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UGLY DUCKLING PRESSE
uglyducklingpresse.org
This book consists of selections from and expansions of four chapbooks of my poems: Noughtbook 1 and Noughtbook 2 (1998), The Unraveller Seasons (2000) and The Off-Centaur (2002). Eugene Timerman provided the art and design for the first three chapbooks, whereas the last was designed by Macgregor Card with art again by Timerman. I wrote the final section of this book, The Ambassadors, as a verbal illustration to a series of as yet unpublished computer drawings by Timerman.

—E.O.
## TABLE OF DISCONTENTS

**THE GANGSTER WHO LOST HIS G**
- Autobiography, 9
- An Encyclical on the Addition of Zeros, 11
- Poetry and You, 15
- The Anniversary, 16
- Senselessness for Vvedensky, 18
- Sextus Propertius on the Steps of Mission Dolores, 20
- The Stomach Flu, 22
- Autobiography (Hardcore Remix), 24

**THE UNRAVELLER SEASONS**
- The Consolation of Philosophy, 29
- I Locked the House of Myself, 33
- I Found My Thrill, 35
- The Unraveller, 38
- The Martyr, 42
- The Prayer, 44
- Zoe’s War, 45
- Ballad, 49
- Language, 51
- Song of the Western Slavs, 53
- Group Portrait with Massacre, 54
- The Anatomy of Monotony, 58
- I Struck Rhetorical Poses, 60
- The Aeneid, 61
- Third Water Poem, 62

**SMOTHERLAND**
- Heliotrope, 67
- White Ewe, 68
- The Sick Man (больной который стал волной), 71
- Master of Swallows, 74
- The Airman before Sunrise, 76
- The Death of Oleg, 78
- Cantor in the Aviary, 80

**ERRORISM**
- At a Temp Agency, 87
- The Man-Moose, 88
- Happy Birthday, Wayne Chambliss, 90
- The Chow Family, 92
- The Birth of a Superhero, 93
- One of Three Philosophers, 95
- The Two-Dimensional Philosopher, 97

**THE AMBASSADORS, 103**

**NOTES, 110**
THE GANGSTER WHO LOST HIS G


You like Coke, I like Pepsi,
I got Hep A, you got Hep C.
I used to think of myself as just another Ovid somewhere in Romania sporting a Mogen-David,

racking the local parlance to make it sigh on
Jah! How well I remember Zion.

My image changed when I got a visa
only to declare there really is no
Zion—that whether rhinos course by or reindeer,
it’s just varying degrees of Romania.

I turned bilingual. Romanians claimed
I had two characters, two lives, two brains.

Although they say two is more than one cranium,
it’s half as great if both be in Romania.

Then I found myself with no native tongue,
only two prosthetics to flap among

teeth & gums, or sitting below the palate
like in a cockpit two pilots.
I wore my jeans loose & used the word *stoopid.*
I used to have love but I don’t know where I put it.

All my flats turned into kennels.
My only pets were my packs of Camels,

whose caravans filed under the sun
of my soul’s desert—it, one by one,
made them go up in smoke. My sole amenity
was to point at them & say *All is vanity!*

That too, my dear, is another bubble.
In most of the cases, one’s only trouble

is oneself—so stick up two fingers over your
head before the mirror in the corridor.

---

1.

I would blow away with a big popgun
the porcupine that plows your arm

whose pricks sprout poppies & bloom in red
on your skin’s wax roller, as if some compass had
tried to tattoo a circle whose center is
in each hair follicle & circumference
also, but fluttered up, so you point mute
like a bottleneck at the Absolut(e)
absence, the lip-crowned O
into which we all spiral, spiral and then fall
in the process of going down the drain
imitating a candy cane.

2.

Maybe that’s why I loved you. As a disheveled crest
Beethoven-like in its race towards rest
atop its wave’s roll of muscle, massive & tensed
up for the slap into the turbulence
of a wipe-out, only accidentally sweeps along men, boats, sharks
skyscrapers & strollers, desire wants its own annihilation, & to signal what
it really wants, what makes it move what the final cause is of our love
it handfiles our lenses & ensures we find in emblems of death objects pleasing to mind.

3.

All we got is refinery rented, put on; our selves but gleaming and vain-glorious eggshells
of a scrambled nothingness within which you can't tell a trigger from a light-switch.

So stay in bed & hold in that pee for that way at least something inside you be

plus a laboratory technician may not decipher your character in a chamber pot
thus unraveling your knot/you're not. What we think and feel boasts its own clockwork, own set of wheels
winds itself & is to us a monster out of Oedipus or of Jaws.

4.

Whereas we are nothing. If you had encased yourself in an Arcimboldian self-portrait
with cookers to cover your forehead and cheek, fits over nose, brows, mouth, neck,
hair—cotton, for eyes two Bics, it would be as you as what now you is,

since, like me, you are nothing. Not even smoke.
For even smoke to Israel spoke & we—O if we could break through our junk-sculpture casements, we'd just mouth moo
or boo, maybe oo—oo probably, for an oo adds up to a single o.

5.

This is the ring with which I thee wed.
This is the fold of our marriage bed.
This is the tube of our embrace, televising in our ribcages an everyplace;
contracted pupils, by trance beset, the monogram on our wedding-gift china set,
your hot small mouth around my tongue-kiss. This is your belly ballooned up with our kid

& also the emblem, where Cupid sits inside a circling serpent that eats

its own tail & beneath it says **Post Fata Superstes**—"love past death."

6.

* * *

_**Line of Bottles**_

Like a Russian placing the drained and emptied in a line-up to be looked at from where the lamp is,

we built a bridge through each day, inch by inch, adding not log and log but syringe and syringe,

yet the sum was the same as what prints every orange cap. Now your legs measure Shotwell or Capp

& in every locale, landscape **slash** site read a thing synonymous to the eye-sight,

homogenous, unaffected by feature nature, nurture, culture, creature

a reflection of nothing, bare orthography of why I don't need you and you don't need me.

---

**Poetry and You**

Put on your sundress & sing **oy lule**: everything is imaginary.

Fallen out of bed, crawl to get a beer: this way you ensure the world won't disappear.

Never mind your studies. In much wisdom is sorrow. Any cataclysm will give you the same wisdom, i.e. the same sorrow. With luck you'll get hit by a bus tomorrow.

Combining letters, you could place endless propositions before your own face.

It could react its way through the entire National Portrait Gallery—it'll never act natural.

Stomp on your papyrus, smash your inkhorn & reed. What you write no one will ever read.

Make your lungs cancerous with a cigarette Under the pyramids of cement.
THE ANNIVERSARY

I was your caballero when we was little.
You loved me not—I kept the bit in,
did circles around Stuy Park or
studied Nausica by Jean-Paul Sartre.

You went to Union Square, became a Buddhist,
mediating with your booty due east.

On West 4th I popped Bud, Pabst, Schaeffer
cans with Dave Z. & Jeff Schaeffer.

This shows we both had a thing for the void,
though that’s what the black in Asteroids
represented for you, while for me it was
when the spaceship met the asteroid’s force.

Did I change the bait? cause my dream came true.
I took you home & I unwrapped you.

Your body flopped around like a sturgeon,
though five minutes before that you were a virgin.

You were not gentle & I was not meek.
I was like Ahab & you—Moby Dick.

You threw a party where you manhandled Brett,
so I took the opportunity to pop you in the head.

We’ve done the limbo over dozens of faces,
jumped like poodles through hoops of embraces,
but for, say, four years I found it tough
not to think any girl you if she was distant enough,

that’s cause I’m myopic. Now I got glasses.
& we sit down today so as to empty glasses
face to face, knowing that, like sister & brother,
we loved others besides loving one another.

Happy anniversary! Were I able to live
my life over, I still would have loved
you—

but there’s no other life & before we bed,
I count the gray hairs on your head.
SENSELESSNESS FOR VVEDENSKY

You grew up on bread & the Pentecost.
Into your throat was a serpent cast

& you walked with it out of your mouth coiling,
as if the air were water & you were to boil it.

Stick your fingers into a socket—you are
a Christmas tree, dissociated & spectacular,

whose toys are pieces, but they’re no Reese’s,
each is its own genus & its own species.

With a pair of compasses, cosmographer, lay
concentric circles à la Ptolemy.

In a glass elevator bisecting them go
eeny meeny miny moe.

An angel, at haec, is hit by a rock.
A demon sits brooding on a language block.

An eagle plays chicken with a Mack truck.
Each is a cuckoo you’d like to clock.

Cause what makes an image is a STOP YOUR MOTOR!
But you ascended, shedding your neurons motor

& sensory—
now no one can clock you, even if he tear
(since all you are is nothing) apart thin air.

Nature blanks on what you’ve become.
But nurture, abhoring vacuum,

pictures you soar through the galactic pinball,
like Richard Crashaw mainlining a speedball.

Poet & saint! That accidentals are insubstantial
you now sing with houses, numbers, oceans,

also the wood of boxcars, guns’ steel—the whole range
of Russian poetry’s attributes in the Heroic Age.

Let us say that is true, cause it is the same
whether it is or not: we, if substance stay

inaccessible & immeasurable, its existence bar.
So I talk into nothing, but that’s what you are.

You’ve lost your ear, you can’t distinguish
plosive from surd, Russian from English,

you comprehend nothing. Accept this verse then
from a Eugene trying to be a horseman.
SEXTUS PROPERTIUS ON THE STEPS OF MISSION DOLORES

On this hill, a pin-cushion for acupuncture,
we tested whether rapture should follow rupture,
in brown habits reproducing St. Francis &
airplanes flew around our trances.

Our skin exploded in stigmata
cause the said planes shot tracer bullets at it,
their metal coffins into the flesh lowered decomposed, sprouting blood flowers.

Skinny, our shirtsleeves down,
we walked the town eyes scouring around,
our teeth gnashing in desire
for a more-substantial-than-love fire.

Or we sat in the Orbit & sucked martinis,
sighing “O, if I only had a teeny
bit!”—but the bit in our teeth is all there was for us,
so we twisted on the sheets, in a spat with Morpheus.

All we learned at that point is now forgotten except how on metal to cook up cotton,
the angels & demons have shot up, startled,
& the allegorical figure of geometry is departed.

O, let me not recoin the past: its laundromats—
their washers gaping—sigh the O’s of loneliness
mirroring those driers whose drums I now see.
So to go back would be a redundancy.
I'm lying in bed and I have a fever.  
If you were to kiss me, I'm sure, fewer would number the degrees of Celsius.  
Might not Fahrenheit then advance on us?

No. They run parallel, whether East or West,  
but the Fahrenheit is nine-fifths as fast.

It is nervous, irregular, it all but falls over  
turning—like a dog in an uncarpeted corridor.

Their is the race and I’m the track.  
In the pillows’ ellipse I feel like drek  
and my mind spins as if some Star Trek fan a naked woman startled.

Yes, my mind spins and my stomach too.  
Should you look at me from the ceiling, you would see the metamorphosis of Eugene O. into a pair of taking-off UFO’s.

I’ve puked almost a gallon; I am as light as a room gets when you switch on the light.

Around me angels and demons tear,  
bloodying each other’s noses and pulling hair.

There one sits on a chandelier.  
At another’s leer it gives a Bronx cheer.

Is this a thermometer or an odometer?  
How does one hold down a glass of water?

Why is it your name I’m so pathetically moaning?  
Maybe my subconscious is histrionic,

maybe I love you, or maybe I err  
cause it sounds so close to mama, Maia.

You gave me this flu, you dangly bitch.  
To smack you my hand doth itch,

but I’ve already taken so much shit from you, this is nothing in comparison—just a flu.
AUTOBIOGRAPHY (HARDCORE REMIX)

I don’t want to be an American
marching for various Campbell’s cans;

the country I was born to makes me nauseous,
its spasmatic Igors, strung-out Natashas.

I was gonna build me a house of love,
among see-through walls I would live,

incorporeal doorframes, but non sono capace,
I turned this house into Fort Apache.

In my head I heard melodies,
I deformed rhymes, misscannd syllables,

but I have no native language,
I can’t judge, I suspect I write garbage.

Learning is a dialogue
where you think dead men talk,

but the tragedy in their words
made me cry on toilets.

I shaved my head, demothed my parka,
said to myself “Hey, you ugly mother-fucker!

There’s not much time left, but don’t get anxious—
have patience.”
THE UNRAVELLER SEASONS


Excuse me is this Damascus
asks the absent-minded man

and falls from his horse
just in case

No one comes to pick him up
so he lies there
THE CONSOLATION OF PHILOSOPHY

*En la forest d’Ennuyeuse Tristesse*
—Charles d’Orleans

In the Arena in the middle of Verona
Like the letter o in the middle of verona
Two mouths sang they were each other’s corona.
Open, they appeared to be a score on a

Scoreboard: love, all. If an imagined pencil
Wrote a +, a − or the x of

Multiplication between them,
Their note would have changed not. It wrote division’s

Bar and two dots.
All
Bodies are interchangeable,

Their noses and lips rearrangeable,
Their breasts and thighs detachable and reattachable:

Held together by fishnets of arteries
They implore you to play Isis to their Osiris.

A mouth chews on a cigarette
To confuse what it bewails with what it sniggers at.

A really straight spine
Makes you note, “It’s not like mine.”
A pair of testicles hanging from a tree
Looks at you melancholically.

Of legs and arms the crawling unity
Says, “We’re a community.”

In such a forest of noxious heavynesse
I met a lady of lucent loneliness.

With her I forgot my distress,
then she extirped her loneliness with everyone else.

So I spent a lot of time crying ‘Alas!’
in the forest of noxious loneliness.

In the forest of onerous sadness
I pranced around, mine own onager that is ass.

My ears were as the conquest dreams of Emperor Hirohito,
My tongue was a burrito from El Farolito,

I-beams stuck out of my pupils,
My teeth pointed every which way like recessed pupils.

I went sinusoid over hill and dale
Until I bumped into a knight named Gayle.

Her hand the bolts of her visor did assail
Cause with a bottle of Absolut she was trying to wassail.

She said:

“O, what can ail you, pale wretch?
You walk about with a stale kvetch.

Watch the clock that stands on a windowsill,
Says, It’s not forever you’ll need Clearasil.

Soon your flesh will dissolve, your chest turn a T,
Your head an O: there’s your eternity.

If every brain the universe’s focus is,
Each death is an Apocalypse.

Sun, stars, planets, Acuras and Mazdas,
Levi’s and Diesel, Wells Fargo, pastas
And pestos, your bicycle, each girl you know, her period:
All phenomena whose I/eye you were shall vanish, period.

The world is like TOMORROW: O-full,
It’s less than more full,

It’s mostly absences and Absence is its ruler.
Under her muff’s a pencil sharpener
she holds a ruler,

Upon its face there is a series of ciphers:
She keeps the world stretched out, you infer.

It’s due to her that objects don’t collapse, since
Each holds its place like letters in a sentence
And each position in that sentence
Is made of other objects’ absence.

Since Vanity’s her sense and alias,
She crashes the ball of being in the dress

Of death and parting: which two, impressionable Eugene,
Are just manifestations of ontology.

So when some object waves to you bye-bye,
don’t cry,
don’t sigh,

Cašt a cold eye.”

I saw that what I took for a knight named Gayle
Was actually a nightingale

And next to it I saw a horse and a man and a ship
And I saw that it spelled out HORSEMANSHIP

I jumped into the saddle, a Clint Eastwood clearly
And rode off into the sunset cavalierly

Yet still the following ditty
Spiraled within my tittie:

Good God, as I lay me down to rest
Clutching a vacuum cleaner against my chest

With hands semi-limp like in a Renaissance painting
Let me remember every thing.

I locked the house of myself
The chest’s cupboard and shelf

The pot of the pelvis
Folds of muscle, fat’s pearles

Pupil’s agate
Colon’s maggot

The skull’s deep cup
No one shall lift up

I bolted the lip
I belted the lap

Fastened the ears over my face with a clip
Taped my palms in a silent clap

Said,
  Goodbye
  Goodbye
  Goodbye
  Goodbye

I walked in the forest like an elephant
Everything I saw seemed irrelevant

I walked in the forest like a donkey
Everything I saw seemed on key
I flew over the river Volga
Around it milled a people vulgar

I became longer and longer

I FOUND MY THRILL

On Esquiline hill
Death paused on my windowsill

She was not as the other Eugene has
a stately lass she had no class

in fact she had nothing even resembling tits and ass
so I must fix my pronoun It was

a common death, a winged skeleton
Down stuck to its bones as if they were gelatin

On Esquiline
hill I was not on mescaline

not on Ritalin, I lay broad waking
whereas it

acquiring the human fashion of forsaking

squatted for a while, then flapped into the dazed glow of the day along Via Principe Amedeo

Please God O God pretty pretty please you who does not exist

make this Death my Death
don't make me a witness to another's death
I would rather fall on the floor in my elbow a saber
than figure out life from the agony of my neighbor

Right as I finished just saying No
there appeared a very big Crow

In its beak there was a serrated row
and as it was going to bite me in t-w-o

I again cried, No!
Take my neighbor, take her for here or to go,

Table on that body I once did know
very intimately, until it grow

into the main ingredient of Sloppy Joe™
Pull out her bluish intestines real slow

chop her up into Caesar so
cheeze fly through the air like crimson snow

It will be very educational for me
Seven
planets danced their courses through heaven

and the devil
walked around with a spirit level

In his other hand he held a bevel
On the other side of the wall sounded a gavel

And I knew there was eternal life
that there will come a day when I rise
out of the grave, my eye steady and sober
my hips swaying to the trumpet like a cobra
THE UNRAVELLER

I met an unraveller from an antic land
his device was a broken ampersand

his beaver was grand, with him was a band
of bandits in pompadours layered and fanned

Their mouths smoked cigarettes a.k.a. fags
The horses they rode on had several legs

They jumped over bogs, fell into logs
Sometimes they even fell on top of their dogs

Where their horses had hopped, there was nothing crescent
Their scimitars were like so many crescents

I said, “Hey unraveller
Digger or Leveler

Abelard, caviler
reveiller, reveler

You got blinds on your eyes like slopes on a parabola
Your middle name is Levolor
Why you be behaving so irregular?”

He said, “Alas, Alas, I am the Prince of Aquitaine
In my chest is a guava, in my nostril a plantain

Those you see in my train, each one is my thane
There’s one that cries choochoo but he is insane

As for the rest of them, they’re just inane
They got a group portrait from the brothers Le Nain

So we ride up and down valley and lane
Everyone we meet we a) kill b) maim

But I wasn’t always like that
I used to be pretty
My hip was like the Centre Georges Pompidou
like SFMoMA my tittie

My hands were like the Iglesia de la Sagrada Familia
With my pelvis everyone was familiar

and when I stalked after dinner I was so happy
All the kids on the block called me Pappy! Pappy!

At breakfast a wood nymph in furry slippers
rustling my forest of newspapers

I read of amputations, assassinations
castrations, decapitations, defenestrations
depellations, eviscerations, flagellations,
infibulations, strangulations, violations

and other mutilations most favored by nations
as they make orations among carnations
Till once, after I had almost stepped on a turd
I realized there was evil in the world.”

Well:
I’m in debate like the fish in sea
I said, “Hey Tin Man,
you got a psychological deficiency!

You ride around waving your scimitar
knocking down every perimeter

so that you’re everyone’s, to put it in Greek, nemesis
and all this is an act of mimesis?

You’re acting like a character from Theodore Doštoyevsky!
Thus proclaim I, Eugene Oštashevsky!”

But his face was the prisoner of his beaver’s grate
and I could not extrasubstantiate

whether my tirade had made him irate
or whether he thought it was just great

The whole situation on my nerves started to grate
To stand there and prate did me denigrate

He valued himself at too high a rate!
Did he think there were no other kumquats in the crate?
I decided to break his pate!

Pushing off with the wishbone around my prostate
above his head in the air became I prostrate

I stomped on him like a jack-booted mosher
until he turned to kasha

whereupon his band drove through my face 50 lances
so that I looked like a cross-eyed man
casting 1,225 lascivious glances

No, I did not—if devochka Masha—
convert him into a dish of kasha

nor did his band drive through my face 50 lances
to make me look like an entomologist
in reverse circumstances

He just cut off my head
and now I am dead
and writing the poem you just read

So send me a dictionary
I wanna improve my diction
THE MARTYR

Some people think that death is really gruesome
but they are not the ones who died and then grew some

I was killed for my faith by a mob
At me hefty stones they did lob

They hit me with fists and large sticks
Blood ran down my face
I spat white teeth

I was lonesome at that particular present
I had expected God but he wasn’t present

I wished my life were at some other minute
I hated this one — I was beaten in it

I was prone in the ooze of the Nile Delta
An ibis 8 my heart
I did not belt ’er

A heron 8 my toe I did not kick ’er
Flies blackened me nose to pecker

My iris
became papyrus

My jaw
fell ajar

Clouds moved in from North South West East
like a hand closing into a fist
A blowing went through it — the fist, a tuba
A part of me stayed on the ground like a tuber

another part flew aside like a goober
I became II like tanks for scuba

The I that flew felt really über
it moved its extremities, dancing the juba

and sang
THE PRAYER

Said a little girl, all frizzy and gay:
Won't you come out, come out to play?
I won't come out, come out to play
Play by yourself, you piece of clay

I'll give you a daisy and a violet
I'll show you where my biscuit be at

Or is it where my brisket be at
I don't know myself I forget

I don't want your cookies, I don't want your meat
I spin in the air without hands and feet

I spin in the air without hands and feet
because nothing about me is concrete

ZOË’S WAR

She looks over her shoulder
She looks over her older

On the ground mice scurry
They’re in a hurry

In the air birds fly
They cry, Bye bye

Let’s take the train to Vienna
Let’s hear the play of a piano
Let’s avoid a missile hit an antenna
Let’s Let’s

She was once very little
Was it she—here’s a riddle

Now she’s two
What are we gonna do

Here’s an elephant
He is really fat

Here’s a hippopotamus
Show your bottom to us

They’re behind bars
She rides around in backs of cars
In came a man with long moustaches
Along his pantlines were red sashes

He waved a tin saber
He declaimed he was going to save her

From what?
From yourself
From me
From you?
From all of us

From coffee flavor
From licorice savor
From someone named Raver
Do me a favor
Mention nothing graver

She looks over her boulder
She looks over her colder

To a tuba whose sound
Through all regions resounds

At once on and in mounds
Always now and not then

You got a call from a general named Pete
He says his feet are enveloped in concrete
He is currently located under water
—Can he call back?—No, this is his last quarter!

Oh, okay, hello general?
I make you an admiral
Your behavior under duress is so admirable
If I could I would make you a several

Says general Pete
I'm dying repeat
I'm dying I'm pete- ring out

Poor general Pete
Now his days are complete
Now his holes are replete
With peat

Share O sole mio
Look at depicted trio
Cry, O poetry O
O

She looks over her molder
She looks over her solder

Like Alexander Calder
She spins in the air

Where she looks there is ire
Plus a p that makes pyre

Her desires expire
She revolves in the air
Our *donna è mobile*
She read Hugh Selwyn Mauberley

Now she thinks very soberly
She rotates in the air

Let us go to the theater
Let us hear something sweeter
Than this silly repeat of
I’m pete

er ine got u

She went to town
on a horse
once she got down
in a forest

She fell into a spring
its name was Death
its waters’ swing
exact as death

**SHE SAID:**

I was attached to a rock like a limpet
around me ran waters limpid

I could not move not even limping
I became Eleatic and Olympic

I could not c
I could not d
I could not e
I could not f

I saw a knight
of special k
he wore a scuba
he was ok

I took his scuba
his face turned blue
I cried, Where are you
Scooby Doo?

I cried, Where are you
Dooby Doo?
slap on my count
your doggie-doo

no o no k
his name was night
he stuck his clock
into my tight

my name was fear
my name was igloo
my name was fünf
my name was Jennifer

Language
You look like a soup you eat like a meal
Around you various figures steal
They steal

They wave their arms they wave their legs
They eat stir-fried dogs
They pop eyeballs with wooden pegs

In smashed corpses
They burn corpses
No scent worse is

You move them
You approve them
Illusionist you remove them

What is death
What is pain
What is what

You do not
Explain
O breath

We say to you,
Teach us love
Teach us love
Teach us love
Teach us love

You say,

Know reads No

That’s all you know
That’s all you do not know

We say,

Teach us love
Teach us love
Teach us love
Teach us love

We are wholly unfamiliar with it

---

SONG OF THE WESTERN SLAVS

We opened fire like Miller cans
It was that kind of time
Before us miscellaneous people fell
All over the ground

Their thighs beat the ground
Their teeth bit the ground
It was so very interesting
I shall never again see anything so interesting

The way they moved was so interesting
The way I watched them was also interesting
And especially interesting
Was the interesting

I went down to the corporal
Said, Gimme my head
He was smoking a Marlboro
Red

He said he had left it
Outside city gates
A pike up the esophagus
Eyeballs moving with ants

Oh my tongue it was lolling
and my nose it was gone
If you find it dear reader
Please sew it back on
Oh please sew it back on
GROUP PORTRAIT WITH MASSACRE

Four horsemen moved along Mission Street
I jumped in the saddle and the set was complete

Our number was circular; if you squared it
It would end in itself, even for the visually impaired

Even for the hearing impaired
Even for the tačtilely impaired

Even for the olfactory impaired
Even for the gustatorily impaired

Even for the impaired impaired
It rotated impassive, it didn’t yearn to be paired

We rode through the thickets we rode through the glades
Cattails exploded like hand grenades

Before they were gone, they meowed woebegone
Beneath each shone a black sun

I couldn’t bear it
I was a rabbit

I was a bunny
I was a hare

I walked around like Maurice Scève
My left retina was a sieve

My right retina was a colander
I hit save
I hit save

But my ram got knotted in its own Boolean
Ringlets
like a stoned anaconda

Our captain said to us, our captain
The earth lies like brown tartan

Various peasants upon her go
Recalling the Book of Hours of Jean, Duc de Berry

Let us depopulate her fully
And treat ourselves to a game of tic-tac-toe

Tic-tac-toe is a kind of binary arithmetic
I don’t know the number of combinations but there can’t be many

It’s like flipping 9 pennies
And 9 is 3², my maties

Just then a dragon flew by, its wings were covered with scales
Do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-ti-do

Sanctus Ioannes
I am Poof the tragic dragon

And I’m looking for a date!
So another one of us, whose name was 17, said:
Yes yes let’s commit ethnic cleansing
Like we did at Danzig, like we did at Lemberg

Now no one remembers how mouths crammed dirt
And blood coagulated on it like amber

I have seen a strange equivalency
Between all states of life

The presence of horse at your gate is congruent
To the absence of horse at your gate

The only difference is the time
Time is stretchable and tensible

But the point where you’re at
Is inescapable!

Do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-ti-do
We did what we had to do

We rhymed *pillage* with *village*
The responsibility rests with language

We had nothing to do with it
We’re just a bunch of fictional characters

We don’t have any other characters
Except for our letters, that is our characters

I looked over my left shoulder
To see what I could see

And then I saw, and then I saw
I could not see to see

I was surrounded by various dead
And so I said:

Dear friends, I said, blessèd be our union,
It is like the mind entirely circular

For the essence of a circle is a circle
And same for the mind

Let us however recite the following clarification:

Our relative, give us the freedom of will
To recognize that we have freedom of will

And thereby acquire freedom of will
And also please prevent us from evil

From the malefactions of the malefactors
The reactions of the reactors

The prosecutions of the prosectors
The projections of the projectors

The actions of the actors

Amen
THE ANATOMY OF MONOTONY

There were two of us there
me and despair

I resembled a salad
that resembled a mallard

It resembled a parrot
that resembled a pirate

that resembled an island
that resembled an eyelid

that in its turn resembled
something either assembled or disassembled

We watched my life retreat
ebb and diminish

and I said in my incomplete
English:

Should I bulge my cheeks with silence?
Should I devolve to a fish

or maybe a clam
since I already am

invertebrate?
Despair said:

Prate, don't prate
no one will hear

I've crammed 1,085 roller skates
into the collective ear

I said, Excuse me, despair
are you really there?

When we banter
are we like the poles of a centaur

or are you totally other than me?
If one woman wed us, would it be bigamy?

Despair said, It would be anomie

I said, You just said that because it rhymes!
You're only an echo!
You don't really exist!

I can do anything!
I can be all that I can be!

Despair showed me its tallow fangs
Despair showed me its fallow clangs

Despair showed me its callow tanks
It showed me its trunks, it showed me its yanks

It must have thought it pointless
to argue
I STRUCK RHETORICAL POSES

I struck rhetorical poses
around me rose various roses
they were my frame I their spectacle
Then I walked around very skeptical
Then I sat down, void of thought and emotion
gas was my only motion
I would like to know I would like to know
the difference between yes and no
knight and night, Kurd and curd
what / means in the word world
if a fiend in need is a fiend indeed
what is the maximum number of the dead
O you who are a) love
b) remove
c) fauve
d) none of the above
you're not going to tell me anything I don't already know
so I'm just gonna wait till my braincells grow

THE AENEID

My goddess went by the name of Hera
She chased me up and down various seas
I landed on a beach and seduced some woman or another
by talking. All the miseries that befell me
the deaths of all my relatives and especially wife
I recounted more or less as they happened
We swore love in a cave and then it came time to split
The subsequent part of my biography isn't clear
As I recall, my enemy was a large strapping turnip
There were fields steeped in blood, excrement, body parts—
in short, gore
The gorier the tale, the happier the ending
My seed shall inherit the earth
It shall do so by means time-tested and honorable
perseverence and induftry, discipline and deft management
With a measure of satisfaction I climb into the cold bed of
Persephone
THIRD WATER POEM

That which is prior
is a many-armed fire

eyeless eyeless
without expire

it wears a tire
it wears attire:

Water
its spell

its Latin
weathervane alphabet

Water
is before fetter

Nor form nor matter
Its house is the letter Bet

Lacking one wall
A gaping sign

Dicey the first embrace
above the abyss of the letter Ain

Sea si
c see

---

We say, O sea
Permit us to see

us, electors of ramps
us, erectors of camps

composed of the letter Breath
composed of the letter Death

beyond us
SMOTHERLAND

Formerly known as
Russian Poems
San Francisco and Ankara, 1999 – 2001

Ils sont mangés des vers
– Malherbe

THE DESPONDENT DESPOT

Since not even his wife ever called him “Kolya,”
Nicholas I suffered from melancholia.
O dead poets who rustle
in the forest of books

Who died by the rope
dysentery, hunger

suffocation in boxcars, lead
Who beat on the floor like an eel and recanted

Who lived to old age growing wisdom
i.e. acceptance

What is this death
you talked about so often

the port
of your trope

the black pun
of your sunflower

We cannot think,
sing the dead poets

We are unable
to answer your question
WHITE EWE

In the heavens horses do a dance
On the ground stands a black square

Between them errs a white ewe
With no when no where

The white ewe in its errancy
Eschews all sensibilia

A member of the family
Where no one is similar

The white ewe has no eye
Ear tongue chest fist

It is neither yea nor no
Does it exist

You die in a cell with no heat
You die in a cell with no bread

You don’t know who you is
What is the point of this

The white ewe in its errancy
Builds pyramids of fire

You have not seen the sun in so long
Bombers rock the city

Death stands in the middle
With a bow and a fiddle

That it has no riddle
Is its riddle

To the right an expanse of ice
My great-uncle makes the peregrination

Upon reaching his destination
He is slain by chicken soup

The white ewe already lacks an I
Its site is short

Within a single pronoun
It holds court

The white ewe came to be by parthenogenesis
As fit for object strange and high
It was begotten by desire
Desire is a virgin

In tongues she is the Anger of Chance
Death sits by her sickbed to see

Water water water everywhere
Freeze into ABC

Where are you beautiful islands
Where walks the white ewe

Where the dead know no loneliness
Where what is, is not in error

THE SICK MAN (больной который стал волной)

The sick man is a wave
His body is

Curves circles and lines
Of analysis

The sick man knoweth
His 1, 2, 3

Above his bed hangeth
A terminal degree

The sick man lies
Stick-man flat

He feels the warmth
Of his stick-ball bat

The stick man is an analyst
The stick man is an ear, nose and throat specialist

He is in a lot of pain
He says to himself, What is pain
Pain is like bread
Bread is like born

Born is like bear
Bear is like pain

What is the sick man himself like?
The sick man is like the Neva
Running over her granite shelf

He accompanies himself
On a wah-wah

The sick man divides
to a stick, a moan

The stick moan is alone
The shtick moan is a loan

He says to the orderly, What is pain

Pain is like 17
17 is like 352

352 is like 8
Must be something I ate

The orderly says
You're being disorderly

The shtick moan behaves according to his denomination
He says nothing

The orderly says
Heal yourself, physician
If not, we have the Inquisition
To aid you
MASTER OF SWALLOWS

The vermillion of flesh
The alluvion of the eye

Who saw from the tram
the I

Whose head
crammed

The hot bullion of bread
The mullion of the needle

The ship of fools.
Whose bodkin

Soft and pink
Enlarged, capillated, stank

Who leapt off the tram
Crying, Scram

Landing with a BAM
in the same tram

For whom the air
gathered there

Oblique
Potable, cracked

Every animal is a tier
Worms in choir

Who pronounced
Swallows pull the bier

Who saw
Who was

O eyelid
You close

You disclose,
My lid
THE AIRMAN BEFORE SUNRISE

Pleasant is the death of the airman
in the invisible forest of air

final and light
out of Ovid

He feels himself becoming
a leaf a star

He sees his own spiral
and makes a wish

O airman O Hesperus
of an occupied century

You've distilled the wormwood of death
into eau de vie

You are excused from seeing
the bloody bones on the wheel

the soggy bones in the ground
the grey bones in the air

You will never taste
cat, human meat

wallpaper glue
boiled leather, sawdust

Pleasant is the death of the airman
in the incandescent heights

The birds go on
And then everything
THE DEATH OF OLEG

Stung the prince falls
turning into a field of prints

His host passes by
brandishing spears like umbrellas

Their funeral feast
is enlivened by yeast

Ergo they don't cry
when the cook serves chicken Kiev

They speak obliquely
licking their fingers

for
the inventor of forks awaits to be born!

Says one, the hiss in the grass
That's our sister, life

Says another, alas
she's our cousin, and distant

We are made up, of language
We are paper soldiers

And even our death
is a jest
CANTOR IN THE AVIARY

Cantor in the aviary
reads
a crib
his Ossian of black suns

He runs
from the aviary
to the aviary
He lies
in the crib
that he sings
accompanyed by violins
in the fat arms of washerwomen

The water breaks
through the window
into the ear
that is the aviary

Is the band banned?
No

they play on
and they’re not even weary!

There’s a bird
called swallow
It comes from the land of the dead

There’s a bird
called la rondine
It says nothing

Cantor questions the swallow
They discuss
The equivalence of parts and wholes
The precise meaning of transcendental

Whether the crib is a crib
I’m not a child
cries Cantor
and stomps on his bib

Outside there’s a horseman
green, streaky and bronze

In flesh he was Mors man
Had a thing for cranberry

Cantor heads outside
lip-synching his crib

Uncountable swallows
yoked in the sky
pull a bodybag
with the cooling black sun

Cantor cries
although now he is the best poet!
ERRORISM

San Francisco and New York, 2000 – 2003

A philosopher from Attica complains of sciatica.
AT A TEMP AGENCY

At the time I was assailed by insects as well as outsects
My defenses were implausible
My scratching would have entertained a turntablist

When I recovered
I put my new insights to work!

As I worked
I sang

I was
so lonely
I was
so moanly
I was so
whatever

I was several
like the number tree
I was myself
only approximately
Thank God for the pronoun that held me together!

My job conspired
at a den of gossip and malaise
I photocopied my hand
THE MAN-MOOSE

Alas I am a poor moose
I want to be a pure vaqui

I want to be a peer muse
I want to be a spear cruise

I said to God, God give me strength
I said to God, God give me hope

I said to God, God give me charity
I want to stand stiff like a rarity

I want to be encased in glass
Admired by all those who pass

I went to the forest and what did I see
But 17 owls looking down at me

I went to the desert and there a camel
Laughed laughed unlipping his yellow enamel

On the path of life I met an alien
His tongues cartwheeled sesquipedalian

I said, Take me up in your UFO
They said, No

By the rivers of Babylon
I sat down and wept

By the rivers of Babylon
I sat down and wept

I couldn't tell the sweeping from the swept
I was like Death

I was like Maréchal La Far
I pranced around, crying LAFAAAA!!!
Everyone said I had gone too far

I said to God, God give me love
I said to God, God give me patience

I said to God, God give me strength
God said nothing

Alas Alas cooked is my goose
Am I a poor moose? Am I pear mousse?

Should I rub mousse into my pair
Of antlers? If only my hooves ended in fingers!
HAPPY BIRTHDAY, WAYNE CHAMBLISS

In a jungle, constricted by a boa
I went from feeling low to feeling lower

My teeth exploded like semen
and my eyes saw everything according to Riemann

My liver got reconfigured into a sphinx
and my heartbeat resounded from Minsk to Pinsk

I summoned up my last remaining strength
and cried:

Why do these things always happen to me
Why couldn’t I have settled for regular and gainful employment

Why did I insist on becoming a poet?

Being a poet is like going on a safari
when all you have to defend yourself is an “I am sorry”

It’s like flying to the moon
and when you’ve almost arrived

you suddenly don’t see any moon
cause it’s noon

My momma wanted me to be a suicide bomber but wouldn’t you know it
I had to go off and become a poet!
THE CHOW FAMILY

Mr. Chow lies on a cot
underneath which slither the sibilant
wolves of history
He feels he is a cat

about to be devoured by Mrs. Chow
who feels she is a dog

Their children
take air on the balcony

One child says to another,
History is a mirror

The other child answers,
I do not understand

They have erected a wall
around themselves and over themselves
and it accompanies them invisibly
as they locomote to the mall

THE BIRTH OF A SUPERHERO

“I saw the black sun
in the seeing of the black sun

Equals

I did not see the black sun
in the not seeing of the black sun,"

confessed

the logician to
the Queen of Forms, the joy of man’s desiring.

“I have your glove but it is void of hand,
and if I turn it inside out
it is void of the other hand”
(he was now a topologist).

His third utterance
went like this:
“trym chekym chekym
chawa lapa
tr tr tr tr tr tr.”

He had become
a random-sound generating machine.
Nature looked upon him
in her own, natural way.

Birds arrived.
The did not
arrive, they did.

ONE OF THREE PHILOSOPHERS

The youngsters' philosopher
avows, I'm incorporeal

There's precious little of me
Only a pronoun

Where are my hands with dimples on knuckles
Where are my plump footsies

I do not know
How will I ever get to the playground

Who will tell me
how pail differs from shovel

I furrow my brow
I take aim at the word “parallel”

What comes after one
What comes after one

What comes after one
I can't count it

They say,
Two comes after one
Two comes after one
Nothing less but two comes after one

Such is the truth, and it, perfect

No no I am not perfect
Where are my hands with dimples on knuckles

Where is my head, round as a brass pot
Where are my dreams like swollen rooms

in which I am loved
and return the favor

THE TWO-DIMENSIONAL PHILOSOPHER

We play at “Is it true I am real
and death will come”

We look at the photograph of the philosopher
The philosopher has the wet eyes of a rodent

Alas, but I am not real, says the philosopher
I am a photograph

In my photograph I am depicted
with my favorite phonograph

The phonograph plays through the day
What does it play, say?

I made love long ago
to somebody else

At least I think it was love
Love is, never having to say

boy
am I sorry

She took this photograph
of me and my favorite monograph

And then we played at “Is it true I am real
and death will come"
So what was your conclusion?
we ask the philosopher

Tell us
Tell us
Tell us
    Deaf man, dead man
    ancestor god

_Deine Zunge ist rot_
Your tongue is rot

The philosopher in the photograph
only clutches

his favorite monograph
cause language, what can it say
I'm not losing a pseudopod,
cried the amoeba,
I'm gaining a friend!
1. **CHOIR OF BIRDS:**

Matrix  
  moortex  
  meetrix  
  nutrix  
  nutrix of Dmitrix  
  nutrix demeretrix  
  nutrix antisemitrix!

**CHOIR OF INSECTS:**

Zzzzzz  
Za za za za za za za  
Zzzzzz  
*They fall asleep.*

2. **CHOIR OF ELEPHANTS AND ONE RABBIT:**

Who will provide us with food?  
Food is the ultimate good.  
Never mind the scenery,  
Just serve us some greenery—  
It so much improves our mood.
3. **NURSE, out shopping:**

Quels sont les sons des patissons?
Quels sont les mots des haricots?
Quels sont les mythes de merguez-frites?
Ses mythes,
   ses mythes—
   but that word,
   it is so strangely **FAMILIAR**!

4. **DMITRIX:**

_Ва б ва'_

я ползаю едва

три четыре
пять шесть семь восемь

и так далее.

**NURSE, entering:**

Are you playing the Peano?

**DMITRIX:**

_Ва б ва'_

5. **DMITRIX, alone:**

I shall now compose a poem entitled *Esprit de géometrie v.*
*ésprit de finesse.*

Can an octopus concoct a puss?

Does a dachshund deduct some?

I shall now compose another poem. It is called *Lucky in Love,*
_ or Everybody Deserves a Second Chance._

Each boatswain wants to have a dachshund,
each dachshund wants to have a boatswain,
and they go driving in a Datsun.
The boatswain picks his nose. The dachshund
decides to turn the blind spots on.

**NURSE, entering:**

A prodigy, a true prodigy!

6. **NURSE:**

Dmitrixipoo! Let us play at Giraffe and Hyena, oo? I'll be
the Hyena. And what are the Giraffe and Hyena playing, oo?
The Giraffe is playing the unfortunate Podarrestes, and the Hyena is playing his sister, the iffy Evgenia, with a hard g. Their drama is called

7. ОФИГЕНИЕ В ТАВРИДЕ
(by Everypede)

PODARRESTES, in bounds:

I am the unfortunate Podarrestes, son of Ogo-memnon, king of Alas. What family is more dysfunctional than mine? I fled here because I killed my mother, who killed my father, whose father killed his brother, or rather killed the children of his brother, except for one, who, sleeping with my mother, got her to kill my father, who was his cousin, son of his father’s brother. A family is a burden and a bother! Why am I not an orphan? (Brightening.) I forgot—I am an orphan! (Darkening.) So slay me now, go ahead, kill an orphan!

EVGENIA, eagerly:

O Podarrestes, I am Evgenia, your long-lost sister. You have family after all. I am the cause our mother killed our father, whereupon you killed our mother, for our father killed me in order to allow his brother to reunite with his wife who had left him for another, and when this other died, married his brother—

Podarrestes falls down dead.
9.

**CHOIR OF PENGUINS:**

Floop floop
    floop floop
Flickoooooo
Flabadibadilloo
    Floop floop

10.

**DMITRIX, alone:**

*Wah wah*
перехожу на слова

A curse, a curse, a curse for the nurse,
the cause is terse—no nurse is worse:
    through spelling error may your slaughter be!

Turn to a purse, turn to a horse,
a hearse, a corpse, a copse, a tree—
    Is this any way to bring up a child, namely me?

Where are
    your promised ambassadors?
NOTES TO SMOTHERLAND

"White Ewe" is about the death of Daniil Kharms of starvation in a prison asylum during the blockade of Leningrad. "The Sick Man" develops a line by Aleksandr Vvedensky. "Master of Swallows" is about Osip Mandelstam. "The Death of Oleg" revisits a ballad by Pushkin in which a prince, told by a seer that his horse will kill him, gets rid of the horse, only to be stung years later by the serpent nesting inside its skull. "Cantor in the Aviary" is about Georg Cantor, born in Petersburg eight years after the death of Pushkin.

DEDICATIONS

"The Anniversary" is dedicated to Jesica Bornemann; "Sextus Propertius" to Ben Robinson; "The Stomach Flu" to Maia Fraser; "Excuse me" to the La Mura family; "Zoe’s War" to Zoya Prousline; "Group Portrait" to Matt Hollis and Kurt Bigenho; "I Struck Rhetorical Poses" to Anna Omodei Zorini; "Cantor in the Aviary" to Zaheer Ze’ev Ostashevsky Coovadia; "Two-dimensional Philosopher" to Oya Ataman.

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