

I SLEEP WITH THE CORPSE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

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A.D. 1990

COMPLACENT

Feeling comfortable in complacency
We rehearse the trite replies
To questions likely to arise
When we lift our eyes up to the skies.
Philosophy will do no good,
It's a poorly concocted excuse,
A fabricated explanation
For anomalies which seem so profuse.
Should we profane the sacred mores,
Should we desecrate the sanctity of pride,
Violate the citadel of our prejudice,
Should we try to start anew and strive?

I do now understand
How Cassandra must have felt.

We pause for a minute to think,
Who we are, where we come from,
Where we are going to, but in lack
Of replies, these are still uniform.
We pause... or do we pause?
Or do we mitigate the unknown,
Embroidered in justifying theories
Do we shun responsibility that is our own?
And when we feel we know the answers,
When we are sure we've got them right,
Isn't it strange that the bluntest pain
Still lingers in our suspicious hearts?

I do now understand
How Cassandra must have felt.

We wrap our virtue in glossy cellophane
And offer it for sale to the crowd,
Like virgins who solicit strangers,
Our righteous deeds are dirty shrouds.
We hope machinery will take us into cosmos,
We will desert our iniquity on Earth,
We contrive to rectify our very nature,
But evil pregnancy begets an evil birth.

I do now understand
How Cassandra must have felt.
I think we ought to read our Bibles in Braille.

Sofia, 1990

One of the rare cries to all Humanity. The fear of my own clairvoyance is explicitly manifested, which is unusual. The conclusion is bleakly desperate: it has the finality of a verdict without the hope of acquittal.

EXTINCT LANTERNS

It was dusk when I looked out
And stood staring through the lattice
When I saw among the mindless
A young man lacking judgement:
He was strolling down the street
To the house on the corner.
At twilight, as the day was fading,
As the dark of night set in,
From that house came out a woman,
With a kiss she came to meet him.
“Come.” she said,
“Let’s drink deep of love till morning.”

The love of the lanterns
flickers in the dead of the night.

I wandered though the damp and empty streets,
I shivered in the symphony of cold
Unflinchingly I was led by my eager feet
To that corner-house’s door.
A refuge from my pain, a shelter from my heart,
A sanctuary where for thirty silver pieces
I could buy some paper love.
There she stood at the door,
A courtesan in her violet robe,
Trading in her love to everyone
Who would stop and pay enough.

To her melancholy merchant eyes
I sold the remnants of my pride.

So here I am again, in the misty shroud of dawn,
Wandering dejected and lonely
Kicking ’round the spherical stones:
All I can feel in my pockets
Are the crumbled remains of my love...
That weren’t enough.

So here I am again, with the extinct lanterns.
I see: in the seaside cafe
Some people early awoken are still.

They collect their tears in cups
And, like coffee, they drink to arise.
So here I am again, with the surf of foam,
I can see the old-clothes man walk with preying gaze
Picking from the dunghill of feelings
The tossed out bleeding hearts.
I know he picked up mine.
So here I am again, with the extinct lanterns.
Nothing beats within, he picked up mine.

Bourgas, 1990

The first draft was written in Bulgarian. The translation is not really faithful to the original as it seems to have acquired a life of its own. The poem is a result of a morbid analysis of a group of people sitting in a restaurant. The night in reality transformed into morning, but the sun is still missing. And no, I did not really pay for a prostitute.

FRACTURES

The shaky hands are ready now to cast the dice,
I'll let my destiny decide because
I delegate this ever to someone else.
Being a dastard is the state of my existence.
I always wait for someone
to give me hints and solve my problems
Even under the disguise of pleading for advice.

Thoughts...

Ephemeral, recondite, festered, thwarted,
Frittered, desecrated thoughts
My thoughts

I tried to steal a look
behind the mirror of my conscience
Without hypocrisy, without prejudice, without fear
But I just could not get rid of the faint apprehension
Which slowly transformed into nightmare
When I saw the dilapidated harlequin
with black beside his white.

Misosophy...

Aggravated, callous, disabling, surly
Exasperated, acrid thoughts
My thoughts

It makes no sense to wipe somebody else's tears
When mine are streaming down my face.
All my time passes by in visions of bliss
In beautiful notions and hopes for some love
But I grovel before all the happiness that I have missed.

Opportunities...

Maddening, enticing, fickle, bribing
Bogging, dreaded thoughts
My thoughts

What's under the mask of this ludicrous smile?
Friendless, betrayed and alone, I am hereby beckoned
To join my fears at the end of the abyss
To look at the dice which now reveal nothing.
But my options are clear and the future - unravelled.

Destination...
Calling, infernal, deceptive, commanding
Omnipresent, sanctified thoughts
My thoughts
abeyance... disarray... vague soliloquy
i squirm from the advancing mask, a figure in a mask
my mask

Sofia, 1990

Typical teenager rambling. Written in Bulgarian during a card game over coffee and cigarettes. My best friend, Boriana, read it and thought I was exaggerating. She was right.

SOLEMN KNELL

The solemn knell awakens me
and I kneel under the weight of fake perception
still encumbered, with eyes closed,
waiting for the pitcher to be shattered at the spring,
watching the scornful swing
of the pendulum, which faintly sings
my requiem.

The sleepwalkers in my mind
with chisels carve an epitaph upon my heart,
upon this tombstone of the slain light.
They are rummaging now through the attic,
looking but for nothing.

The solemn knell awakens me
and leaves me mourning for the desiccated leaves
covering the dejected earthly bed
of heroes once gallant, once noble, now dead;
with a severed silver cord,
at the broken golden bowl,
lie dead.

The bookworms in my mind
search for quaint knowledge of forgotten rules
in a thicket of apologies.
They are rummaging now through the attic,
hoping but for nothing.

The solemn knell awakens me
and I lie staring at the sky with reddened eyes,
aspiring to attain the reverence of past,
waiting for the wheel to be broken at the well
scared to fall asleep again,
the he night unwilling to yield,
until death is dead.

The money changers on my mind
piecemeal are selling dreams of future life
bartering my pride.
They are rummaging now through the attic,
finding nothing.

The solemn knell seems to linger here,
seems to exist in my ears forever.

Sofia, 1990

The call of reality, a realization of change permeates the story. Highly metaphorical of the abhorrence I experienced for aging. The unavailing frantic search reveals nothing; there is nothing to find, just the knell sounding as an epitaph of a life.

LE COUP DE GRÂCE

Pale granite cliffs
Like beggar's covetous fingers
Hungriely reach for the sun,
Waves chased by the wind
Fling about the firm weathered breast
And wounded recede
From the shoreline.
Only the tears of sea,
The mermaid's pearls,
Lie strewn on the damp sand.

Hoary stark weeps the marble nymph
In her ivy tinsel gown
And craves for her reef.

The rack erodes the high fervent sun
Then scorched dissolves in the distance
Implacable spice of strum lingers on
Like a subtle web of an unseen weaver
Embraces the brake, embraces me...

Here in my house of reed
I think out my days
Here I pine
In the shadow of a date palm
While the supernal harbingers of blast
Bring the signs of calm.

Upon the painted satin glides
A carelessly drawn gull
Then darts down
To the acuminate rocks.
Impaled on the blade of stone
The acolyte of sun bleeds
As his life slowly runs down
The baked crag.

Sofia, January 1990

This poem was set to music by Ivan Terziev and was recorded by us at the Bulgarian National Radio Studios during the summer of 1991. It was an ambitious

piece that was over 16 minutes long. It is one of the few surviving recordings of my band era. This is another picture-in-poem rendering. The mutable Nature can be unmistakably illustrative of emotions.

A.D. 1991

ON ABSENT FRIENDS

Sometimes I feel so far away,
Endowed with impartial knowledge,
But solitary, heeding not the play.
I feel like a lonely puppet
Playing to the tune of desire.
When winter comes and I'm away
Remembering the absent friends,
I am unable to withstand the day.
A face or two I can recall,
But only when my eyes are closed.

When I can see again, the snow outside
Is falling on the marshy ground.
Down, down, down.

I am all alone again, so far away.
I know my friends are dancing
In another time, another place,
Here I am, but where are they?
Phantoms of a passing night,
Flash by, I obliterate the past.
Knowing that I live, I am better
Than the dead who knows nothing,
Even the memory of him has long departed,
His hateful jealousy is now no more
And yet I have my raven Nevermore.

The evil once conceived by Poe, the bird
Which sits with me in my chamber cold.
Hold, hold, hold.

Ostensibly, I'm not alone.
The absent friends that dwell inside
Now raised to warm me up
In the cold rays of the dying sun.
They all arise to help me out
Against the bird that bears my name.

Sofia, 1991

This is the prequel to "And Never Come." The two poems should ideally be read

together. The first draft was a remembrance of the friends from the school I left when I was accepted to the English Language School. The poem was written several years after the fact. The sequel deals with the similar situation, which occurred when I moved to the US. Old friends similarly left behind, ties broken never to heal again.

LIKE A WHISPER IN THE WIND

I can hear
I can move
I can see
I can breathe...
I am the world,
Crucified by doubts,
Do I really exist
Or am I like the mystic dragons?
I bleed from pride:
The pain is lost
In a maze of sights and feelings.
I am the ocean
With tired waves of grief,
Confusion drifting overhead:
I drown and die in myself.
Passion? Glory? Immortal death?
All is gone and nothing's left.
I am the one, who comes and goes,
Where to, I do not know.
I don't dare ask the wind,
But I am the answer, I am the word,
So far beyond this world.
I am everything
But still, I'm noone.
I have no face, I have no name.
I don't belong here,
Where is my land?
I am a monarch
Of ghostly shadows
Dancing in my mind.
I can see, yet I am blind.
Witches...
Demons...
Wizards...
FIRE!
I still believe in death:
I have missed my final sunrise,

Strange but realistic, sad.
I am the world,
I still can breathe,
But now I'm floating
Like a whisper in the wind.

Sofia, 1991

There is a curious story associated with this poem. It first appeared in Bulgarian, then resurfaced in English as a lyric to a song, and finally ended up here, in its current form. A classmate, Petya, wrote an essay for the literature class about the poem. She did not say who the author was and that way I could enjoy the discussion unmolested. It was a terrific experience.

URBAN LANDSCAPE

Jungle thrown between the mountains,
Lines malformed by steel and glass,
Strangled 'neath the clouds of lead
Lies oily, asphalt-paved grass.

A place where psychopathic fathers
In shabby robes and frayed slippers
Snort in sagging dirty sofas
And read the yesterday newspapers.
A place where mothers' screeching voices
Toss old eggs in reeking kitchens
And wail when their only daughters
Come home late with swollen wombs.

Here I live with peeling walls
On which saffron blossomed blooms
Here I sleepwalk all night long
On aphrodisiac smeared floor of my room.
I reflect how faces plunged into the ceiling
Mocking me with twisted smiles
And then submerged in cracks so wide,
Leaving just the pale sun of 60 watts.
I reflect how crumpled ink-filled pages
Of unfinished scripts and poems
Lay beside the empty White Horse glass
Patiently waiting to be torn up.
I reflect how fingers full of shivers
Scatched words of rancid wisdom
between the Camel's legs
And how stained with nicotine then thrust
Into the purity of never warmed up fireplace.
And at nights when drowned men call me
From the eerie depths of mould canals
When the seaweed stretch and grasp me
Suffocated under sheets so white,
The killer in my dreams awakes
And starts on his deadly quest,
Then I try to run away,
A refugee I become in myself.

And when the daymare comes
And brings his immutable gift,
I am presented with the lizard paten
With a Cup of Poison and a Bread of Death.
And wrapped in the cloak of egoism,
With the oaken shield of discontent,
Armed with scorn and hatred,
My alter ego accepts this gift.

Jungle thrown between the mountains,
Lines malformed by steel and glass,
Strangled 'neath the clouds of lead
Lies oily, asphalt-paved grass.

A place where I was born
And a place where I lived,
A place where I loved and cried,
A place where I died.

Is it a life lost or is it a life gained?

Sofia, 1991

An early foray into the ugliness of the big city and the odd attraction it generates. Also, one of the first picture-in-poem attempts. It all falls apart at the end, when the images degenerate into a self-serving confusion. An edit would cripple the feeling and that is why everything is left intact. This was part of "The Dawn of Creation" lyrics.

A STUDY IN CHINA INK

And it was morning.
The world seemed drawn in crayon
By the gentle hand of a sentimental artist,
With hypertrophied love defiling the sky.

And it was morning.
The green hills slowly diluted
In the remote from my eyes
Purple sun's commencing dyes.

My feelings are auctioned off
To be hung like needless paintings
In the dusty corridors
Of some ruined manor beyond Lethe.
Passages of broken paintings
Where broken hearts cost less than broken frames.
What is worth more, a limousine or a hearse?

And it was morning.
I found myself in a boring odyssey
Within the imagined sanctuary
Of a velvet boudoir, showered with filmy sapphires.
A legacy of shame
From a crazy wax-work exhibition
Of false prophets, witches, graves and sunsets.

The people that I love
Brand my love upon their shields.
When I kiss their haggard sallow faces
Unclassified senses run through my lips.

Sofia, 1991

Contrary to popular opinion, this is not a reaction to a rejected love. Rather, it is an attempt to deal with the feelings of damnation I had forced onto me when I left the evangelical cult I had been a member of for over a year. My ex-"brothers" and "sisters" laid hands on me and tried to perform exorcism, while my old friends thought I was totally mental. So I got stuck in-between. Also a part of "The Dawn of Creation" lyrics, from the Poet's Morn sequence.

STARLESS

Dedicated to Irena.

I carry the trial of my substance,
Reminiscences of love gone to earth,
I carry the beatific vision
Of your heathen body and your gentle purrs.
Night; palliase 'neath beryl arcade
Where Hebe brought the Chalice of bliss,
Where we tasted the ambrosia of all entity
And I drank sweet nectar from your lips.
Upon scattered globules of chartreuse
We spread out an amaranth quilt
Where we shared our flesh and our essence,
Where eternity of our love was distilled.
Beneath the dome of heavenly moons
The sable veil of death was torn,
And in the feast of our craving, in harvest of love,
In the flames of our yearning a new life was born.
Down the moonlit path we came to the Gates,
We rode the aureate tides of faith
And in the newest wine of sweetest pain,
We found life, we found love,
We finally found ourselves.

Sofia, July 1991

One of the earliest surviving love poems. There is no platonic feeling here, just a carnal expression of lust. The great sexual encounter depicted never really materialized. Pity.

FROZEN SIMPERS

Ophelia,
your eyes smother my inner world
just like embers slowly burn and fade away,
so does our knowledge for each other...
You talk so much just to hide the silence inside you,
Your overwrought sincerity only causes pain:
Upon a pallid pedestal rests your itinerant beauty.
Will I ever regain the part of me I lost this day?

Ophelia,
I am not talking about you, but about myself,
about efforts to salvage the relics of my pride
from the seething look of your eyes...
Your super-ego always seems to know the answer,
I can induce where you are going with all this:
This oddly parallaxed viewpoint makes it clear,
I guess there's more to it than your naked beauty.

Ophelia,
your frozen simpers won't do any good,
your nervous actions and indiscriminate affairs,
even making love upon the grass, not what I expected.
I saw the snakes coiled upon the brick walls,
their cloven tongues filled the air with poison,
and in the upholstered with fine leather coils
I could see the bare forms of your passion.

Ophidia,
you have infected my heart with your tongue,
spoiled my world with your lust until it starts to rot,
I am bleeding slowly and you... just change your skin.

Sofia, 1991

I found this poem quite recently, scribbled on the back of a notebook. I can remember neither whom it was dedicated to nor the circumstances surrounding its composition, which is highly unusual. All I can say is that the she-character was real.

BLEAK HOUSE (WHITE CLOISTER)

In the poet's morn, the pale sun
Encrimsones the hills folded in mist
And sets slowly ajar
The nail-studded gates of my heart.
In the poet's morn, I see myself
Frenzied in the cloister of solitude
Meditating upon Man and Time,
Lying on the palliase.
Indiscriminately chosen
Underactions of the Play
Irresistibly throw about
The pandemonium fair,
Implacably draw me
Somewhere away.
I am lost in the mirror,
A narcissus face.

"There's a withered flower
Forgotten on the floor
In the formed by the window
Sunlit tetragon. . ."
My broken-nailed fingers
Blurred in delirium
Scratch words of quatrains
For grown up children.

Just another martyr
Waiting on the shore,
Paralyzed in his chair,
Tied to the dawn.
With feelings gone
In the vanity of his obscure thoughts,
Looking small, alone,
With blind eyes staring eastward.

The walls entwine me and whisper,
They whisper with a silent grin,
"The time has come,
The ceremony must begin.
Hero, are you still asleep?"

Are they whispering to me?
Another mute heroic posture
With restricted incidence.

In the mirror I can see
A white relentless mask
Gazing at me, and I shiver inside.
I tremble like a captured deer
Trying hopelessly to reach
That dead flower on the floor.
But the mask has already said
That it is now too late.

It is a custom here,
A custom to feel lonely.
I cried to the mask:
“Don’t leave me to my thoughts!”
It disappeared, in the mirror -
Just the bleak house
With rooms chained in webs,
The hero and the icy narcissus.
A carpet-knight latched in his dreams.

Sofia, 1991

*A poem of visions. Part of the Poet's Morn series (from "The Dawn of Creation").
It is a story of the Self, sliding through a mosaic of mutable scenes. The morph-
ing sequence finally disintegrates abruptly.*

FRAGMENTS

I

Daggers - eroded,
The harvest - unreaped,
Mute idols women knead
From powerless Seed.
The Sky is unleashed.

II

Blood - the kiss of erosion
Yellow bones show forth crimson clay,
Giants of a midget breed
Proudly till the land
And fertilize their kingdom field.

III

Lo! The sage posy defaced,
Ancient wisdom from the narthex erased
With netherworld scent
Of Knowledge - in Reason blend:
Fine perfume, the Scrolls of the Dead.

IV

An Angel who does expose
To the Sun his blinded orbs
With one Purpose in his Holy Mind:
To shed a stagy tear
In Reverence unkind.

V

Man-made stars in artificial rage
In an image of a firmament adored:
With each and every falt'ring Sun
The weeds of Darkness are withheld
To guard the progress of the Soul.

VI

“Repose, o dusty Traveler,”
The voice of ancient ages spake,
“Haste not Eastwards where
The treacherous Sun awakes.
Remember, there the Moon lies dead.”

VII

The precinct 'round the Sun,
Where aped Humanity staggers
Among graves of sacred altars
Where the Divine was haggard,
Is now empty corporeal graveyard.

VIII

The Spectres blind and Inspiration haggard,
the Muses mute and Poet stiff now cry:
“Awake, unhappy and bewildered Child!”
When they only mean to lull him down,
Enclosed by Life too frightful to aspire.

Sofia, 1991

These fragments were supposed to evolve into a Blakean book of illuminated writing. I ran out of visions before I could complete it. There is no unifying theme for them, which is one of the reasons they remained “fragmented.”

OBLIVION

Cased in my body like in a cool vault,
I'm left by hope that I will live again:
It has vanished with her gown of crape
And amidst this grave I'm left alone.

On the desolated hill, upon the tomb
A rose bush rotten grows
In winds that scourge Oblivion's plains
With the reigns of horror.

To this country I would like to go
To find the answers of my life,
The place where by the Moon defeated
The darkened Sun eternally retreats.

Is death another way
To see my Christmas dreams come true,
To wave a long good-bye to pain
And kiss my nightmares farewell?

Across the valleys of Oblivion I ride
On the unruly horse of Dreams
And I smile together with the smiles
Of odd puppets in some weird scenes.

I ride headlong, on and on
Until I reach the Lake of Fire,
And even sinking, I continue to wonder
What's left of my decaying body.

Sofia, 1991

This is actually a lyric to a song (part of "The Dawn Of Creation"). The music was written by Ivan and is now probably lost. Here's the pale $\frac{1}{2}$ of the whole.

REMEMBRANCE

Dedicated to Vera.

Do you remember
The sun crying on the sand
And the lines of our footmarks
Stretched upon infinity?

Do you remember
The sea kissing our soles
As we walked out hand in hand
From the rising sun?

Do you remember
How the sundial counted our
Time and swiftly meted out
The voices of our hearts?

Do you remember
How the sunset came
And how the air was filled
With silence grim?

Do you remember
The shadows in the sea
Engaged in secret plays,
Harbingers of night?

Do you remember
Heavens looking from above,
With the shining of its stars:
How they said nothing to us?

Do you remember
The Moon with saddest smile
That cradled northern winds,
That never stopped to teach us?

Do you remember
Two tender silhouettes
That idle stood upon the line:
Of Space the stark horizon?

Obzor, 1991

A warm memory of a female friend, my relationship with whom I never quite understood. Maybe there never was any relationship at all? This is a sad story about a morning at the sea. We woke up before dawn and went to the beach to see the sunrise. The breeze was chilly but we had a blanket that we used to huddle into. The skyline was beautiful, the feeling of closeness- too cozy. We fell asleep and when we woke up, the sand was dry and the sun was shining in its full splendor. We had missed the dawn.

THE CHILD

I want to be a child again,
Staring from the sandy tower of my existence
Into the dim horizon
Where faith will turn to knowledge
And the Door with no handle will open by itself.
Grain after grain, the mountain turns into a plain.
Drop by drop, the oceans turn to puddles.
Day by day, I am changed into a Child
Until one I become.
Somewhere from the depths of death rose the sun
And tried to warm the little body up
Although it had frozen waiting in the night.
I want to be a child.

Sofia, 1991

A longing. Time extinguishes the innocence of childhood. This is a wish that I may retain some of the lost purity.

THE STARS OF BETHLEHEM

There's a whole nation,
A new generation,
With the same explanation
For its conscience frustration.

Look at the skies,
With your eyes now so dry,
See the stars shine,
Behold their light.
Do you ever ask yourself
What every star stands there for,
If there's a star for all of us,
A star of Bethlehem to show the path?
Do you ever search inside you
When you say that enemies surround you,
Do you ever think of the one
That lies hidden deep inside?
You say that foe are all around,
You feel like a lonely island
But you ever fail to suspect,
The enemy within yourself.

There's a whole nation,
A new generation,
With the same explanation
For its conscience frustration.

Sofia, 1991

I don't have anything to say about this poem except that it is trite, ridden with cliches and honestly banal. The only possible salvation for it lies in the truth it is trying to communicate. This is a song that was bled. Part of "The Dawn Of Creation," the music is irretrievably lost to me.

THE CHALICE

Argument

Strange nights fell upon Euclea, a world without a motion, without direction, a world without future, where the impersonal time lies dead, a world, suffused with the red light of the present, fixed by the counteraction of mighty forces that stopped the death of a star. Strange nights fell upon Euclea, if there were nights...

Conflict

Our life is a play
with the voiceless audience of distant stars,
So far, so close and cold,
Waiting for the Man to lift up his head
and dare challenge them,
The stars are waiting.
The cosmos bristled up in vulnerable harmony,
The stars are above us.
Sometimes they utter speech in their strange voice,
They're calling us
and who could stand the call of infinity?
Man stands with outstretched arms,
naked before the universe
And the starry dome is like wine
in the Chalice of eternity.
An ocean. The mankind's anguish is a tear
And who would see the drop in the advancing surge?
Will we have the chance to live again,
Or are we to drink the Chalice to its end?
The stars are waiting...
There's a woman's face in the firmament,
Wonderful, thousand years old but young as spring;
There are her hands holding tightly
the Chalice of eternity;
They offer it to us and in exchange for what?
I know what those eyes of beauty want from us:
They want us - lost in the vortex of the Challenge,

Us, who dared to deal with Her - She wants us.

Strange nights fell upon Euclea,
a frozen world in the nullity of a Now,
a world waiting for the balance to be disrupted,
waiting for everything to end
in the instantaneous gravitational collapse,
where even the non-existing will be gone.

One more star will huddle, dwindle, die,
One more star tired of waiting.
A question lurking in our eyes:
"What will happen when all the stars die?
What mutated sky will then survive?"

Abatement

So we walk down the coast of the sidereal ocean
And it's night, a strange night.
We shall not dive in the calling, alluring,
unknown waters.
We cannot see the floor, the water's cold
And the coast will be dissolved in twilight,
And there are no stars to guide us.
Afraid to dive, we stand on the shore,
Waiting for the dawn to come and play its role
In the play that takes place under the sky,
The play we can't refuse.

We are waiting on the wet sand
On which every wave
leaves a tear from the ocean's weeping,
A mournful cry for the next darkened star.
We sit, we wait, the sunrise will not come.

In a futureless world, in a world of strange nights,
In a world I want to live in
because I shall be never able
to play again my part,
that has no understudy or rehearsals,
only the performance with the mute audience of stars.

Denouement

Head hangs down, hands are languid,

I have forgotten all my catchwords
and the Prompter's silent.
I blush upon the stage and the stars are staring,
They stare and weep.

An ocean in the Chalice of eternity, we all shall taste it.
The Chalice in Her hand, my time has yet not come.
Let the stars wait, I come - I'm just a man
And without catchwords I fall into their arms.

Strange were the dawns upon Euclea,
they sanctified the empty Chalice.

Sofia, October 1991

The first poem where Euclea makes an appearance. Euclea is a place where Humanity will discover its true Self, without the helping hand of God or any of His mythical host. I will let this rather complicated and ambiguous semi-poem speak for its own auguring self.

THE CLOCK'S WALK

A Star, A Veil, and a Globe:
I am caught in this triangle.
Sitting in the dark,
where a phosphorescent chair
thick with honey-dew waits in the center
and the dome of Philosophy is strewn
with fireflies, with gods and gourds,
and Moons of Elder Ages.
There I sit and the Bell is silent,
buried under muddy ashes of times passed
and when I look at it, I see the Clock
weaving a shiny carpet, which I lay
on my way of rising to the stars.

A Veil, Sphere, Bone, and Stone:
the air here's not enough to breathe.
Bleakness with hands of dusk
embraces me and I am suffocated
while someone in front of me
sits in the chair dressed in colored laces
of a matchless jester
and consumes my air!
I stretch out my hand to grab him,
my fingers groping for his peace
but I only reach the Clock
and grime sprinkles in greasy drops
as if a lion has been roasted on a spit.
I kick the chair and find myself
travelling through space with speed some over c,
I see undusted stars, pasteboard suns,
planets with staging behind,
workers eternal of this Milky Way,
I see how everything is turned
into stripes of shining darkness and again:

A Star, a Veil, and a Globe:
here everything is black and white... and cold
and at this moment
someone pulls the circuit breaker

and everything becomes devoid of sense,
as absurd as the Colors.
I trace the walk of the Clock,
I trace its tracks in me,
but it is like writing on the sand,
where the next breath of the surge
wipes all the precious letters out
and nothing's left, except
extended foot prints in the sand:
two parallel lines—
of my heart and of my mind.
They walk hand in hand but never cross.

Sofia, November 1991

A vision of the inner cosmos. It is not a horror poem but it does make my blood curdle. Special bonus points go to people who figure out what the Star, the Veil, and the Globe stand for!

A.D. 1992

O, SUN

Moon gave birth to Sun
But Pale even more he was
Than the dreaded mistress
That had called him forth.
Unchaste! O, harlot meek,
Canst thou name his father?
While Stars with sland'rous eyes do seek
To satisfy their hunger
Again: in the starry brothel
Of false humility and shame;
And every star that does in Pity sneer
Can be in Fatherhood to blame.
Or could some evil god of Man
Called Poet have begotten Thee,
O Sun, in Feebleness befettered
By sweet smells of foul insanity.
Never mind, o luminary bright,
For thine Pale arrows have fermented us:
And amidst the incense clouds we plight
Death—and Thou be sponsor for that Mass.

Blagoevgrad, 1992

My first cosmogony myth. This one has no counterpart in any religion, ancient or new. A sincere attempt encouraged by Prof. Scott, who hopefully does not regret that now!

YELLOW PEARLS

Dedicated to Vessela.

We walked upon the sand,
our footprints entwined and seemed as one:
where did we come?
Raging stars danced above
the blackened waves crushed the blackened sky:
what did we try?
Making love upon the sand
beneath a canopy of fire, wind, and blood:
what did we start?

What else could we do but yield to the stir
and strew our love dreams as false yellow pearls?

Yellow pearls lie scattered on the wet sand,
Forming eternal triangles, a brand fiercely glaring,
Yellow pearls, a brood of egotism and of passion...
Your fallow flesh is fed by someone else.

I walked upon the sand,
and the waves caressed my naked footprints:
and they disappeared.

The Moon was tarnished,
beneath, the tears of the sullen sky
fell one by one.

I thought of you
somewhere making love to someone else,
it seemed out of place.

And while the kisses I knew and the words of the song
Were for somebody else, I knew I'd done wrong.

Yellow pearls lie scattered on the wet sand,
Forming eternal triangles, a brand fiercely glaring,
Yellow pearls, a brood of egotism and of passion...
Your fallow flesh is fed by someone else.

I had done wrong
That night was wrong
We had done wrong

I was wrong...

Blagoevgrad, April 6, 1992

An awful mistake that cost me dearly for a long time after the event. I hesitate to call the act itself a mistake, rather it was our motivation for doing it. Before we knew it, we were back in the city, strangers again and forever...

SUN THAT SHINES

Even the Sun himself I can obscure
With a mere movement of my lids,
But no rest from your face I can procure
For darkness can be no eclipse
To a Sun that shines internally.

But let this no amusement be
For my heart traverses in stray agony
In the amnion of passion floats
Envenomed by whims but waiting for Him:
The Sun that shines austerely.

A still anabiotic carcass there lies,
Now poor but once needful shape
Which having tasted the forbidden spice
Is thrown now there, all forsaken
By the Sun that shines incurably.

Once did we fairly decide
To bear each another's heart,
But your homing one did hollow me
And did not bother to pronounce a vale,
Like a Sun that shines returnably.

Neither mine nor yours now beat within,
Even mine was in His furnace forged
(though I prefer it to your smoldering one)
It now lies in ashes, scorched
By the Sun that shines eternally.

Blagoevgrad, September 25, 1992

I did apparently survive the ordeal despite the gloomy foreboding of the poem. Human nature is amazingly resilient: I now utterly fail to recall who devastated me so completely 8-9 years ago! This was a distant memory even when I wrote it!

BLITHE POEM

A child of gold, the sunbeam
Lightly kissed the garish pine tree gown
And down the stream it went,
Playing there and dancing with its siblings
To the merry tune of the Universe.
All world's harmony brought life,
Brought light, brought merry glee.
All brothers and sisters
Dance down the curves of the spring.

The Woods outside Blagoevgrad,

March 28, 1992

This has to be the only happy poem I have ever written... and it shows why I never tried that again. I am a poor observer of light and smiles.

FAIRY SONG

This song, this dance
are threnes to Night,
this aubade is merry,
a happy farewell to dark,
to the nocturnal augur with its mournful cry,
a final farewell.

The fountains gay
now steep the glade,
the meadow where the fairies dance
and moonbeams cry
on withered grass beneath the feet
of the faerie queene.

Hands twine briars,
gloom expires
as the milk-white gowns
replace the cypress,
while the mountain nymphs are dancing
to the tune of Sun.

On the greene lawn,
where elves a-play,
with flutes and harps
singing with the wind,
the fairies start their magic dance,
on tender grass they dance.

Now the day is fading,
and darkness peeks within
the ruined belfry,
all the lizards hide,
the song grows faint and then dissolves
in the advancing dusk.

Fairy Mab came hither
to calm the darkened glade,
with her wand of pure silver
and her eyes of golden shade.
Cause fairies, even though they're magic

Also need their sleep.

Blagoevgrad, March 15, 1992

Ah, fairies! How often have I wished for their existence. The text should have been accompanied by a drawing.

LESSERS' DAY

I know, my love but ephemeral be
If my heart weren't thine epitomy
And if thou whisperst a nocturnal nay,
Then know—it's for the pageant on the Lessers' Day.

But do believe me, one or two, or even three
Refusals will implicitly accepted be,
But each further dized "No" adds orderly
A chiseled cleft in love's white effigy.
'Cause if untouched by limbs, adored extremely,
All thy beauties but mere phantoms be.
And in hope to get admission to the levee,
My seed is mingled with my blood's tenuity.

So don't deny my flesh the ecstasy
That angels left their God to see
And if thou whisperst a nocturnal nay,
Then know—it's for the pageant on the Lessers' Day.

Blagoevgrad, September 1992

A metaphysical rendering of a non-event, reminiscent of Donne. Sometimes I pretend that it was this poem that changed the stalemate that the characters have painted themselves into.

THE DEAD POET

Since sister-goddess is capricious oft
And takes its bloom together with the holt,
Left I'll be—senile and prostrated there,
before the altar of the blank white page.
Will you love me less
When the thing that you admired best
Is gone and I am but an empty treasure box
Whose jewels have been somehow lost?
When no longer able I will be
To paint you with sincere eulogy,
Will you then simply decide
That in my heart no longer love abides?
Will you then just simply see
The negative one of me,
Who's been concealed from your eye
By thoughts outpoured in a rhyme?
There's something more to add to that,
When this part of me is quiet, dead,
And the other half belongs to you,
What's then left for me?

Blagoevgrad, October 1992

I had overdosed on poetry and was suddenly and quite irrationally terrorized by the idea that when the girl of my passions sobered up, I would find myself bleached of all charm.

WHEN SILENCE FAILS

When your vision does all parts of me convene,
Even them, which I haven't known,
When I to love's sublime demand adhere,
For something else I long anon—
A thing is needed to perfect the sphere.

With fickle litanies bedight,
A revelling love I do despise—
Reverie unto fancy,
Where romanced eulogies abide.

But through lips a silent heart does speak
And where perchance a kiss would fail,
The longing of my heart would be appeased
By word, or three—the best avail.
Have you ever thought of it?

So fear not in speech
To outpour your heart and reach
Decidedly for mine—
It will render not yours bleached.

Blagoevgrad, September 1992

People are sometimes slow to speak, too slow for comfort. It was a gruelling and exasperating wait, but the poem had the desired effect.

DECEMBER CHILDREN

We played games—
 as the light fell upon the city
We used to dance—
 as the light slowly went away
 to the land where children play.
We were children—
 playing in the courtyard of wonderworld
We had faith—
 no fences in the garden of dreams
We played games—
 as the light slowly went away
 to the land where children pray.
We still believe that fairies will appear
 when we need them,
We still don't ask what we have done
 to be the lucky ones,
We still are children in a world fit only for adults.
So, what is the secret of our faith?
Then what is the source of our love?
December children, praying on the snow of life,
Pretending to be old,
 dying young,
 taking the answers to their graves.
December children, grown up into the real play,
They die so we may live.

Sofia, May 17, 1992

Written while in the waiting room at the dentist's. In Bulgaria dental work used to be a traumatic experience seeing that doctors rarely (if ever) used anesthetic. My mind simply drifted off.

THE CELESTIAL MANSION

On Cupid's wings toward the bier of piety,
Disregarding matins sybils growl eternity,
I wake to scalp the sceptered prophets
Who offer deadly nightshades in embellished bouquets,
all perfectly flavored.

I hearken to all modern sermons, but I can't perceive,
I mourn over a peeling pieta in a self-deceiving
Way, and in show-off manner I lift my hands
And brazenly await for God to shrive the debts
of a conceited life.

Are we all booked in the celestial mansion?
Who can know something unseen?
There is time to live and time to die,
But how many forget which is now,
which is our time.

Sniffing to detect some brimstone scent
In every wrong and evil thing, some
Forget that even Lucifer himself
Sometimes can't make it better than the men
who plot their deaths.

And it is everything you do, dream, plan, intend, contrive, hear,
learn, think, say, cry, feel, want, need, touch, teach, smell,
taste, figure out, and understand,
It is everything you have in your dormant brain
That makes you be yourself.

Don't recant when you are afraid to make decisions,
Don't douse your sails when there is storm ahead,
Forsake your far-fetched identity and be yourself,
Then use the storm to take you further on!

Sofia, May 26, 1992

*This was written upon my realization that religion is a dead-end street... literally.
The end sounds like a slogan, but then it was meant to be one.*

POET'S MORN

There I was, within my soul,
a timeless void with no directions,
neither warm, nor cold,
neither black, nor white,
neither now, nor ever,
neither me...

There I hung, reasoning slightly,
scared by forceless congelations,
amidst odd stars in odd constellations,
how could there be stars
in the emptiness of my cosmos,
neither bright, nor dark.

Whose are these thoughts?
whose is this waiting?
whose is this hope
for a final awakening?

Dragalevtzi, May 30, 1992

The first rays of the dawn are barely enough to dispel the visions of the nightmares. The morning is that narrow edge, a transition, a birthing, when for a fleeting second I don't know who I am. Part of the Poet's Morn series and "The Dawn of Creation."

SOMEDAY

When the tropic sun has mellowed
Upon Savannah's russet oceans,
When the savor of the grass has grown insipid
And the Tree of Life has shed its leaves,
When vigor disappears like water in the sand
And reddened eyes stare viewlessly beyond,
When slumber overtakes at times of vigil
And weariness assuage the fear of death,
When ages old engender wisdom
Which sometimes is hard to comprehend,
When knowledge grays the brows and beard
In fathomless exertions of despair,
When stars all cluster round the Moon
To merge into a new and single sun,
Adulterated light spreads out a bedding
For the traveller who came to rest.
When life at last is bound for the West,
The aged elephant submitting to an ancient hest
Makes his way into the jungle depths.
Far from eyes, and minds, and hearts,
He lies burdened with the load of years
And starts waiting for his love
The date with whom he long has been deferring.
When death comes to mark fatally his eyes,
With the sight of love he will survive,
Free to enter the eternal fields of red
And find the one departed springs ago.
Someday, when in his eyes the sun has mellowed.

Boyana, April 5, 1992

Elephants really do that. I wrote about this astounding parallel between animal and human relationships upon reading an article in the National Geographic.

THE TIMEKEEPERS

Halfway through infinity,
forces condense into a curdled mass,
contaminated clutter of temporal disasters.
Concussion's black hole - space vampire,
where energy is lost without trace,
where past and future simultaneously take place.

Now entropy will make it impossible
for the will to be transformed and done,
there is no place for timekeepers in reality,
for the ones that take their chance.

Under the disastrous pressure
no nuclei can survive.

Between the white walls of a cosmic room—
A dying star.

Combustion's raging to reach out for them—
The timekeepers.

Sofia, 1992

A tale of Cosmos, Time, Energy, and Chance. This is an early precursor of the concept of Euclea; it can be viewed as the creation of it.

A.D. 1993

INFANT LOVE

O, beautiful flower, cast by the sea,
How I love thee, how I love thee.

With tenderness meek of thy gentleness born
The clouds of the Storm beguile thy form;
Like bliss of a mother, soft is the Sea
Touching thy leaves, how she loves thee;
By love of the Earth encompassed with care
Thou will not sleep bare & winch ye shall never;
The guardian Fire - protector of thee
From fall onto thee protects any feet.

O, beautiful flower, cast by the sea,
How I love thee, how I want thee.

I went to the shore on which you were born
I was lost in the frenzy of the ravenous Storm,
And stopped I and asked "What dost thou wish?"
My voice sank in her fury unleashed.
But lo! There it came wearing no face,
Reaching my ears but leaving no trace:
"Sweet little boy, all I need is your mind
For I want it to teach me to be gentle and kind."
I gave to the Storm what she did desire
And tried to progress but was stopped by the Fire.
"Now give me your eyes, o sweet little boy
So that I may escape the quench of the void.
If you give them to me, I'll grant you the way
That will lead you from here to your love's bay."
So I told him "Take" and happy was he
And I moved on but was caught by the Sea.
From the depths of her waters there came her will:
The gift of my soul in exchange for her still.
I conceded and went, feeling my path
When I was halted by the Earth's greatest wrath:
"To Fire - sight, to Sea - your soul,
To Storm - your mind, and what's my toll?
Sweet, you are sweet and all that I want
Is to have now your heart to warm up my womb,
For mother I am and I must take care

For the children that daily my love forward bears.”
“All I have is my heart and even it is not mine”
I hastened to say but... “Divine
Is your love, yet minute, profane
When tested with mine in its glory and fame.”
Alone with the flower beloved on the sand,
Sold by its Guardians, dead by my hand...
O beautiful flower, cast by the sea,
How we love thee, how we love thee.

Blagoevgrad, Feb-10-93

A sincere confession. I wrote this poem during a boring class of Computer Science at the American University in Blagoevgrad. Mailed it off immediately afterwards. I am glad the girl kept it all those years. There never was another copy.

AND NEVER COME

We have grown to take our separate ways,
No longer able to understand the words we say
to each other.

So easy to forget the years we've been through,
The secrets that we shared, the games we played
together.

Only wishing it can be the same,
Now I know what it was that we all had.

A terse card now and then,
A quick-flown conversation on the phone,
And yellowed memories to color up the album:
The distant semblance in my eyes
Will soon not be able to convince me anymore
That I know your faces.

So many new people, so many things to know,
To heal the broken links.

I feel patched, imperfect, flawed,
And I feel the holes

Showing up from below my new dress
That I chose to wear on my own.

The old friends never go...

And never come

Again...

San Angelo, December 1993

Written during the first months of my stay in the US. It is a natural continuation of "On Absent Friends" and shows that growing up sometimes does not change certain feelings. Somewhat simplistic, not very poetic, but charmingly truthful.

THUS LOSERS PART

I've been wearing that face for so long,
I start to doubt I know what's inside.
Can I still see or am I afraid to look
... behind the mask?

I've been the Fool to say the truths,
I've been the Clown and the Thief:
To please, amuse, but never be
... the real me.

And now, when lights grow dim,
The curtain hides the empty hall,
The stage is silent
And Wonderland reveals a dusty scaffold,
The backstage full of ghosts and echoes
Embraces me in its darkened veil
And I see the mirror on the peeling wall.

The play is over and the mask has to go down,
But when I scrub the grease paint from my face,
I see the same below, the colors of decay
... and of my mask.

Where did all applause, where did all the laughter go?
The audience disowned the mask of life I bore.
And I, too old to see the mirror of my beliefs,
All cracked, forlorn, consumed by rust and grief,
I stand
On the empty stage
And act my death.

San Angelo, December 1993

Shakespeare may not approve of me swiping a quote for the title, but then the subject was very William-like, except I am genuinely terrified by the revelation that I might be an actor too.

THE DIVINE IMAGE

Things that do in us
Perform their Furious Arts
Unknown, Uncovered & Unseen,
Stir our Holy dream.

What the furnace might it be
Where strife becomes eternity?
What the Chaos, writhe & curse
To be God in his own Universe?

And where does pain leap to delight
Like a Pendulum that swings at night?
What Dreaded Mask & Lethal Kiss
Conceal the Angel and the Beast?

And what golden shrines dare He aspire,
Who bled the dust of Harlot's pyre,
When Love, sweet Love, can be only born
In manacles of suffering of Human form?

When serpents coil around the Tree
To drink the sweet milk of its agony,
When wolves are howling & the wind is cold,
The Caterpillar will His wings unfold.

Cloud the Sun, o pallid Moon,
For His golden tears are but Spears of Doom,
Blow all, ye fierce winds of Sky
For feeble are His wings to fly.

And only weeping will then sustain
The laughter of the Human brain.

San Angelo, October 1993

Blake is certainly one of my favorite poets and this is a reaction to some of his work. The conscious imitation of style only serves to highlight the differences in thematic content. Unlike Blake's mystic visions, this is a deeply humanist poem, with existentialist overtones added to connect it to the Euclea of "The Chalice" and the later poem of the same name. This text appeared in the "Oasis", the literary magazine of Angelo State University the following year.

THE LADY SLEEPS

Every man has moments when
His mind unrest needs cease the pest
That day by day his life curtails:
'Tis then when I go to the Lake.
And though frightful, be them misty,
The darkened waters quench my thirst,
When my mortal eyes dive into scenes
Yet never seen in mortal dreams.

Thus one night I went thereat
The wooden quays that pierce the Lake
To spend in silence there unbroken
Visions showed by words unspoken.
Be the stars my faithful witness,
For I know not where to fit this:
The figure hooded, black that bore
The dreaded chill upon my shore.

"The Lady sleeps!" I heard me say'
To the blackened vision of the Lake.
None but the wind responded slightly
To my confession muttered quietly.
But soon the silent innocence was torn
By mystic music & harmonies unknown.
The hooded piper played the tune
That fragrance brought of Her perfume.

Magic spirits glided there
Over the stilled and chilly waves,
Dancing figures, dancing veils
That my heart on ice impaled,
Glided there, and danced the way
She used to dance throughout the day.
And gentle whiffs caressed my face
Like silken laces of Her dress.

A touch of tissue, fine and white
I felt, like in past moments of delight,
When I believed I never would
Spend my nights alone and mute,

And numb; a hand once held so tight
That I still can feel it in the night.
“The Lady sleeps.” I heard me say’
To the blindness of the silent Lake.

San Angelo, September 1993

A direct consequence of an unfortunate listening session in which I indulged for over two hours in the operatic rendering of “The Fall Of The House Of Usher” done by Peter Hammill. The libretto uses several of Edgar Allan Poe’s poems, “The Sleeper” being one of them. The haunted line “The lady sleeps” proved to be both a torture and a catalyst.

A.D. 1994

EUCLEA

Dark nights fell upon Euclea,
A starless sky, chaotic void,
A world with no laws and no directions,
With no holding force employed.

Existence is the rugged bed
On which we dream our wakeless sleep,
Hoping fervently that we, the lesser gods
Will be, at last, but not the least.
With their purpose unknown and unperceived
The frightened heart and mind conceive
Consolation to our worried brain -
Divinity that sweeps in universal strain.
Survive! Is it really so unreal,
Is there a grander urge to feel:
To better what we were and our children will,
To gain happiness that isn't ours. . . Still,
And numb, and naked we exist
And each ounce of burden on our back,
And each feather in our fiery wings,
Is ours. Whether laugh and cry or live and die,
We are, and if we think of better life,
A future bliss, we do but lie to our nature
And deny existence to ourselves:
Heroes that die one thousand times
Before they even learn to live.

Dark nights fell upon Euclea,
A starless sky, and cold, and bleached.

San Angelo, February 1994

A rage against the divine, against God, against anything that could deny our nature. There is nothing grander than Man! This poem should be read together with "The Chalice" and "The Divine Image." Published in the "Oasis" (the literary magazine of Angelo State University), I don't know how it slipped through the Bible-belt mentality of the review board.

GODDESS

Three blossoms graced endowed Her head
And crown of silver gently laced,
With bracelet runed and pale as Moon,
Around Her magic pearls lay strewn.

The distant tower of fierce fire,
Where the Twelve tended their Desire,
Amidst the flames, in Love embraced,
They waited for the Virgin fair.

A gentle kiss upon Her lips
Still lingered from the daily bliss,
And wish did She the genial touch
Of sporting youth upon the grass.

The fire lit, the veils torn,
The Twelve await, the child unborn,
The altar silent, hungry stood
For the Fairy of the Woods.

The sun still slept in Eastern skies,
When the fair maiden did arise
To bid a final farewell and leave
Her woods of joy and sweet relief.

Thunders raked impatient clouds,
The time for Ritual Rebirth has come,
For one should die and other live
According to the Ancient Gods' decree.

Her tears rolled and touched the grass
As gems of red and finest craft,
The nymph lamented not her fate
But the one that She would not abate.

The whetted sword scalded in expectancy,
The candles scorched their ecstasy,
Upon the sacrificial stone a place
Was made, and put a blade.

Dreamt of in eager, but unexpected,
Familiar stroke caressed Her hair,
She wouldn't say and wouldn't hope
But Her desire would lessen not.

As the Scrolls of Wisdom firmly said

The purpose of all life is death
And after that the true Life comes
For those who venerate the Ancient Ones.
Her dress of silken web and light
Lay forgotten on the sacred ground,
Whilst stars shone mirrored in the crown
And winds accompanied the loving sighs.
All tradition now lay broken,
All the portends and all tokens,
Meaningless and so impotent
As death is for a life awoken.
On the mattress green and soft,
Her vestal vow eternally dissolved
In delightful passion that wouldn't stand
The separation of even God-liked death.
And all the Gods amazed and frightened
Stared at their desecrated altar
In apprehension of their future fate
As slaves to those who once they led.
And when the sublime moment came
Her breasts so hot and body trembling
A sudden rain of pure silver
Poured upon the fiery tower
Her lips a cry, Her fingers clenched
In love and joy never so intense
And from the rain and flames,
All elements in Unknown rage
Alive as never She had been before
And giving Life, rebirth that truly was
Alive! From the altar stone She rose
Of Rain and Fire Goddess born,
Of a maiden, who brought Life to death
And death to the Immortal Ones.

San Angelo, March 1994

Another tale of my obsession with sex, innocence and the Union of the two. Here we have a Virgin destined for slaughter but the intercourse with the unnamed partner frees her from the bonds of her existence and gives birth to a new Order.

SHE

The sighs of dying sun
Awake me from my daylong sleep
And I rise to be embraced
By Her, who no other creature meets.
And then again, on my adulterous bed
I place my head upon Her breasts
And freezing fire fills my brain:
To Her, I loved and frightened pray.
Aspiring for Heaven, I long for fires of Hell:
This very instant great, the next so low I fall.
Yearning for the sunrise I wish to murder time
And linger in the darkness, unseen but vivid mime.
I freely give my roses but never blunt the thorns:
My blood dripping from them slowly, forms
The deadly hue of beauty on the blossom,
Brought to life untended by the sun.

San Angelo, March 1994

I don't know who SHE is. Sleep? Death? A Person?

THE PASSAGE OF TIME

Dedicated to Kalina P.

The torrid day retreats its shadows
That weary stretch in no relieving signs,
The motel room - so barren, with curtains
That witness the passage of time.

Some weird whim to see the sun die
To the dead-beat roll of passing cars;
Hissing in the evening, the only living ones:
The birds that cannot fly.

The corridor is so majestic,
With dummy moon in greasy light,
Sweating in the silence, bent over the sink,
Witnessing the passage of time.

The cigarette burns itself in pleasure
As we burn ourselves in dreams,
Horrors and beliefs, struggles, victories-
All of yesterday, so tiny and so brief.

The lights are off, the windows sealed,
The bed - repulsive and the flies all soar:
She is lying there, in her own nightmare,
And I in mine, prostrate upon the floor.

Another day will come so slowly,
Another run upon the road.
In ceremony fasting on survival tips,
The day will come and go and so will we.

Another room, another city,
Another mirror but the same mute eyes:
Dead dolls on the flea-market
Crying with the passage of time.

I guard my love with stingy caution,
Afraid that it's not love at all,
But a habit, born of the impression
Or hope that we have human souls.

She sleeps alone as I do too,
Both dream of passion and of pain,

But both prefer the dream, afraid
That we might miss the passage of time.

A shrivelled kiss awakes the morning,
A love well-played, well-bred and sordid:
We all know that we're lying
But we can't stop the passage of time.

A weekend prince and common princess,
An entourage of roads and dust -
Even if we could, we bear our life
Unwilling to change the passage of time.

Boston, January 1994

An endless passage of time and space, a long trip. Nothing really happened there except the two physical bodies kept moving along the Road with a purposeless destination. This poem was first published in the "Human Abstract" in 1995 and subsequently appeared in "Logos," the literary magazine of the University of Rochester two years later.

THE FALL OF MAN

Dedicated to Kalina D.

The merry sounds of laughing guests
Waned into a distant world;
The tiny garden where we lay,
As island far in farthest seas,
Overshadowed by a tree's green fan,
Kept for us another, separate sun.

Your hair soft and temper kind,
Your silent eyes reflect my dreams;
And would I stay, enchanted still
On this magic isle for a thousand years.

The guests depart as voiceless wings
A tender night descends on us,
And we must leave our flowery world
Haunted by the ghost of so-brief Paradise,
So eagerly awaited, in a hurry spent,
Sweet memories refresh my longing brain.

And still you touch and kiss
And somehow all those simple things
Betray the hidden passion
A bridal night to virgin brings.

Yet, we played friends, or I should say
I acted out a greater man
In lofty sophistry, oblivious to all the rage
My heart conspired in its mystic Vatican.
And I denied I was the Beast,
But then I yearned for yet another kiss.

How far the realm of our friendship lies?
I walk the narrow brink of time -
To the right I see a field, empty skies;
To the left - a chasm, luring, wide.

And I ensnared by its hypnotic eye
Leap into the maelstrom of hope,
An angel that now falls bereft of wings
Into the outer darkness, timeless void,

I fall to meet a greater fire
That never dies, as does our Desire.

Santa Fe, April 1994

An odd recollection of events in 1990 (I think). We went to a party and simply lay in the garden the entire time. Then I took her home and spent the rest of the night alone in the nearby park.

AFTERNOON ROOM (TO MIRIAM)

Dedicated to Miriam Mercedes Rössig.

She holds back her passion
For the leather book of poems in her hand;
He is playing the indifferent,
Through smoke of cigarette - a stolen gaze.
Stiff characters in the deadlock of an evening play.

Still a page, still a light,
The motion - so absurd, so uptight
With sterile stupor etiquette
Just a slipped diversion - and they both turn red.

She dies with the heroes
That act their lives between the lines,
She'll shed another tear
On a paper drama in a paper cry;
And he'll be the perfect man, all but sure of himself.

Tiny talk, eloquent
The rules - all observed, both pretend:
All words fall dead upon the floor,
Unheard and unsaid, both reach for the door.

San Angelo, November 1994

A still-frame of a frozen cinematic experience. Miriam drew a picture to accompany the poem (now lost), which was the exact same scene I had in my mind when I wrote the lines. Uncanny and never repeated since. First published in "The Human Abstract" in 1995, also appeared in the University of Rochester literary mag "Logos" in 1997 (second printing does have the dedication in the title). Also published in the 1999 poetry book "A Celebration of Poets" by the Poets Association of America. Perhaps one of my favorite poems.

A.D. 1995

SLEEPLESS

I cannot sleep,
My chamber quietly lit by starlight dim
Is cold as tomb and haunted by the ghosts
Of my unsettled dreams: I see them not -
But a Daemon Presence, a Lover dark
Of a Spirit that cannot rest, and rest
Will not in life, but only hope to find
Its Peace in Death. I have an ember,
Burning through my chest in a flame
That will not die in the void of
Self-rejected usefulness,
For we live but what we see:
A phantom dream, a stark reality.

Imprisoned in a haven,
To peruse the Scrolls of Life and Death -
Where each and every Law
Wrought a wrinkle on my face,
And on my heart - a hungry chasm,
Where I was left to ponder on the reason why
The Tree of Life has shed its leaves
In the spring of my youth and of my time.
Unhappy king, a smileless jester
Or repentant thief: I have been all of these,
Unknown to others, and a mystery to me,
They still exist in vulnerable harmony:
A fragile balance on the Scales of Sleep.

I quiver in troubled silence
Under the soporific cover of my bed,
Vaguely aware of the unrelenting army
Of elemental fears marching through my head.
Uneasy slumber and eloquent defense:
Neither one could then prevent the yield
To passion of an Unknown Fear and the
Mindless leap of mutated faith: disfigured
Fractures of ephemeral strength, Unreal
And non-existent, a secret God and
Secret face - a cruel smile that drives

Me mad and I rage against myself,
The one and only enemy that's safe.

San Angelo, January 1995

Composed mostly during a walk around the University campus, I wrote the stanzas from memory when I got home. Published in "The Human Abstract" the same year.

THE RAIN AND THE TREE

Dedicated to Anke.

The words died unsaid
As the night enclosed her in its cloak of dark,
Through the rain she walked
As I stared through the door -
Welcomed no more, alone and cold.

The grim tree, its soaked leaves
Release their tears upon the pavement:
They are gone and so is she,
There's no one left in the misty night
Beneath the pale light
Of the lanterns and their stark
And numb delight.

The cigarette is scorched,
Its smoke dissolves never to exist again;
The coffee cup - forgotten,
With its blackness no longer warm.

The skyline in the East awakes
But in bed I have to lie:
A satin tomb that greets my vampyre life.

Misplaced reaction and a silent counteraction,
A poem unfinished sleeps on the floor -
Refused and yet unbroken,
A dream lost to life,
A child that perished unbegotten.

My fingers grope for words my mouth refuses to admit,
My mind stays quiet, unable to resist
As I resume my act and paint it in a deadly hue.

The storm is settling down
As the ground drinks its farewell -
Oh, I wish she'd stay -
Its last convulsions flash and fade away
Never to be followed by a groan,
I still sit alone.

The leaves in passion torn

Now slowly drown away from home
In the puddles that tomorrow will be gone.
A chilly gust of wind turns the page
In a symbolic act replacing with tomorrow another yes-
terday,
A paper that stayed blank.

I hear distant voices but the people are unseen,
Phantoms that pass by
Locked in the tiny rooms of their lives;
And I - in mine, the door wide open
With no one to come in:
I have to close it with the morning.

A touch unfelt, a kiss untasted
Lingers on my shrivelled lips,
A thirst that could not be quenched;
I reach out and embrace emptiness instead.

The empty sky descends upon the empty streets,
My empty look cannot see through. . .

San Angelo, February 1995

This is an I-hate-myself poem. A real life situation, in which I acted like a total jerk. Playing with feelings is fine as long as it is on paper. There is no way to reverse the unfortunate developments of which I happened to be the primary causal agent. Published in "The Human Abstract" of the same year without the dedication.

VAMPYRE

Dedicated to Miriam.

A shadow of a bird upon the red brick wall,
A withered rose in her marble hand,
A moon beyond the scattered clouds,
A star so distant and a frozen smile.
A passageway so dark, a staircase forlorn,
A window closed, an entrance locked -
A pale figure in the chamber -
A peaceful slumber, death, behind a curtain long.
A touch unreal and a dark embrace,
A hair soft, a trembling soul -
A creature new awoken to the sleep:
A vampyre kiss.

New Orleans, March 1995

Written during one of those nights that only happen in New Orleans, in an old nunnery, amidst a genuinely gothic scenery. An expression of the fear that something I had wanted for a long time just might be given to me later in the night.

VISIONS OF HATRED

The Dark Room

Cold... vapors... then warm... fingerprints
Steel touch - the rolling film
Darkness... fingerprints
The light is dim... if present
Its absence sustains me... and my film
Rolling against the silent steel
Groping for the frame - it's incorrect
But so unseen by my muddy gaze
Darkness... things which should be
The way I see...
But all things live... outside my scene
And still I cut the film in black and white...
Colors present in my mind... only pictures that I like
Chemicals... and water... cold and warm...
Through eyes unseen I masquerade another charade
Grotesque dreams and nightmares
When my pictures of black and white
Solemnly reject me...

The Dark Tunnel

Vision light... a tunnel dark
A solemn figure - a countenance so stark
Tinsel image... opiate dreams
The dark engulfed my midnight queen
A shield of frozen words cannot uphold my sword
A sacred covenant and forceful promise
Partake of the mournful rite
Of lie within my heart
The draperies so heavy, your lips so tight
The carpet weak and face so weary
A heart that surrenders to the fight
Never ending, all extreme
My passion overcome by grief -
A monologue within,
A love confession to a dream,
I am within.

The Pencil

The pencil perishing so slowly
I can feel its agony
Upon the white virginity of the pale sheet:
I do not grieve,
I can't perceive.
The situation awkward and the empty glass -
I would her pass
Another bluff.
I cannot laugh...
I have but a smile that beguiles
I hear her cry...
I cannot die... I would not lie.
But I kill
Myself and all my grief,
Aggravating mysteries,
I am a thief,
Oh, may it be sweet...

Steps and Engine

Steps so faint and engine roar
Waning in the night... I wish the light
But only if it's outside.
I feel so well scratching words of poems swell
I don't know how to spell.
I love myself.
I hate myself.
But I am the one and only that I can confide in,
Fearless of grief
And some betrayal of heartless principles.
Each figure splits in two
I wish I never disappear to the hostility
Of brooding silence
As I did tonight -
Talking too much.

Voice and Melody

I hope she comes
I hope she phones at least,
But I know that all I'll have

Will be the pages and the list
Of my unconsummated grief.
I hate it when I repeat
Myself...but for the lack of better word
I have to use this one...
And I am burned.
My voice is out of tune
With the melody no longer known.
I hate it when my poems make me cry...

Jester in Melancholy

A creaky stage: I cannot stop
But make myself a
Jester for tomorrow:
Laugh but never funny
Love another melancholy...
I need to see but I am tied within my grief
Within the endless circle
Of the silhouette of my unfinished cigarette
I should not be left alone,
My hopes are tied up to the phone
And I know I'll sleep alone.
The red elastic on the floor -
My hair overflows...my eyes are lost.
I need to kiss and love when I'm alone
I need a friend
When my slumber takes me to my bed.

San Angelo, Apr-01-95

These are actually several short vignettes, written during a hectic haze of drugs and alcohol (probably the only ones of such a nature). Three sordid relationships had just become unravelled and the self-inflicted wounds burned worse than ever.

A.D. 1996

TECHNO-POETICA

Shredded paper, crumpled in my hand:
a virtual existence meeting its own end
 confused and dazzled
A whirlwind of electrons in savage dance
spectres of reality, personality collapse
 disintegrated, scattered
Anti-matter burns through me
with light that shifts from blue to red
 and then disperses to infinity.

Half-way through the zero,
immaculate, divine,
a breathless stallion
bursting in its prime
 through time

Where would I live,
Where would I kill myself
 or be a martyr
 or a satyr
 or a beast

Where would I be human
Where would I kiss
 and love
 and see
 through my own irises?

Where would I be me?

Splashing colors make a rainbow,
By a simple law ordained
 with the wrinkled hand
 that still sustains
 the Universe

And I am dead to be reborn
 into the future
 or the past
 that both belong
 to me.

Muscles strained
 perspiring hands

widened nostrils

glazed eyes

A leap of faith into the vault
of all forbidden hope
incoherent thoughts
digest the world as toothless worms
into a mash

Swallow hard and swallow fast
the hard part's been done
for you
and me
by some divine
authority.

My attraction to the world repels it
disowning me as its own son
I could be a killer
if there only was
a life to kill

A fiber-optic shadow, I appear on Channel 3
to tell you about my agony
and preach my practice once again
to a restless and abhorring audience
and I am dead
and I am bored
by the remote.

Pastel painting in a frame,
would I sell the tormented visions of my brain
or would I pretend
and sell a rose
or sell a bird
or sell a poem, maybe two
or just commit a crime
that will be called divine.

Our past now forms the future
and my present with them both collides
a stitch in time
would only take me
where I would rather be:

Everywhere and nowhere, but only me.

San Angelo, Mar-04-96

A futuristic virtual world. And I am stretched across the pages of History. A trip of self-discovery that might end in disaster.

1997 A.D.

A DREAM WITHIN

I dreamt I slept and dreamt I lived
I dreamt I woke and ceased to dream
I dreamt unhappy silent woe
Locked in the muteness of a scream.

San Angelo, Mar-10-97

It was really just a scary dream!

CONFESSION

I mourn the loss of innocence
With the cynical conclusion of a mundane mind,
All practical, pragmatic. . .
Sometimes I wonder if it's still alive.
The words constrain and censor with propriety
Immoral pride - two worlds apart.

Beneath the weight of stars I lie
A canopy of myths, now no more
Than a shroud:
It is even colder now, I freeze
In knowing that I'm still alive
And yet the bloom is stale inside.

A single motion, like a ripple
Disturbs the murky sky,
I lie now vexed
Acknowledging the fact
With calculating eyes
It moves me not and it drives me mad.
Sometimes I think of it at night.

Cruel lunacy, I am your martyr
That I should hope for grander life
When doubt of Self steals inside
To gnaw the flutter of my heart.

Dare not exorcize this folly
Lest my ruptured veins bedrown the soul,
The element of ether, delicate and timeless
Baned eternally by pagan blows.

The worm of waiting in slow damnation
Feeds on me
And I am a dish for his devouring ecstasy.

I am a luckless prophet
By vengeful destiny
Doomed to ignorance of his own futurity.

'Tis but a dreadful aspect of every Man
To fancy comprehension of himself.

Yet when it comes to pass,
To hope I'm damned
That I have never sung a dull refrain
Nor have I lived in vain.

San Angelo, March 7-13, 1997

A reiteration of the old adage that we live through what we do. I just want to be able to say in the end that my life has not been wasted.

TO DEATH

Death, thou be not proud,
For even if thou hither comest,
Neither sway, nor chill me
With thy sable whiff thou canst.
Many a fierce gale
Were soothed on thy earthly bed;
O, Temptress, thy kisses feel so sweet,
Thy nuptial ring of gold is made.
Not in Love's vain hope
My warmth from thee I seek,
And not in Pride defying I foresee thy death.
Thou, the Ancient Mistress,
Art but a child that feeds on milk
From its mother's breast.
Deadly parent, thy name shall give me strength,
Thine child's destruction lies in it,
And my eternal loneliness.
My freedom is thy dread, o Fear;
I know thee, and thy pallid vision
Shall taunt me not, it being
A relic pitiful of past dominion.
God was barely alive the moment
All these words I spake:
His sister, Death, had cast her spell,
As ending act of reverence.
Begone! Thou, Angel and a Demon!
Away! Thou, Serpent and a Dove!
My spirit rises to thy mother, shaking all the Skies;
With wrath and roar of the ages
Emerges from seraphic trance
Tearing down the walls of Paradise.
No more shall thy sibling's laws
Provide thy food with meekness false
Of those beguiled and enticed by holy smile.

San Angelo, May-04-97

The only poem that has undergone substantial revisions from the original ver-

sion written on October 8, 1994 in Sofia. This latest incarnation is the fifth in the sequence. A twist on Donne's Holy Sonnet, it is evidence of how substantially I disagree with him. It is easy to argue with dead people, of course, but I do believe this poem has enough merit to stand on its own.

MY LOVER

Dedicated to Margarita.

'Tis but a thousand miles between us;
Not thrice ten days since we have part,
Yet thousand thoughts I've thought of you
And thrice that number sung my heart.

Though the world may lay siege to my tower
And devour it stoned with a spree
Then enjoin an attack - for each piercing arrow
Your breast checked its flight unto me.

When dark and misguided I sail
Through oceans and perilous seas
When rocks sink their teeth in my keel,
My compass and lifeboat were you.

When shunned, you welcomed me in,
When hungry, you fed me, and clothed
When I froze; I am now forever beholden
To the winds which my fires uphold.

You know my secretest face
That would shame me if it be revealed
But you kept it in delicate locket,
Close to the heart had it concealed.

Though dreams are now rudely awoken
And my frail eyes strained to see
The morn past, the day unbegotten,
Your face is still comfort to me.

You trusted me your very essence,
My Child, my Lover, my Friend;
Though I falter, and stutter, and shiver,
I shall never betray this last stand.

Though years now dull the ideals
And a cynic have I hardened to be,
There's a garden most heavily guarded
With the flower of my love for you.

San Angelo, Mar-08-97

I usually try to avoid romantic entanglements with the paper. Attempts to write love poetry leave me feeling quite impotent, incapable of translating passion into words. Detachment is a requirement, which is all but achievable in this case. (Margarita is, of course, my wife now.)

RIDGEWAY COMMONS

I am bounded below by expectations
and my limit restrains me above,
so in the narrow range that's allowed
I stray in random motions...
Uncomfortable with the chain of events
yet purporting to be the causal agent
in a mad rush to get as far as I ever could
from a regression to the mean,
why am I so afraid to be in the middle?
Is it worth the bleeding strain
to formalize the proof that I am more
than I really know myself to be?
Can it be done at all? Or am I simply vain?

Uncertainty creeps on me and hugs me cozily
then suddenly snuffs out my guiding light
I find myself alone in the night,
wondering how much light
my window to the world gives out
and whether it provides some warmth at all...
or is it just as coldly black
as the windows of the other flats
adjacent to the microscopic cosmos
of my apartment in this house of ants!
Think I'll have a beer,
guess I'll have a smoke,
then go back to the homework:
I'll find out if it was worth it... in the end.

It seems I've reached the place
where the path is cut off as it bends
asymptotically descends and dissolves below,
it looks like a decision must be made
for a jump toward an unknown end,
I sense the pull of a demanding fate... I think
or is it just inertia that won't let me mend
my ways and keep a straight face
when I strenuously pretend to steer the present.
Ghosts of future reminiscence, of distant summing up,

dance down through the ages:
relentlessly around me,
they choke my heart and tear my flesh,
distract my thoughts, compelling yet out of context:
still my mental faculties are overwrought.

Rochester, Sep-15-97

An expression of severe doubt in Self's purpose. This poem infested with mathematical references is both angry and contrite, a combination which is awfully difficult to achieve.

VOYAGE

Ocean! Thou art but a watery continent!
Yet some fearful attribute, some quality
Of thy character has me enthralled,
Captivated and enraptured by my own mortality;
How dare I limit thine boundless energy?

Is it thy billows or thy plains:
The one that feeds, the other kills,
Is it thy froward freedom that bemocks
This one man's effort to constrain thee
In the camera of passing faculties?

Yet every rhythmic draw of breath
That yonder Moon takes forth from thee
Consoles me with the countless myriads
Of now forsaken creatures of the sea
That part with thee to keep me company.

Ere long they gasp bereft of sustenance
In the leaded poison that we breathe
I clutch a heavy handful and to seek deliverance
I eager run to meet with thee.
But now thy chilly currents dance with me.

Disconsolate but merciless thou spurn them
As once to Man thou chose to be the cenotaph.
Whilst one by one they join the cavalcade,
I think of how we changed to cheat Her lust,
And I know not who's happiest between us.

Upon thy pathless corpse I chart a course,
My passage alters with thy furrowed whim
And yet all strained and fierce I persist
The voyage to the Albion from my dream:
Take thou my hand and dream with me.

Rochester, Oct-20-97

This was meant to be an ambitious project and I have yet to finish it. I have not abandoned all hope yet. Parts were written in San Angelo in the spring of 1997, revisited during the late summer in Balchik, and then substantially rewritten in Rochester. The poem itself is a Journey.

A.D. 1998

A FLIGHT OVER A PLAYGROUND

A flight in slow motion
like a free fall
toward an ever unassailable landscape
I am motionless
as the earth rotates below
with fractal mountains
chased by jagged trees
drowning lakes framed in obsidian
shed their essence of blue
into the corner of my eye
I clutch the colors
my open palms release a tear
translucent and near to my skin
I taste the saltiness
of its brief existence
and it mingles with the cry within
I am chained by the unbodied hand
that keeps me suspended in the air
above and yet below
neither touching nor escaping
I will never reach the sky
I will never meet the ground

I find no humor
in this perverse divine joke
that populates my dreams
with copulating specks of matter
seditious images that subvert
my humanity
disintegrate it
and let it sink
like dregs of imagination
I glide through a mutilated zodiac
the sun glimmers in the vacuum
darkly illuminates
tableaux set in space
that statically translate
n-dimensional experience

time recasts them
in an existential matrix
and I am born

The swings submit to listless habit
the playground sands are cold
the forms obliterated
by the strain to guard them
from the thieving winds
it would have been
prodigiously metaphoric
if children played their secret plays
amidst crude metal
plastic joys
and putrid toys
it would have
but even the poetic eye
refuses to inhabit
the scene below
with more than the inanimate objects
grim consorts
in subservient existence
share me

Against coarse canvas
the lips of the moment press
life stills its breath
a new drawing emerges
from the moiré pattern
I float through the gallery
without walls
its series of paintings
curious specimen
for a study in teratology
converge in me

I am the old man with the kite
in an infinite field I run
the kite
perpetually drawn by gravity
hurtles down
the curvature of the horizon

evades it
and it flies again
always falling
never falling
I sadly smile
with unhappy knowledge
I sadly smile
waiting for the kite
to collapse for eternity
The morphine nanny lulls me
to the midnight spleen
of a bedtime story
I sleep
with the corpse of consciousness

Rochester, Apr-02-98

*A melancholy journey in which the starting point coincides with the destination.
It is not circular however even though it can be endless.*

A.D. 1999

DOWN

Balance breaks
flesh flies
greet gravity
musket shot
splatter
flow
Still fingers
blind handle
mouth broken
scream meets
gravity
silence

Syracuse train, Mar-04-99

A cliff, with an arrow following the fall of a person. Only a splattering on the ground.

EVENING ROOM

Evening, door-bell, entrance
She's ready to go out
He's rather talk, so in they go
As night for fun turns awkward conversation
He'd rather talk, she'd rather go
But in they stay.
He knows the answers,
She'd rather hear not the questions
She wears her nightdress
Uncomfortably perched at the edge of the chair
He talks in hopeful desperation:
Before a firing squad,
Blind-folded, praying for a miss
Resigned to steel tearing through his flesh.
She listens,
Her grey eyes say she'd rather not,
He carries on, monotonous soliloquy,
Nothing like the passion he rehearsed.
He's tired, his sentences are tired
She listens mercifully, tries to frame the answer
He'd rather hear not.
Her silence speaks in thousand words:
He talks to change the way of stars.
She sighs and draws him near,
Hugs him closely to her breast.
He cries, she lets him cry,
She strokes his hair.
Grey eyes stare into the distance,
She does not see and is not looking,
Her grey eyes are sad.
He cries, she lets him cry.
Her ruined dress,
their ruined evening,
his ruined life.

Balchik, Aug-21-99

The second installment in the Room cycle (with "Afternoon Room" being the first). This narrates the unhappy result of a love confession to an unloving woman.

A.D. 2001

24 EXP.

One frame—for every broken flesh
One frame—for every conquered dream
One frame—for every crossed-out page
One frame—for every deeper wound
One frame—for every unmade bed
One frame—for every hungry dawn
One frame—for every concept named
One frame—for every banned refrain
One frame—for every hollow gaze
One frame—for every chaos planned
One frame—for every fancied bliss
One frame—for every lover scarred
One frame—for every sunset missed
One frame—for every jealous lust
One frame—for every aimless trip
One frame—for every passion slain
One frame—for every faith betrayed
One frame—for every curtain drawn
One frame—for every mask revealed
One frame—for every brutal kiss
One frame—for every summer rain
One frame—for every shared fear
One frame—for every fragment lost
One frame—for every other frame.

Rochester, Feb-13-01

This poem forms the basis of photo narrative with 24 pictures, each illustrating one line from the poem.

NIGHT ROOM

They converse,
or, I should say, he talks to ward off silence
she stares at the wall:
two empty feet between them,
his words arrive from miles away,
already weak, exhausted, strained,
she does not understand but listens on
of courtesy:
she does not want to hurt a stranger.
She's trying to recall the features
of a face she knew,
or thought she knew,
he's trying to remind her.
A wallpaper silhouette
with stains for eyes and crack for smile,
or maybe frown,
she knows the picture
in an objective way.
He stops weary of the effort,
he listens, or, I should say, he waits.
It's coming—powerless to stop it,
he bows his head—it is upon him now.
She smiles faintly,
she'd rather cry,
she smiles sadly,
she does not like to hurt the stranger
under familiar skin.

Rochester, Mar-02-01

The third installment of the Room cycle. Another tale of alienation.

LEAVES AND BRANCHES

Far—deserted peaks loom hostile;
a crime from previous life
condemns to their grim detention
There—rivers seethe, headlong with fury,
intent on seeking refuge in the plains,
waters drown forbidding shores.
Closer—receding gorges unravel slopes,
greens in hidden valleys
rustle for unseen inhabitants.
There—sky and earth with care touch,
in the river's hymn of foam and droplets
stars admire silvery reflections.
Seated upon a wet rock,
I am disturbed by the thought of returning.

Rochester, Aug-24-01

The title is a Japanese expression that means insignificant trifles or worries. Upon venturing into the forbidding expanses of the wilderness, one quickly discovers how remote civilization, with all its attendant concerns, becomes.

WEDDING NIGHT

Behind the painted screen
the lamp flickers
animates ink figures;
Cormorant fishermen toiling
to amuse imperial travelers,
nuns huddling in boats
to cross the lake to their temple,
mysterious gorges crowd in the fog
floating above thatched huts:
Seasonal change in black.

Behind the silk screen
the lamp flickers.
She loosens her hair
in front of the mirror;
a jade pin drops to the floor
the sound flutters ink ducks.
She unties her sash—
brocade by night—
the cold wind seeps through cracks,
she shivers slightly, her skin exposed.

Behind the folding screen
the lamp flickers.
Her shadow moves
stirring pear blossoms,
startling dragonflies,
scattering petals.
Gracefully her lips
put the candle to sleep.
In the dark her fragrance
as my fingers trace her satin curves.

Rochester, 14-Oct-01

The painted screen refers to traditional Chinese and Japanese screens used to set off a part of a room from another. Many have elaborate paintings and poetry. "Brocade by night" is a quote from a Japanese poem and refers (obliquely) to the idea that one cannot appreciate what is unseen.

ON WAKING

This night I wake around 2:00am
Cold autumn breeze drifts through the open window
I burn, discard the covers
Heart palpitates disquieted
Stomach growls angry.
I am apprehensive
the dawn is distant yet.
Pulling down a random book from the shelves -
poetry by Po Chü-i -
I read to calm my mind:
“When mind is stilled, the body will be cool.”
A cat scratches on my bedroom door;
When I open it, he scurries away.
What could be disturbing his sleep?

Rochester, 15-Oct-01

Written during the months of waiting to hear from places I had applied for work. I was hardly getting any sleep, worrying about the future. Why?

FATHER SEES TWO SWANS AT LAKE OHRID DURING THE
NIGHT OF NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS

Still somewhat fuzzy
I roll up the reed blinds;
Far to the North—boats glide
drunken revellers chant
Macedonian songs
without music.
Gay lights dimmer
than the clear Moon
floating on azure waves.
Far to the South—candles flicker
people at a monastery
perform the rites
for golden harvest.
Hopeful lights dimmer
than the yellow stars
garlanding the Milky Way.
Out on the terrace
the chill freshens my gaze.
Absently, I look down:
two swans on the shoal.
How incongruous amid rigid cattails.
Earth frozen, the lake almost so,
two swans on this wintry night,
as white as the snow,
remind me of my young ones,
three thousand miles and an ocean apart.
Would that these birds
could fly somewhere else;
here they only bring sadness
on this winter night.

Rochester, 16-Oct-01

My father saw the swans during my parents' trip to Macedonia in 2000, when I was in America.

AROUND THE POND AND INTO THE FOREST, I COME
ACROSS A DEAD TREE STILL STANDING

Impervious to seasons,
next to pines, amid
the bursting colors of the fall,
the gray tree looms alone.
The autumn breeze drifts through
its unclad branches,
no rustle to perturb
its silent gaze.
Underneath that tree
a whirlwind of foreign leaves;
a squirrel leaps by uninterested,
the crows forsake their nests.
This tree guards
the passing of the moons;
already dead, it imbues
the beauty of the living
with melancholy gloom.
Today I watched until sunset.
On my way home
I walked around sleeping ducks
and wild apples rotting on the path,
wanting to disturb neither.

Rochester, 20-Oct-01

On such a night as this
the fire crackles, frigid flames,
beneath the weight of snow
outside the branches snap.
Within the empty room I lie
and wonder:
Were winter nights this cold
when you were here?
The snow outside keeps falling
while I sleep fully clothed.

Rochester, 30-Oct-01

We live together
and we are happy,
maybe even in love,
but we don't know each other
and we love what might not be.
Sometimes,
when she isn't looking,
I look at her:
I wonder who she is.
I look intently
at the stranger next to me.
She looks up,
I smile
with an empty smile.
What do I say
to a stranger?

Rochester, 1-Nov-01

A.D. 2002

DISGUST

Yesterday, down in the fun district,
slightly drunk I stagger past whores,
and I meet that girl that used to be my lover.
She waves hesitantly, I stop for a chat,
pretending to ignore where we are.
We talk trifles without looking too closely.

A gust of wind opens her blouse.
The sudden sight of her breasts stirs me,
like Pavlov's dog I salivate recalling,
without passion, embraces in sweat:
I'd bed her in an instant.

I look away—pulse flat.
She looks disgusted and so do I.
I feel disgust.
Love, even past, is easy prey.

La Jolla, 24-Aug-02

I LIVE

I live—
my house, like any other house,
furnished not unlike the others;
my street, among the other streets,
filled with strangers like the others.

I live—
my loves, like many other loves,
the burst of flame, the embers smothered;
fear guards the ashes still
faking warmth, just like the others.

I laugh—
my happiness, like any other,
a tinge of sorrow and regret,
a dream unfilled and half-forgotten;
with tears dry I dare not fret.

I die—
my grave, like any other grave,
with requisite inscription, flowers;
from the mountaintop invisible,
just like the monuments of others.

I lived—
my house, like any other house,
up to the open door a stair;
my street, like any other street,
busy strangers passing, unaware.

San Diego, 25-Aug-02

IT came back.
I'd rather hoped that it wouldn't.
Yet, uninvited like hunger,
and untimely like thirst,
IT came back.

IT is tasteless and yet I taste it.
IT is weightless and yet it weighs me down.
Like a blanket envelops and yet I freeze tonight.

The ocean stretches forward
but its white gossamer arms retreat,
their strengths sapped by the moon;
still it tries again, never ceasing nor succeeding.
Like me.

Across the darkened beach—
lifeless carcasses of seaweed
discarded amid tracks of unseen creatures.
A stray glimpse of the moon
reveals two figures now walking toward me,
now vanishing—
collapsing on the damp sand
to fuck out of sight.
How romantic.
I am repelled by not participating.

Still,
IT clings to me like sweat
getting colder against my back.
The Moon plunges behind the cliffs
and I stop writing.

In the darkness:
IT with my thoughts.

San Diego, 27-Aug-02