



Taxidancing

poems by Paul Pines

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Biography & Acknowledgements

Paul Pines ...

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After Hours

Oh, to be the nameless member of a quartet like I heard today!
— Charles Mingus, *Beneath The Underdog*

Taxidancing

Out of the garage
by sunrise
cruising for fares

nothing seems clear
but the meter
which is divine.

We know the bee
is spectacular
among creatures

that its life
is orderly

its law nourishing.

Solomon was told
to study the drone
as I do now

stuck to my seat
at the intersection
of 57th and 3rd...

I think

9 isn't what
it's cracked up to be,
all head and no feet

6 is 9
asleep or in vitro

side by side
they form Cancer
the voluptuous Crab

or a form of sex

in which we struggle for air

the Romans
gave their numbers
a foundation and a roof

which they used until
barbarians became bureaucrats

3 isn't much better
in spite of its publicity
simply an implication

of 8
that sidwinder INFINITY

of which we are reflections
so pale
I want to jump the light!

The Tin Palace Troll

When TEX ALLEN
leaned across Bradley's bar
to thank me for the years
I let him practice
in my basement

I thought:

*What's done is done.
The world breeds new joints
and savvy kids
and mornings so long-of-tooth
you wonder they were
ever otherwise.*

“Lissen,” he said. “You’re a poet
and it musta been tuff
running a club but
if you never do anything else
you’ve done enuf
and if I didn’t tell you this
I’d be worth less than a weed
that owes something to the sod.”

Hitler's Favorite Trumpet Player

—For Karl Stuecklen

Eddie Jefferson told me
when Hitler wanted

to hear jazz in Paris
he looked for this guy

we see all the time
on Second Avenue

in a brown silk suit
gold cuff links

and a rug on his head
with peaks

like the Hartz Mountains.
This morning I spot him

hatless in the rain
bent over a mail box

on 5th Street
whispering down a damp

chute:
"Il ne veut passer!"

Jazzmobile

Did you

dig

Dexter

dancing

in front of

Grant's Tomb

when

his keyboard

took a solo?

HE DID THE LUSITANIA!

puffing

a cigarette

arched

his back

fanned

his knees

and listed...

a ship

with explosive cargo

Cocaine Cadenza

After Bradley
finishes his last set
I see his nose
has become

pitted
as moon rock

a surface of craters

a terrain on which
bulges grow from
other bulges
like Black Forest
mushrooms

a huge sponge
with a
 starboard
 list

a creature
that has started
to drift
 leaving
 a small
 abyss
in the middle
of his face

After Hours

I love
to be dissolute with you

get high
and stay up all night
 listening
 to jazz

Every time
you move I watch

your breasts
through that sleeveless
 blouse

hear
 your thighs rub
 in harem pants

and feel
the ocean shift...

how could anyone say
I've wasted my life?

Tompkin Square Meditation

Those yellow leaves,
an immense burden of detail
for such narrow limbs,

remind me of the way
things are turned around
these days

 a spring rain in autumn
the economy in trouble
Laurie back from
the Philippines
by way of
India

 a long time manic
 on the phone

something in her voice
about to give
about to flower
 out of season

 so hard to return
 and live

to be as free at home
as you were
on the other side of the world

The Whirlwind: After Sonny Rollins

These are possibilities,
currents at the center

of stones. At times
you can feel what

your senses mean:
to render,

that is, to interpret
and tear apart

simultaneously
where the wind is sown

Meteorology: After Philip Guston

The weatherman
is born
not made

a kid rushing out to catch
the first
snow
flake

a tiny seismograph
registering
every change
of light...

In the same way I have
always been
a writer
which is
why I
am
applying for a

NELSON ALGREN AWARD

and declaring
according to your rules
that I am in

financial need:

if you require
further proof
I can send you snapshots
of my shoes

The Death of Ted Berrigan

He died
on Independence Day
1983
of a heart attack
carrying too much weight
and cigarette
ashes
in his beard

At his Memorial
in St. Mark's
Sanders likened him
to Blackburn
O'Hara
and Millay
while Padgett
couldn't find words
to describe his friend
of twenty-four years

After Hollo
expressed surprise
Ted beat him to the grave
everyone
paraded
outside
behind
Schneeman's
painting of the poet
naked
in a chair
which moved
a wino
to leap from
the Ottendorfer Library steps
screaming,

Praise Him!
Praise the Lord!

Bebop Head: for Richie Cole

What you say
gets lost in
what you said

always hungry
for more than
words can say

and hunger is
what it's about
no matter how

good the ear
soft the voice
slim the body.

How fat was
Eddie J.
Bird or Fats

Navaro? But
the real
question is

what do you
do if you're
still hungry

and don't have
any more time
on your hands.

Good-Bye Joe: A Eulogy Delivered by Mickey Tucker

When I first got to the City
before I was married
Joe Carrol said,

Mickey Tucker
I love my wife, Alma, so much
I wouldn't leave her
to go to heaven.

That was
the only time
he ever lied to me

Adios Pablo

-for Paul Blackburn

Once he told me

*I'm trying to enter
my 44th year
with a little dignity*

tipping his Stetson
with his thumb
and sat

(you know
the way he used
to...)

head tilted
back
cat-eyes
squinting

and that fibrous smile
on his face cracking
like an egg

Blues for Dick and Jane

All things are on fire
even the moon. See
how it puckers
around every
orifice?

We burn at different rates.

Most poets go mad
or discover
others fixing dinner
who will share
what they
have
made

the conversion of matter into energy

our hearts strive for
at a ratio of 2:1
but it's
never as easy as
Dick & Jane
or anyone
loves
someone...

it was Spot
they watched run

who ran away
and set them both
in motion

Malcolm's Blues

Should I

who have

an assassin

in my throat

be dumb

be gone

be shy

lie

by silence

and explode

or let my words

like lava

on my tongue

burn out

and fossilize?

Allah!

I'm burning up

there are hands

in my gut

that catch

my breath

should I hide

in the shadow

of my lungs

or

find peace

marking time

on a ziggurat?

O, Mecca

of my distant

quick

how many ghosts

in my bones

how many bones

in your walls

how many ways to

skin them alive

Monk's Dream

Twisting

the symphony
as Ives
did

but
with
one
finger

a single
note
implied

between the keys

a note
we can't
hear

no less
look at

call white
or black...

Largo

for Lisa Bond

Maybe
in the end
it's not the poet
who wins
but the one
who wanted to
be a poet

because
the will is not
a beacon
but a match
struck
in the wind

and all we teach
each other
or are taught
begins
and ends
as soon as it
is thought

and every passion
leads us
from a known thing
back
into a deep
unknown

The Way It Happened

for Al Kovacs

The ACADEMY OF AMERICAN POETS
invited me to read
with two other poets in City Hall Park.
It was a cloudy day
and I arrived to find activity
on the steps of City Hall—
a podium facing several rows of folding chairs
adjacent to a brass band
tuning up with a medley from *Oklahoma*.
It seemed marvelous to find

Poetry, Politics
and a Broadway Musical

converging on Wall Street
when a lady on the steps said
she was sorry—this wasn't a poetry event
but a ceremony to honor the courageous
handicapped of New York.

And I watched them
stumbling out of taxis
struggling from the subway like pilgrims
heading for the shrine at St. Anne de Beaupres.

I located my event further south
on a plot of grass surrounded by junkies
and joined the poets
who greeted me like survivors on a rubber raft.
The Academy official was setting up our podium
when a sculptor named Al appeared
with short hair and a crew neck sweater
looking like an Economist who'd been drowned
by his students in the Liffy.

I hadn't seen him for years
since he'd lost fifty pounds and shaved
a beard that had hung in knots
like DeBuffet's

Beard of Perpetual Sorrow.

"You know," he told the poets next to me,
"I'm always moved by this part of town."

That building over there,
the one they're washing...yes, that one.
It's very special. My father
committed suicide in it trying to prove
he could play chess.
That was the last time I saw him."

I noticed that while Al
had cleaned up his body his eyeballs
seemed to bulge
and took him aside
aware others were regarding us
as harbingers of Municipal Confusion.

"What have you been doing?" I asked.

"Oh, you know, walking up and down,
working a lot with the Himalayan She-Goat.
Have you ever been to Peru?
No?
Maybe we can go together.
You can drift on Titicaca in a balsa boat
while I carve in stone—
which is getting more difficult for me
at this altitude.
I'm doing it less and less.
It may also be the shape of my head
or my bones.
I've got to get up high
or wait until they thicken."

"You've got nice ears," I observed.
"Thanks. Would you like to meet them?
This one, here, is Beethoven.
And this one's Van Gogh."

"Pleased to meet you."

"You've got cute ears yourself," he smiled.

"I'll bet a poet with your ears

could work well in stone.
Would you join me for coffee?"
"Perhaps next year," I told him
as the band for the handicapped
struck up The Impossible Dream.
"Right now I have to bring poetry
to the people."

"Well done." Al pumped my hand.

"See you later." I waved.
"Best of luck in Peru."

"Same to you," he shouted. "This is crazy.
I'm getting out of here."

The Radix

for brother Claude

Fire

(what the work is)

set

against myself:

that dream

whose voice pursues.

Everything

is fire but what conducts fire:

Wake up! it says.

Artifacts

for William Bronk

The house on Pearl Street is as it was
in gothic disarray

Loren's iron sculpture
(a lance stuck through a shield)
sits on the porch

bare ginkos
in the December afternoon
hover over the dormers like dowagers
over a tombstone

I enter

through the kitchen
a half-eaten apple on the table
beside your inhalers the compressor
a potentate by the telephone
bellowing orders to an empty sun porch
I follow the hose into the front room
where you lie hooked at the nose
to the other end

under a threadbare
red comforter

stretched out on the couch
your head high-domed
beneath a fringe
of white hair
hugging yourself
restless blue-nailed fingers
at your chest work
to fill your lungs
with air
knit unspoken
words

I sit on the window seat
and wait

not for you
to wake

but something
else...

all the old artifacts
are here

Canaday's darkly etched

variations on
the Chambered
Nautilus

Marril's
Provincetown seascapes
Peter's ingenious
mobile
 sunbeams
 on the Persian rugs

winter light fills the room

(as it always does
as it never will
again)

I feel it in my bones

there is an end
to learning
 its aquisition
 and utility
and to
love

So Long

*O thicker and faster—(So long!)
O crowding too close upon me..*

— Walt Whitman

So long
means

Good-bye or
It's been so
long since I've
seen you or
will be
so long before we
meet again or the suggestion
of unspecified duration so

Sal was spreading mayonnaise
on the mortadella
while a young Puerto Rican
stared at the knife
and sang:

*Make it nice
Make it nice
Put a little more
meat on that bread*

and we laughed
because an April sun was turning
everything in the Deli
liquid gold and
we were warm
after a cold winter
my 39th

then Sal
battered me a roll
poured a coffee to go
and put them in a bag
as the light struck me
like the slap of
a Zen Roshi

and I realized
it would be easier

than I had thought
to enter my 40's
with a little
dignity
regardless
of my
circumstances
so I told Sal

*So long, Sal,
so long*

Bits and Pieces

I reflected that even in the languages
of humans there is no proposition
that does not imply the entire universe...

— Joge Luis Borges, *The Writing Of The God*

books are...the *children of silence*.

— Proust

to be a fisher of memory
is not the same as being a fisher of men

to be a fisher of men
one must know everything

synchronously
never cleaving to a single historical detail

to be a fisher of one's own heart
is to share assumptions with no one

to bait a sensation and reel up
a century in silence

The Persistence of Memory

The smoke of your fire
still smolders
in the eaves of Rouen
Jean D'Arc

my soul
in ashes

We Build Our Shrines Where We Once Refused To Go

for David Unger

I was taught to recite
the 23rd Psalm at bed time
before entering
a wilderness

 that left me
 scared
late into the night

Calling out
to a father

 who would not
 comfort me

I wondered at
the assurance David
wrung from fear

 a boy so small
 a sling shot
 of a boy
 like me

who understood
that shadows
form

 an underground
 stream

on which he
had been set
adrift

The Secret Doctrine

for Dalt Wonk

the Bal Shem Tov
suggests
the sight of a single soul
in the after world
renders
all argument
moot

Squirrels

A generation of squirrels
is killing itself

because of the extended
summer drought there is

something untoward
in the seasonal patterns

parents have become
neglectful or defunct

leaving their children
unprepared for the world

nothing can be done
to compensate

for this lack of adult
guidance and tiny corpses

litter the highway
where they've tried to cross

unable to judge when
to go forward

or retreat mouths full
of nuts and old corn cobs

these little pieces of nature
with a death wish

Monsters
are born

in the dark
and come
to light

they exist
to show you

the shape
of your
fear

which you
begin to see

is the door
to your
heart

that you have
located

in despair
but enter
in

sadness...

a wave
that carries you
away from old
wounds

Kicking Up Dust

Duke at bat
Jackie stealing home

from Flabush
to lower East Side 60's
push carts in autumn
on Avenue C

 heatless winter
 bed-bug nights
 snow like lace
 on fire escapes
the track in my father's head
where they drilled for cancer
 Hank Moble
 and Ornette
 at Sluggs

acid rain
of bodies falling past
my window
 on 6th & Boo
LSD Magi who thought
they could fly

 finally shipping out
 spring on tramps
 Gulfwise summers
 December on
 the North Atlantic

United Fruit banana boat
to Olangapo
and Nam
 bamboo roofs
 ablaze
 New Year's Eve
 Tu Do Street
 Saigon 1965

returned with malarial fevers

mouth
and head
on fire

to convalesce
in Yucatan
among Mayans
from Chic-Xulub
outside Progresso...

thought it was the details
I wanted to preserve
mistook events
in themselves
as precious

when it was really
what escaped
me
as I went

I am that Brahman which is like space

— Sankara

The Crest Jewel of Wisdom suggests
my psyche interfaces with the universe

(Brahman and I
linked by a darkness that dissolves
all boundaries)

the black hole
I will sink
into
at death

is
a pin point

at the center
of the milky way

that anchors
the galaxy

Pin-Headed Angel Dance

for Fred Waitzkin

Driving home
on Quaker Road

corn fields gone yellow
burning bushes everywhere

I grow old
as I knew
I would

spent my life
practicing for it

the question that burns
like autumn air
in my lungs

as Buddha
stated it

“what happens
to a fire
that’s gone out”

what happens
after the dance of leaves
what happens to exploding stars
or salt abandoned by
the sea

wherewith
the burning ashe

I’ve
grown
tired of myself in time
and of a universe
in which

light
stretched thin
becomes invisible to
the eye

clings
even
as it moves
away from

its origin

*I have brought thee the Eye of Horus,
that thou may equip with it thy face...*

What is the touch of delight
but the seeing hand

in the palm an open eye
that looks out from a place beyond death

we thirst for that clear stream to which
we may draw close but never drink

not even touch the water with our lips
always a membrane between

the eyeless palms of our yearning
the sorrow that separates us

Anima

*The curse you bear
is your own weight
I am not she
All soul is not bent upon
your undoing*

*Apart from yourself I am what
you seek
I am your heartbeat
I was always there
and will be*

*You need not call me anything
Where no boundary exists
between mind and space
there is no power
in a name*

Hoops

Everything wants to be a circle.
— Black Elk Speaks

Black Elk spoke
of the hoop

a flowering tree
center roots & branches
extending into upper
and lower
worlds

at the center
where time and eternity
meet

and overflow

a hoop of abundance
enclosing
the hoop

of each person
inside the hoop of each nation
inside the hoop of the planet

like ripples in a floating universe

the hoop of the mind
expanding within those others

each of us
a center
corresponding
to centers

that open
into the darkness of a dream
in which I hear his voice
see a sand painting of the tree
restored

yellows and reds leaves
reaching into my world
the autumnal splendor
of his failed vision

Homenaje al Neruda

for Hernan Galilea

The interior
is an Arucanian tree
roots pushing into earth
in search of that
sorrow
 which is also
 the source of desire.

There are no politics
apart from this.

What blossoms from it
turns us into lovers
with the hearts
of tigers
 (even in old clothes
 even with gray hair
even in the uncertainty
that moves us forward
into uncertainty)
 there is only this left
 after everything else
 falls away

she who waits
apart from ourselves
that part of
ourselves
 we have missed
 without realizing it
she who has searched for us
where we can't
be found
 and finding us
 wraps us in her shawl
and sings
with the voice of our voice
a lullabye
 in which a fledgling
 rawness beats its wings

Way of the Warrior

I planted my madness
in the world

watched it grow
and fade

like a wildflower
on a hillside...