when Helen's chased the day away.  
I, then, laugh, a Pi-  
    errot  
    again.

IV

– still in love  
shapeless in the shattered glove.  
God may send a perfect dove  
but think the poem still  
    termed, “her-  
    metic.”

V.

Moles, then, see  
only, that which tortures me,

the curved dolphins in old seas,  
no sound, the pre-  
pubescent  
cold round.

## Returns

Fiction betraying  
found outside the  
    whole life  
not entertaining  
    not quite  
    home to many  
expected inhabitants  
creeps to my cognizance.

Never betraying  
past or present  
    then found  
fatally boring  
    old ground  
    evanescent  
assurance of interest  
past the first dinner guest.

Wondrously lying  
my progression  
    here or  
trust not denying  
    the door  
    in digression  
an eye on the prior cares  
then to the victory stairs.

Foolishly paying  
some attention  
    the oaths  
pledged by the weighing  
    high hopes  
    minus mention  
the yawning inconsequence  
counter experience.

Insinuating  
egotism?  
the sort  
all to berating  
mean sport  
of the schism  
between face and content  
wielded like armament

not to regard spring  
illustrative  
to pains  
cautiously inching  
from rains  
to the plaintive  
remember the sacrifice  
witness my paradise.

## Gedanke

This futile thing  
an Innocence  
holy fabled  
hermetic sense  
of emptiness

incredits things  
remembered us  
duly violenced  
at terminus  
hypocritus.

## The Burnt Flower

1.

You greeted me  
and time stood still  
ridiculous that I should think  
such sentimental things  
after discussions  
of Spinoza

2.

Inseparably we  
walked the shrill  
enveloping of autumn's link  
of winter to what sings  
summers to visions  
of Spinoza

3.

You cautioned me  
that time could kill  
near everything if one should blink  
a second more than rings  
true to persuasions  
of Spinoza

4.

And wretchedly you  
paid the bill  
and left the park cafe to sink  
into a thought that stings  
hearts of the lost sons  
of Spinoza

## Ophelia

The essence of Ophelia who  
thanked the skein of Hermes' fire  
who found the trailing to be true  
of this quick and solid fire  
who reveled in consistency  
of a blank illumined sea

The essence of Ophelia who  
danced the pilgrim's dance of life  
who found the falling to be true  
of a wide and tended life  
who celebrated ignorance  
of determinating chance

The essence of Ophelia who  
wept a state of common bliss  
who found the flowing all untrue  
of a pure and honest bliss  
who honestly unreconciled  
viciously denied the child

The essence of Ophelia who  
spoke of an accepting place  
who found the picture to be true  
of a whole and other place  
who ambitiously conspired  
to provide what is desired

## *Jazz*

The fingering of time in jazz  
like weather in a tonic taken deep  
awakes the stifled comic from his sleep  
    the cornie who in dance  
reorganizes space with female hands  
is now the swaying branch and singing leaf.

The sky is now the pattern leaf  
the wind is now the professor of jazz  
the cold is touch of mitigative hands  
    the well which is not deep  
in pulses strong and weak will keep the dance  
forever, now, until the crowded sleep.

Who wishes when in ready sleep  
to fall to frozen ground like reddened leaf  
participate in winds and in the dance  
    in time which is not jazz  
in space which falters congruously deep  
in space which drops like old, rheumatic hands?

The criminal in cautious hands  
returns, a painted knight, in sweated sleep  
in quest to realize the springs of deep  
    inside of branching leaf  
which more than symbolize the fated dance  
which grow in minds like swingers set to jazz.

Before one takes the hint to jazz  
to reassure the mind of hidden hands  
of silly feats and turns observed in dance  
    in hollows of one's sleep  
the step and shudder of remembered leaf  
will prove a lesson well and print it deep.



And never in this witnessed deep  
have ever two grown souls united jazz  
so well as those who like submitted leaf  
are limber in the hands  
of midnight guided all too vicious sleep  
who as the pitted beast resign to dance.

The suffered dance and deep  
respite of sleep define the jazz  
like interested hands the fallen leaf.

So  
have  
you up  
there begot  
more mysteries of  
sounds and confusions  
walks and your profusions a  
new way to take up your interests  
to conform with my inevitably demanding  
self? I am lucky there is no compromise, for  
here in this dock, with no one to talk to but the old  
vague and possible selves which clutter these  
drawers I am not too keen on selling so  
I hold onto it, again in spite of  
the fact of all the silence  
issuing from the spot  
I leave it Shrine  
of Solace I  
simply  
call  
it

I  
nor  
you nor  
anybody who  
sleeps in these  
woods could ever keep  
promises from these trees (as  
the forest is a lonely place) to deny  
it your favorite story or the  
joke for which you're  
famous would be  
a thing too  
cruel a  
too  
limited  
function of  
confession that  
will bring about true  
isolation That is many things  
weighing down on the heart and on the  
trees so all the forest be in  
a dark which is false  
as there is the  
space where  
lie you  
and  
I

## Houseboat

Roger Rabbit kicks off a sneaker.  
Lofting through the air,  
the sneaker seems to land in a plate of  
cookies,  
oatmeal, Oreo, but  
with a quick turn,  
we see the nose sink in Yosemite Sam.  
The shoelaces hang from his mouth like spaghetti.  
Understand

the ways beneath the ways.  
The houseboat sings when the Delphic waves  
prick a lost strand in the consciousness  
fixing the stare as a soulless, dark eminence.  
But nothing in the houseboat seems to stay.

With the refracted  
light through the crystalline  
proprioception  
of the vamp donning her Maybeline,  
the schooler with legs like Bruce Jenner,  
the priest with his  
CDs in his corvette,  
the housewife who, apotheosized,  
is a demon who should not bleed your eyes  
– all, now a  
trick of the light.

Know the curtain  
closing on our first days  
when we were taught  
reality really does not matter.

In the silent

forum of our earliest thoughts  
one could hear  
a hairpin drop  
under the shattering tea-tray's disaster,  
under our first saint's lisp.  
Were it a lesson:  
veil the creature with a neon fiction.

## The Library

1.

Having most recently escaped  
That cubed cloud of books,  
the Mississippi revealed  
by Mark Twain's simple crooks  
of invention,  
the charm of boy  
America  
– who over heard a table-turned tale  
of creeping ghost barrel.  
I know the novel  
is more in America.

2

That strawberry-headed girl  
meets death with generous cigarette  
obscuring a nose  
for more refined comfort,  
unknown beyond the painless throes  
and aches of a liquid dream,  
she,  
a ghost  
stalking these halls,  
ignores the glance and call,  
she balks.

3

Meting the rage of centuries  
these walls' institution  
finds fruition in a room  
dedicated for all  
peculiarly to talk, peculiarly to smoke.

4

The lamps flicker:  
We are all Tiresias:  
Wordless, we hear sounds.

5

An upright posture  
enters with an air of old money,  
tied around his waist  
an old straw dummy,  
invaluable until scrupulous  
attention reveals— 1'd say  
nothing his chalked, undramatic  
voice has not just revealed  
to involuntary audience.  
Nothing, only nothing.  
(I wish he were a poodle.)

6.

No Huck Finn could ignore  
the leer of harelip from the corner,  
document it with a strength  
not betrayed ignoble, grace  
of gesture and silence— insures  
there is heart in that flesh.  
Don't let careers get you yet!  
Exist in that careless state,  
it is nothing less than death we await.

## Open Letter

The obscene leaf  
bearing your desire  
was paltry, more so  
stacked contrary the

page after page  
of poetry sent you  
– pregnant  
with resoundings of my

quest, a lumbering, gagged  
achievement.  
Not to harp on  
incongruities

the complementary  
hermitage of your  
word  
to my *poseur*

did provoke laughter  
and a spit back  
even from cautioned  
devils, a phallic

critique,  
chorically agreed,  
deserved.  
– Or to talk

of “form to content.”  
Humor, lady,  
hysteria  
disassembled with flames the



political umbra  
separating sage  
from a hell-bent other  
– the sadist, who

together, then  
deduced  
the portion proper  
to your emotional cramp,

a generous third  
of the postage stamp.

**“Your Beauty...”**

Your beauty, or the figure  
of it, shaded by word  
processor, now supine  
on a grandpa bed of iron  
frame and inhibition,  
the metal clock and calen-  
dar set teetotaler-  
ish on the safe dresser,  
smart head to the magnet-  
ed interest in that  
central mission, is simple  
like the macrocosm symbol  
in my book, the dream.

Twisted in earnest drama  
ill-spent on the crowd  
of kids in Sunday tow  
by aunts, lisp and muscle  
spasm, rewards of fickle  
day may seem unsettling  
like fish as compromising  
meal at Lent, or dance  
tainted with circumstance.

**“What, With Whitman...”**

What, with Whitman my great  
predecessor and a music  
Plato would be ashamed of  
the Loreleis are mad? The  
pleasant earth now reeling  
arteries now coursing with  
the question of cognizance  
and of anatomy?

No high  
curse of the Dionysian can  
eradicate for me the waned  
significance. Nor history  
of suffragette and consti-  
tutions avert the attention  
cerebrally. Having thus  
sent the violent fruits of  
those efforts, I advocate  
the political and accused  
damaged couplet:

a pleasant  
dress is all what meant.

“The students are all gone asleep...”

The students are all gone asleep  
at twelve o'clock; presently  
stirs a beetle underneath  
my brightened desk; honestly  
no cause could ever make me creep  
below my desk, courageously,  
to certify my naked feet.

It drives itself with crippled wings  
against the floor, hallowing  
territories taking in  
a greater ground, visioning  
no charms begot by fancied round  
of destiny; and countering,  
I do not stir and let it win.

**“The time is killing me...”**

The time is killing me; I cringe  
at smug hero, the syringe.  
Shapes which falter for my eyes  
coursing arteries disguise;  
irony which sure persuades  
me to fury, dizziness fades.

All persons, who my company  
may regret, soon bore with me,  
thus inhibited I'm safe:  
damning hands and temple quake.  
Time is killing me. The rook  
of my conscience, remedy took.

## The Voyeur

The light switched on, thus  
my guessing the ten minutes  
passed and fooled solitude:

but my deductions falter  
heavenless, and sight  
inhibited by four walls and

more: the light switched on,  
I saw no ghost depart, not  
later, the penitent divorce.

## The Scholar

Sit and think the night's not over,  
She's not yet dressed, in all her colors  
For the cool taste of bed. I can't see her body  
Resplendent in a cool shore's gasps .  
She is not yet naked in my mind.

And climbing up apple trees he used to wonder,  
And watch her skin, soft beneath her touch  
Time would not be his, then , but did  
He know? Her skin, forever behind windows,  
Her hands, forever by her side.

I wrote until the lightbulb flickered  
And tried to imagine the weight of her breasts  
In my hands. Her eyes did greet me, I know,  
Her smile burned. But I have been there  
Too many times. She walks away.

He didn't know why, in summertime,  
Sweat would crawl between his legs as he watched  
Each garment fall, not too quickly.  
Ten years of his life spent not knowing,  
Ignorant, and ten years more.

## A Dream for Winter

*after Rimbaud*

Winter, in a railroad carriage  
to Niagara (pink, with blue cushions, and  
sleepily in the corners,

kisses, with goblin smiles, howling “Stretti!”)  
We will leave together, and we  
will be comfortable.

You’ll close your eyes, you don’t want to see  
“the evening shadows with mocking faces! those snarling  
monstrosities! black elves

and black wolves!” (I ask  
if you don’t want a cigarette. Then you feel  
your cheek scratched. A kiss

like a mad spider, runs round your neck.  
You scream, “get it!,” you bend your neck.  
Your neck, quick! I see, and I soon realize

that it will take a long time  
before we really grab that creature  
who laughs, and travels a great deal.



## Complaint of Pierrot

*from Jules Laforgue*

Oh, that model soul  
bade me her adieu  
because my eyes... too?  
    lacked principle.

She, such tender bread  
(now a Wonder loaf)  
...typical! gives birth  
    to one more brat.

For, married, she is  
always with a guy  
who is a “nice guy,”  
    hence his genius.

## II. Pierrot (One Has Principles)

*from Jules Laforgue*

The girl decided (oh in her vain way!)  
“I love you, simply, for yourself.”  
O la la! what conventional cribs!  
    just like art,  
but let’s have calm  
and indulge in our capitalist ideals!

Then, she whispered to me, “I wait...  
Here I am, but I just don’t know,”  
her gaze affected by milling moons.  
    O la la! was  
it just for prunes  
we attended, in our town, the school?

Then, one beautiful evening, perfectly  
ll-starred... the moment just right!  
the girl dies. O la la! now that's  
    original song!  
You will be reborn  
as we know, some time on the third day.

if not in person, then in the streams  
and smells of spring months, taking  
up more fools in quest of the Zäimph  
    veils of the Gia-  
conda, and the Skirt.  
I may possibly be one of those fools.

## Toto Merumeni

*from Guido Gozzano*

### I.

With its rambling gardens, vast rooms, and its seventeenth century balconies overrun with verdure, this villa seems like something from my verses, yes, the typical villa from a *Book of Letters*.

The villa thinks, sadly, of better times. It thinks of gay parties beneath century old trees, of illustrious banquets in immense dining rooms, of the festive salons raped for their antiques.

But where, in olden times, came the House of Onsaldo, House of Ratazzi, House of Azeglio, House of Odone, now stops a sputtering automobile, trembling, twitching, and some hairy stranger walks to knock the Gorgon.

A barking is heard, a passing... cautiously the door opens... in this cloistral and barrackish silence Toto Merumeni lives with his “convalescent” mother, his schizophrenic uncle, his gray-haired great aunt.

### II.

Toto is twenty-five years old, melancholic, quite cultured, with a taste in the inkwell works; slight in brains, slight in morals, and scary in his hunches... he is a true child of our times.

Not rich, one day he decided to “peddle my wordlings” (there’s his Petrarch!), an embezzler, a gazetteer... He chose exile. Liberated, he reflects presently on his follies. We’re safer not to print them here.

Oh, he's not bad. To the poor, he sends money  
to keep them going... to his friends, a basket of fruit.  
He's not bad. Students come to him for a topic;  
for connections... he's a service to most emigrants.

Cold, conscious of his self, his faults,  
oh, he's not bad. He's the Good Man sketched by Nietzsche:  
"...in truth, I must deride that fawning creature  
called *good*... simply because he lacks claws..."

After draining studies, he runs to his garden, plays  
with his sweet friends, the earth inviting...  
His sweet friends are: a caterwauling blue jay,  
a pussy cat... and Makakita his little monkey.

### III.

Life had taken from him all his early promise.  
For years he dreamed of loves that would not call.  
Despairing, he conjured a princess, an actress;  
today he loves the cook... she is eighteen years old.

When the house sleeps, this girl, barefoot,  
a fresh chill plum in the day's first light,  
comes to his room, with lips to his bounces  
onto him... he possesses her blessed and supine.

### IV.

Toto cannot feel. Some latent, untamed illness  
dried up the prime founts of his sentiments;  
analysis and sophistry have made of this man  
what flames make of a house in healthy winds.

As that ruin, however, that has seen fire  
produces gladiolas with colorform flowers,  
his parched soul loosens, oh little by little,  
a scattered efflorescence of consolatory verses.

V.

So Toto Merumeni, after sad events,  
is near grace. He alternates research and rhyme.  
He is locked in, meditates, expands, explores, understands  
the Life of the Spirit which he never understood.

For the voice is small, and his treasured art  
immense... and because Time (even as I write!) flies...  
Toto writes apart, he smiles, sees a future.  
He lives. One day he was born. One day he dies.

## Petition

*from Emile Nelligan*

Queen, will you assent to unfurl just one curl,  
One billow of your hair for the blades of scissors?  
I want to inhale just one note of the birdsong  
Of this night of love, born from your eyes of pearl.

My heart's bouquet, trills of its thicket,  
In there your spirit plays its roseate flute.  
Queen, will you assent to unfurl just one curl,  
One billow of your hair for the blades of scissors?

Silken flowers, perfumes of roses, lilies,  
I want to return them with a secret envelope.  
They were in Eden. One day we'll take ship  
On the ideal ocean, where the hurricane swirls!

Queen, will you assent to unfurl just one curl?

## The Ship of Gold

*from Emile Nelligan*

There was a mighty ship carved of massive gold:  
Its masts touched the azure, on the unknown seas;  
The Cyprus of love, hair loose, with nude torso  
Stretched herself on its prows, in excessive suns.

One night, however, there came the great danger  
In those clever oceans where the Sirens sing;  
This horrible shipwreck inclined the ship's bottom  
Toward the depths of the abyss, unchanging grave.

There was a ship of gold, and its diaphanous flanks  
Displayed its rich hold to those profane sailors,  
Disgust, Hate, and Nerves... they split it between them.

What is left of the ship from that so brief Tempest?  
What has my heart become, but a deserted ship?  
Alas! it has foundered on the vacuum of the dream.

## Love's Labor

If this Christmas you feel  
nothing but unique gall  
at ceremonies which seem  
the indecipherable sum  
to a human mathematic:  
the human mind is stuck  
in Thought's thorns and pricks  
– might as well get him socks!

If through winter's mist  
shouts the routine Must  
and pleasures for the kids  
don't taunt experienced heads  
like color for a sister's  
nightgown, or dear brother's  
difficult taste in hats  
or brand-names for the aunts

If for the special racket  
you finger the vacant pocket  
swear one time you had it  
now some bureaucrat's got it  
to finance a mutual war  
– if in department store  
your spiteful credit card  
whispers what you most feared

If you have marked dissent  
of a conscience sorely bent  
by measures you have taken  
to service each guest wine  
– though not wine for a king  
the mind now fully swung  
to conclude the season's ill  
with a long, long-distance call



– Then, presuppose a pass  
a lucky, explored course  
between the gift of chance  
and awkward social science  
– a poem is what you mean:  
the riddle of deliberate man  
whether object or good dead  
is solved by the schemer's word.