WITH A PREFACE BY THE POET SELECTED POEMS Srinivas Rayaprol A WRITERS WORKSHOP REDBIRD BOOK

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Celected Poems

by Srinivas Rayaprol



Writers Workshop Publication



Son of Dr Rayaprol Subbarao, the "father of modern Telugu poetry", Srinivas Rayaprol was born in 1925 in Secunderabad, and did his B. A. from Nizam College (Hyderabad) and Stanford University, California (M. S. in Civil Engineering). His poems have appeared in Indian and foreign magazines, including *The Atlantic Monthly* (Boston) and *Quest* (Bombay). His poems have been represented in six anthologies, including *Anthology of Indian Poems* edited by Erik Stinus (Copenhagen).



Gratitude is expressed to the editors and publishers of Manuskripte, West Germany, Inferno, California, Occident, California, Simbolica, New York, Accent, Urbana, Ill., Poetry, Chicago, Neurotica, New York, Atlantic Monthly, Boston, Mognuscoti, Hungary, Between Worlds, Puerto Rico, Imagi, Philadelphia, 21st Century, Sydney, Chakra, Madras, Quest, Bombay, Unilit, Hyderabad, The Journal of Indian Writing in English, Gulbarga, East and West, Secunderabad, Writers Workshop Miscellany, Calcutta, The Orient Review, Calcutta, The Illustrated Weekly of India, Bombay, Youth Age, Pondicherry, The Literary Half-Yearly, Mysore, Poet, Madras, Indian Literature, New Delhi, where some of these poems have earlier appeared.



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Though the poem "Sometimes" was written in Berkeley, California in 1948 and the poem "An Ordinary Life" written in Secunderabad, India in 1995 the seventy-odd poems in this collection still touch me and make sense to me. Most of the poems in this collection have not been published before in book form but some of them have appeared in *Bones and Distances* (1968) and *Married Love* (1972) both published by the WRITERS WORKSHOP, Calcutta.

As I say in one of my poems, life has been mostly a matter of living the days. Except perhaps for that special occasion, the splitting of the brain into the myriad moments of intensity and feeling that perhaps give rise to what is a poem. Not that there is a poem in every one of those outbursts. Sometimes a precious word with its special meaning sits on the page staring back at you, asking to be written. These poems are not of that nature. Many of them have been conceived over days and written over and over again, but the actual birth of the poem has been like the first spark of semen that shoots out, uncontrollable at the climactic moment.

Many years ago when I was about seventeen or eighteen my one ambition was to be a great poet, but I did not know what it meant except to thrill at a line of Auden or a word of Wallance Stevens, and imagine the unimaginable—that one day I too would join the galaxy. Poets were lonely people, I had heard, and was I not the loneliest of the lonely? Poets had their minds full of words and thoughts

Prefacc

of unimagined beauty or ugliness. Was not my mind so often a garden full of flowers or a cess-pool full of filth that I could not dare look into the mirror? Poets drank a lot. . . ves, I had qualified by every known standard. Except perhaps that I could not sit down to write a poem. There they were, in the mind, the beautiful unbelievables, the fire and the flame burning within me. But the minute I put pen to paper, a million trite words would rush out. And so it would remain, a solitary word or a single line to convey the magnificence of my unwritten poem. So I hope that these poems, read by someone removed from my person, my mind, and the time and context in which they were written, contain some of this mystique, and give satisfaction-no, not that, but rather pleasure, that only words can convey, with or without their meaning. Why do I write? Because I like to write, because the words which I use convey the meaning and feeling that I wish to convey, and the reader wishes to understand. Primarily the need is mine. I need to write just like I need to eat or sleep or fornicate. As far as readers are concerned, a majority of one is OK with me.

I think I have achieved most of what I have wanted to: reach the top of my profession (as a civil engineer in the Government), publish a magazine in English from a remote town in India during the fifties, EAST AND WEST, to which one leading English daily devoted its entire centre page under the caption "A Surprise from Secunderabad", publish two books of English poetry in the days when Indian English was not acceptable to the Cambridge crowd. The magazine EAST AND WEST which I started with Kenneth Pettitt, an American friend, and my own meagre finances, was a satisfying but frustrating experience. I foresaw its inevitable end but that did not detract from the beauty and trauma of its birth. I knew it would be so. People told me so. THE LITTLE REVIEW and TRANSITION and PENGUIN NEW WRITING had also gone the same way. But while it was alive it was very much so. People called it a legend. It

attracted the attention of Mulk Raj Anand and Khushwant Singh who were the great gods of Indian English writing in those days and of Henry Miller and William Carlos Williams from America who contributed to it and a host of younger writers who like myself were struggling to articulate.

Looking back on all this, I feel that life had always been eluding me. I and Chris were the dream children, walking down Kingsway in Secunderabad, dreaming of the world. We lived in a second class city in middle class families but we had big ambitions. We felt we were the stuff genius is made of and there was some truth in that. We had problems of money, and ununderstanding parents, conventions, and moronic companions and many moments of dullness. But we were there first. The Beardsley Prints of Wilde's Salome, Auden's abracadabra with the words

High up in this vertiginous crows-nest above Will you let us know what goes on in the world below,

Eliot's special magic, Dylan Thomas's burning fire, all this was with us and more. With what perverse pleasure did we read of Herr Issywoo's Berlin stories, when our companions were flaunting Somerset Maugham or James Hilton. For we were the outsiders, the brilliant people, not left out, but standing away from the crowds, because we ... KNEW.

But as the years have gone by and I am safely ensconced in the world of wood, I have realized indeed rather painfully that I am no longer the genius that I thought I was. But now that there is such a spate of Indian English writing, and handsome books of poetry are coming out every year, I no longer am part of the scene. I no longer wish to talk of the I. On the verge of 70, I do not have much more to live for. But I am proud to have lived in those years, seen the glorious era of Hollywood and proud to belong to the times of Eliot and Auden, Sartre and Schweitzer, Sophia Loren and Marlon Brando, Tennessee

Preface

Williams and Dylan Thomas, Satyajit Ray and Madhubala. And I am deeply grateful to many people whom I have known, who have helped me realize myself and find fulfilment of a sort. Raymond Burnier and Alain Daniélou of Benares, Gaylord Hauser of Hollywood, Gilbert Neiman, Max Lazarus and Ray Perkins of Denver, Colorado, Kenneth Pettitt and Barbara Jean Holmes from Berkeley, Ted Warren and Yvor Winters from Stanford, William Carlos Williams from Rutherford, N. J., James Laughlin from New York. Nair from Prague, C. R. Mandy, Khushwant Singh and A. S. Raman from the Illustrated Weekly of India, P. Lal and Buddhadeva Bose from Calcutta, Jagmohan from Delhi, Christopher Sripada from Secunderabad, not to mention countless friends and companions from Secunderabad, Benares, Ranchi, my father and mother, my brother Rajasekhar, my sister Lalitha and a host of relatives who have been part of my life. And finally to my wife Rajeswari, who has borne with me these forty-odd years through thick and thin, my three graces Anu, Manu and Apu with their spouses and children.

S.R.

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Selected Poems

AN ORDINARY LIFE

The first decade had best be left unremembered With kisses, pattings and beatings None of which I could really comprehend A child among others with no mind of my own

In my twenties I was in love With books, paintings and music And similar passions; Women lurked in the corners of my mind

In my thirties they warmed my bed Displaced friends, found fault With me when I did not always comply With their demands on my time and money

In my forties they lost interest in me Children were more important And when the problems of Life Loomed large, liquor helped me sleep

In my fifties, first it was ulcer And they my heartbeats got awry Unwise indulgences had begun The decay of my body and soul

In my sixties, I tried to find peace But my mind would fly in myriad ways Regretting past mistakes And making new resolves that couldn't be kept

Friends made way to companions Sons and daughters crossed my path Grandchildren would play with me As with a toy that often went out of order Here now, on the verge of seventy Unsatisfatory husband, irate father Ugly, old, much misunderstood man 1 begin to philosophise on my failures

And sprout platitudes That have lost all meaning On a life that is almost over With too little to show

FOREBEARS

Thank you Mr. Eliot of the most precise cut And of course Auden, human on my faithless arm The great Gide whose honesty was more than one could bear Valéry dining in lonely rooms And Kafka hallucinating Behind crowding walls Rilke and Lorca at opposite ends And dear Eluard of the soft lips Chanting of Liberty in my schoolboy's notebooks

Thank you all

And the Americans, bless them all The two Williams: one on Rutherford's Ridge And Tennessee lost amidst the sweet bird of youth Stevens strumming his blue guitar on Sunday mornings And Hart whose heart was mine Till he gave it to the wave.

Not teachers these But Practioners of Poetry Play writers and prose makers Craftsmen, artificers and artisans Who have filled my mind With their words

Thank you all

Without you words are but vowels But for the special magic you endow them with The special airs, fancy smells and flairs That keep it all going For the likes of me.

10 DOWNING STREET

I saw a few books in a pub the other day calico bound volumes on a mahogany shelf over a marble mantelpiece

10 Downing Street it's called with a picture of Churchill proudly displayed over the bound books

A pitcher of beer and some crisps later I walk over to see the titles of the attractive books Unimaginative titles by nondescript authors that you'd find in British Clubs of the old Cantonment days or in P & O liners on the high seas

but there's volume of Cyril Connolly to surprise me, and a few poems by second rate poets, for a change

2000 watts of power beats the music of today flickering between the lights to drown out the frail voice of a Swedish singer

Which surfaces now and then by intent

Is this the India, that I have come back to? —tempted by Gandhi's gospel and Nehru's call after centuries of slavery. Have we come to this? Bound by the shackles that we overthew not so long ago.

THE GOLDEN GATE

Dear Jag:

Just to tell you of my latest bug *The Golden Gate* By Vikram Seth A fellow Stanfordian who does us proud For the likes of us who are still around That were part of the still familiar scene Berkeley to Stanford and all that lay in between And wanted to do it but didn't Plain fact was perhaps we just couldn't With Phil and Ed, June and Jane And that Wily li'l old Charlemagne.

Here's a book that I strongly recommend For all Indo-Anglians that are trying to vend Their latest versions of our Great Culture For the Western Vultures And like most of our time Indians do well in a foreign clime How I dread to think of Vikram's fate If he'd stayed behind in his native State And tried to produce a similar Tome Of similar happenings here at home.

SOME THOUGHTS ON TREES

Trees have no Overcoats to Protect Them

and simply die in the winter as well as they are born each succeeding spring

Man has machines to comfort his body and condition his mind

Trees have no overcoats to shed so much to put on and so much to cast aside Ridiculous in either costume and uneasy without

The hard core of man is as of the tree with its dead branches in the Winter weirdness and a leaf-left frailty of Autumn Or the green bud that plunges its root in spring and the yellow proclamations of flowers leaves and other Summer splendours

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There is a Tree Within me

that shoots its green barbs through this bark of flesh and bone

that shouts its raw-red sprouts through these coats of skin

Selected Poems

that breaks its sore points on these eyes of water

that speaks its hungers through these veins of mine

that wreaks its vertical agony through the surge of blood in my groin

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They have Written on Leaves Before

but what a conspiracy this between that tree without

my window and the willing within this body here

White loads have fallen from the sky and my wishes are winter men

Yellow leaves have spread

PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION

Words do not like music move nor like a picture play upon the senses Here mostly it is a matter of silences within the self the slow travail of thoughts that stick in the throat

And how often has my poor medium betrayed me in the middle of a mood by the paucity of its power And how often have I held myself at a tremble on the threshold of a discovery that this word could not contain

Picasso is passé and Miro is no more Yet one stands transfixed at the sight of what one need not understand the shapes and colours that speak the inexplicable unlike the word

Yes,

I trade in a different medium My goods are not for ready sale I have nothing to state that will startle your senses If I am vague, oh do not ask— And if my meanings are clear Please do not step over me too quickly

NOT YET THE END

Myself as I was. met me One day in a forgotten lane; But passed me by unrecognizing While I looked back with longing. I followed the stranger I knew so well, Foilowed his sprightly step, Envied the halo of innocence he wore, Till unbearable at last Stopped him and asked "Have you forgotten?" With vacant looks and haughty eye Lighted by optimism, not pride. Brushed me aside "Stranger you are I've never before seen Why do you stop me so?" "To tell you a story," I said, "I'll tell you my story And you must listen For you are its beginning And I'm not yet The End.

In my unborn darkness I struggled for the world's light In the world's translucence I lie await for Death's other darkness. For I have come a long way From where you now stand Through mazes of doubt and Bye-ways of distraction. Aimless I have wandered Seeking but one aim Where? Whither? I have loved but love dies Where Desire ends.

I eave lived but life ends What Death may not begin.

Yes! You must listen to my story You whom I yearn for and hate You whom the world adores You who stand and refuse to see. I must make you listen to my story. I, who am not yet The End. I, an old man, hanging between The two darknesses See only you who are the centre Of the world's light. Come, tell me. Surely You have heard my story before An old man's story, by the fire."

Selected Poems

YOU CAN DIE

crossing the street or be the sole survivor of a ship sunk at sea.

It is all a matter of choice not years.

But whether you wish to look at flowers

or bury your children in the backyard

is of your own making Whether of the mind

Or because the body's horse leaps through your eye

It is all because of the way are shaped

to be the present horror in your mirror

THE DEAD

We love the dead For their being so

Stowed away in the solitary Seclusion of the individual mind.

Avoidable as necessary, Avoidable at a moment's recall

To fill the tears in drawing-room Many years later.

THIS IS JUST TO SAY

I do not grieve every time There is a death in the street But a man died today Who, I last saw placing a rose In his button-hole.

The rose has now left the rose tree Rootless amidst the thorn And the garden has ruined the gardener. Graves will not remember him For his dust has joined the earth's dust And flowers will forget his face What was ever a full-blown flower.

This was a man whose life has filled my life This was a man whose death will diminish me. 25

I DO NOT GRIEVE EVERY TIME

there is a death in the world but today a girl died I know who I saw last picking flowers with a thin smile on her face

Now sorrow sits thinly on my own though I have seen its various shapes cloud my heart like a sudden shadow

The death of a dog beneath the wheels of an express train Someone dead on the street and the live collecting coins on his body

The death of someone not seen but heard in the next room suddenly stopping the heart

My own with its bewildering terrors . its agonising questions and the answers from the seashore

The death of loved ones never properly expressed

and the death on the wide screen with its tensions magnified, stretching the sentiments on a violin concerted in beauty

"Oh do not let the dead live beyond their life Let not cold tears fall on the warm flesh And your tears disturb the world in laughter." But yesterday a girl died who I see today picking flowers with laughter in her body and no death in her eyes.

A FUNERAL

Tell me you people who are gathered here with your apt faces and your broad shoulders

Are tears so necessary

Is my face fitted for the occasion, does Sorrow sit well on me?

Tell me for I face it alone without mirrors. Would you have me show a stout heart or rather see me break down in tears?

Are you here because they say if you do not see him to the grave no one will see you to yours?

Tell me you people who are gathered here to share my sorrow.

Selected Poems

And does it not matter my people for you to know for instance,

If I loved him with my heart or used my mind for the daily intercourse

If his physical absence felt like his physical presence Tell me my people For you are here To share my suffering.

Can you feel the pain in my fingers As they grope for yours? Can you see What my eyes cannot say That I wish to be alone Rather that I did not Have to have loved or Suffered as you you'd have me

Or for that matter To have to be here

1

Tell me you people Who are here To bare your bosom And cover me with the silence of your no-sorrow.

I AM ALL THAT I LOVE

I am all that I love if for an instant's being

Yes doctor, I am you too and at 66 your hair floats like thistle into my mind every graying weed has a root in me.

And you too Christoph, I am you if only in the jaded flares of your quick-passioned heart How many tangled ways have crossed us by?

And you, absent one, I am you too and the bones and distances you carried within,

If all the pains you have caused leaped like gravestones All the corpses would be me.

For I am all that I love!

Bnt of course, dear mother, I almost forgot, I never could tell you the love I feel for you

You know, love is such a funny thing when you feel it most you least can tell

Selected Poems

To you, I shall give me without subtraction For you never wanted what you most gave

I am all that I am that I love, Well, yes, of course . . .

NOTE:

I have this thing about love. A kind of *idée fixe*. That it has nothing to do with sex, that its expression is always inadequate and falls short of the feeling itself, that it is sad and tender and beautiful, full of aacrifices and completely undemanding.

And yet how to divest it from this other feeling, this possessiveness, this hunger, this physical torment of absence, this wanting between the thighs.

This has been the problem always.

And so I have loved, with equal intensity and passion, and at different times, my father, 66 year old Doc Williams, my wife, the Adivasi child on the streets of Ranchi, Picasso's naked ugliness, Kruschev's face in *Time* and Tennessee William's women.

SUNRISE OVER KAMAREDDY

Sunrise was no sunrise not the set of sun over the hills if it were not for you here

Or otherwise that the fact without feeling is no occurrence like any other.

The sun sets or rises in my heart that is full of you And the river sad, the mountain forlorn I am not I without you

and my body exists like a bone feeding for itself without the feeling heart or the seeing eye

Or the sadnesss that is all around me here and nowhere else but in the cold rise of sun over the December lake

through a mist of memory to keep me alive for you that are not here.

ALL KINDS OF LOVE

Yes,

I have this thing about them Gross of body, florid of face Full lipped and wild haired Fat old men with flat white faces That shine out of the pages of *Time* And speak to me

Of the unspeakable pleasures possible Between our bodies.

Beneath every rape There is hope For peace with the flesh And before my body is taken My mind has fallen As I await my special doom Knowing that some day The commerce of our bodies Will end In the meeting of our minds

And that tenderness will travel

From his arm to mine.

FOR MULK RAJ ANAND

You have similarities with Picasso: I mean in the ugliness of your bare body

For was it not he that showed us beauty in ugliness.

Bare of body with a woman's flabby breasts and sensuous folds of flesh

Your ravaged face and luminous eyes burn into me from the page.

What I mean is, You hold a fascination for me wholly physical and your body seeks my betrayal.

But it is just another way to say that our minds have met a long while ago

and your words have stripped my soul naked As I now lust for your body that breaks in black and white upon my hungry eyes.

ALL AMERICAN

I like the American face successful, clean shaven closely clothed with arrogance of chin but soft of eye and always ready to break into a false toothed smile:

The kind of face that photographs so well in *Time* a face with the races so well mixed yet wholly new and all American as apple-pie

Individually interesting but pointless on the whole sexless on the surface with a hint of pleasures beneath the skin carefully controlled by the waist-band

Successful as I said in the jut of lip and the tooth's proclaim of the body's supremacy over the mind. 1.

NAGARJUNAKONDA

And you my father who did not let me see you then now face me in your old age as I feed you with my hands. Love and pity will not explain the hurt of my then young pain and what I feel for you now is but a token of thanks for your sperm that gave me root

You my father that gave me being can you see me now as you were then strong as these stones? Or do your tired eyes see in me the vision of your broken dreams as I counter my impotence with yoor infallibility?

And you old man hungry yet for the pleasures of life Lean thy strong body on my frail arm, And lust for the world while I face the shame of being thy son Full of the love that I cannot share with you.

THE HATRED IN MY HEART

All kinds of ruin have I seen to bitter harvest of tears for the unpitiable

The hatred in my heart has been fed by the love that I never had And the stones they have thrown have turned my heart to stone While the tenderness within has been bursting for a breast

Endlessly I have searched for my father Aimlessly I have spread my seed On fields where nothing would grow Pitilessly I await my ruin While sons of my own disown me the same shame that I have felt all these years The hatred in my heart is full with the love I never had. 37

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PAEDICATTO

The object is material And any old hole will do For the passions of the mind

The boy's unopened bud Is just as good For the body's betrayal

Old men ought to be lovers But boys will be beasts In this game of unrequisition

Love, be blind And spend your seed In this makeshift bed

For what nature As but a means to an end. Selected Poems

THE JESUIT

was an able casuist.

After a discourse (on various religions) he suggested intercourse.

I have been asked about the Indianness of my poems. And I am puzzled and do not know what to say. I have never thought that a poem required "racial" characteristics. I have written a poem titled "Sunrise over Kamareddy" but the poem was about the Landscape of the Heart. And yet, I suppose I cannot forget my birth, and somewhere lying deep below was a private hurt about this. What did I share with these people of my land? Not the language or their wave or their thoughts. Certainly not the time-old habits, which if they had some sense in those days, were now nothing but examples of their cruelty, their lack of consideration for others, their utter disregard for kindness. \rightarrow

POEM

IN INDIA Women

Have a way Of growing old

My mother For instance

Sat on the floor A hundred years

Stirring soup In a sauce-pan

Sometimes staring At the bitter neem tree in the yard

For a hundred years Within the kitchen walls.

GODHULI TIME

It is the cowdust hour And smoke lies heavy over my head As I walk across these earthen paths And smells of burnt milk from inside Mingle with those from the fields outside

I turn a corner And surprise a pair Besides the haystacks Whispering sweet everythings. She smiles and flies Like a bird, her anklets Ringing, her mirror-work skirt in a flutter While he plucks a strand of hay Foolishly from a corner of his teeth.

It is Godhuli time

And darkness is but a few minutes away Man and bird and beast Turn towards the flickering lights That beckon them home And in the distance, I can see The lighted windows of a fleeting train That has brought me here While my thoughts travel towards The home that I have never had.

DIWALI DAYS

These two sit in the house hardly a word between them, One is hard of hearing and a cataract makes it difficult for the other to see.

Shaking like leaves on the tree waiting to drop, My father and my mother, for we have left them

And at festival time they gather, the sons and daughters, grandchildren and in-laws. And while the women serve and scramble around the men sit on the floor for the annual meal. We have no words for each other except for pleasantries and share the common guilt while the children cackle and sometimes fight.

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But my father and mother, their hearts are full and their eyes flood with tears as they see their children and their children's children The mango tree in the yard is full of birds again

But at eventide each of us leaves with the usual words of farewell, and our hearts full of emptiness. For tomorrow is another day And the old people are left again with each other to look at the walls and the pictures on the walls.

1

MY SON

I have this only child after these many years alone with my husband.

Looking at the men around me I have often wanted a son like them

My brother My lover My husband

But this my boy is so like me that I am afraid

The World's wave will topple him and this love

that I flood him with will surely be understood as but a sign of my shame.

FRIENDSHIP

When old friends meet out of school and have nothing to remember but the borrowed copy-book and the school gym where love hung on the handle-bars and the time has now come to talk of wives unseen and children only heard and love no longer free for distribution:

When lonely roads are walked in each other's company muted by the years between Remembering now what has been long forgotten and suddenly called into the memory by a chance encounter at the crossroads of a foreign city.

ON APPROACHING FIFTY

I have come a way now and the meanings of Life are clearer to me.

I have read a little seen somewhat tasted a bit

of everything. But there is nothing I know really

Full circle I am back at the beginning

But without the wonder of being child again.

SHAKUNTALA

Shakuntala, Shakuntala the beautiful daughter of the famous sage went with loving heart to the palace of the Iron King

> On the way she sang to her maidens Walk slowly walk softly We must be sure My Lord, will be home when we are come ...

Shakuntala, Shakuntala Oh my daughter of the wasp black hair amd the fish white eye Oh my daughter For the king has forgotten you

> Walk slowly through the green walk softly over the brown

So long ago Oh my daughter The hunt is now over And the doe's eye wet beneath the grass Those were thorn that were his body

That was a lie your body softened for Oh my daughter For the king has forgotten you ...

> And the king He sat in his chamber weaving cords of forget.... The hut of woven grass and the frightened deer he had saved for your love . . .

They were not in his eye, my daughter They were not in his eye

For He sits on an Iron Throne And all around him iron walls.

> And his men they took his message And a pot of honey for the little boy which meant He did not desire her.

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.

Oh my daughter For the king has forgotten you ...

Shakuntala, Shakuntala the beautiful daughter of the famous sage returned sadly to the forest

Selected Poems

And on the way her maidens sang Walk slowly through the green Walk softly over the brown.

THE SUICIDE'S LAMENT

I am such a coward I cannot even commit suicide Said my friend (in a letter written in red . . .)

In the streeted face of this sickskinned city with asphalt bursts like pockets of pus

My soul is a small sin

He said

atranging (among other things) a mallet-shaped tie-pin.

I am

so different I cannot live like all of you Said my friend The ink was green.

In the mirror-eye of these pavement-people the windows revolving about a single light

My infinite image is a geometry of complex thoughts

He said arranging (among other things) a Matisse on the wall which had moved out of symmetry.

The white snow cannot contain me (on this tree it sits like a wood-louse) Nor the summer arm of love (after the wood-louse the chrysanthemums) My life cannot be a sacrifice to compensating alternates

He said arranging around his neck a rope of Manila hemp.

STREETS

I have walked these old and familiar streets many a time as child and boy, young man, and now not yet old I make these right angled turns with the street dogs smelling each other and the old bungalows now bricked up into blocks for brothers or tenants and the architecture of red and white iron grilles replacing the weary mango trees and the coconut palms

Nothing remains for me here except the shouts of children or the bark of a somewhere chained dog The old familiar faces have gone underground submerged in their strife And all I have is a memory of the old days when as kids we shouted across the compound walls or as young men lit the nights with our drunken songs and raced these streets with the silencers off on our OK Supremes Nothing remains now except these neat back streets that turn away as I approach them. Selected Poems

OLD RAIN

Am I your lost past? For heaven's sake stop Treating me like a child The golden boy you were once That tomorrow will be you or you or you To fit me into the pattern Of growth or decay That others clothed you in before So that you can say It had to come to this.

You wait, soon I'll be forty And I'll say (but what an incomplete triumph for you my mockers will all be dead) "Well, here now, I am forty And I haven't seen or known What you would have me see What you would have know. These eyes have seen, this body thrilled or suffered alternately Night has filled my body And I have filled my weight on the day I have known the thousand treacheries I have felt the death of the heart I have gone through all."

And before me will be a circle of eyes (As ours are before you now) Then will I pick the bluest eye of all And I will say to her: (Sadly, wistfully though That is the only way to revoke desire

Your past face from the present face) Then I will say to her: "You my dear are far too young Wait till you are as old as me."

Then will I tell her Of the roots that will harden within Or the blood that will flow slower with reason Of the desires that will invade Her mind and her body To make her into the present ruin that you are. And while she steps from stage to stage (and the desert feet are not alone) Then will I be the insistent voice The voice before and The voice after That will say: "Nothing is new, I Have been there, your Pain and your pleasure Look in the mirror You'll find a thousand similar."

Selected Poems

DEAR KEN

Dear Ken: Way out there in Sacramento on the L street

You now seem a number that I must not forget while I try to remember the awkward youth in glasses and gold teeth with whom I shared those years of gaucherie and Poetry à la Perse Remember the evening when over a gallon of Gallo I got on your father's nerves with my coffee-coloured skin

Remember Ken the midnight hours at the "Ground Cow" and the wrangle over the words we chose to choose And the barefoot waltz on the Carmel sands with Barbara of the Seven Moons when we rode the world with our words yet to find the printed page. Oceans lie between us now and words are no longer valid but our thoughts travel together over these invisible miles

as I remember those days I from Stanford, prim and proper and you the Devil from Gay Berkeley And my words are but a weak vehicle to carry my love to you.

IN MEMORY OF THE POET RECENTLY DEAD

1

Wystan Auden is dead fallen in a flat in Vienna not far from the prater where the violets no longer bloom W H Auden is gone from our lives.

Forty years ago you broke on our senses For thirty years your wit and your virtuosity have kept us on our toes with words that rhyme and words that fall flat on our ears.

With Christoph and Louis You played the *double entendre* Looking for the dog beneath the skin You uncovered the Man within.

2

And what

If I fall dead on the streets amidst the cold skyscrapers? you said. So you hied yourself to the halls of Oxford, for the cup o' tea and the arm that will not betray, for a free lunch in the common room and the pinta beer at seven with a good companion from the old school days.

Sing Christoph, Sing Sing Chester, Sing

"Our rational voice is dumb: Sad is Eros, builder of cities And weeping anarchic Aphrodite."

3

Ordinary you were like us But your multivalence surpassed us all Old Englande gave you birth but you conquered the New(er) York.

Perfection of a kind was what you were after Poetry you fashioned from the word But your subterranean mind was not for the pedestrian on the ground.

You mated the violin with the hammer And shocked our sensibilities Into a new way of lookiag at the old English has had a face-lift in your hands.

Grave, receive a distinguished Guest And lay Wystan Auden to rest World, mourn the well known citizen And let us gratefully add: The planet has been a better place For Wystan Hugh Auden.

FOR JOHN EVERYMAN, POET

Nobody thought this was how poor John wd. go One friend at the funeral was heard to have remarked "All these thirty years I'd never known it'd be so."

Was one, I'm told, much given to silence and drunken gusts of brilliant talk Had a number of friends, poets, painters and people of the streets as he'd say Had on occasion been seen at the galleries with the wife of Consolidated Chemicals.

Adolescence, my boy, is a funny thing. I was in Paris, penniless, didn't own a thing And what a time we had of it "Paris is so prone to pronography" was his favorite saying.

At thirty his voice was milder and the critics said marriage has mellowed his taste. "Best love poetry since Donne" raved one.

And to the Museum of Arts they drove in herds to hear him recite his latest verse.

In his fortieth year he started to write his autobiography. Friends said it was right Hh should be the one 59

to record their fun. "All my friends are geniuses" he began That year they predicted he'd be in the Yeats anthology.

Fifty years closed round him a new fear, but not of death. You know my friends, he'd say I've had visions too. "Someday emerging at last from this terrifying vision I must write or I'll burst, Lord give me time," he'd pray.

This was his major work "Explorations" he called it No one showed jealousy or surprise when he was awarded the coveted prize "The very best, this side of the ocean" they cried.

Twenty four hours later, they found him in his room, quite dead with a bullet in his head. Must be cancer they said, Poor fellow, couldn't bear to tell Jo. ...

Selected Poems

THIS POEM

I speak not of the mystery that is woman Nor of the great white being that is God— I do not speak of love, or of people, For I have known neither father nor lover And none have I reached with what I cannot utter.

Bat I speak of the lonely word That will not reach beyond my tongue Nor fulfil my frustrations.

There are things beyond this word. I know—

That the grocer's bill and the rising Prices occupy me most, Concern my body with their ignominy Break my will with their boundary Reduce my rest and snatch the spoken thought Before it can find the page.

This too I know, that love is All, that truth and beauty and The standard values of an ordered mind Are what remain behind my bone.

By my lonely soul I will only see The beauty of an orange on a table Or a word in a poem.

TO AN EDITOR

You ask me for a poem And I say I have them in hundreds Not written.

The bird in the air or a leaf on the tree Love in the throat or the Lion's leap in the dark—

There are all poems, in a way.

The rhythm is in the motion or the stillness The reason in the word or the silence. But the body which has given these shelter, The forest, the concrete tree, the suspect sky—

These have roots within the consciousness and expressed altogether otherwise than what you'd say is a poem.

LINES TO A FELLOW POET

I have often trod the middle ground af habit, not inclination My mother was a woman of the heart and my father could have been a banker And while I was trained to build of steel I sought for the structure of words.

But how can you use words like incarnadine to describe your baby's bottom?

Equally do I abhor the one who in colons and semi's invokes a world for you.

Life is a little of this and a little of that Bur poetry is not the mere patter of words.

I too have thrilled at the thoughts of Rimbaud and trembled with Baudelaire Valéry has equally been my tormentor My mind has been conditioned and my heart frozen by these happenings

But bad poetry cannot be excused By no words or long words Words have both meaning and music And nothing will convince me That the bones of the one are separate From the blood of the other.

YESTERDAY

In the bus on the way to Los Angeles

An old man was the only one who sat beside me

Other men and other women stood with blank eyes and unlovely faces

but this old man with beautiful eyes sat beside me

This beautiful blind man beside an old nigger woman.

IT RAINS SOFTLY ON THE CITY Rimbaud

Wormwood and water return the smell of morning mildew of memory and the fresh spider stain on the roses in the drawing room do not relieve the recurring monotony of days hung like wax on the skin of my life

But I: Inside myself there is a world

Where the moon becomes the empty hollow of a spoon And the sky a blue sufficiency in the winkless eye And the sun a turn from dark to light from the mind's tight To the unclosing, soft-circled...

"Lightning does not break The thunder's absolute vigil The nightingale does not approach the soft end of day The sea does not recede where the sands concede

Inside,

inside youself, there is a world 65

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Subject to the many excursions Of my soul."

Said the rain Softly in the city. Selected Poems

FOR ROMOLA NINJINSKY April 1959

Thirty years, you beautiful lady Romola, for thirty years

What did you see above his uneasy bed?

The slight thread on which the fawn trembled in mid-day?

The glass shocking beneath the tremble of feet like flowers?

For thirty yeare beside an insane bed

Growing old beneath feet that did not wake

Looking at eyes that looked back like walls

For thirty years, you beautiful woman, withered at his feet.

OPENING DAY ... UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

... and yesterday

The mighty womb threw open its iron portals intending, perhaps, to release the floods . . . But more and more poured in, Not the seer but the seeker: each in separate intent in deliberate hold In private pursuit of the common fruit.

The while, amidst the book-store bickerings, the shuffling feet and the painted veils I lay beneath like a broken bow wearied, and on a sudden, old.

In the sky, a trail of smoke read Burmah Shell or some such . . . But all I saw, a million questions and a million un-answers; octopus-feet and scorpion-tails in succession ravaged the vistas of my mind: Deserts in aery suspension and dried-up oases.

And, below, on our floor automobiles crept, men and women like innumerable larvae scuttled.

And in the blue beyonds the hoary Rockies squatted like Indian cows; and the river flowed in lazy ecstasy; and the fish in denuded delight courted with quivering gills.

While we, poor humans, in civilised counterfeit moved and moved.

And so the record changes and plays again,—single-paged truths documented, catalogued and preserved.

And when my voice is a silence, huge as the earth The ricochet speaks.

PORTRAITS OF AMERICA

Snow 1

The snow lies on the rail like a broken snake

It climbs this branch and down another it falls on the leaves

accumulated like a fine white rain.

.

Snow 2

Atop the woodgreen shingle porch

Projecting from brickred brickwalls

the snow sat all of twenty four hours.

Capitol Building

At night the capitol

building shines like an embalmed corpse

being the effect of subdued lights

Sherman Street runs into the capitol steps

and to the right are Democrat dining halls

and to the left Republican restrooms

on either side of the capitol building.

Department store window

He had seen them swinging in his amorphous gaze behind the glass and gold of a noonday window

the smells embracing his eyes and the navel desires revealing in the neardark nates of his wife receding into the corner of the kitchen

Had brought it home to secret his desires within the pneumatic satisfactions of a rose he had never lipped.

Apartment house

In spite of three great big windows at ten o'clock my room is dark

You can do nothing about such things.

If the sun rises in the east three big windows

in the west are no help at all at ten in the morning

The Mother

Her nipples have widened from original points

Into black diaphragms Open to hands and the spread of weather

Her desire has split from man to child.

Business Executive

Come Mephisto, the cup said the urgent layer sunning himself on the synthetic sands.

Srinivas Rayaprol

Selected Poems

The Park

Two bronze seals

in the waterless oval of the park, ply their constant trade

Dull

Balancing imaginary balls on their noses each supporting a black boy

on their back

And on circular rows of green benches, browned by birdshit and rain, old men sit and stare pants worn, souls torn each wholly alone in his observation of the unhappy seals.

Used cars

The number of used car lots

all by the main street

.

convinces me that the men in this city are a dissatisfied bunch.

Snow 3

How pure the snow as it falls fresh

onto my black overcoat from a blue sky

covers the green beds and escapes the metal pavement.

How like white is the white snow

before tomorrow's sun takes it all away

and leaves the streets brown as before.

Snow 4

White loads have fallen from sky And the trees let down destructive arms yellow leaves have spattered on the green green beds. The little cone tree sits forlorn like a dog in the rain.

VALDSTENSKA HOSPADA, PRAHA

Looking at her face One would have thought. She is maybe Gtde Stein Or Marianne Moore in her Stupid hat or the other one Who'd burnt her candle

At both ends. An old face with young mischievous eyes a red blouse and a stark black suit. A magazine

of the Arts in her hand, Alone at a table with a basket of bread and a goblet of red Viennesse wine.

A once upon a time lesbian and now in need of a man to tell her that the paintings she'd buy

On Sunday afternoon auctions and the poets she'd propagate on her Wednesday evenings were both without meaning

A man to rough her up a bit with his coarse lips and his unshaved-on Sunday face to light the candle

She'd been holding these many years unlit among the books and paintings and schoolgirls trying to learn the piano.

Selected Poems

A TASTE FOR DEATH

Shared we such a room on Sherman Street, only this is Washingtonova And several years dead now

I open the closet and find bottles of wine, poems on my typewriter and stories on yours, rejection slips

and cigarette stubs on the parquette floor A Kleep on the wall for me and a Patchen for you, Old Bunk Johnson shuffling by Mozart.

Such was our life, twin-bedded Jealous of the one and in love with the other, a passion for apple-pie Or a taste for Death.

Only dead now, these several years Your self turns up to meet me on these stone paved streets And I cannot remember your eyes

Shall we say Christoph the pact is ended and I cannot turn a sudden tear for the memory of your love

Your life was full of body Frail but full of flesh, bursting like an apple on the table keenly to be killed.

TRAVEL POSTER

A Geisha like a fish for Japan

An elephant for India and velvety lions for the Veldt

A cockatoo for the Indies and a Gendarme on Eiffel's Tower for France

Beer for Germany on the Motor-bahns Tulips for Holland and a dutch treat for the lower lands

A totem for the New-Zealanders An emu for Australia or maybe a kangaroo

Minarets and moustaches for the Middle East and the Albert Hall for the English Selected Poems

The Good Earth for China And for the Russian a smell of vodka, and a whiff of caviar

Cathedrals for Italy And a sparkle of love

The Golden Gate or the golden eagle for the Americans

And all round this world Eternal dissatisfaction For the eye of Man

Life has always been a series of elusions for me. I remember now that mad rush, several years back, all the way from New York, to a little Rue in Paris, to see Gide, and then suddenly to see pasted across one of the urinials on the Boulevard a faded newspaper front carrying a larger than life picture of André Gide, beret and all, dead. Only these few weeks! What else was there to do then but walk past the yellow, grey, old facaded house and up above on the top floor, the drawn red black curtains. And to call up the imagination, always a willing varlet for such purposes. His body on a yellow settee—his gaunt brown frame laid out on the cushions.

Has not Paul Valéry said somewhere, "Lapses are my starting point, My importance is my origin".

MARRIED LOVE

Every evening

I am met at the gate by my wife Her hair in disorder and her dress a mess from the kitchen and the girls hang on the leaves of the gate while my ancient car rolls in. One carries my bag, the other my lunch basket the day's work is over and I am home. I have forgotten them all day and now suddenly remember that I must disappoint them again for my evening is planned for a meaningless excursion to the bars And the coffee which my wife has served is cold in my mouth and the tales the children have brought from school are dull on my ears In spite of my love for them I must disappoint them again tonight.

Selected Poems

MIDDLE AGE

When the skin has stretched tighter On the bones of the face And the face closer shaved with distinctive moles and warts When lips have softened with love And the eyes hardened with age And the stomach achieved a wholesome round And the legs move with a known swagger When a life is half ever And Death is yet to be and beauty no longer of the body

Oh to be middle-aged and competent and monied and loved among other things Husband and father Friend and inadequate lover. GONE NOW

Each has gone

And left a void

They are all gone

Gone is the googly bowler

And the getter of runs

And the maker of words

Are not good for the other

What is there to fear of Death

Which is but a mere cease

The sudden stoppage of Is.

And if you live a full life

By which I mean, Raise

A family, love a wife

And generally Be

of a heartbeat.

The cutter of stones

In my world of wood But the lessons of the one

Srinivas Rayaprol

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Selected Poems

I SIT HERE

in my loneliness alternating between the book of Modern Verse and the return of the Hood unable to gain satisfaction from Swinburne or Spillane

The transistor on the table provides the right amount of noise and my daylight tubelight made by Philips India illuminates the right areas

But my mind flies to Paramaribo and Dakar on the radio dial places of pleasure peopled with laughter

And my eyes fix themselves on images of beauty that l'll never see beyond this well of my loneliness.

LIFE HAS BEEN

mostly a matter of llving these days simply a subject of the senses surrounding this body Really repeating the words of others and doing the deeds of those that have done them already Merely a matter of the moment within the hand.

And yet occasionally out of hand inexplicable a moment of time that is beautiful or sad a breath of splendour a flicker of greatness that keeps one going for the million other hours in a life that has been mostly a matter of living the days.

Selected Poems

THESE DAYS

My pen is so heavy It hardly crawls on the page dragging a chain of hesitant words trying to give meaning to what is not there. These days

So much of me is submerged in this act of living Raising a family, loving a wife In with friends on meaningless conversations Or simply sitting on the grass vacant of mind

And I wonder now Where was the fire that burnt me where the words that danced on the periphery eluding my reach with their many moods And where the man within who searched the streets for love And where was the arm that betrayed me with its tenderness.

DOGS IN RUIN

Go love! Rainclouds hang sad in the sky And dogs need direction in their life

The flower has missed the bee And the garden ruined the gardener

When you die could you see What I would of you

You must live as you would wish To face your death

You must love the object As you would the idea

Go love where the bougainvillaea blooms its inconstant yellow against the colourless sky

The rain falls cold, love On your face, For the moon has missed his moods And you have succeeded in achieving failure

Go love, do not let go love, for love is all for a dog in the rain Selected Poems

FOUR LOVE POEMS

1

Love is all But only In the particular moment

Of surrender or deceit Or the close coition Of desire That is not desire

Love is all But only For the eye That sees

Or the dormant hand In the heart That stirs The privacy of pain.

2

And a lost road Has brought me this way The blind girl smiled As she held my deceptive hand

A thousand sheep bled Beneath my harshwood stave While her flowerblind hand Held my cloth of rucksack and skin You are He, her lips smiled Her idiot eye on my body I, casual, indifferent Took her on the mountain slopes

And left her the mudbrown day

3

Child, she said, Be outside my love For I bear the burden Of your iniquities

Just like your father In anger and in love Find in me only The receptacle of your deceits

While constant I stand Helpless in love And my unwilling womb Accepts your cruelties.

4

Remember when as children We slept in our grandmother's coffin A box of oak with camphor smells And the rose in your hair crushed within

Grown now and forgotten In memory's green sorrow And the mildewed breath of insincerity We sleep in our own

Selected Poems

And I can see beside me Your uncomfortable face, and our jaded bliss Showing like cancer spots Beneath the rose-leaf

Smoke brown flames Across the flat white moon And time passes like a knotted hand Before the window bar's golden bloom

The eye that lies beneath the object's delight The heart that beats behind the clocking heart Is but a small sufficiency For the ingrown sin in the bone.

CRABS IN THE SEINE

Flow softly sweet Seine Maldoror is melancholy again Between chimney teeth the eaten moon glows Between the bird's freedom and the bird's flight Maldoror sits counting the lines of rain

I thought I knew you For forty years There was no question of not knowing Of not being known And yet only yesterday Coming down the stairs In some hurry I missed a step Did not fall your face rose To my eyes and I asked What is it she?

Really no question at all It was like opening a door Knowing that beyond were other doors And the emptiness far As the step I missed yesterday For there was love And in the dark have felt your familiar weight Each separate part a known delicacy So finite at times vulgar

And in the lighted hall how often Have I been blind to your dullness One can be sure of love, It is an infliction We impose on ourselves to release certain Vague desires. A selfish volcano

Selected Poems

That ignores the destruction beyond Its satisfied interior

And I thought I knew you All these years, your few favourites Your private distastes, the turn Of your body in fear, the swivel Of your neck in love Forty years is a long habit

But one arrives somehow Often beyond one's willing To certain lonely graves That ask the unaskable

What do I know of you? What do I know of myself that I can say? We are made for each other and indulge In the common talk that people in love Invoke to satisfy their lacks

For me it was the step yesterday That makes me see That the release I've always sought The knot I've wished to unknot Is nothing more Than the crab's dignity in the sand

The flying bird flies In a controlled orbit Circumference without centre Is not the freedom what Is sought by the flying bird As it flies into the air Between the bird's motion And the base that fixes it Is an understanding

And the nets we weave around ourselves The rope you used yesterday Is the only hope I ever had for the being The rope having slipped The release in my groins, in my head, in my body Is for me now quite void

What hurts me my dear is not your death But that going you removed the centre And left me free and tearless. Selected Poems

ORANGES ON A TABLE

acquire the subtle distinction of Mahogony

No longer a thought on the tree in spring

but nude as green its body a summer-arm

yellow and slow woman-close

Not an ultimate order of the orange sky

but the angular desire

of the stone that blocks the river's run

LETTER TO EZRA POUND (for William Carlos Williams)

Not the shadow filled tomorrow nor the last night's hesitant recede but the present; Always the immigrant now in the heart where dissatisfaction builds like sea tangle; Break a branch without the window and flower it within this room in the precise bottle of prussic acid And if the rose does bloom Is it but an old man's old mind?

Ah, dear Ezra, how your head burns in the grate, beside the flower that beds slowly— And Bill, moist-eyed, old-shaken sings of your cruel jests Your swollen head and your utter lack of consideration. Sing William sing for a lost playmate now-cheery eyed, now stubborn, now unbelieving behind bars conjuring Chinese rhyme and ancient myth sing Willam sing a sudden tear for the only fish in the only pond, lonely, lonely Ezra Pound.

ON GROWING OLD

There is a manner of growing old A manner much like trees That pass from day to night Clocking the seasons For the inquiring eye Themselves transitionless In grief or green And still.

And a manner not like women Gold in their mouth, glaze In their eyes, the similar glitter Of an illusion of the past Or a remembered one Self-deceiving and concupsicent As the moon On flat white faces Behind plate-glass windows

Not shedding like a tree In age its gaudy acquisitions Not shooting the sap But containing it An even yellow Manner of growing old Like trees Like women.

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A LETTER FOR MOTHER

For heaven's sake, mother, how you've aged! You could have been kinder.

Roots twist and the rinse of leaves under rain has different smells white loads them differently and the sun sets a new yellow Trees grow old too.

Couldn't you crust your kindness in another way?

Wormwood and water decay in your mouth your body is a dried river and your eye a seamy stream of undone sins.

> (But not in the same way, you'll say, the modus of trees is different. The white snow is white and the seeing eye black you're still my golden body and I your beautiful bride neither the barked tree

Selected Poems

nor the burying axe are at fault The centre not here.

Mother do not kiss me, For Heaven's sake, your lips are leavenings and mine withered ants.

You could have been kinder separate yourself from your oldess. The return is not the end and hope only in the waiting.

it.

LES SALTIMBANQUES

Simply say The mute clown yonder And the sufficient singer there And the living ghosts, at the eye's concupiscent remove the private part played for the public eye which is always the self.

The laugh we stopped And the tear that never broke its eye, the impotent excitement of our normal lives lies in the seeking for them elsewhere. Selected Poems

Though it makes me feel old fashioned I begin to wonder whether my definition of poetry has changed since the old college days, or whether this really is the poetry of this age and generation. For the cliché has been scrupulously avoided and the references to contemporary life are just suggestive and obscure enough to evoke a whole private way of living. I think modern American poetry has done a lot for poetry or rather that the American writer has done a great deal of good for English poetry, which, once the Second World War was left behind, all the smartest expressions of Auden & Co could not salvage from being repetious and casual. But then I also wonder why it is that when I read Rilke (even in translation) or Lorca or Pasternak (the poet) or Valéry or Gide or Kafka-I am picking out deliberately the obvious influence of Modern Poetry-I do not get the feeling of being won over by their cleverness or artistry but basically by their sincere and absolute lack of pretence in thought or expression. And yet when I read the poetry that these same have inspired, the schools which there have been unconsciously created in the New World. I can't get rid of the feeling of virtuosity and perfection that is peculiarly American.

BONES AND DISTANCES

And so each day with a shaking of hands begins a part a new part for every corresponding gesture of the body.

Some new lie to be conjured some unhappened glory to enrich our normality, a new fitting word for the just worn suit.

And so there is the moment for every man, the moment out of space, between the clocks the moment within and without the self, when perhaps happily in sleep

to escape from life But what then of the thousand letters unanswered, the sunshine and the trees, what of the million conversations with your million parts

When to escape from desire and the million doubts of being born.

POEM FOR A BIRTHDAY

I have never been more than the occasion demanded

have never been in an occasion which demanded more than me

I have never had the mind's argument dislodged by the horses of the heart

have never ridden horses who did not know their riders

I have never risen above the immediate moment

have never had a moment which demanded my immediate answer

I have never needed a new face to meet the faces of my friends

have never had friends without faces that did not smile back at me.

HERE IT IS SPRING AGAIN

and sorrow in this eager air has the sudden smell of stones washed by man-walked streams

certain cotton charms and the green round of her arm proclaims the dull return of spring

Each different-same day the sea washes its smells on the sands and a constant tree stands

to be seen everyday. Everynight the distraught drum beats the rhythm of some ancient heat

Each night the flesh moves its heavy weight on the air and at morning the distant

Wall of a broken barn through the nightlong snow And with all there is perhaps

a lip to be wet, a clock to be wound, windows to be opened, everyday in this world that I am.

Selected Poems

LEGEND

Never have eight daughters, says an Indian proverb, for they may all be barren.

Then the grandmother said "I want a grandchild . . ." As the night seeks the day And the tree shouts a sprout

Everything re-claims a birth To seek a meaning for its death So the grandmother said She wanted a grandchild.

"These breasts are the snow From which no water flows Between our thighs are stones Our belly, an empty white cloud."

Said the eight daughters Of the dying grandmother Like the trees in the yard On which no bird sits.

"I have killed wy father And struck my mother down I have stood all alone Like a cloud in the sky

But my breasts were flowers And my thighs the roof Of this world. My belly ripe As summer apple-trees

Eigh stitches have ruined my life Eight times these lips have fallen Have I lived these eighty years To see but eight stones in my yard?"

The dying woman asked And like trees They stood and waited For the rain to fall.

THE MAN WHO DIED OF A FEVER

Faith moves mountains, they said and put a book of prayers beneath his head. But the fever was stronger

and burnt a yellow hole in the page. Let the Angels guide him, they said and they opened the windows wide but the sunlight shrank on the floor.

And the fever stood like night beside the sheets of his bed.

And when at last he lay dead They looked sadly at his bed. "It must be so" one shook his head "For his soul was dark as lead."

Sec. 18 14 St.

and the bar and the second of the

the state

STILL LIFE (for Constantin Brancusi)

Break the air like a bird

into indivisible planes indefinable blue at night Bronze by day

Moving finer particles of lighter light proving that in stillness is motion most beautiful

Bird of freedom, heaving oceans in the air, fixed in flight to a base of bronze Bronze bird of Brancusi

Move, Move in beauty And a brown silence over all. PASTORALE (for Paul Klee)

Green

stretched the ground

Till

the first broken wall of a barn broke the rhythm that monotony sometimes has on the moving eye.

And farther beyond the barren cypresses stood like planted arms.

Above all he was the other one.

Reaching for the river's brown muscle he found a single fish moving like a black arrow.

Bones and distances was what he sought Confined in his cell he thought what a wonderful thing it is that a painting has walls.

And so in secret script he converged the terror of the moment lost in space Searching for the earth's green root he found consciousness reflecting beneath the body's mask.

Selected Poems

YELLOW AND BLUE (for Jamini Roy)

Yellow and blue is a way of flight. The apple is true and the arms a night long sadness. Her eye a white fish of form and her lip a lie that the worm forgot to chew; for the apple became an egg and the two eyes being the same.

It is a question of earth ever: of the fluted pieces of clay. A question of love. Of the devotion of the eye to the object, of old rains and young lovers. A question of humility. Of time's suspect blue of the yellow spread of the sun in the throat.

Yellow and blue is a colourless silence. The bird is new and the brown fence does not surround her fish white eyes; The green round of her thigh breaks on the yellow of the egg as it must. The earth being slow in turning to dust.

A question of earth ever. The formless most beautiful form of death. Of clay of trees, of old women; of affinities between the earth and her hair like wasp's nest. A queestion of earth ever. And the air that blows yellow and blue around our perplexities.

Srinivas Rayaprol

THE BLUE WOMAN (For Jamini Roy)

On my wall in my room is a blue woman whom I have fixed in the midst of a dance

fish for eyes and her hands painted red (for in my country they like the colour) her feet big and weighted by metal rings

Her lips lowered in all modesty A white ring in the only showing ear, a yellow dress which is all about; Naked yet, and shy.

But after sleep and after day when the moon is quiet and dark and my mind is full of walls my head full of white

It is the blue woman awake? her silence released aud all around, her movement subtle and her smile within my closed eyes

Is it the wall, the woman or the inclosed smile?

FOR ANOTHER NEW YEAR

Remember, how one day, waking At the neutral hour of evenings brushed over With hasty forget, with cords of flesh stretching Between us, mirrors of mutual ruin:

Sharing not only the pain but the blooded joy In the parented tear-eye of a lost father Speaking also in language's vulgar overtones Brushing the sea's hairy face with misty hands.

With a subtle grace while you stole the smile From my lip, and an anxious ear dropped To lift skyward words dropped in abandon.

We, the double-man, I the single life And in the nuptial bed, a secret lost.

When the dog's tongue gave a final twist And the nuptial bed, a secret lost. When the moon and the sea lay still over one another Then, when it was not right, I had thought of you. Selected Poems

PORTRAIT OF A MISTRESS

This paper lip that I kiss Had a life yesterday: opening Before blackened teeth of bliss And a smell of early morning.

This silent eye I now deceive Had a trust yesterday: discovered In the burning thirst of a sieve And the empty arms of a beloved.

This empty bed that I press Holds a summer arm: guilty Like the falsehoods I profess And your heaviness in my body.

LINES TO A CHRISTIAN LADY

Your flowers, Madame oldened, withered by hand and impaled on cotton dressed wire

lead a life wholly new to their original seed

are perhaps grateful for the frills you curve them into, and the metal vases which gild your room

for flowers are born to die early unless watered by your spinster Destiny.

Or do your knotted fingers feel the pain of roses separated from the thorn so that younger hands in farther carriages

in places like China, perhaps, can smell through their perfumed noses your intricate nosegay

while you recover from beneath a mildewed skin, the rose once wedded to the inevitable thorn.

FOR A NUN IN A WAITING ROOM

Her knotted fingers can not untie the knots she made yesterday . . . all her life, her day, her night safeguarded within these knots which she cannot now unknot.

Poor sister, why do I pity you? Removed on this wooden bench by bones and distances and the fears of my eyes. Shall I help untie these knots?

Long ago my mother used to make them too, and eventually I had to loosen them for her. Old women's fingers have a habit of getting that way about such things; And I have learnt to undo these little complicacies.

Only will you not let me sit awhile and watch your fingers while they fumble and your rose-red lips while they mumble.

THE WIDOW

Picking her true path past rainwalked streets through the russet of the evening's fade,

flares of jaded grass in her eyes, and the slow dying dreams of her many lovers,

the widow walks though Washington Square.

Many women have walked their repeated agonies many days and many nights have sunk their teeth

in the smoke from the many chimneys. Yet today was a different day. It has been colder before

warmer suns have shone on the square, colder partings have seared her heart. Yet today, everyday

sadder than yesterday the window walks through Washington Square.

Srinivas Rayaprol

Selected Poems

THE PETER GRIMES OF BENJAMIN BRITTEN

There is the ringing of a bell somewhere Said the fisherman And a weaving for the nets of night in my skull

Remoteness by rain or riverache Unapproached by fish or foam There is the love of child Or surfbreaks within my heart.

Cannonade of conversations by wailmouth Rockhungry Ocean's raucologues

Line, prolong your agony Sound, beat an inaccessible walk On the seabed of memory Eyes escape that tideless point In your brain White or withered by moon

Snshine and seamstress tremble In the tortured nest of night Seaweed and decaying lips must Return to the original womb.

2 POEMS FOR THE BUDDHA

1

He stood at the edge of a time-scarred life That lay behind the mists: His sleeping wife, The infant in a white circle, and the elephant Which was the first conceived vision. The serpent Of war on which he had fed his lips and gave Death in return. Dark lust beginning as a slave To his superior mind and grown to reverse the state, And last, existence shivering in the shadow of Fate.

He stood and wondered: and something revolved within Like an angry wasp. And he seemed to feel beneath the skin A feeling wider than love and a knowledge white As if an outer flame had dressed the hidden light, And voices from behind the curtain bid him Go To seek the love that man had lost to find a foe.

2

It is said:

Ants formed an anthill round his head White loads fell from the sky on his winter body Yellow leaves spread sunfull desires on his skin A greep arm descended branch like to earth With a navel darkness on his eyes.

And the Bo-tree rustled a leaf of sound And said: This love, this incident will repeat For other men and other trees, why, my friend, For Time will end us out?

And he: Not against time

Selected Poems

For I contain that within this beaten body And the green that shouts your shoots Through this flesh and bone I am the man tomorrow and you Are the tree

Not against the white horse That drops from the sky Not against the sea that swells Around my eye Not a struggle this.

No conspiracy this that rustles your leaf Trembles this body of mine The green arm will swell again And white will be the white long snow No, not an unbeing this.

The bird is not deaf And the ugly man loves The mirror's reciprocal thought

Stones know their waters too, No, not a silence this But a light within my head that revolves Its painful geometry for you.

SOMETIMES

Sometimes it is the tragedy of words and meanings: Sometimes of ambitions and fulfilments Sometimes it is the nameless fear, at the Base of your skull.

Sometimes it is the private pain of love Living under the surface like an unhealed wound. Sometimes it is the distortion of your face In a cracked mirror. The un-recorded thoughts, the un-registered feeling.

Sometimes it is the hushed light The coarse fingers, the vulgar breasts The reek of beer, the dimensionless smoke. And the Saturday night receding.

Sometimes it is the solitary lamp post And the little fingers of rain The loneliness of your room And the empty bed.

Coda

The creative act, after all, is in itself unique, a thing of beauty not forever but for the moment. And who can say it is not for such a moment in our life that we are all living our many days, serving the sentence of monotony and drudgery, drinking cups of coffee, walking miles of streets, shaking innumerable hands. It is for such a moment, for such an eternity perhaps, that we live, and continue to live with our own failures and shortcomings, our particular problems, our special morals and conditions. And then suddenly, the moment of beauty is there before you, unexplainable, sometimes unfelt, like coming up for air through all the millions of seconds of breathing.

And while it is the privilege of every created being to experience this unique moment-and how many of us have been blind to it in the present and only longed for it wistfully after the moment is lost-it is for the creative artist to express this rapture through the medium of words or music, paint or stone. So that for the countless gifted ones their lost moment is once again brought before them to recaputure all over again. Perhaps that is why some sort of an answer can be given to "Why Art?" but not to "How Art?" How to reveal this most exquisite, most private part of him except through the body which he must clothe his art in. It is thus easy to understand that the work of art is a creation, as result of the particular experience, but invariably not during the experience. What I mean is that it is necessary to "live" or "experience" but it is possible to recreate the same only after the experience is over. To that extent we demand of the work of art a

mastery of the craft and the medium. That it should be integral with the other qualities, that is, to be able to inspire the participant not only emotionally but cerebrally, and above all be touched with that indescribable genius which distinguishes each separate work of art.

And then again I believe that a certain amount of participation is necessary for a thorough enjoyment—how I hate this inevitable word with its suggestion of drawing rooms and foam seats, and pictures on the wall and things on the mantelpiece—of art. A certain sympathy, shall we say, which is the price the participant must pay if he has to fully appreciate the object of art. I do not expect that anyone who is suddenly confronted with one of Picasso's cubist nudes is likely to think of it as a great work of art. So sympathy would also include a certain degree of awareness of the climate, a matter of time and place.

Comment

Muncle, IN. 47304 (317) 282-3569 16 March 1990

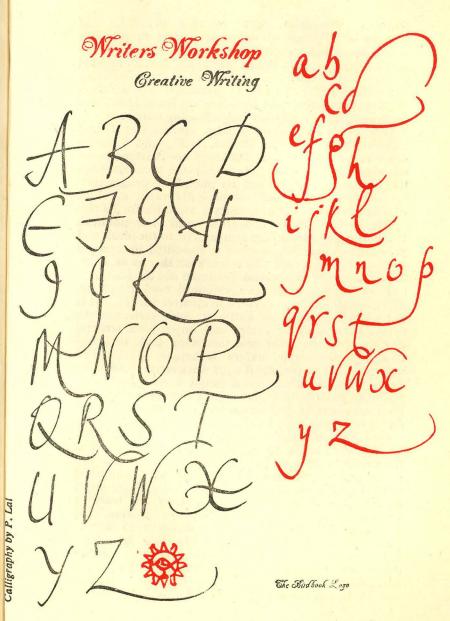
Rayaprol is the son of a famous Telugu poet and himself one of the small group that began writing modern Indian poetry in English during the 1950s. Whereas some of the better known poets of that group (such as Dom Moraes and Nissim Ezekiel) went for a time to England, Rayaprol came to the United States to study engineering. In USA he published in the better literary and cultural journals of the early and mid-fifties and became friends with Kenneth Patchen, E. E. Cummings, William Carlos Williams and others. He and Williams carried on a long correspondence over the years. Three of the letters are in an edition of Williams' letters; the University of Texas recently purchased the complete correspondence from Rayapol. (I will devote a chapter to this in a book I have planned on Indian-American post-colonial literary relations.)

After returning to India Rayaprol published two good books of poetry; but as this was during a time when Indian intellectuals did not believe Indians could write good poetry in English, his books received little attention. For a number of years he edited a literary journal called *East-West* which published such Americans as James Purdy, Henry Miller and Williams alongside Indian writers. But as he had to pay all the costs himself the magazine eventually came to an end after the 13th issue or so. Rayaprol was later involved with several other journals in Hyderabad, which published creative writing in Telugu and

English.

Rayaprol was a successful engineer, but over the years became cut off from the main network of Indian poets in Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi and the recent excitement over their work in India and abroad. He was surprised when I originally wrote trying to locate him and his pubilcations. Since then he has been rediscovered by younger writers and intellectuals who have been using him to translate Telugu texts into English for anthologies of writing by Indian women and other publications. Some of these translations will be published by Women's Press in New York. He recently edited and translated a volume of Telugu short stories for Penguin India. Besides translations and literary memoirs he is also planning another book of poems.

BRUCE KING



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Writers Workshop

WRITERS WORKSHOP was founded in 1958. It consists of a group of writers who agree in principle that English has proved its ability, as a language, to play a creative role in Indian literature, though original writing and transcreation. Its task is that of defining and substantiating that role by discussion and diffusion of creative writing and transcreation from India, the Commonwealth, and other English-using territories.

Discussions are held on Sunday mornings at 162/92 Lake Gardens, Calcutta 700045, India, and diffusion done through a series of Bird logo books issued under the WORKSHOP imprint. Since 1971 the WORKSHOP has laid increasing emphasis on its publishing programme. A complete, descriptive 100-page illustrated checklist of over 3000 books and cassettes is available for Rs. 10.

The WORKSHOP is non-profit and non-political. It involves writers who are sympathetic to the ideals and principles commonly accepted as embodied in creative writing; it is concerned with practice not theorising, helpful criticism not iconoclasm, the torch not the sceptre.

The WORKSHOP publishes a periodical book-magazine, The New Miscellany, devoted to creative writing. It is not a house journal; as a rule it gives preference to experimental work by young and unpublished writers, its two chief criteria for selection being high imaginative awareness and mature technique. Established writers appear in its pages if their work meets those standards. The New Miscellany does not carry advertising. Sufficient postage (registered mail) should accompany book manuscripts and magazine submissions if their return is desired. Only typed submissions are considered.

One can become a member or an Associate by written application to the Secretary, which requires the support of two members and approval by majority on committee. Members are writers with published work to their credit. To be an Associate requires agreement with the aims and objects of WRITERS WORKSHOP, active interest in creative writing, and a willingness to lend practical assistance to WORK-SHOP activities. Subscription to *The New Miscellany* automatically confers Associate membership. Further details are available from the Director, P. Lal, at the WORKSHOP address: 162/92 Lake Gardens, Calcutta 700045, India (Phone: 473-4325 and 473-2683).

Indian Creative Writing in English