

## Some Old Poems, by Robert Basil

### Briggs Room Reading Stanford University Spring 1984

*Hi there, everybody.*

*This August I was sitting outside the Student Union reading To the Lighthouse and thinking about when my mother would attain the literary buoyancy of Mrs. Ramsey. It was a spacey day, and out of the store comes this little kid with a woman I presumed to be his Ma. The woman had three chocolate bars and she gave the child one half of one. The Union bees were waiting for him to open it. They had already crawled into my coke can, too intent on sucking sugar up to sting me when I waved at them. The woman gives the child her chocolate bar and she walks away, and I might have seen her start eating, but reading all day made me too tired to turn my neck, so I just heard her unwrapping. Then the child said the first two lines of my poem. I was blown away by the beauty of his words and how they represented in *haiku* implicitness the perfect tasty union of mother and child. Then the child said the third line of my poem and that changed everything. Because the word that is my poem's second line was misspoken. The child was about four. And he meant to say something else, that, in order to say, he had to add a couple of cloggy syllables. What before had been sweet now signified a kind of craving I knew more closely, and I guessed that the woman was probably a sitter, not a Ma.*

*The last three lines are mine.*

### “Sweetness Alighting”

“Me and my Ma  
are chocolate.

Choclaholics.”

Always  
a ways

away.

---

*This next poem was conceived while working the graveyard shift at a Mighty Taco on the east side of Buffalo. The key situation of this place: Everyone I had successfully avoided on the streets for the four years prior all came in to buy food after drinking. The poem is about Deb, the junior assistant manager.*

## “Deb Says She Will Lose Weight Soon”

Your thighs are capsized canoes.  
But this is bliss.

My maya and your maya.  
You lean over my lap.

The handiwipe is in the sink.  
And your breasts are encyclopedias.

They are heavy.  
They are stiff.

Never been used.  
World Books.

We scrape the red right off our faces.

---

*The first book of poetry I purchased was Wordsworth's collected poems,  
near Edmonton, Alberta. I was working on famous Al Oeming's Game Farm  
literally dawn to dusk, shoveling shit into the pick-up.  
I memorized the first sections of the Immortality Ode  
while trying to spot the buffalo who had the runs. Because once you saw  
the runs you had to report it and then watch for it to happen again  
so you could shoot a dart into the animal and give it medicine.  
This was the only part of the job I liked.*

## “Under Wordsworth”

“There was a time  
when meadow, grove,  
and stream” –

filled my genderless eyes  
with steam  
and with blood.

I kicked mud  
but being spry  
didn't eat

mud.  
Vapor sleeves lid up  
the waterfall's drawers

like football player  
hobgoblins.  
I plopped in

the hole the splashing gored  
and stayed there  
perky

until I heard my friends  
coming, throwing  
twigs at the hanging

pine cones.

---

*This is a poem about a wimp from my childhood, Mickey Higgins, who was large but weak, who nonetheless had a large and strong dog, named Arbumba. Arbumba bit the ear off Dirky, my best friend's dog. This poem is not about that particular incident.*

### **“Remorse Years Later”**

Those boxing gloves  
Given to Mickey Higgins

Made him even easier  
To beat up.

---

*I wrote this poem the morning my first day working at Xerox, a morning that marked the beginning of me getting back on the stick, said my Ma, who was driving the car. I was looking out the windows and recalled that scene in “Taxi Driver” where Travis drops an alka seltzer into the glass and, a Zen trainee, absorbs himself into its patternless plop and fizz.*

### **“Rural Red Light”**

He goes through it.  
We sink.

without  
bubbles.

Our samsara waits on Fairport  
's nirvana.

A spent strawberry field

and mushy yellow cambium

crave another galaxy's  
smoother

religion.

---

*Robert Creeley and Lou Reed seemed to take on a greater significance for me after I left Buffalo and moved to Palo Alto and lived in an apartment complex called "Tan Village." California! Only when I returned to Buffalo did I discover that the place was owned by a man actually named Mr. Tan.*

I.

**"Proof"**

Proud words like lurid  
need lines longer than  
Creeley's breathed-in ones

lines drunk with nouns  
aims for our irises

shingleboards  
denting our nuts

or any kind of play  
biting the hair  
of the night

or noon  
and after -- .

Live with  
out bur-  
glary of

mind

lone

II.

**“Lou Reed is Saved in Newark”**

(after Lester Bangs)

“WANTED

LOU REED

DEAD OR ALIVE

*(what's the difference)*

*for transforming a whole generation  
of young Americans into faggot junkies.”*

Is there any word  
I can use

and how much  
does it

cost  
to leave

here?  
Oh

sweet nuthin?  
sweet Jane –

unroll,  
rock your hearts.

---

*This is pretty much the first poem I wrote. I wrote it in Nevada, 1979:  
East of Reno, on the banks of Interstate 80. I stood in one place for 25 hours  
with a sign that said “HOME.” Normally this was a fabulously successful sign.  
Three cars emitted “Obbbbs” that were split by the Doppler Effect  
as they locked their doors. Although I was hitching alone, I imagined myself  
with my brother, Christopher. When I rolled his boyscout sleeping bag out  
I started having desert hallucinations. I overheard four people  
arguing at a table that had a red and white checkerboarded cloth on top of it.  
Then I heard the A side of Tom Petty’s “You’re Gonna Get It” album  
and understood and remembered all the words for the first time.  
Me and my brother started to dance.*

## **“Two Days in One Place”**

The Reno truckstop is behind us  
and Christopher’s halo and frantic rap  
have unraveled and scattered  
into entropic bits of benzedrine psychosis.

Morning is still early rinsed orange  
but my sneaker treads are melting.  
Mindlessly I roll  
my dewy down bag just right.

My brother sucks breath from this skinny roach  
and sends melancholy streams of smoke  
skidding across seed-heavy heads  
of ochre desert weeds.

I console my brother.  
“Two more of these black ones,  
will wring what’s left  
from your dopamine glands.

“So be happy.  
And take my place by the roadside  
and thumb till noon.  
Dance where the roads merge.

“I am just one yawning fucker.  
Tonight, brother, we are going to brush our teeth in Cheyenne.”

---

## **Tequila Mocking**

### **“Tequila Mocking”**

Shudder again Basil, at your success  
Better pleasures will surely follow  
And alter your odor  
    So another shudder  
It all seems to be there now  
What you have wrecked has been moved away

Between lunch and nighttime chocolate  
Fred found your blonde tequila  
It was in a bottle it was on a table it was in  
Another neighborhood

Private language exposed.

---

### **“My Drive Home”**

Driving home from the Main Street tequila store  
it hit me that this love  
I am now suffering is not  
a new kind of love remember

what you wanted to give the woman I wanted  
to be her friend. She is married and has two young sons.  
Promiscuity will save me from this  
before virtue does. Should I put a hymn to her

here? *What should it contain?* Her hair  
when it is parted down the middle & right now  
also my fear, that I would flood the one  
who would alleviate my loneliness – my love

restrains itself from its object, her  
shoulder, eye, her hood & her nod,  
hymen, toe,  
hair & ear.

---

### **“Tequila Man”**

I will sleep where the dog sleeps.  
“The dog sleeps under my bed.”

The kind of guy you never get friendly with,  
“the kind of guy you miss the most.”

I closed my eyes  
“to see yourself”

near the coffee in my cup  
“and saw yourself”

on Bailey Avenue  
“with a cup you cut with white tequila.”

---

### **“The Shine”**

I have walked up another hill  
And hated it's perfection  
The brown shine of its beauty

I know all the ways your sweater turns to beer  
I have lied to you perhaps you know when.

But it must be  
Never merely  
This and here

Shutter tomorrow's  
Minding, kiss  
All four lips

And keep this  
As you have  
It. Love and  
Glow of gut.

With the endurance of tequila  
I have found no reason to move  
My small wares to Budapest  
For rage does not enhance reason

Though it feels necessarily human  
Like a vice, or an eyelash.  
Your music, honeypie, was the new necessary.  
It was good as bone on a wet day.

First bone, final wet day.  
Just that you smack it  
Can I crave my  
only body now.

---

### **“This Morning”**

I.

After four hours I'm  
up, & I smell  
like tequila & piss  
& that too smells like  
tequila, & my teeth  
tequila, underarms are  
my favorite & best,  
like tequila & also  
you. My dreams one wash  
of you, that's all,  
I can't believe I am

alone right now or  
how much I talked just  
in order to  
avoid letting you know  
you have given me  
the quote unquote world  
& such coolness cost me!  
Who drove me here?

Running puff puff  
puff four no-shirt  
sidewalk miles, my lungs  
will love me forever  
& I smoke to spite them  
but I get thru my run  
hit the park for pull-ups  
but there's two kids  
swinging on my set & two  
others sprinting beneath  
them like maniacs in a queer  
kiddy game of near  
collision. I check out the world.

Bark pieces are in between  
my toes (which smell  
like tequila) & all Moms  
seem old today,  
wearing lots of coats.  
But I know that this  
morning you too awakened  
with your cat, perhaps,  
on top of you, but also I'm embarrassed  
I've taken this long  
even to know  
I haven't been able  
yet, to say,  
just what there is,  
I mean, here. Hi there.

## II.

I started by wanting  
to say I

was going to sit  
here

all  
night

until I said it.  
But it hit  
  
me  
the impossible  
  
task  
I had set  
  
for  
myself  
  
was to sit here  
& all night  
  
until I  
did  
  
it.

---

## **"Running with Ish"**

I. Run –

The orphan.  
The family.  
The neighborhood.  
The striding.  
The Sunday.

The foods.  
The beds.  
The porches.  
The restaurants.  
The generations.

The off-time.  
The marriage.  
The hammock.  
The payment.  
The working.

The abortions.  
The dresses.  
The soirees.

The twins.  
The musicians!

The air inside.  
The lovely try.  
The team member.  
The biggest race.  
The red present.

The cot-winners.  
The good sinners.  
The take-home meals.  
The three watchers.  
The faith-healers.

The one, one male.  
The taste of yum.  
The lovely look,  
    Around the arm.  
    Atop the mom,

The sweat and goop.  
The crack alight.  
The motel room.  
The rented car.  
The near-deaf teen!

Money for time.  
Soup for you.  
Match for me.  
Television for us.  
Ideas for travel.

Kisses for sleep.  
Blows for change.  
And room for everybody.  
Help for us.  
    “Out for good,  
    oh, for shame.”

Sins for that.  
Locks for legs.  
Tears for effect.  
Shoes for parties.

Hands for holding.  
Rolls for noses.  
Air for outside.  
Cotton for comfort.

Extras for leaving!

II. Back –

Two divorced men,  
the desire to write.  
    the night within Palo Alto.

The music too loud,  
the wear of masturbation,  
    the vodka in coffee.

The friends in Buffalo  
trust of the past,  
    the surprising poem.

Pissing in the backyard,  
the patience they all have,  
    the tape Ish listened to.

The brother's brother,  
the inhabited apartment,  
    Being on to something.

You are not in jail,  
clothes in the dryer,  
    Saturday is different.

Elsewhere I think,  
telephone one's son,  
    the lovely landlord.

Loud all these years,  
unified isn't it,  
    it made the driveway.

Increasing ugliness,  
the friend is immoral,  
    too dead to speak.

Unaware of this again,  
Karen Carpenter is back,  
    gossip gives birth.

My joy is yours,  
the kiss on the arm,  
    two first names.

Finally got it down,

anything in bed,  
Christmas and holidays.

The alarming arrival,  
words in the morning:  
what blood got.

It should catch you:  
It was hard to say:  
You don't re-

member a lot  
of it,  
of spray on our ceiling.

---

### **"Clean As a Whistle"**

The completed sentence  
to stand alone

away from all  
things. Away from

a way to  
complete a lone

sentence. The standing  
thing away alone.

---

## **Bailey Avenue Buffalo Poems**

### **"Prelude to a New Career"**

Today is finally our day  
To write poems whose lines  
Are exactly of equal length

When written in longhand  
And without enough weapons  
To show I

Can put up with your  
Pages and pants. Did I say,  
"Just love?" Yes, a mere

Fair love, a fast ass, a

Coquette, one just  
Stretched, to make it, to

Pack it, in,  
Toward our night, our  
Soiree, or your thin opalescence,

Or your men, wee bones, the pelt  
Of our beer, when broken  
Throughout, by straws.

The next movement from all those  
Epiphanies is the worst:  
Cut clogged sod

Wadded in our mouths before  
The end. I can't stand it. Oh man:  
Are your dad's hands like yours?

Are those my dungarees heated  
In the holy water, so near  
His One Mouth in Twilight?

I am not guilty of that, but  
Of this:  
Making an interrupting

Move – that is, you there.  
We must scratch. Your un-  
Mothered word, hurting

My teeth. We must scratch  
Oh, it. For instance, I  
Have been reading about it

And reading a lot, about them,  
Like wanting to find one:  
Libya's bee going backwards

Manoeuvring the steering wheel  
While the other poets wriggle lamb  
Embryos over the rocks the Balls (surely)

Of God.  
Must I guess this, sniffing like a glug  
In a mug?

Their eyes peer down  
And cats are often in the photo.

Otherwise they are alone, while “ad-

Dressing,” yanking an underwater  
Circle down into the dumb,  
Nearly deep enough to pleat

Our clavicles, dent our  
Temples. To avoid the bends  
It becomes habitual.

But you, lover, are still  
One with unwiped and soft teeth.  
With you a kiss is what one properly terms

A meal. Please push up all volume  
In these shiny stadia:  
You are talking about the seats.

---

### “The Advice”

Miscegenate for world peace!  
Veneration should never find  
Blood allied with gratitude.  
Your loves will be time-zones apart.

Scorned men explain  
Neither sleep nor insomnia  
But remember the clothes they kept on  
To keep their love perfect.

And under  
Wonder  
Mood  
Lies  
                  everywhere.

---

### “The Lasting”

Love is its own aversion therapy.  
It is a harsh toke from a big bong  
where favorite flavors find their connotations.

And even our sweeter vacations  
(Sweetie!)  
never lasted this long.

---

## **“The After”**

Cold coffee does not necessarily  
Got bugs in it.  
A large town can be a safe place.

But to your friends there  
I was just a subject of interest  
And we were momentarily the case.

Everyone I did not know wanted to  
Talk about it.

*Motherfuckers!*

Generalizing  
Primary human feelings  
Is a questionable act.

---

## **“The January Drive”**

I decided not to hit the Pink Flamingo tonight  
& didn't turn off at the liquor store on Elmwood  
which I had forgotten was there  
across the street from the doughnut store  
wine was at home  
and I might relax for tomorrow –

Who should move in this  
place who should take  
my son's room where can I buy  
a bed and how big  
must it be,  
how big must it be

for a four leg fit  
to finish the bottle  
and cap the pour  
legs lip just yours.

---

## **“The Memorial Day”**

A pubic brush  
has pulled back

a  
pink bloom

from a pair  
of underwear

you borrowed  
to share.

---

### **“The Funny Valentine”**

You yearning honeybun  
Sad eyelash honeybun  
You make me cry in my heart.

Your hope is laughable  
Unphotographable  
You see your favorite work of art.

Is my figure less than Greek?  
It's my soul, 's a little weak.  
When you open it and seek  
Is it smart?

Don't change your thing for me  
Let yourself sing to me

Bye, yearning honeybun, bye.  
Each love's sweet funny day will die.

---

### **“The Romantic Song”**

Count those kisses  
And let tonight  
Forget tonight.

Feel your back and when  
Rain covered our car  
Where are your roaming lips  
When they are near the words of love?

Break your breath  
Before that note dies  
And bring your hands near

Sweet honeypie.

Oh hang back and then  
Wave fire at far stars  
Where are your flat eyelashes  
When they are near the one you love?

Break your breath  
Before the note dies  
Bring those hands near  
Sweet honeypie.

Where are your roaming lips  
When you are near the words of love?  
And where are your light eyelashes  
when you while the one you love?

---

### **“The Deaths”**

(a gloss on lines by Jack Spicer)

No love deserves  
The death it gets.

The same should not be said  
For the lover, or the other.

---

### **“The Brief Candle”**

I'm going to fuck your brains out.  
And keep them out!

She is going to fuck her brains out  
And keep them out,

And he is going to fuck our brains out  
And keep them,

\*Period\*  
(as they say).