

Early Poems and Failed Experiments

by Bob Lawler

Two Adolescent Poems

Untitled

*When I reach maturity and know the meaning of
Work and laughter and the joy of requited love,
To achieve a synthesis lasting and sublime
Shall be made the challenge of my remaining time.
published in "Songs of Youth, 1958"*

This poem was titled "1958" and burned into the mantle of the bedroom fireplace in **Cedar Hall** in 1969.
(see the last pge of this collection of verses.)

Untitled

*I loved her with the innocence of childhood.
We kissed and pass along our sep'rate ways.
It could not be -- and yet it was,
And now we've said good-bye.
We must grow up my mind cried out;
My heart denies the lie.*

Most of the Rest: Other Poems Written Soon After

Hunter Mead Taught Me

*That I might find in works and lives of men
Absurdity, high tragedy and pen
A truer line of praise than that the head
Could shape from dreams reworked and shown again.*

*"Art can be seen as tapestry. Align
"Experience. Select and weave. Define
"And order life and death. The form," said Mead
"Survives the truth; since colors fade, design."*

*"With irony and reverence your life,
"Though short, can be alright. Use piety rife
"With ribaldry," he stuttered and is dead.
I celebrate the way he wore his life.*

Sonnet

*Warmth of the dawn raises the river, lofts
The brown to a grey mist and drops it from
The colder limbs of leafless trees. Wind sifts
Through the woods. The cold makes the landscape dumb.
Off to the north in fog along the banks
Sounds a rasping, grating raking noise,
The sound of beating strong and heavy wings:
Once more the southern flying wild geese.
From out the fog above the river, framed
By concrete clouds and mist, against the brown,
The white, the wild geese have crammed
The moment, flying held it fast - have flown:
And only this is left: that I must clasp
The image and the pinions fading rasp.*

Reveries upon Returning Home

I lived for these past years in a place no rains
Would comfort. Memory of maple trees
And ash and sycamore defied the plains,
And deserts where I was. I had the wheeze
and clatter of wind in palms, dampness to tease
Thoughts of you with rain. Post summer rain is fresh.
I still miss the warm smoth closeness of your flesh.

Oh, Tawny one, hands hold the feel of you,
So scrawny, yet so soft, as the waves slack
And leave the draining sand and the salt dew
In your thick hair; my chest at your warm back
As we looked out to sea and saw the black
On the sea rolling west. And in bare feet,
You turned, we kissed, and Oh, your flesh was sweet.

Reflection (haiku)

Bourn mist pulled along,
Wind blown back again
Up on itself: thoughts of men.

Untitled

I have the warmth of half a moon
And, perhaps a hundred stars.
Frost replaces morning dew.
What once were wounds now ache as scars.
Images comfort as they can.

I miss you.

Untitled

*I gnaw the bone
Of what I've done.*

*My mind then questions whether
I have been cruel
Or just a fool
To turn my skin to leather.*

At Stover Mill

*Above the brown ascetic sculpted head,
As simple and as shining, through dutch doors,
Open, framing the night, were two stars;
And drawn by the attraction that they had,
I went to the dark
And down below,
Dry ice in ink,
Rapids I drowned
In years ago.*

Erwinna: Autumn and Winter (1st is a haiku)

*Dead leaves on the porch,
The stream, smothered ways:
Christmas maples, clear crisp days.*

*Like a sprinter, winter
Hurdles barren trees.
The marathon drags on:
He crawls on bone white knees.*

Untitled

*Too sensitive to stand the world,
Committed suicide.*

*He struck a pose, decision made,
And then he sat and died.*

*The tug, the warmth, the living blood
Dropped lifeless on the floor.*

*The tug, the warmth, that's all he felt
And then he felt no more.*

Recalling an Incident at a Campus Dance (a dialog sonnet)

He: "Come, tell me why."

She: "Why do you want to know?"

*He: "You burst out laughing and you walk away
From your partner and off the floor. I'd say
That's just too real, too human to let go."*

She: "If I told you, we'd have to walk to our homes."

*He: "Thirty miles? Not even the worst of us
Are that cruel. I won't tell."*

She: "They made a fuss

At School, the older girls, 'They're creeps, they're gnomes'

They said, 'They pull slide rules out of their ears.'

I couldn't believe it. No one could do

That or be that way. I came, and it's true."

*He: "We call them trolls. Stop laughing, and those tears,
Let's talk."*

She: "About?"

*He: "Tensors? or Yeats? or why've
We found it so much fun to be alive."*

At Fleming House (Sonnet)

The air was cool, and we, the last awake,
Were growing sober when a melody
Some rising bird had sung to break
The night with his heraldic monody
Had made us pause, had made us note the dawn:
The glisten on the mountain to the north,
Outlines from obscurity, and on
The fuchsia flowers, dew the chill brought forth.

Some trifling caustic thing that I had said
Had caused you to reply with, "I suspect
That you, at least, would know that I have said
And done those things through lack of self-respect."
You so hurt me, more than I hurt you,
And I remain ashamed that I hurt you.

Untitled

A madness crept into my mind
And lurked its way around
From tumbleweed to cactus bed
Then leaping from the ground

It jumped right past the arbor wall
and kicked the honey hive
And ran about and in and out
To make me come alive.

On My Mother

Who can not see
And can not walk
So can not feel
Secure,

Has found the strength
In Body's wrack
So that she can
Endure.

Fall and After

Gone on one short windy day
All small leaves are blown away.
Here, remaining through the snows,
A silent cardinal and the crows.

City Song

Walk down the city street
Where darkened sidewalks crack with heat,
Red shadows grab my feet
And goblins ride the trolley-o.

Things go from bad to worse,
With empty pockets, empty purse
Love thoughts become a curse
Unless I sing with folly-o.

Where, where is gone my baby?
Is she comin back? Oh maybe
Why, why is gone my baby?
Where or where's my dolly-o?

Untitled

*In this rotten age of wars
The subtle sound of poetry
Is smothered in the bestial roars
Of mortar and artillery.*

*They vitiate the common air.
Pollute the thoughts that rise within.
But who assumed that life was fair,
Or gods had but a bloody grin?*

Sonnet

*When I think political affairs
Beyond our power to change or comprehend,
The blood of these young men and mine with theirs
Demand to irrigate a hostile land,
When I think political affairs
Compel us as the ancient Fates to fight,
For freedoms we are daily losing, wars
Whose weapons never were our greatest might,
When I think of poets of the past,
From Aeschylus at Marathon to now
And wonder what they learned that let them last
And wonder were they helped or hurt and how,
And wonder, some, of those who went, and go
Whose names no future men will ever know.*

Stover's Mill, 1961-62

*In the library at night,
The library of Stover's Mill,
Standing quiet in the light,
Listening to the sounds that fill
A country building in the night,
Looking at the books that there
Fill one room and many minds,
A single desk, a lamp, a chair.
Window watched, a headlight blinds
You, reminds you the road is there.*

*Trucks still race it,
River road I come from;
Sports cars pace it,
All come the same.*

*Lady Gregory's Journal - I pause,
Search and find the parts on Yeats,
Read, my interest soon withdraws,
Replace the book among its mates.
We speak to fill a cricket's pause.
We speak of indians in the dark,
A buried chief with sword and quiver,
Of scholars digging in the park.
Framed by the door above the river,
Two stars. I rise to the dark*

*And down below,
Dry ice in ink,
Rapids I drowned
In years ago.*

Fragment...

*A half seen face, some minor thing --
The children's song you used to sing --
Returns my thoughts to you.*

On a Love, Long Gone (after R. Herrick)

*Rain brings the memory of one
Whose love was worth salvation,
Rain, that falling through the week
With moisture touch supplants her cheek.*

*Let spring what grows
As the best of those
The like complexioned Rambler rose*

Sentimental Verses

*To see the place that passed by now,
The summer, there, without me,
To see the maples colored leaves,
To have them fall about me,
This is going home.*

*To feel the rain, the autumn rain,
Before it turns to colder,
Falling warm through bashful winds
That winter will make bolder,
This is going home.*

*To see again the mist of dawn
And geese above the river,
The sun a kindle leaves and trees
And end the long night's shiver,
This is going home.*

One Song from a Play

*O, my love, how is it we have loved each other?
What is there that I can give or you receive?
You and I have joyed to be together.
This was good, that's all we know and must believe.*

*I must leave you now or else must bear dishonor.
Who can tell what Fate demands, or Gods approve.
If I die, be worthy of our friendship:
Love again; remember me; and bless our love.*

for a Lost Love

*The bite of wind, the lingering chill of dawn,
Some few leaves now fallen underfoot,
These are among the things that fall brought in.*

*The eastern moon, like pewter at the start,
Through changing second by second, could be seen
Through leaves, a golden goblet as it set.*

*And I returned to you from changing in
A different round of seasons, fearing what
I now have found: that you and I are done.*

*I had expected you to change: I thought
You might change your hair, your work or gain
The poise you sometimes lacked -- a child is got.*

*The stars seem fixed, the distant stars alone,
And I move on, and curse, and I move on.*

At the end of basic training (Andersen's, Fort Knox)
The storm comes from the west and north
To end a rather muggy day.
Through nearby trees a breeze comes forth
To ruffle my rumpled dismay.
One cloud in the western sky,
Red cream in the motley grey,
Northern lightning staggers by
Fighting the ending of day
And I stand here with beer and cheese
Stretching my body in the breeze.

Another Song from a Play
Father lost me when I was but a child,
Sailing seas he never saw.
Shipping out, I wondered who had smiled,
Who had dealt and who controlled the draw.

I have ravelled about the twisted years
In the many-wasted when.
I have heard the chuckle that one hears
In the doom that dangles over men.

Untitled
The Intellect is definite
But how can Wisdom be,
Perceiving patterns all unfit,
Yet knowing Unity?
Destruction is definitive
As Birth can never be,
Comparing Non-existence with
Potentiality.

Verses ending with a line of Shelley

The day is grey and grey was dawn
With snow, like cotton on the lawn,
The first of winter coming on.

Snowflakes dampen all the walk,
Dampen, cotton-like the talk,
Still -- and still my thoughts you stalk

The cluster of your memory
An ambushade of succubi
Defeating all the rest of me,

Like Shelley's satyrs, mournfully,
"Far from thy delights and thee."

published in Stylus, once a Temple U. Literary magazine

Untitled

"Atomic Age?"
Or "Age of Steel?"
Oh no, they're not essentials.
Our modern gage,
Confetti, Seal
For an Age that's "of Credentials."

Signed Papers date
Our birth and thought
And death, and all we dream of.
This final fate
Is what we ought
To feel, perhaps to scream of.

Untitled

The winding winds and current of words
Have split my mind upon a reef,
Reached by warm translucent waves,
Submerged and glittering source of grief.

The Intention

To cage between the thought and word
The fragile fragrance of the surd.

Song

Laughter in the summer,
Summer's kisses too,
Loving one another
All as children do,
How we held our hearts out,
Bashful and afraid,
While we played our parts out
Glad we had been made

but...

Winter's snow is falling,
First to come this year,
Night has grown appalling,
Loneliness to bear.
I have had to leave you,
Love has made us part.
Know I would deceive you
With my proud mad heart.

Song fragment from an unwritten play
Priestess of the Thund'rer sworn

To feed your fire and chants intone
When I all earthly love did scorn

And puberty a woman own.

A daughter of the river, I
Sure as the river, Time flows by,
Command and use me e'er I die.
Show me where must duty lie.

"Judge of all through all time's span
Who keeps the universe in true
Let us serve your justice," Man
Beseeches and believes in you.

A daughter of the river, I
Sure as the river, Time flows by,
Command and use me e'er I die.
Show me where must duty lie.

Experiments with French Verse Forms

Triolet: America

A land no land our people owns --
We bury our dead and move on.
To mix our flesh with sand and stones,
A land no land our people owns,
To interlock the land with bones
And own with flowers when we're gone
A land no land our people owns,
We bury our dead and move on.

Villanelle

Coming with a western wind
Changing all the scenes we know,
Weather makers change the mind.

Winter moisture fell and twinned
The surface land and water show,
Coming with a western wind.

Blankness outside, and in kind
Blank within began to grow.
Weather makers change the mind.

Whiteness covered all that sinned,
Down upon the mind did flow.
Coming with a western wind.

Remnants fall had left behind,
Covered by a fall more slow;
Weather makers change the mind.

Earthy when the snow had thinned,
Hope we had not hoped to find:
Fertile, solid soil below.
Coming with a western wind
Weather makers change the mind.

Chant Royale

Success is absence of the plight,
The human economic woe,
Awareness of the envious' sight,
The kiss of laurels they bestow,

The luxury of rising late
And watching workers from your gate,
The power to repel, restrain.
Safe and full, what can remain ?
Boredom and increasing girth.
Without some goal left to attain
Success alone has little worth.

Freedom is the thing we fight for
For, time, the time in which they grow,
Concieved with wonder, born with fright,
Whose power only time can show.
Calm between to breathe and wait,
A hand uplifted over hate,
Receptive as the soil to rain,
Contented watching all things wane,
Meeting tragedy with mirth.
Without the birth such can contain,
Freedom has but little worth.

Intelligence is but to smite
The strange encrusted stones that glow
In the sea deep mind at night,
Cutting them to forms we know,
Polishing the facts of fate,
Grinding all the crooked straight,
Scribing lines along the plane,
Striking out the hidden grain,
Produce of the deepest firth.
Without the skill that love will train
Intelligence has little worth.

Love has been our source of might,
Reaping passion in the row
By seeding all the kernels right
And fertilizing where we mow.
Thinking always of the date
Scrabbling over clods and slate,
Finding in the hoeing pain
Any lesser pleasure vain
To prepare the longed for birth.
Without grace it's all profane
For love alone has little worth.

Grace is dance a measure light
About the gnarled oak to go,
Seeking for the whirling sprite
While moonlight patches slide and flow,
To enchant the spirit mate,
Make it join in man's estate,
Dancing to the subtle strain,
The ancient delicate refrain
Chanting of the human dearth.
Without life, deserves disdain,
For grace alone has little worth.

If we keep our hopes mundane,
Shackle down the vagrant brain
And confine our thoughts to earth,
Unless these worthless things obtain
Life itself has little worth.

Later Dedicatory Verses

On completing construction of "Cedar Hall" in 1969

(see <http://nlcsa.net/lc0a-rwl/lc0a-other/LC0a01/>)

*I composed and burned into wooden mantle pieces over three fireplaces
these dedicatory poems:*

In the living/Family room:

I built this house with my own hands

And needed helps of friends.

Memento be, a friendship house,

Past days when friendships end.

In the kitchen / Dining room:

Janus, Lares et Penates

Protect your home, this room and table where we meet,

The bread and wine we make and eat.

As range, we must space, time beyond these walls so dear,

Keep us safe, return us here.

In the master bedroom: familiar verses

1958

When I reach maturity and know the meaning of

Work, and laughter, and the joys of requited love,

To achieve a synthesis, lasting and sublime,

Shall be made the challenge of my remaining time.