

Era



# Era

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*Jeanne Cohen*

## Love Song of the Dead

'O going down I'll  
cry for you, I shall  
my dear,  
ya ha ye ya ya ha'

—*Kwakiutl Indian song*

Comes the time  
for going  
it will not be hard  
a word will walk before you  
'this is  
what happens'  
the way is worn,  
going down

Then will be time  
for mourning  
the one voice who lay  
always beside you  
'I will give you  
this little—  
what I have'  
going down, you will remember

But soon past—the time  
for crying  
done with hope  
you will tell yourself  
'Put love  
behind you, for now  
is no reaching, no  
place of reaching from'

*Karen Drayne*

Lion Gate (Mycenae, c. 1250 B.C.)

Mycenae's massive lintel,  
monumental limestone lions—  
headless, sightless reminders  
of Agamemnon's homecoming,  
triumphant sorrow.  
Striding arrogance,  
the resolute soldier slips  
into lustral embrace  
of deadly waters,  
like a fish in a murderous net.

Two stone lions  
resting muscularly  
by a Mycenaean pillar.  
Brute strength and a woman  
worthy of no praise  
destroyed Troy's destroyer.  
Two stone lions,  
headless, sightless,  
on the massive lintel of Mycenae's great gate.

Two stone lions,  
headless, sightless,  
no tongue to tell  
of beaten gold,  
of Agamemnon  
slipping under bloody waters  
of triumphant treachery:  
just two, two stone lions.

*Herbert L. Carson*



## Hic Dragones

Old maps mislead us. Florida's foot swings  
Three hundred miles past Cuba's throat,  
Stretched Europe swells, a woman with French  
Breasts and rich Spanish thighs.  
But the hedges warn us right, away from cliffs,  
Cataracts, slow death, and  
Dragons, "Here there be dragons."  
And so the mind's map warns us, "Here, dragons."  
There, the calm center, where mirrors return  
Approximately what they see, stairs slice  
Walls in equal portions so, when you trip, you're sure  
To trip again in the same way.  
But swim to the foaming edges, gaze  
Here, at dragons. See that mirrors flash sun  
At your eyes, stairs melt to walls  
And your legs fail like jellyfish impaled on sticks.  
See that all maps lie, that edge and center  
Flow together on a line of rocks, Whether you hang  
On edge, center, rockpeak, you'll still  
Hear dragons.

*Deborah Burnham*

## Two Views of the Nature of Pan in Stephane Mallarme's "L'Après-Midi d'un Faune"

Stephane Mallarme's poem "L'Après-Midi d'un Faune" has been the source of many creative endeavors—notably Debussy's composition by the same name and Nijinsky's ballet. To rest the laurels solely on Mallarme's brow is wrong for I believe it is more the myths concerning Pan, the satyrs and the nymphs that inspired these artists to create.

Pan, the goat-god is fascinating for his diversity. As Robert Hogan and Sven Eri Molin said so succinctly:

Pan is a curious figure in ancient mythology. He is both god and goat, both a saint and a satyr, both more than human and less. He is a link with the best in man and with the worst. He is a god of fertility, of riot and carousing, and of shepherds in the fields. He is the god who lustily pursues wood-nymphs while joyously dancing and playing on his pipes. But he is also a god of pain and death. He is the god who strikes terror into man. He is the god of panic, the god who was beaten as a scapegoat, and the god who died at the birth of Christianity. And finally, as his name tells us, he is the god of All, of fusion and union.<sup>1</sup>

Pan is generally acknowledged to be the son of Hermes by any number of mortals—nymphs or human females. From birth:

Pan was a monster in appearance; he had two small horns on his head, his complexion was ruddy, his nose flat, and his legs, thighs, tail and feet were those of a goat.<sup>2</sup>

Combine these characteristics with a beard and an early propensity for dance and laughter and you might understand why his mother fled from this strange "child" after his birth. Nevertheless his father was "proud" and Pan was carried to Olympus wrapped in hare-skins by Hermes for the amusement of the gods. This "most of all fill'd Bacchus with delight/And Pan they call'd him, since he brought to All/of Mirth so rare and full a Festival."<sup>3</sup>

Pan loved the nymphs\* or at least wanted to yet still he

---

\* Spirits of the trees (Dryads or Hamadryads), brooks and springs (Naiads) and mountains (Oreads.) A nymph was not immortal or as Hesiod charmingly said: a crow lives 9x as long as a man, a deer 4x as long as a crow, a raven 3x as long as a deer, a phoenix 9x as long as a raven and a nymph 10x as long as a phoenix. (If a man lives 50 yrs., then a nymph lives to be 486,000 yrs. old!)

remained "lean and lovelesse."<sup>4</sup> He did have a son, Lynx, by the nymph Echo (later the unrequited lover of Narcissus.) His most well-known rejection was by a nymph named Syrinx. As Philip Mayerson explains:

Her name was Syrinx, and she was actively pursued by the gods of the woodlands and fields. She would have none of them because she was devoted to the chaste goddess Diana. Pan, meeting her one day, was very much taken with her, but Syrinx rejected his amorous advances and fled before him until she reached the river Ladon. There, with Pan in hot pursuit, she begged her sister-nymphs to transform her. At that moment Pan caught up with her and embraced what he thought to be a nymph, only to find that he held a tuft of reeds in his arms. As he breathed a sad sigh of frustration, the air sounded through the reeds and produced a plaintive tone. Charmed with the novelty and the sweetness of the sound, Pan said, "At least this much I have!" and took reeds of unequal lengths, bound them together and named the instrument Syrinx in honor of the coy nymph he desired but could not have.<sup>5</sup>

He gave oracles on Mt. Lycaeus and elsewhere in Greece. Still,

he is a shy god and mischievous . . . it is best to avoid certain shady spots by springs at noon-day, for there Pan chooses to sleep while the big flies buzz in the sunlight and all else is still.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed Pan is a god with diverse characteristics—more so I feel than his cohorts the satyrs (and later, under Roman influence, the fauns). Therefore I believe that Mallarme was generalizing to a faun the combination of characteristics truly belonging solely to the "great god Pan."

It is easiest to examine first the strictly superficial characteristics and actions of the poem. The poem opens and closes with a statement on the nymphs surrounding the faun on a hot summer's afternoon. "I would perpetuate these nymphs,"<sup>7</sup> is offered half-idly, half-hopefully, a wish showing from the start the direction of the Faun's desires. They are generally physical. The last line changes in tone and is partly a spiteful comment, reminding the nymphs of their mortality, but it is also a reminder of the aloneness of the Faun ("Sweet pair, farewell. I shall see the shades you become.")

The Faun (Pan) seems to be waking from his nap in the "immobile and heavy" air (line 14) "drowsy with tufted slumbers" (l. 2-3), "stifling with heat the cool morning if it resists." (l. 15)



He muses, wondering if he loved a dream. His thoughts trace back: first "undulated an animal whiteness," (l. 29) the abduction of the "girls sleeping in each other's perilous arms" (l. 71) to the "frenzy of her sister who burned" (l. 89-90) and finally and unfortunately for him to the flight of the ungrateful "stained" (l. 89) nymphs. He concludes: they must have been real—how else could my chest be nibbled? His decision therefore colors the line "So I loved a dream?" (l. 3) with the thought—you must be a fool if you think it wasn't real. Yes, he feels, the cold-eyed chaste nymph and the warm, sighing, younger one were as real as were those pleasant moments of dallying—if only they'd been longer . . . But they've gone . . .

No matter—for on the "thirsty sand,/ forgetful of the outrage" (of the nymph's desertion of him) (l. 108-109) Pan says he will "open my mouth to the powerful star of wine." (l. 108-110). Indeed one might mistake Pan for the son of Bacchus, and not Hermes, with all the mentions of wine, grapes, drinking and drunkenness. The longest passage on the subject makes explicit connections between attributes of Pan and Dionysus.

when I have sucked the bright juice of the grapes,  
to banish a regret by my pretense discarded,  
laughing, I raise to the summer sky the empty  
hulls, and, puffing into these luminous skins,  
craving drunkenness, I gaze through them till evening.

(l. 58-62)

The most startling facet of Pan's personality in the poem is his petulance. The previous passage, with its vows of drunkenness, comes in response to his remembrance of Syrinx's rejection of him. He has already spoken in a particularly spiteful, childish manner in his address to her:

Try then, instrument of flights, O evil  
Syrinx, to flower again by the lakes where you wait [for me]!  
Proud of my noise, I am going to talk at length  
of the goddesses; and by idolatrous paintings  
to lift again the cinctures from their shadows . . .

(lines 53-57)

He also exhibits this behavior when left alone or refused love by any other nymphs.

Thus far it seems obvious that the faun portrayed in the poem is much like the "physical" Pan of Greek mythology who likes to



chase nymphs, nap in the noon-day, and be carefree through drink or song.

Many passages in the poem, in fact, are devoted to Pan's pipes, the music they produce, and its effects. It is the "harmonies" poured from Pan's "flute" (l. 16-17) that lead the reader to another layer of Pan's personality and of the poem's possible analysis. This is the interpretation pointing towards Pan as creator—artist and dreamer. Indeed simply to believe in the shallow reality of the love-making described previously is to deprive Pan of his potency in other directions.

This analysis begins with the imagining of a sigh before or after "So I loved a dream?" Pan has doubts, "a mass of ancient night," (l. 4) that he ever experienced the pleasures he has described. The phrase "the illusion escapes from the blue eyes and cold of the more chaste" (l. 10-11) must therefore mean that this whole incident is but an illusion brought on, in all probability, by "tufted slumbers." (l. 3) ("Tufted" here implies the fur of the Faun or the reeds the Syrinx became.) "But no!" Pan cries in distress (l. 14); this cannot be. He wonders what the true reality might be beyond his dream-world where his desires have been fulfilled:

... through the immobile and heavy swoon  
murmurs no water but that poured from my flute  
on the grove sprinkled with harmonies . . .

(lines 15-17)

Therefore the cold blue eyes of a nymph, like a "weeping spring," could not have existed either. And:

... the only wind  
prompt to exhale from the twin pipes before  
it can disperse the sound in an arid rain  
is, on the horizon unstirred by a wrinkle,  
the visible and serene artificial breath  
of inspiration, which regains the sky.

(l. 17-22)

There can be no "other one, all sighs," who "contrasts like a day-breeze warm upon your fleece." (l. 12-13)

It is true that there is something "artificial" about this landscape. I hold that a background so still could only be designed by an artist, and is impossible in the world of base pleasures seen in the previous interpretation. How, if this is not so, could a rain be truly "arid" or a horizon "unstirred by a wrinkle"? Pan himself says that

there is no water except for the flowing harmonies of his music, no wind except that which he blows through the syrinx. Suitably enough, this evidence of artistic and creative inspiration must return to the heavens from whence it ultimately came.

Pan speaks of "flowers of sparks," "suns" which his "vanity plunders." (l. 24-25) "Vanity" here means creative ability and imagination. In the other reality, is there not only one sun? He even shows how he could have been sent on this reverie away from "the world": by "swans" mistaken for Naiades. (l. 31) He complains that the heat leaves him "inert . . . not noticing by what art together fled this too much hymen desired by who seeks for *la*" (l. 35) "*La*" may mean either the feminine principle or a note of music; perhaps both. Perhaps the fleeing *la* is strictly in the Faun's imagination. The mention of "art" should be noted even if in this case it is not used in terms of artistic creativity.

Pan continues:

but enough! as confidant such arcanum chose  
the great twin-reeds one plays beneath the azure:  
which, diverting to themselves the cheeks' amusement / or  
disorder /,  
dream in a long solo, that we may amuse  
the beauties hereabout by false confusions  
between them even and our credulous song;  
and to make as high as love can modulate  
vanish from the banal dream of backs  
or pure flanks pursued in my closed eyes,  
a sonorous and vain, monotonous line.

(lines 43-52)

Here again we are reminded of a "dream," an imaginative flight. This is a dream, "vain" like his plunder of the sun's brilliance, seeking a transcendence over "banal" sexual fantasies to the highest pitch to which true love can modulate in his "credulous song." He trusts sometimes too much in the verity of his dreams. But, alas, as dreams are not real, this interlude is also not real, from the frenzied fantasies of a lustful liaison with Venus atop volcanic Etna (accompanied by sure chastisement and rejection) to the other flanks and backs. So Pan reluctantly wakes from his dream.

. . . No, but the spirit  
empty of words now and the body numbed  
unto noon's haughty silence at last succumb: enough!

(l. 105-107)



Enough of dreaming? Hardly. Enough of the moment's dream? Possibly.

It is fitting that the poem should end with a reminder that Pan is immortal and will outlive even the nymphs' half-million years.

Surely Pan is more powerful and impressive with his creation of a mid-day paradise of fleshly delights and roses, of nymphs and burning desires quenched. Indeed many men would like to tarry there. But not all can; for not all can see these pleasures and create them.

By the end of a second analysis of "*L'Après-Midi d'un Faune*" this different viewpoint has yielded a richer view of the myth of Pan as used by Mallarme. First Pan is a lusty pursuer of nymphs occupied by his own thoughts of carnal satisfaction only, pouting when his wishes are not granted. Pan is more, however; he is the creator of the tableaux through which he chases his nymphs. He seems, in fact, to watch his dream-self engage in these vulgar activities. This Pan, the Overseer, is truly a god of All who uses his music as an instrument of celestial harmonies which shape the setting and ultimately the reality both inside and outside the poem.

*Cathy Silverstein*

## Notes

1. Hogan and Molin, p. 332.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 344.
3. Merivale, p. 233. Homeric Hymn to Pan (trans. George Chapman), lines 80-82.
4. *Ibid.*, line 9.
5. Mayerson, pp. 217-218.
6. Tatlock, p. 178.
7. Mallarme, "*L'Après-Midi d'un Faune*," in MacIntyre (translator), pp. 46-55. Hereafter line references to this poem will be given in the body of the text.

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## Rudolf Hess

*Recuperating: Rudolf Hess, 82, last of the major Nazi war criminals still in prison; after trying to slash his wrists with a table knife in West Berlin's Spandau Prison last week. Since 1966, Hess has been the only prisoner at Spandau, where troops from the U.S., Great Britain, France and Russia take turns guarding him.*

—Newsweek, March 7, 1977

### I

I will speak!

I claim now the harp for my tale of the past  
And I claim my obligation to sing of what has  
gone before,

But will be with us to the last.

As I have since man began,

I shall raise a voice from my homeland

And tell my tale by the burning fire  
in the night

Asking, always asking,

Can we make the days of our fathers right?

Though I am only an inheritor to this

And did not smell the fulfillment of the promise;

I am today,

And have heard immortal Compassion speak

Of the pain of pain of all, strong and weak,

And I must ask:

Can this be the divinely human way?

### II

Day after day I have watched the morning wake,

Sleeping as an old man sleeps: Escorting in

Each hour, lightening hues of the day they make.

Every day my body is stranger to me,

And when this alien has taken it all

Over, there'll be no more room, and I'll be free.

Consequence is the will of man  
And gives meaning to his empty plans.  
It gives a nobility that cannot be calculated—  
And never could this have been calculated.  
It is not the months and years forever lost,  
But the despair of what just one day—just one  
Hour with eternity ahead—will cost.  
Yes, I know the Lord's eternal sulphur fire,  
And though unpromised oblivion is near,  
Still I long for the mother-warmth of the pyre.  
I've borne it all, being as I am a man;  
And as men judged me, so I've judged the price and  
It has been paid.  
No coward behind his sanitary war  
Shall find me expired in that corner cot  
At breakfast-time, ungroomed when I am called for.  
No, I chose, I accepted, and I have borne:  
The nobility of consequence is mine  
And to the end my life has been my will's form.

*Joshua Mostow*

## The Tutor

Part of the deal is this: the squat machine  
That sulks in the bedroom waiting to change  
Her blood will be ignored. "There's little pain  
In the process," the mother says, her words  
Carefully chosen. And the sound,  
Its hum and click, will not be heard.

The father asks me if I've heard  
About the dialysis machine  
That keeps their girl alive. They sound  
Out my discretion: will they have to change  
Tutors in mid term? My bland words  
Reassure them, and I'm hired. Although pain

Isn't in the contract, I soon learn pain  
Is its main clause. I remember now I'd heard  
No one else would take the job: mumbled words  
In the teacher's lounge. Well, I'll be machine  
Efficient: the new steel pedagogue. Change  
My mind because death makes its little sound

In the next room? Just tell me how sound  
The old man's credit is. Where there's pain  
Involved, there's money. The parents know a change  
In luck's forced me to take this job, heard  
How much I need the cash, and I don't think a dumb machine  
Will unnerve me. Why is it we use words

To hide our fear? When I see the girl, words  
Fail. The sound  
Of my strained voice counterpoints the machine:  
It mutters, I click out grammar. Nouns, death, pain,  
Death, verbs . . . She's heard  
Passive tense ringing its chill change

Along her slight veins; why should rules change  
Anything? She calmly waits for words  
With meaning, and I want to say: have you heard  
What it's like with a man? The most frightening sound  
Has always been the voice of pain.  
Listen, and I'll tell you—. But the machine

Keeps me in line. It murmurs: money. Sound  
Bells, change words. Who hasn't heard that pain  
Is a noun? I am the grammar machine.

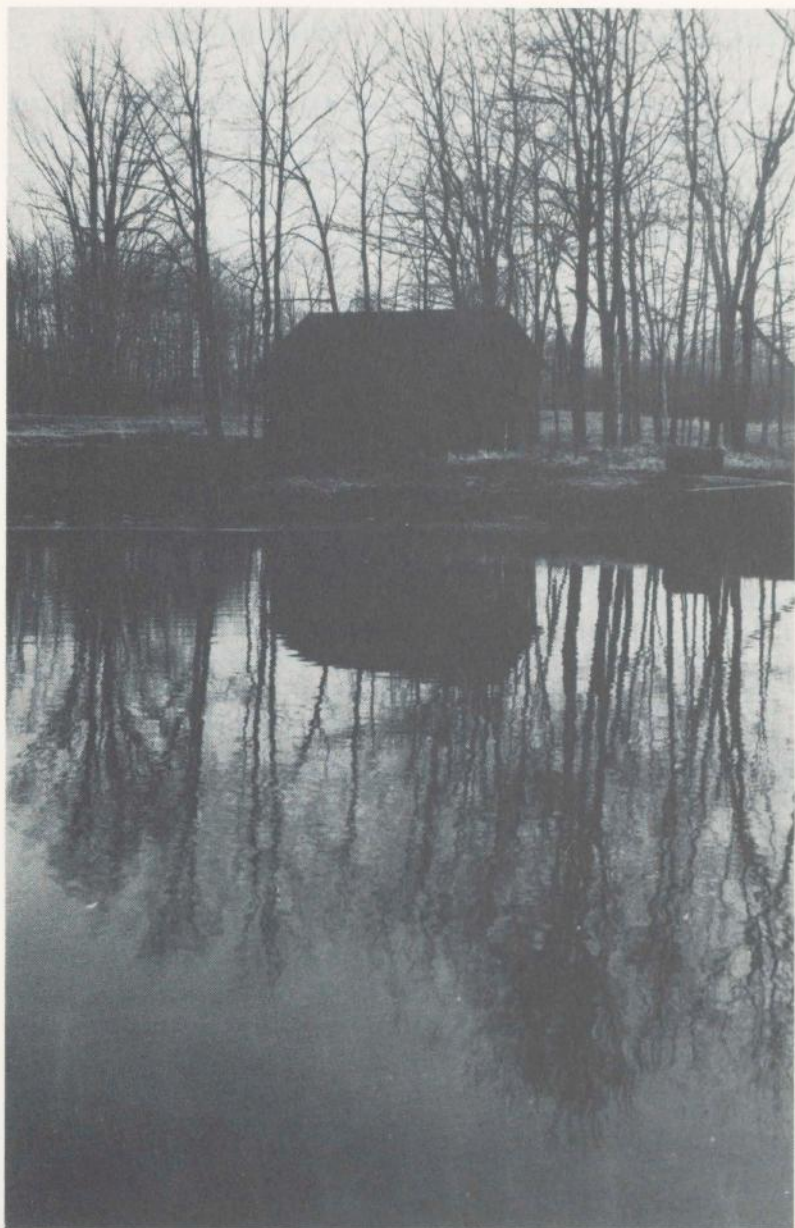
*Darcy Cummings*

"here are your waters  
and your watering place . . ."

I remember (before anyone could)  
sitting in your kitchen, drinking brown coffee  
from a butter color mug, chipped and clean  
talking against the night  
as it crept up under the window (which held firm) and the  
kitchen a small square of captured light  
which contained us, and magnified like leafdrops our thoughts  
and night lay down and slept under the window—  
Ah, Cindy, we were wizards then  
when our dreamwishes, out thrown, were given eyes

*Carole Bernstein*





*Carolyn Fox*

## The Concave Mattress

On the wedding night the mattress was new and full. His long immense body lay on top of it and relaxed in its suppleness and greatness. He said to his wife, who at that time was standing by the window, "Look and see if the world has changed."

The wife looked out the window and said, "No, it hasn't changed."

"Then I shall sleep for a day."

He slept for a week and then woke. His body had caved the mattress a little. He looked at his wife and said, "Look and see if the world has changed."

The wife looked out the window and said, "No, it hasn't changed."

"Then I shall sleep for a week."

He slept for a year and then woke. His body had dug deeper into the mattress forming a pit. He said to his wife, "Look and see if the world has changed."

The wife looked out the window and said, "No, it hasn't changed."

"Then I shall sleep for a month."

He slept for five years and then woke. His body had sunk even deeper into the mattress. As usual he said to his wife, "Look and see if the world has changed."

The wife looked out the window and said, "No, it hasn't changed."

"Then I shall sleep for a year."

He slept for ten years. By that time the mattress had formed a deep trench for his body. He died. They pulled a sheet over him. The surface was smooth without having a single wrinkle. They carried him in the mattress, which had been transformed into a coffin, and threw them together out the window onto the solid ground of the street.

She witnessed the descent of the coffin-mattress until it reached its final resting place. The wife looked out the window, turned her eyes to the heavens, and said, "Oh, my God! The world has changed!"

*Yussef Idris*

*translated from the Arabic by Sami Khella*

## Fragmented Fable

the sky  
    is  
        falling  
            the sky  
                is falling  
chicken little said,  
running to the red wooden shelter.  
a piece of sky hit him, splitting open his head.  
and the wisest rooster of all,  
an old old cock of many years,  
proclaimed  
    "chicken little's dead"  
someone has to tell his wife  
    "he's lost his life"  
who will tell her?  
and no one spoke  
            no one clucked  
One impertinent hen thought it all rather a joke  
she laughed herself red in the face and  
forgetting her place,  
she  
    walked  
        out  
            of  
                the  
                    barn  
                        and  
                            into  
                                the  
                                    sky . . .

*Peter McNamara*







## Song

O my thoughts, my thoughts,  
What trouble you cause me!  
Why do you stand there on the paper  
In bleak, sad rows?  
Why doesn't the wind carry you off  
Like chaff in the steppes?  
Why doesn't Evil, your child,  
Afflict you as it afflicts me?  
Since Evil bore you into the world for derision,  
And tears watered you—why did they not drown you,  
Carry you off into the sea, wash you from the steppes?  
Then people would not ask what pains me;  
They would not ask why I curse my fate,  
Why I bother . . . "Nothing better to do!"  
They would not say that with derision . . .  
O my flowers, my children!  
Why did I raise you, why did I care?  
Will one heart weep for you  
As I have wept? I know: "Perhaps . . ."

Maybe there will be a girl's  
Heart, enchanting eyes  
That will weep for these thoughts;  
I do not want to any more . . .  
If only one tear falls from her eye,  
Then—O Lord of Lords!  
O my thoughts, my thoughts,  
What trouble you cause me!

For those enchanting eyes,  
For the dark brows,  
The heart wept, laughed,  
Poured out words,  
Poured them out in the only way it knew;  
For those dark eyes,  
For the green cherry-orchard,  
For the favors of that girl.

For the steppes and the mounds<sup>1</sup>  
In the Ukraine  
The heart swooned, not wishing  
To sing in exile.  
It did not wish to call  
The Cossacks for advice  
In the snow, in the forest . . .  
Let the Cossack souls  
Meet in the Motherland:  
Far away, where it's green  
From village to village . . .  
Far away like the freedom that has passed.  
Wide Dniper<sup>2</sup>—O sea,  
O steppes rolling far, rapids roaring,  
O mounds and mountains!  
There was born, there grew,  
Cossack freedom;  
There by the hands of the Tartars and the nobles<sup>3</sup>  
The steppes were sown,  
Sown with corpses,  
Till it was over . . .  
They lay to rest; and meanwhile  
The mounds grew up.  
And above them a black eagle  
Soars, guarding them;  
And about them the Kobzars<sup>4</sup> sing.  
They always sing about how it happened,  
Those blind ones,  
For they are worthy. And I? . . . And I  
Only know how to cry;  
I have only tears for the Ukraine,  
But words—I have none . . .  
Do not wipe away my tears—  
Let them fall;  
Let them water a foreign field  
Every day and every night  
Until these eyes are covered  
With foreign sand . . .

O my thoughts, my thoughts,  
O my flowers, my children,  
I raised you, I cared for you,—  
What shall I do with you?  
Go to the Ukraine, my children,  
To our Motherland,  
Among the orphans,  
And I—will die here.  
There you will find a kind heart,  
And a good word,  
There you will find the honest truth,  
And maybe even glory . . .

Greet them, my only,  
My Motherland,  
These my unreasonable children,  
As your own child!

*by Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861)*

*translated from the Ukrainian by O. Julian Plys*

## Notes

1. The Cossacks erected huge burial mounds to their dead in the steppes.
2. A river in the central Ukraine known for its treacherous rapids.
3. Shevchenko refers here to the Polish nobles who engaged the Cossacks in frequent battles in the 17th century.
4. Kobzars were minstrels who sang about the Cossack wars. They usually had once been Cossacks themselves, and more often than not were blind.

Japanese Poetry from the *Man-yoshu*

The crane, crying, flies overhead  
Towards the field of Sakurada.  
On the shore of Ayuchi  
The tide seems to ebb;  
Crying, the crane flies overhead.

—Takechi Kurohito, #271

When spring comes,  
The nightingale,  
Hidden in the treetops,  
Having sung,  
Sleeps on the underbranches of the plum.

—Yamaguchi-no-Wakamaro, #827

Is there no way  
To see you again?  
I'd like to keep you,  
Charmed,  
Pinned to my sleeve.

—Awatame, #225

*translated by Joshua Mostow*



波 流 佐 禮 婆

許 奴 禮 我 入 利 互

字 具 比 須 曾

奈 岐 互 伊 奴 奈 流

烏 梅 我 志 豆 延 爾

### Third Rail

We never took the short cut  
Along the Pennsylvania Track—  
This was one taboo we could not break.  
The third rail,  
A rusted menace  
In a long wood box  
Hummed along its narrow banks.

Some nights in dreams  
I cross the lot  
Step coldly over the shining track  
Ignore the twisting vines  
That tear my legs  
The brittle cinders underfoot

No one is near  
The factories are silent  
Listening  
I slip my hand  
Through rotted wood  
And touch the trembling  
Moaning rail.

A spark arches across my arm  
To the weedy lot  
The starved stalks  
Burst into flames

I watch as fire  
Races across the lot  
To the red brick rows  
Chars my mother's house  
Subsides  
As the pale sky opens in a terrible slash  
And I hurtle  
Down rusted tracks  
That never meet

*Darcy Cummings*

## „Der Expresszug“

[based on an incident in Gerhart Hauptmann's *Bahnwärter Thiel*]

Der beschäftigte Thiel hörte die sechs schrillen Schläge und wusste, dass ein Zug die nächstliegende Station verliess. Er beeilte sich aber nicht, tat was er zu tun hatte, und ging erst dann mit Fahne und Patronentasche ins Freie. Endlich kam er zu dem nicht weit entfernten Bahnübergang und schloss die Barriere. Dann war nur zu warten.

Es gab kleine Geräusche, wie zum Beispiel das Zwitschern der Vögel, aber meistens war der Forst still. Es war fast dämmerig, und die im Osten stehende Sonne färbte die Bäume künstlerisch.

Plötzlich sah der an der Barriere stehende Mann einen Punkt am Horizont. Der Punkt wurde immer grösser—vergrösserte sich allmählich—wuchs von Sekunde zu Sekunde—und auf einmal fing er an, vorwärts zu galoppieren. Dieses eiserne Pferd ging nicht auf den Zehenspitzen. Es spuckte Feuer und Dampf aus und dann zerriss die Stille mit einem wilden Schrei. Man bemerkte, wie ungeheuer gross das verrückte Tier eigentlich war.

Und dann war es vorbei. Man konnte es noch sehen, seinen Schweiss noch riechen, aber der Geruch wurde unmerkbar, als das Ungeheuer sich weit entfernte und mit der Zeit kleiner wurde. Es wurde immer ruhiger, und schliesslich herrschte die Stille wieder in dieser Gegend, wo sich die Füchse und Hasen einander „Gute Nacht“ sagen.

E. William Pastor





*Jeanne Cohen*

### Modern Tanka

I sit upon ice  
to cool curiosity  
off from the fire  
of asking why and knowing  
every answer is water

*Peter McNamara*

## A New Genre of Poetry Brought to Light

In the modern academic world where the dictum of "publish or perish" determines success or failure, a favorite practice is seeking out and solving literary mysteries for the enlightenment of colleagues and the assurance of a job next year. It is with an eye towards the future, as well as pride and pleasure then that I offer a newly unearthed genre of poetry for study. It has lain virtually dormant for many years, and new criticism will give us fresh insight into its depth. The genre is that of "poetry without words," the ultimate in esoteric self-expression. I have chosen to publicize it as "non-mot;" here is its history.

Non-mot originated in Paris during the early 1910's. It began inauspiciously. One afternoon a half-dozen nondescript, out-of-work poets were haranguing each other over a single glass of cheap wine in a cafe in the Rue de L'Estrapade. Each was defending his theory of what the "new poetry" they all anticipated should sound and look like. None was willing to concede or compromise, and several times in the heated conversation they almost spilled the wine which was their only claim to the table. In a moment of condescending humor, one of them asked Charles leBoeuf, the waiter, what his theory of poetry was. "Je m'excuse, Messieurs," he replied, "Mais je n'écris pas." The poets were stunned. "Vous n'écrivez pas? Pas du tout?" they asked. LeBoeuf repeated his simple admission. The group stared into space for a moment, then vanished, stiffing leBoeuf for the wine and retreating to their dusty garrets, which were at the time renting for triple the rate of an average suite in a fashionable building.

Non-mot was born. It was the ideal form for budding poets to adopt. Each of the six formed different theories of how it should work, but their work is generally similar enough to be called a school. Some are more pure non-mot poets than others, but in general they all do not say the same things.

The most widely known of the non-mot poems, and indeed this is unknown outside Paris, is this short piece by Jacques Shellacque, who built a prestigious career in poetry without words. He was asked not to speak at the best universities in France, and was not

awarded the Legion of Merit for his work. His " " appeared in 1913:

. . . . .  
( )

Although many find the curious rhyme scheme confusing, Shellacque broke fresh ground with this piece. His jealous fellow non-mot poets all suggested thereafter that he not not write at all after " " was published.

" " has caused peculiar problems within its small audience. The parentheses in particular agitate many readers. Why are they so far apart, and what does Jacques not say in them that he does not not say elsewhere in the poem? The apparent redundancy caused some critics to greet " " with derision. Several of them publicly belittled the poem, and two showed particular distaste for Shellacque's work by paying all the back rent on his garret, doing almost irreparable damage to his local literary reputation.

After " " non-mot met with mixed success. René Canard's rather excessive " " is too lushly sentimental to suit some tastes:

!  
!  
!  
!

Canard enjoyed a simultaneous career writing greeting cards, but this was not revealed until years after his death. " " is not a very skillful poem (one critic dismissed it as "sleight-of-word") and it is hurt by Canard's still unfashionable political optimism. He was, by the way, Poet Laureate of the Vichy Government.



More successful is Philippe du Marais's darkly introspective " ". This is considered by many to be the finest of all non-mots:

?

Non-mot purists, who resolutely demand that the poet say more with less, find du Marais's spare images delightful. His use of an epigraph troubles enthusiasts, but since it is after all from Shellacque it seems acceptable. The internal rhyme scheme creates a kind of staccato rhythm, and while the poem lacks any definable meter it does have a musical quality. M. du Marais is the only non-mot poet to deal in anything but abstracts. He was, as this poem shows, fond of taking his subjects from European history. There are many allusions to the "Casket Letters" in " ".

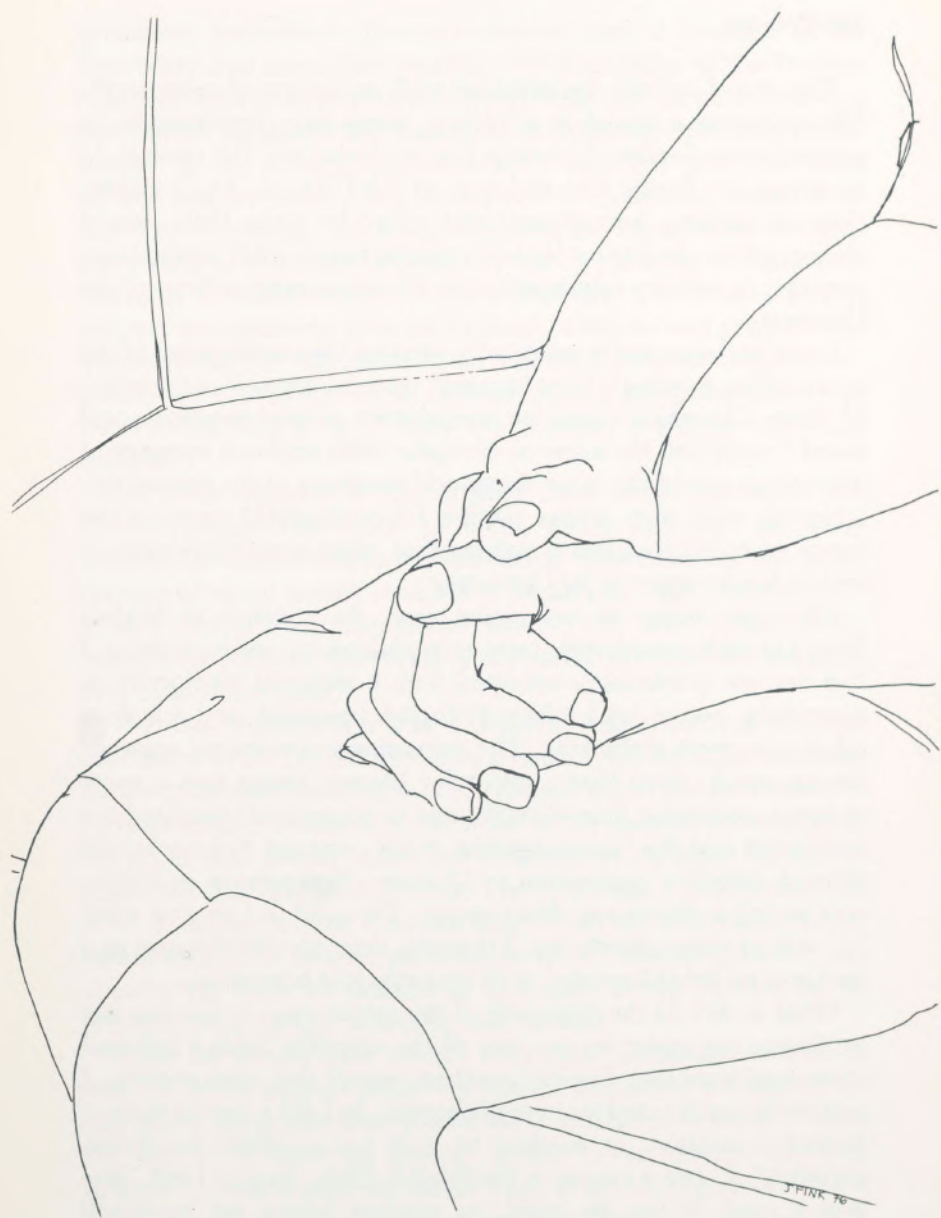
The high point of non-mot came with the purest non-mot of all: August Sanspenser's " " of 1917:

The length alone confirms Sanspenser's virtuosity. He refuses to discuss the clearly autobiographical elements in his work, but his followers cite many similarities between the poem and Sanspenser's own life, particularly in the second strophe. The poem is not widely anthologized because of the rather explicit sexual references, but its

hand-to-hand circulation built a legend around it. Many enthusiasts enjoy reciting it from memory.

Of course this is only the tip of a non-mot iceberg which grows daily. Many students who find conventional forms of expression confining or cumbersome find that non-mot's free-flowing, unstructured style fits exactly what they have to say. This critic hopes that an illumination of its past will enhance a guaranteed future for the style.

*David Clow*





## The Provost

This time I opened the envelope with no feeling of resentment. The letter was a model of efficiency, admirably combining in its printed, mass-produced message the particular and the general, in an appeal for funds. The members of the Class of '33 ("toughest class" something, something) were asked to make their annual alumni gift to the University for a special twenty-fifth anniversary purpose: to realize a sylvan setting in the urban surroundings of the University.

I read the letter and momentarily admired the combination of the handwritten greeting ("Dear Bernard" over the crossed-out printing of "Dear Classmate") and the handsomely printed message—and noted I could link the name of the signer with neither a memory of him nor of any of the other thirty-odd members of the committee, excepting only one, whose picture I'd occasionally seen on the sports page. With all this, I realized that, after twenty-five years, I was no longer angry at the University.

My anger began in my senior year. As a major in English literature with considerable interest in philosophy and economics, I had become increasingly unhappy with a personal mediocrity in everything, except (as I believed) English literature, and a lack of talent in numerical thinking. The increasingly convincing evidence (to my mind, then) that a talent for literary things was a more common possession than scientific and philosophical talent and the realization that the "understanding of life" was not to be achieved through attentive application to Chaucer, Shakespeare or Milton was having a depressing effect on me. The road to knowing what "it" was all about clearly lay, I thought, through mathematics as a background for philosophy, with by-paths into economics.

What to do? At the beginning of my senior year, it was too late to change my major to any one of the scientific fields I believed more significant than English literature; even if that were possible, I was paralyzed by my fear of mathematics. So I did a logical thing—turned to religion, or as close to it as my youthful skepticism permitted. I took a course in the English Bible. Surely, I felt, here was a road, if not *the* road, to wisdom before my twentieth birthday.

The course was being given for the first time after a lapse of many years by the Provost of the University; the accession of a

prominent financier to the newly created post of President of the University had made this possible. My knowledge of the Provost had been limited to hearing him speak long, Latinic sentences on a few formal occasions. My feeling of surprise then had been never-failing, as his thought parenthetically departed from the main subject and his voice wove in and out of modifying clauses, first this way, then that, but always clear in the subordinate thought, and jolting (if you were interested in this sort of thing sufficiently to listen) in the sudden return to the initial idea. There was a minor, indirect acquaintance with the Provost, while he was primarily an administrator, as the result of an extended piece of doggerel occasionally quoted about the campus, something to the effect that the Provost was a lazy man—"he married a widow with four children."

The class sessions in the English Bible were miserable. The Provost mainly read from his notes, which had been for many years available in book form. Attendance dwindled from an initial turnout of about twenty students to an average ten or twelve, with a hard core of a few regulars of which I was one. (I had always feared I should miss something of the nature of a vital revelation, if I cut class—any class).

The final examination was, I thought, one of the easiest I had ever taken in an English literature course. I had anticipated almost all the questions: the origins of the English Bible; a short history of its translations; evidence in the Bible of the medical knowledge of the times; and similar questions. I handed in my exam booklet in much less than the allotted time. I felt glad that a dull course was over, disappointed that I learned little more than what I had known before taking the course, and momentarily I wondered how it was possible for such an uninspired character as the Provost to be respected as a teacher, administrator, or man.

When the grades were posted, I was shocked almost to tears to find a B minus marked beside my name. I remember the wall of the hall where the grades were posted went in and out of focus. I made my way to a bench to recover myself. I—an English major, a straight A student since my junior year, in all my English courses—I got a B minus in the easiest course and exam I'd ever taken in college! My face alternately burned with shame and paled with anger. Obviously, I thought, the Provost hadn't read the exam papers himself; some reader must've done it. But even so, how



could a reader miss not merely the adequacy but also the excellence of my answers? What should I do? I could not let a B minus stand on my record in this easy course, in this my major field. But then I'd never protested a grade before, in any course. I'd always felt I got what I deserved. I knew some students who did protest grades, but I had judged them poor stuff and slightly dishonorable, not to take quietly the judgment of their betters in scholastic matters.

I hardly slept that night. By morning I had determined I would see the Provost about this grade; something must have gone wrong in the grading. I did not, incidentally, compare my grade with the other grades in the class (although I noticed some A's), because I neither knew the other students—although a number were also English majors (the College *was* very large)—nor had I any chance to judge individual abilities from class activity, since there was very little of question and answer.

So for the first time in my attendance at the University, at the end of the first half of my senior year, I went into the Provost's office to ask to see him. No doubts assailed me on this, because he had cordially invited any of us a few times during the term to stop in to see him—"about anything." I made my request to the young woman behind the high counter in the outer office. I had often watched her in and about College Hall and admired the promising spring to her buttocks.

I felt my face flush as she said abruptly, "What do you want to see him about?" It had not occurred to me that I should be asked this. What I had previously thought to be an entirely pretty face now showed a shrewish cast. I had never noticed before that her lips were so thin.

I tried hard to control my voice but I broke into a sweat as I said, with a quaver I can still hear, "I want to see him about the grade I got in his course."

She gave me short shrift. "The Provost won't be able to see anyone about the grades," she said brusquely, and turned away.

I felt ashamed to appeal to that slender back, and I didn't feel capable of going on in this degrading manner with such an attractive girl. So I left.

As I recall, all my exams were over and I had a few days before registering for the second term. I could not quiet the turmoil in my mind. The Provost had invited us to see him on anything. I knew I had written an A exam. But I did not want to expose myself to the



certainly of another turndown—she had been so abrupt!

The next day, although I ordinarily would have been home reading during this time between terms (I commuted by trolley and subway to the campus), I found myself, with no clear plan, in front of the door to the Provost's office. I waited, undecided, for about five minutes. College Hall was deserted at this time. I turned away from the door and started down the hall with no destination in mind. The Provost turned the corner, and I was face-to-face with him.

I blurted out, "May I see you?"

The old, granite-like face smiled back at me. "Why, of course," he replied. "Come on in. I was just going into my office."

I did not look at the young woman behind the counter. She responded quietly and pleasantly to the Provost's "Good morning!" I realized that he had not even asked me what I wanted to see him about. I accompanied him into the inner office, where he invited me to sit down in a deep leather chair (I'd never sat in one before). His desk was piled with mail and papers; he did not even glance at the pile, but straightway hung up his hat and coat and sat down in a chair alongside me near a long, dark table. ("Mahogany," I thought. "How do they keep it so clean and shining?")

"Well, son," he began, "what do you want to see me about?"

In a strong voice, no longer afflicted with doubts, I stated my shock at the B minus, and my lack of understanding as to its possibility.

"My," he said (yes, kindly!), "let's take a look at your paper. I didn't grade them. But my reader might be wrong."

He went to his desk and pressed a buzzer; promptly the young woman came in (I looked at her fully this time—her face was expressionless) and, in response to the Provost's request, quickly returned with all the exam booklets.

The Provost selected mine and read the answer to the first question. He turned the page to my second answer and finished it.

"Well," he said, "I don't believe I need go through the whole exam. Let's look at one of the A examinations."

He found one and we started to read it together. My eye had only to fall on the first page, answering the first question, when I was smote with the realization that I had, indeed, written an inadequate examination. I suddenly realized that not only the first question, but all the questions of the examination required a detail of in-

formation and an integration of knowledge that I just did not have, but which *was* possessed by at least someone who had taken this easiest of courses. The consciousness of mediocrity was like being physically blinded; the room whirled.

The Provost looked up after finishing his reading of the answer to the second question. His face was serene—perhaps from the teacher's satisfaction at observing a student's able performance. Apparently I gave him no outward sign of my anguish.

"I guess you can see," he said gently, "why these answers rate an A."

"Yes, sir," I answered, in a voice whose composure startled me and which I didn't recognize as my own. The thought at once crossed my mind that I was witnessing why this man was respected. In these small, daily matters (as undoubtedly in larger, more significant matters) he could be direct and so clear that what had seemed difficult and shattering and even unbelievable took on the right proportions. What, I wondered, is the method for acquiring this wisdom for action?—could he tell me, if I asked?

"However," the Provost continued as though I hadn't said anything, "there's no reason why this minus should be. Take this note to my secretary and you'll get a B for the course."

My mental turmoil had ended. My grade in the course no longer mattered. I now knew that wisdom was available from a course in the English Bible but not just for the reading and not in a course of four months duration and not just in a college education. I thanked him and left with the note.

"The Provost asked me to give you this," I said to the expressionless young woman. She took the piece of paper and nodded. I left to catch a trolley for home.

I did not receive any requests to contribute to the alumni-giving to the University until about twelve years after graduation—perhaps some had come while I was in the service but, of course, my wife did not forward any routine mail to me. About a year after my discharge from the Army, I got a circular asking me to join the alumni organization and make a contribution to the University. I could have made a modest contribution but I didn't. The circular recalled to me the incident of the grade in the English Bible course and the cool and inaccessible young woman in the Provost's office.

I no longer felt anger but I had a mingled feeling of embarrassment and resentment; embarrassment at the memory of a

youthful inability to accept an accurate evaluation of my work (was I still, I thought, some thirteen years after, unable to approximate the Provost's wisdom?); resentment at the University for providing the setting in which I had to make an initially unsuccessful request of an indifferent and desirable woman.

However, there is a desirable dimming of remembrance to be found in the passage of years. As I mentioned at the outset, I opened the envelope requesting a contribution to the Class of '33's project for the University with no feeling of resentment. I sent a modest check. But I did not go to the twenty-fifth reunion because, as I said before, I recognized only one name on the organizing committee; besides I have a horror of wearing a class reunion hat while, at the same time, trying to read the name on the badge of someone whom I've forgot.

*Bernard Mandel*



## The Severance

In nomadic societies oral literature plays an important role not only in the retaining of their history but in the creation of it as well. The most significant poems are passed down from generation to generation through recitals at social gatherings. Among the Somali of Northeast Africa, there are a great variety of poetic genres; common to all of them is the formal requirement of alliteration: in every hemistich of a poem at least one word has to begin with a chosen consonant or vowel. The non-repetition of words containing the key letter is mark of good poem; the Somali original of the poem translated below is alliterated in "q". This poem belongs to the genre of oral literature known as gabay, which typically consist of 30 to 150 lines with 14-18 syllables per line. The gabay was traditionally chanted without musical accompaniment. The gabay generally deals with subjects of a serious nature; Faarahh Nuur composed the following poem as a protest to his own clan elders. Its impact was notable as it subsequently influenced the clan's decision to migrate.

Between the years 1911-1912 Northern Somalia was in political chaos as a result of the Darawish movement and Ethiopian expansion south and east from Harar. This time is known to the Somalis as Hhaaraamo-cune, "when forbidden food was eaten". The 'iidagalle clan was at that time predominant in the area south of Hargeysa, and for many years the Arab clan lived under the authority of the 'iidagalle sultan. However, as the 'iidagalle grew wealthy and strong, they became proud and overbearing; they exploited their relations in the Arab clan by controlling the latters' marriages, collecting tribute from them, and generally diminishing their prestige. The result was an Arab clan revolt against 'iidagalle authority. The Arab clan formed an alliance with a subsection of the 'iidagalle called Gobdoon Dhamal, thereby shattering the unity of the 'iidagalle.

The event which actually prompted Faarahh Nuur's poem was a call for a "peaceful" meeting by the 'iidagalle sultan. Many Arab elders having intermarried over many years with the 'iidagalle felt



that their kinsmen genuinely desired peace. Faarahh Nuur, though not present at the meeting, weighed the situation and saw that the 'iidagalle were merely stalling for time while they attempted to encircle the Arab clan (lines 11-12) and to bring them again to submission. The poet urged the Arab clan to form another alliance, this time with the Habr Awal to the north. In the event, this latter alliance proved useful to the Arab: they escaped northwards into the lands of the Habr Awal before the 'iidagalle could encircle them.

One should note that the peace parley between Arab and 'iidagalle was broken off as a result of Faarahh Nuur's gabay, again stressing the tremendous importance of persuasive poetry to Somali politics.

A man whose death approaches and, unknown to him, whose  
prayer of death is read<sup>1</sup>

Until the beasts of the field feast on his flesh

Such a person is always foolish before his eyes are opened by the  
death which he has prepared for himself.

The 'iisa-Dhamal clans<sup>2</sup> have not abandoned their misconceptions  
about us;

And they are still making plans, which are mere facades.

If peace is not desired by both sides, securing it is only an illusion.

Behold the fresh graves of their noblemen killed in previous battles!<sup>3</sup>

(Oh, kinsmen), why do you believe those to whom the price of  
peace comes so cheaply?

I can see the deceit in these peaceful parleys.

Oh, my Arab clan, some of you are being misled:

Look at the movements of their *reers*<sup>4</sup> which are surrounding you;

Where are their carriers going, who skirt your lands in the Qadow  
country?<sup>5</sup>

(If they want peace), why do they exchange their milch-camels for  
arms,

And why are they so foolish as to barter their virgin she-camels for  
bullets?

A dry laugh and secret plans;  
A dangerous pit whose mouth is concealed;  
Deep water under which nets and traps are laid;  
Steel traps and baited hooks that could easily snare me:  
All these pitfalls I see—  
Only a fool would be misled by these.  
But should sharp knives also be hidden to kill me?  
How could I eat their poison hidden for me in the gourd?<sup>6</sup>

The 'ismaa'iil Jibril clans and the other Habr Awal clans  
I would have in alliance with us,<sup>7</sup>  
And I would move our clans to their lands in the Albasa Valley.<sup>8</sup>  
Let Qajaje inflict our camels;<sup>9</sup>  
Let us abandon the fertile lands of Af-Meer and Sigodan and Tuur,  
which have few thorns,  
And also Qar-Waraabe and Gawl, on which the Karin rains fall;<sup>10</sup>  
Let us leave Qool-Caday and Laan-Dheer, our usual grazing lands  
And thereby forfeit the prospect of having fat herds.<sup>11</sup>

That we<sup>12</sup> might become neighbors or even live together as brothers  
Becomes a path of thorns upon which none can walk.  
Our clans and the Reer Guuleed are as dangerous to one another as  
raw cereal is to the teeth.<sup>13</sup>  
Allah has ordained that we should despair of becoming friends  
again.  
Now, for the short time we are apart, we have both rested;  
Do not lament that our friendship can not exist; let no bond exist  
between us!

*Recorded and transcribed by Musa H.I. Galaal  
Lee Cassanelli assisted in the translation and editing.*

## Notes

1. The "prayer of death" (*gunaanad*) is the last prayer given to a Moslem before his death.
2. The 'iisa-Dhamal is a subsection of the 'iidagalle with whom the Arab clan fought (the Gobdoon-Dhamal were allies of the Arab clan).
3. Two great warriors of the Reer-Guuleed, second cousins to the 'iidagalle sultan, had been killed in earlier battles between 'iidagalle and Arab.
4. A *reer* is a family group of varying size.
5. Qadow country is 30-40 miles south of Hargeysa and was the grazing land of the Arab clan before they fled north. "Carriers" refer to burden camels of a *reer*.
6. The traditional method of catching ostriches in Somalia involves putting poison in gourds. All the metaphors of lines 15-22 stress the underhandedness of the 'iidagalle to the poet's view.
7. "us" refers to Arab and Gobdoon-Dhamal.
8. The Albasa valley is near Bulhar, west of Berbera.
9. Qajaje is a camel disease caused by under grazing.
10. "Karin rains" are a part of the Gu rains which occur in the region west of Hargeysa during June.
11. The area south of Hargeysa is better grazing land than the area to the north, where the Arab were forced to flee.
12. "We": the Arab and the 'iidagalle.
13. The Reer-Guuleed was the most powerful section of the 'iidagalle and was in the forefront of the conflict. "Raw cereal to the teeth" refers to the Somali practice of eating raw rice or millet (*qadhiidh*) as a snack. While Somalis believe this to help the teeth, the eating is very strenuous and noisy.

As hard as you tried  
to prevent it,  
I look into your eyes:  
And I thought,  
They are blue.  
Once I saw them caught  
by a bright angle of sun  
I thought,  
They are green.  
Then a day you had  
mistakenly come close  
to me closer than you  
wanted to or  
should have, I again  
looked into your eyes.  
They shone as blue-tinged ice.  
But beneath—  
faint hidden  
murmuring alive—  
a pale green rushing river  
in your eyes, a pale green river  
of dark weeds and mild fishes  
swirling with currents that danced through the rushes  
green and swirling with sun and life—  
In your eyes I have seen the river beneath the ice,  
And I am content.  
For I know that it is winter now,  
And I have only to wait  
For the thaw;  
For the spring.

*Carole Bernstein*



### Four Children Playing By The Sea

The dock rocks.  
Brine swashes  
over the dock,  
we run laughing  
to the other side.

The heavy sea  
lurches  
among the boats  
the dock tilts  
and we dance  
the boards,

our feet  
slipping.  
My brother  
slides into the sea.  
He can't swim.  
We can't swim.  
We stand on the dock  
fill our lungs  
and scream.

*Kate Llewellyn*

**Breathing,**

*(for Paul Desmond)*

The way a cat, bored with the earth,  
Dust in her hot fur, drowsing on a brick  
Wall in the haze, leaps to the air, and breathes  
Heat from those slow drowzes, and breathes that cat  
Walk that ties soft loops around  
Trees, slanting sun, and, easy now,  
Unloops them free and freer  
For having once been tied, and breathes the cat  
Spring that proves air is only what you conquer  
In soft leaps and balances of bone and air,  
Takes air easy, easy as bat's circling smoke  
Rings in the wide evening, easy now as swallowing  
The air, breathing it out in song.

*Deborah Burnham*



