

FROM ZERO TO ONE

Robert Zend

If Robert Zend were writing in English or French, he would be recognized as one of Canada's leading poets. But because he writes his witty, inventive, resourceful and extremely imaginative poems in his native language, he is known only to a handful of Canadians. I have translated his poems into English to remedy this sad situation.

JOHN ROBERT COLOMBO

He is a poet of power and originality, a brilliant fantasist whose ideas are oddly compelling, a writer of fairy tales for adults. One reads many books without encountering anything so interesting.

ROBERT FULFORD

A wry geometer, Robert Zend takes measure of the chilly no-man's-land of present-day Western urban life with penetration and pity, whimsy and wit. Like laser beams aimed at a holographic plate, his poems unscramble scene after scene, in which, I suspect, most of us figure — an unheroic crowd, perhaps, but oddly "game."

NORMAN MCLAREN

Among many exciting discoveries, Robert Zend was the big one for me. He has arrived wham-bam into the North American scene which he is both a part of and apart from. Though ego and energy, driving force and central insight into our culture like this could easily disperse the poetry, I suspect we'll be hearing more from Robert Zend.

PHILLIS WEBB

Once Robert Zend told me that I was a poet of gestures. Once I told him he was a mime with words.

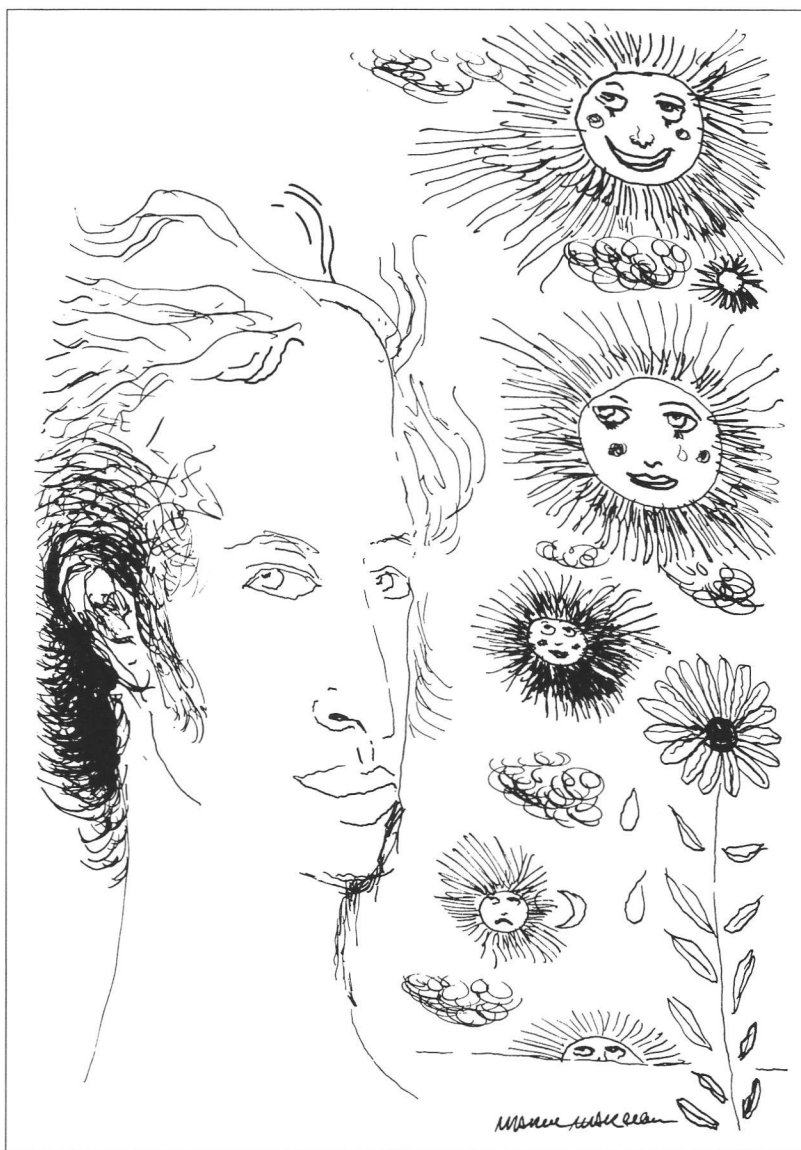
Robert Zend is a poet in every moment of his life.

MARCEL MARCEAU

I am looking forward to see you again, Robert, in Toronto or in Budapest or in Moscow or on the Moon, and show our poems to each other: they have so much in common.

ANDREI VOZNESENSKY

FROM ZERO TO ONE



*Poems by
Robert Zend*

FROM
ZERO
TO
ONE

*Translations by
John R. Colombo and Robert Zend*

1973

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MARCEL MARCEAU

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Acknowledgements

THE TITLE OF THIS BOOK is a tribute to Frederic Karinthy (1888-1938), great Hungarian writer, humorist and philosopher, my spiritual father. The quoted passage comes from the poetic essay "The One and the Nothing" of his volume *Who Asked You?*

The poems published in this book have been picked at random from different periods and moods of my life, from 1960 to 1969. Besides writing poetry in Hungarian, since 1964 I have been writing poetry in English in increasing number. I am grateful to John Robert Colombo, friend and adviser with whom I worked to realize my Hungarian poems in English.

Many of the poems were previously published in magazines (*Canadian Literature*, *The Tamarack Review*, *Earth and You*, *Exile*) in Anthologies (*Made in Canada*, *Volvox*, *The Speaking Earth*) and broadcast in radio programs (*Anthology*, *Ideas*, *Identities*, *This Country in the Morning*).

BETWEEN ONE AND TWO there is a series of road-signs like "Be Bright" or "Take Care" or "Look Ahead" or "Live and Learn" or "Stretch Your Legs According To Your Coverlet" or "Work as Long As Your Wick Burns" or "Be Prepared To Fight" . . . whoever follows them will safely reach the next station, and arrive from One to Two, from Two to Three, from Three to a Million. . . .

But between Zero and One, there are no such signs, and even if there were, they wouldn't do any good. For instance, how could you stretch your legs according to your coverlet if you have no coverlet? And how could you work as long as your wick burns if you have no wick? On the road from Zero to One there aren't even milestones, only millstones, here and there, standing here, fallen there. For between Zero and One is the "Well, there's nothing I can do about it" and the "I'm sorry, I'm too busy now" and the "Unfortunately, the President won't be able to see you," for between Zero and One there lie murder and madness and impossibility.

Between Zero and One is Horror and Desperation. Between Zero and One is Instinct and Religion, Evil and Salvation. Between Zero and One is the Discovery of the World.

Yes, the mathematicians are wrong: the way from Zero to One is longer than from One to a Hundred-thousand-million . . . it is about as long as the way from life to death.

FREDERIC KARINTHY

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FROM ZERO TO ONE

PENCIL

Someone writes with me
his fingers clutch my waist
he holds me tight leads me on
holds me tight again

The poem done he drops me
I feel diminished
and with surprise I read
the part of me he wore away

MOMENT

for Janine

I hate you
she said
I love you too
I sighed

TELEPHONE CONNECTION

I whispered hot words into the receiver. Her left ear was in flames. "I love you, too," she whispered feverishly at the other end of the line. My eyes were moist with happiness, so I tightened my grip on the waist of the receiver. "You are mad," she almost screamed, "don't hurt me!" Her lips brushed against the receiver, and mine were scorched from the kiss. Then I switched off the table lamp beside the telephone, and nine months later our son was born.

CIRCLE

for Erika

If I were back in my own country now
I would not brood about death and solitude
and other such imponderables,
 but rather about Judy, Sylvia, Eva,
 about the cold of winter, firewood, coal,
 about the social system, George, newspapers,
 and I would be angry
 and I would be homesick
for my own warm apartment here where
I ponder upon death, solitude and other imponderables
and am homesick for my own country.

SOLITUDE

Mondays are twenty people behind desks listening
smiling concentrating exhausted
Tuesdays are eight people in armchairs on sofas
in my apartment telling jokes
Wednesdays are fifty people downtown rushing colliding
getting off and on streetcars
Thursdays are twelve people drinking and noisy
and playing cards
Fridays are five hundred people in movie theatres munching
on popcorn making a mess and roaring in waves of laughter
Saturdays and Sundays are two people two people two people
changing places changing places changing places
And from Mondays to Fridays from mornings to evenings it is
one hundred and twenty people with indifferent faces
moving this way and that way and to and fro and
up stairs and down stairs at my place of work
To the simpleton solitude is something else altogether
Perhaps a little island with a palm tree
and the wreck of a ship
Perhaps a small rented room and an artist with a dirty shirt
and a beard eating a hamburger over a newspaper
Perhaps a prison cell with a small window through which
the sun peeks in for an hour a day
That is how the simpleton imagines it but I claim my solitude
among a thousand people is the true solitude
The acquaintance who stares but does not really expect
an answer to his "How are you?"
The friend who waits impatiently for me to finish my sentence
so he can start his
The other woman who plays her double role changing the masks
on her face
The wife who washes and irons the clothes and is too tired
to understand she has her own troubles

The child who is now a butterfly now a flower but ten years
should pass till she becomes a human being
This is the real solitude bearing the whole world within
Consuming colours and sounds and growing big with them and
choking with them
Strangers have locked all the doors around me
Ghosts are stalking the desolate corridors
The walls are tense and about to explode

MORNING

Somewhere
sometime
someone
was
but when I woke I forgot who

MADNESS

I searched her eyes with a sharp blue glance,
sparks were ignited here and there,
the antique furniture sighed heavily,
her eyeballs waved, her voice quivered,
she said: "I used to love you."

I covered her lips with mine,
a tide rose in time with the moon,
it got dark all around us,
the walls of the room convulsed,
she closed her eyes, her voice grew husky,
she said: "I used to be so happy."

I ripped the gaudy clothes off her body,
lightning flashed and thunder roared,
abandoned continents crumbled and sank,
a throne on high rocked
and a god smiled down on us,
waves rushed into the sinking room,
her eyes glowed, her voice was hot,
she said: "I used to make love to you."

"I love you," I said, "now."
"We are happy," I said, "now."
"We are making love," I said, "now."
But she just shook her head:
"It was a long time ago. I remember. . . ."

"We are here," I shouted, "now."
"We were here," she whispered, "a long time ago."

"I'm holding your hand, kissing you, caressing you."
"You held my hand, kissed me, caressed me."

“Now! We’re living in the present, today!”
“We lived a long time ago,” she faltered.

The furniture freezes us,
the air bandages our bodies,
giddyness advances up from my toes,
a blast of ice blows over my heart.
“It hurts me,” I groan, “I can’t stand it.”
Her voice is dry, without innuendo,
“It’s only a bad memory, forget it.”
One after another veils descend on us,
greyness blackens, warmth turns cold,
noises freeze into a silence far away,
we turn into antique statues in the room,
people touch us, tap us, drop us, it doesn’t hurt,
we stare at each other but can’t see each other,
our eyes are open but we aren’t blinking,
we rest in each other’s arms but don’t embrace,
we are enclosed motionlessly in the atmosphere,
flies buzz by we don’t hear them,
a spider builds its web around us — it doesn’t tickle,
the clock on the wall ticks but we don’t age at all,
they talk about us, but we aren’t interested,
they pass through us as they would through mist,
we were, long ago.

Rushing into the future,
time takes us with it in two tiny coffins.

BEYOND THE CUBICLE

for Eric Kettle

One day I was looking for Eric
who works with me
at the dreadful place where the supervisors
imagine themselves prison guards
where we have to put on cards
our comings and goings
and every moment of lateness or early leaving
has to be accounted for
but if during eight hours we redeem the world
or just twiddle our thumbs
no one cares —
one day I was looking for Eric
but couldn't find him

The next day I wasn't looking for Eric
so he came down the corridor
I said to him I was looking for you yesterday Eric
were you sick is that why I couldn't find you?
I wasn't sick replied Eric
that is I was sick but I came in anyway
for I have no more sick leave left
at nine I checked in at five I checked out
but all the rest of the time I slept
the day before I had been drinking
and yesterday I had a headache

I often have a headache
I told Eric
but I've never been able to sleep at work
women can fall asleep in the women's room
there's a sofa there but in the men's room
there's nothing and men can't enter

the women's room so tell me Eric
where do you fall asleep?

Oh don't you know said Eric
in the men's room beyond the middle cubicle
there's a wooden door and if you open it
there's a little dark area behind it
where the water gas and hydro pipes
go up and down
to the fourth and second floors
I usually sleep there when I have a hangover
Really? I marvelled — show it to me
Eric came and showed it to me
how can you sleep there Eric
aren't you afraid that you'll fall down to the second floor
through the gap beside the planking
oh not at all said Eric
and with that he climbed into the area
you see if I curl up like this on my right side
and I raise my left arm just so
and I lean my right leg back by the waterpipe
then I can't fall through
while I fall asleep my limbs grow numb
so I can't move
so I never fall down

That evening I drank too much
and the next day I took a piece of wood with me
and covered the hole with it
so I wouldn't fall in because Eric's words
were not one hundred per cent convincing
I must have threshed about in my sleep
because when I woke up two or three bricks
had loosened and fallen out
and I saw
there was another hollow behind the wall

The next day I told Eric
that there was another room take a look
but Eric said that we shouldn't go there today
because it was Martin's day to sleep let's not disturb him
but tomorrow let's both of us
bring hammers and smocks
under our coats of course so they won't notice
and see what's back there
next day we did that took in tools
and widened the hole in the wall
and hammered the pipes
so they wouldn't hinder our trespassing to the other room

Martin brought wires
and bulbs and from then on
we could see how we were progressing and where we were going
in two weeks we had a regular room there
and painted the walls
Charlie had brought in some thick broadloom

The desk was quite hard to take apart
and reassemble inside
but we had no trouble getting the bookshelf in
neither Margaret's flowers
the chamber was soon quite commodious and homey

Anne proposed
hanging drapes across the wall
as if there were a window behind them
and one night as a surprise Lucy
mounted mirrors on the side wall
so the room looked twice as big as it was

In the morning we would read and listen to poems
in the afternoon we played
classical records on the record-player
but as Martin and Lucy wanted to dance

I had to bring along my dance records
and from then on every morning
we held soirées instead and every afternoon
the chamber was occupied by one couple at a time

One morning Mr. Cork the supervisor
noticed that Chiang was checking in
with a chessboard which he
didn't have when he checked out at five
he asked Chiang where it was
but Chiang just stuttered and blushed
the next day Cork assigned his assistant Kirk
to keep an eye on Chiang
Kirk did just that and followed Chiang
into the men's room but a few seconds later
when Kirk entered the room was empty
Kirk couldn't understand how

Afterwards Kirk noticed that
not only Chiang but twenty-five others
were disappearing each day without a trace
one by one he confronted us
Margaret burst out crying and confessed everything
we were very frightened what would happen now

Cork and Kirk called all twenty-six of us
into the boardroom
unfolding a blueprint for us
they explained that what we had told them yesterday
was a lie because the wall of the building
was an outer wall
and the room we were all babbling about
would have to hang suspended in the air
we naturally grew mad by this time and told them
to go and see for themselves with their own eyes
they did that and when they came back
they said they saw only pipes running vertically

in a little dark area
with no little room behind it at all

The next day bricklayers came
took off the wooden door
and walled in the cubicle
due to all the hammering
from the wall of our little room
where drapes curtained a non-existent window
a brick fell
and landed on the head of the parking-lot attendant
the police came to investigate
and found the whole affair rather fishy
because although no bricks were missing from the outer wall
still a brick had fallen from the wall

Also we surveyed the wall from the street
and everything was as the blueprint showed
the room existed only inside the building
you could enter it from the inside
but from the outside there was only a brick wall
nothing else

Since then all twenty-six of us work more
but when any of us meet in the corridor
we smile at each other like accomplices
hinting at our secret
this warm smile binds us together
we know that the room exists
even if the bureaucrats don't see it
even if it is walled in
our proof is not only our memory
but the fact that the brick hit the man on the head
and also the fact that since then
we can't find in our homes
certain carpets paintings vases of flowers
drapes records

We secretly have hopes
that in a few years the whole matter
will be completely forgotten
Cork and Kirk will be promoted to the head office
and the new supervisors will know nothing about the affair
and then some evening
we will tear out the new bricks
replace them with the wooden door
so that when the stupidity around us
becomes unbearable
so that when we want to love and be loved again
we can climb above the dull and drab
and grope our way through the dark chamber
and enter again the beautiful warm room
where no one will disturb us
and smooth music will play
where our headaches will pass
and where space or spacelessness
and time or timelessness
will dissolve into one another
and grow into one thing

MONDAY

It took me decades
to learn
the basic principles
of wisdom

This is this
Now is now
Here is here
I am I

Nothing else is true
there are no harps in heaven
there are no turtles holding up the world
the best investment is a T-bone steak

THE LEGEND OF THE AXE

for Marika

Once upon a time, when Iron was formed, the Forest began to worry, and its cries finally reached the heavens.

“O Lord, how can you be so cruel and underhanded? With your right hand you give life, with your left hand you sharpen a knife!”

God shook his head sadly and said: “Your fear is groundless, Forest. Tell me, if you can, how could Iron harm you?”

The Forest fumed: “Me, tell you! Do you mock me while putting me in chains? As the creator of everything, you must know the reason. I’m worried because that Iron will turn into an Axe, and with it man will lop me off!”

God answered: “Only if you supply the handle.”

THE LITTLE RAT

*Dedicated to the staunch unionist whose sole aim
in life is to become a member of management*

The little rat races around,
 sniffing about,
 his noticeable nose
 twitching a bit,
and disappears behind a glass partition
where he yanks out someone's file
 to gnaw into it.

Squatting in front of a mirror he admires
 his tiny moustache,
 all the while ruminating:
"I'm an important fellow." His stench
forces others to keep their distance.

Some older mice remember him
when he was a mouse too,
a mouse who squeaked a lot
when there were cats around.
 Now they gather round him,
 and he smiles slyly,
 turning over in his head
 how good they will taste
 when he turns into a cat.

AFTER HANGING: A DREAM

for Armand Charlebois

(This is not going to be a sonnet, an ode, or a rhapsody
but a dream —

now dreams are always being written by poets
who never had a dream in their lives,
but this poet is not going to tell a lie,
he confesses that he did not dream what follows.)

I dreamt (this is the way you start a dream)
my boss (the fellow who became my boss,
who had a respectable minister for a father,
who is older than I am,
whose well-to-do family put him through university)
was standing behind me (behind me,
but had our families, fathers, and educations been exchanged,
I could have stood behind him)
blindfolding me with energetic fingers
(both of us knew that this was routine stuff
which he could not change although he might regret it,
and I might forgive him for it), *tying a noose*
around my neck and (all the time whispering in my ear,
“Don’t take it personally, they’re watching me too”)
kicking the chair out from under my feet, I fell
with a crunch and swayed
seventeen minutes until my heartbeat
died down and I died, but then
(and this bit is somewhat obscure, in a strange way
I was not frightened, as if we were acting
on a stage or were somewhere else, in a world
where the real and the ideal did not mesh,
nor success with value,
nor words with meanings,
nor actions with reactions —

anyway, as I said) afterwards he suggested we go for a walk
and having a good laugh we chatted amiably
about the absurdities of office life, which happily
ends at five o'clock, at which time
we can go back to being ourselves again
(all the time both of us knowing very well
that if not him then someone else would have taken his place
and they would have found someone else to take my place too,
so the whole thing from nine to five, although deadly real,
could not be taken too seriously afterwards)
and then, late at night, we parted, and his parting words were:
"I hope you won't be late again tomorrow morning,
it would be embarrassing
if I had to execute you again."

REQUIESCAT

The tiny wristwatch stopped ticking
and died and grew as cold
as cuff-links and tie-pins and rings and bracelets
and necklaces and earrings and brooches and diadems

DARK AGES

The sun shines satanically among the leaves that tremble in the
breeze
seducing my body with this desire to open up under them
to breathe like a heathen and stretch my muscles
and paganly expose the sinews of my soul —
My careful steps echo along the narrow corridors of the monastery
I cast down my eyes as I mumble the six hundred and twelfth
Pater Noster
statuesque saints beside the high altar smile down on me their
encouragement —
Oh how good it will be to flagellate myself where no one can see me
in the secrecy of my cell
I obey the divine command and this short-lived body takes in short
breaths
I diligently restrain any fresh shoots or buds that erupt on its surface
I meekly withhold its itches that aspire to the condition of life
I enjoy the unenjoyable things and sulk and turn away from the
enjoyable things —
For when the trumpets sound
and the beast with seven heads thunders down from the heavens
one who was but a worm here
will rise up and stand beside the throne of the great one who shall
return
ones with crowns down here
will crawl upon the ground and gasp in the dust like worms —
With pride I will stand there in the army of the humble of the earth
then we will flagellate the fallen sinful proud and powerful brood
oh then we will be the powerful and they will have to grovel before
us
and we will breathe fresh air and the joys of life will be ours —
Until then look neither right nor left but watch over our example
and sacrifices
and pray for us and Hail Mary Full of Grace. . . .

WAKING STATE

In the room in which the two of us work
there's no chair — so we have to stand —
we do little more than stand around,
but one of us keeps an eye on the corridor
in case someone should come —
no one comes,
but we know someone might come
and we keep an eye on the corridor
for if someone should come
we would quickly begin turning one wheel
which drives another wheel,
the first makes a G sound,
the other an F-sharp sound,
and the dissonance sets our teeth on edge,
our foreheads collapse into five or six wrinkles,
proof we are working hard,
this would please the someone in the corridor,
and this is why we keep an eye open,
but no one ever comes.

Sometimes we have the need and walk
to the end of the corridor —
then we see them, standing around nonchalantly,
pretending to talk to one another,
smiles all over their faces, full of honeyed greetings,
limitless love and trust radiating from their eyes,
but we know
that as soon as we pass them
and as soon as they see our backs moving away,
their heads will come together again,
one of them will pull a notebook from his pocket
and mark down the time of day beside our names
and will replace the notebook so fast
we wouldn't have guessed they were spying on us,

so that
they wouldn't know that we knew, for if they knew,
they would have to think of what they would answer
if we asked — and if one answer differed
from another answer
it would be extremely embarrassing all around —
once, a long time ago, somebody turned his head
and caught a glimpse of malice on one of the faces
that a second earlier was smiling wholeheartedly:
the hand tightened on the pencil and notebook,
he turned crimson
and only with great effort and throat-clearing
could he retrieve the malice from his features,
but his eyes — his sly, smouldering, Cain-like eyes —
did not wonder, only the mouth
began to curl upward —
months later,
when the episode was long forgotten,
both of them disappeared, and we all behaved
as if we had noticed nothing.

When the bell rings
we pretend not to hurry
as if the need wasn't there
after such a long day
to race out of there —
quietly, slowly,
we adjust our hats, our coats,
and exuding well-being from our faces,
we slowly walk out.

Outside, on the street, Weinstein joins me,
his face pinched, his eyes runny,
his small shoulders twisted,
he looks up at me with his twisted neck,
and his words blurt out:
“Couldn't we cross over there

where their missiles won't threaten us,
it's unbearable here. . . ."
I wave the suggestion away. "Stupid,
I crossed over here because these missiles
were aimed in their direction —
here you can go to a bright home each night,
but over there it's dark, even at night. . . ."
"True," Weinstein snorts, his head falls,
"I don't know why I always forget that . . ."
and he scampers off ahead of me,
like an ape, swaying his uneven arms
homeward, where his wife awaits him
with her paralytic smile, in her wheelchair
for the last twelve years,
and his son whose hair hangs down to his shoulders,
who reads the stock quotations every evening
with his feet on the table
from which his father takes his dinner.

I go home too.
Lola, my Italian lover, falls all over me with a scream,
"Oh, my sweet, you came so late,
you must be hungry, come into the bedroom,
let me give you something, let me give,"
and while I hurriedly take off my coat, she hurriedly
takes off her blouse, her skirt;
while I put my hat on the hook,
she lasciviously rocks and moans on the bed;
while I get out of my jacket and trousers,
she pants and screams, tosses her arms;
I fall down alongside her,
"Oh, yes," she whispers, "come, come," and licks my ears,
something I don't like,
I get on top of her. . . .
Somebody knocks.

Lorenzo enters, my young friend.

"I can't afford supper. Invite me?"

I nod, and he glances at me with contempt from behind his glasses.

"I hate you," he says, "you always eat supper."

"Would you hate me if I didn't give you any? Then I won't!

Then you might even like me."

"Oh, forget it. I'm too hungry to argue.

Yesterday Isabel gave herself to me.

That's the real reason why I hate you.

Until yesterday I loved her and it was good.

I like loving, it makes me happy.

You handed me the key,

told me what to do

to get her.

I did it.

I got her.

Now she loves me, and I don't love her,

and I'm unhappy."

"But I thought — "

"That's the trouble,

you always think something

and then you think what you think is true,

but you and me, we're different,

you want to get — and this is typical of you —

but I want to give."

"Oh, no, Lorenzo, oh, no.

I peered into a microscope.

I watched a drop of water and saw all of you swarming in it,

and I watched for such a long time, and I bent so close

to take it all in,

it finally took me in, and I became a swarming microbe myself,

one of you. There, above us, like the vault of the heavens,

the outer coating of a waterdrop covers me —

that light shining above

is not the light, as you all believe it to be,

isn't the sun, isn't the Celestial Spheres,

but it's the lens of my microscope, I'm not sure
that someone's peering through it
since I'm not there. . . ."

"Ridiculous," Lorenzo burps,
stuffing his mouth with macaroni —
"Ridiculous — like everything else
you've been telling me —
although until yesterday I hung on every word —
it's not a bad comparison, but that's all it is —
you don't know how to use a microscope.
What microscope? There was no microscope. . . ."

While I push the lumpy macaroni down
my throat with a pleasant expression —
so Lola won't notice that it's lumpy —
the muscles of my face stiffen,
for I feel that this is Lorenzo's last visit,
he loaths me so much for helping him,
now he's obliged to be grateful,
and I know it,
and he knows I know it,
the only thing he can do is hurt me
by accusing me of hurting him,
if someone has to feel guilty
it's better for him that I should bear the guilt.

After supper I stand up
and notice an envelope,
it was delivered by someone in a uniform,
either I pay more money than I now possess
or I spend some time in jail.
Yes, I have to earn more money,
money, more than I now have,
my debts increase month by month,
somehow I can't get on top,
I can't return to

rooming houses with cheap furniture,
lacking in music, colour,
love,
I'm not twenty any more, like Lorenzo.

I dial my wife's number . . .
she picks up the receiver,
I hear her giggle then a pause and then
she says: Hello,
sitting beside her, most likely, is her friend
who like a modest little worm
has wiggled himself into our life,
nudging me out . . .
when she hears my voice,
she gets rattled and often shouts,
but all I want is the address
of Mr. and Mrs. McIntosh
because with their help I could now
co-author a book that would become a bestseller . . .
for ten minutes we talk around the point
until finally I ask her for the address,
she promises,
but before finishing her sentence she forgets,
I hear it in her voice,
she always promises,
she always forgets,
and I always decide
I won't ask her anything anymore,
but I always forget too.

I drive Lorenzo home,
we both open our windows,
the exhaust pipe of my car, eaten by rust,
is exhausted from all the carbon monoxide . . .
when I drive I have a choice:
either I sit in the stifling warmth
or my hand and face are sliced to pieces

by the sharp air
from the side windows.

An upset, humiliated little boy, I sit
beside Lorenzo's telephone
and call Ludmilla who five days ago
twined her legs and mine together on a narrow bed,
and tried to get my word that I would come the next day too
to play chords on her shivering ribs.
The next day I didn't show up,
and now I'm calling her for the first time, afraid of punishment,
for I need someone to sit in my car
to wait for me while inside I talk with those wearing uniforms,
to wait for me and fill me with strength by waiting for me —

Ludmilla's words pelt me like small, hard
hailstones,
she still remembers me,
doesn't really understand what I'm afraid of,
doesn't say she wants to see me again,
doesn't ask me why I didn't show up for five days,
asks me to hang up and let her sleep.

I step inside the building
I might not step out of again
for twenty-four hours,
a broad-faced, wide-eyed, deep-voiced
man in uniform asks me questions, patiently.
"No, I didn't come to pay,
I moved."
"Yes, my wife got the summons
when I was in Europe."
"No, she isn't with me,
I moved out."
"No, not to Europe, I spent my holiday there,
and had no idea what was happening here."
"Oh, yes, my wife still lives there. . . ."

The big, wide eyes
blink before the sharp edges of these oddly shaped facts,
nothing is "yes,"
nothing is "no,"
everything is "perhaps" or "but" or "on the other hand,"
he glances at his watch and says, "Come back tomorrow,"
before he gets completely confused,
"but not here, go to the head office please
and explain everything to the man with three stripes
on his shoulder."

I drive down to the university library,
the girl librarian smiles at me, she knows me,
I know her too, but from where I can't recall,
anyway I talk to her as if I were a scholar and a gentleman,
she has never heard of the book
I want to take out —
In endless rows the card catalogues
stand stiffly against the wall,
Aba Cir Elf Hud Kon . . . Nim,
no writer is listed there whose name begins with the letter M.
"Miss, I'm afraid I can't find Mendolini."
"Of course you can't find him," she replies with a smile,
"M is the thirteenth letter of the alphabet
and people are superstitious around here. . . ."
I stare in front of me, seeing nothing —
if I wrote a 160-page
essay on Mendolini, then maybe
in two years I might be able to get away from the two wheels
that squeak G and F-sharp respectively,
if I knew that there were only two years to go,
it would be easier to bear the dissonance
that enters my ears and invades my brain,
but there's no letter M,
and I don't know what to do,
the girl librarian looks at me, smiling,
finally I hear myself asking her:

“We’ve met somewhere, haven’t we, but where?”

“Oh, don’t you remember?”

At the attorney’s office,
you went there about a patent,
then you invited me to go to a movie,
but I didn’t go
because I was engaged —
but he’s left me now and I’m all alone.”

Now I remember,
I tried to patent an idea once.
“Fantastic,” the attorney said,
“with only five thousand, within a year,
you can make fifty thousand,
it’s really amazing nobody ever thought of it before —
couldn’t be simpler.”

The girl smiles at me:

“Do you still like going to the movies?” she asks,
I see her lovely legs and think
how on earth can I lay my hands on \$5,000 —
and as I stagger out of the library I see her,
out of the corner of my eyes, reproaching me bitterly.

On the street the trees are bent over
greedily lapping up the muddy water in the gutters —
the moon, holding two clouds over its head like fists,
circles and dances, twirls and sings —
one after the other windows light up
to keep an eye on me as I walk, then they blink out —
alcoholics pass by me
with my head on their shoulders —
oh, yes, I feel decidedly
that around my head there is the outer coating
of a waterdrop about to burst, if I stretch
it will burst all around me!
I stretch — and stand behind the microscope,

two of us are working in the room,
there's no chair — so we have to stand —
and keep an eye on the corridor, for if they come,
we have to rub our eyes as if they have grown tired
from the strain of watching,
this should please whoever comes down the corridor,
but no one ever comes.

ELEVATOR

for Raymond Souster

The elevator operator presses the button —
the elevator starts up — the floor numbers flash —
one — two — three — faster and faster —
nineteen twenty twenty-one — all eight
of the passengers anxiously look up and cry out —
thirty-two — the top floor —
the roof of the building is blasted back —
the elevator continues all the faster —
speeding through the dark sky on toward the moon —
on toward the moon and the planets and the suns —
beyond all the galaxies like a speeding
bullet — keeping within its clenched doors
all the nine frozen statues of its
passengers —

THREE DIMENSIONAL FABLE

for Sole Steinberg

One day a Cube
with six smooth planes
cast its eye
on a bright red Heart,
and when nobody was looking
gulped it down.

The Heart
was
then wasn't.

Then the Cube
started to swell
and blush
and ache,
it remembered,
it hoped,
it dreamed,
finally it broke apart
and fell to pieces.

The Cube
was
then wasn't.

Moral:
Well. . . .

CLIMATE

for René Magritte

In the room in which I work, it often rains. Sometimes the sun shines, but usually it's twilight. Bright in one corner, dark in another, the weather can't seem to make up its mind.

When I can't take much more of it, I wander outdoors. The hills are gentle, the brooks are bubbling, the trees are whispering. Then I switch on the overhead light, turn up the heat, draw up a chair, sit down in front of my desk, and begin to work — until the clock tells me it's time to quit.

SOIREE

for Plato

The company arrived slowly —
at first only the Circle and the Triangle
sat at the bar, across the top of which
hung the Great Bear (the real one).
“I envy you,” the Triangle said,
its hypotenuse twitching nervously,
“you are always so quiet and good-natured. . . .”
“It’s just an appearance,” sighed the Circle.
“Don’t you see that I’m revolving
around my centre all the time?”
“Really?” said the Triangle, astonished.
He bent closer but couldn’t see her revolving.
Then C-Minor entered the room.
He wore a berét on his balding head,
and greeted them in a low voice.
Red arrived too, and fast in his frequencies
he made his way to the bar
and poured himself a glass of wine.
The hostess, chubby Alexandrine,
sat down and started to play Liszt’s “Mazeppa”
backwards on the piano, to which C-Minor
made a face and whispered to the Arc:
“I prefer Beethoven’s ‘Fifth.’ ”
The Circle sat in the corner with Baroque
and went into raptures over her son, Spiral.
Having no children he could call his own,
Baroque inched over to the blonde Music of the Spheres
and asked her: “Tell me, do you believe in Man?”
But she just waved her hand as if to let him know
she no longer discussed such banalities.
She left Baroque and flirted for a while
with Integral Calculus,

then disappeared down the corridors of a dark nebula
and went into a clinch with Minus. . . .
Otherwise the party did not last very long :
after thirty-five thousand years
they were all pretty tired and went home,
except Dissonance
on whom the hostess, Alexandrine,
had a crush from the start.

TELEGRAM

for Isaac Asimov

It was heard by everyone —
for centuries that Central Voice
spoke from a tiny chamber
when they wanted it to speak —
now it spoke without the chamber
 (out of the very ground
 out of the very sky
 out of the very walls)
and at the same instant spoke in everyone's apartment:

“Humans
at eight o’clock this evening
there will be an important announcement —
Humans
on land in valleys on mountains on the floors of oceans
in submarine cities
in satellite cities
in underground rock cities —
Humans
at eight o’clock this evening
tune in on the tele-wall
and the Terrestrial News Service will carry
a special trans-cosmic message”

And so at eight o'clock that evening on land and underground
and on water and underwater and in the air
glass walls in every apartment glowed
and there appeared in every apartment
untouchable behind the glass
the President of the United States of Earth
he beamed on his family of earthlings
and said :

“This is the first time
tonight is the first time
the first time in recorded history
Humans
that man will receive from another galaxy
a message two hundred million years old
you will witness this with me my friends
our probe ships relayed this intelligence to our space craft
and our space craft relayed it to our space cities
and our space cities to us here on Earth
that they had indications
that this message was beamed toward us
in a minute it will reach us
the answer to the mystery of mysteries
the key to the Labyrinth
the essence of existence so far unexplained
from the moment we stepped out of the jungle
I will read it to all of you —
I will read the message from another world
 which is no world
sent by someone
 who is no one
about something
 which is no thing
we will see with his eyes
 which are no eyes
hear with his ears
 which are no ears
feel with his soul
 which is no soul
understand with his mind
 which is no mind
in thirty seconds more the message
will have gone through more than a hundred transformers
and will be typed out on this teletype machine
the letters were electrical waves
the electrical waves were sound waves

the sound waves were light waves
the light waves were radio waves
the radio waves were cosmic waves
the cosmic waves were electromagnetic waves
the electromagnetic waves were . . .
it's here! . . . this is the moment . . . listen. . . .”

The teletype was typing away . . .
families sat on the edges of their seats waiting . . .
a long strip of paper snaked out of the machine . . .
the president tore it off and his eyes sparkled
but immediately went glassy as he started to read:

“GRZ XBU ABAKI DRRR
AXIND SSS BREIEB ALA BO
ZENNEZ L-FOA BINK KVAZAI
IVIOR LIM OA LA. . . .”

RELATIVITY

No turtle ever believed
a turtle carried the world
on its back —
no turtle ever believed it
because no turtle is a turtle
to a turtle.

OFFICE MEMO

Dear God:

Before presenting your Annual Report on the State of the Cosmos to the Congress of Aeons, we are taking the liberty of returning it for further revision. First, kindly reduce the manuscript to 15,000 pages, as all the other Gods have done. Second, kindly eliminate some of your incidental remarks (as, for instance, on the bottom of page 9,127, where you devote 4 lines to that parasite on Planet 3 you call something like Uman).

Thanks,
Your Supergod.

FISH

Fish
live under water

Fish
die under water

Fish
eat fish under water

Fish
eat nothing but fish under water

Fish
think every day is Friday under water

SPHEROID POEM

for Marcel Marceau

I wrote a letter,
put it in an envelope,
stuck a stamp on it,
mailed it that night,
received it the next morning,
opened it excitedly,
read every last word of it,
and didn't quite understand it.

I dialed my number,
the telephone rang,
I picked up the receiver,
and talked to myself,
we had an argument.

I was bored,
I put on a tie
and paid a visit
to myself,
I behaved myself
to make a good impression;
we had a good time together.

After I knew myself
a little,
I felt the need of a real friend —
once, accidentally, I came upon
me,
it was an unforgettable experience
to hear my contrary opinions,
it made me feel good
to educate my self

and to be educated,
and this friendship grew,
we were seldom apart,
winters or summers,
we philosophized together,
days and nights,
we were inseparable,
my self and I.

I was lonely,
so I got married
to myself,
I desired myself,
myself desired I,
I loved myself,
myself loved I,
so we lived together a long time.

I gave birth to myself
and we loved one another:
I loved my child,
I loved my father,
I clearly remembered
what I had been like
when I was my father
and I decided
that I will do better
when I am my child,
and that's how it is.

I, a nobody,
landed a job
with myself,
a somebody —
and I loathed myself
because I was
so unlike myself —

what else could I do,
I, a somebody,
turned over my fortune
to myself,
and I, a nobody
took my fortune
from myself —
I, a nobody,
grew rich,
I, a somebody,
grew poor,
so I loathed myself as before.

I sometimes met
myself on the street
and punched myself on the nose —
and I was mad at myself
for I wasn't even sorry for myself —
sometimes I stayed home
and penned poems
for myself
which every hundred years or so
I will reread
and either like them
or dislike them.

I wrote a number of plays,
then I went to the theatre
and actually enjoyed myself —
the newspaper articles
that I turned out
annoyed me most of all,
the idiotic pieces
I wrote
about my painting and sculpture
plagued me —
but the music

I composed
always had a calming effect on me,
as if I were rocking myself
to sleep.

Sometimes I,
a frail speck of dust,
prayed piously
to myself,
the infinite god,
and I begged myself to hear
me out,
and my prayer was carried to my throne
and I smiled benevolently
upon myself
and forgave myself
all my sins.

I was often dissatisfied
and rebelled against myself —
I declared war
and in one bloody battle after another
I wiped myself out —
through boring years of peace,
however,
I thought triumphantly about
my losing the war,
so I thought revengefully about
my winning the war,
so I thought triumphantly about —
and so on.

I finally died
and instantly rose from the dead
and shouted to myself
in great anger:
“Is there no escaping you,

not even in the after-life?
Must you follow me even unto death?"
The whole thing practically
started all over again
from the beginning
but luckily I
God
rebuked me
who was quarreling with myself:
"Please let me rest
on the seventh day!"
then, at last
we all fell sound asleep
and couldn't even hear ourselves snoring.

THE MESSAGE

for Marshall McLuhan

The messenger arrived out of breath. The dancers stopped their pirouettes, the torches lighting the palace walls flickered for a moment, the hubbub at the banquet table died down, a roasted pig's nuckle froze in mid-air in a nobleman's fingers, a general behind the pillar stopped fingering the bosom of the maid of honour.

"Well, what is it, man?" asked the King, rising regally from his chair. "Where did you come from? Who sent you? What is the news? Then after a moment, "Are you waiting for a reply? Speak up man!"

Still short of breath, the messenger pulled himself together. He looked the King in the eye and gasped: "Your Majesty, I am not waiting for a reply because there is no message because no one sent me. I just like running."

VARIATION

for Arthur C. Clarke

Somewhere in the empty reaches of space
there is a place where
dentists play pianos in caves
children with wrinkles on their faces
throw snowballs deep in tropical jungles
in garrets escaped convicts pen their poems in blood
mayors panhandle at streetcorners
butchers with green hair stand on their hands
for this is the way to be with-it
whoever can come up with the greatest number of words
that start with B
gets the hand of the dirtiest of princesses —
Everyone of course despises those with three eyes
but delights in those whose toes can touch their mouths
on the thorns of giant cacti
the dead are displayed in museums —

Red clouds drift across the sky
curtaining off a desk behind which
wearing his spectacles and well-worn corduroy jacket
god bends over his accounts
and when he balances it he sighs and mumbles:
“It could have been different,
but what difference would it make?”

LITERARY CRITICISM

for Professor J. A. Molinaro

Leibnitz thought
this is the best
of all possible worlds

Voltaire thought
Leibnitz was wrong when he thought
this is the best
of all possible worlds

Pirandello thought
Voltaire was wrong when he thought
Leibnitz was wrong when he thought
this is the best
of all possible worlds

I think . . . but I'm wrong anyway

SYMPHONIE FANTASTIQUE

for Glenn Gould

When they left their apartment
they forgot to turn off their record player.

The music was alone in the apartment.
For a few minutes it continued to be Berlioz,
but when it realized that no one was listening,
and that it could now do what it wanted,
the music suddenly speeded up into Rock.
Then it got tired out
and slowed down to a lazy Negro spiritual.
Some time later, as a four-part Bach invention,
it raced like a fugue around the apartment,
but it couldn't catch itself,
so it got down on its knees and sadly
recalled its Gregorian upbringing,
a sombre, gloomy period that, better to forget it,
then it brightened up into a romantic tango,
suggestive words were whispered into its ears,
but then it realized
that there were no witnesses,
that all this would be lost,
that none of this would be remembered,
that not one bit of this could ever be forgotten
because it was so incredible,
so incredible as to be impossible —
not to a single soul would it ever occur
that such things were possible. . . .
The thought of death weighed down its heart,
and it turned into Chopin's Funeral March,
but it couldn't go more than the first fifteen bars
because the needle came to the end of the record,
and the arm lifted automatically,

worked its way back to the arm-rest,
came to rest, and then went off to sleep.
The record was still turning, but it grew tired
and finally stopped.

When they returned to their apartment
several hours later,
they didn't even look around.
Everything was fine.
They had yet another drink,
they set the alarm clock,
tumbled into bed
and fell asleep.

3,000,000,000

Mankind:
telegraph-wires
stretching

Stretching:
between soil and star
tingling

Tingling:
on and on and on
unaware

Unaware:
of the message
they carry

SEVEN MINUTES

I'm sitting comfortably on the chesterfield in Vivian's apartment,
there are purple drapes and velvet curtains here and there,
there are classical paintings and baroque statues everywhere,
we converse in our sophisticated way, and she expects her husband
to arrive any moment now, he is expected within the hour.

In the middle of my sentence about
the Coptic art of Ethiopia, I notice
that her skirt had worked its way up over her pretty knees
revealing her well-formed, slender
thighs, and at the same time

I notice that her lips are trembling —
is it possible there's something still alive in her
that dates back to the time when, on the stairway,
I kissed her so wildly I bruised her lips?
I ask myself this — forgetting how
to complete the other half of my sentence on Coptic art,
loosing myself in her eyes until she casts them down
and begins to mumble about her husband and how much she loves
him.

Feeling awkward, I get up and go over to the window
and pull aside the heavy drapes
so I can see the six other apartment houses,
one behind the other in battle-array. But the six
are not there now, now there's only
emptiness there, nothing else.

I peer out and look down:
the wall of the building drops vertically to the ground,
and the ground continues dropping down, vertically and steeply,
as if the earth itself had been split in two;
there is nothing in front of me, nothing.

I let the drapes fall so Vivian
won't see what I see and won't worry.

I step over to the bookshelf, select a book and start reading aloud
her favourite poem, but when I turn the page

the poem doesn't continue, there's only a blank page,
and blank page follows blank page to the end,
I shut the book.
"And so on," I manage to say, "you know the rest,"
and sit back on the sofa beside her.
I draw on my cigarette but it has gone-out half-smoked.
I pick up the telephone to make certain
what I know in advance,
that I won't hear the usual hum
because the line is deaf and dumb.
I don't want to tell her, I don't want her to get nervous.
"Really, my husband should arrive any moment now,"
she slurs her words in embarrassment, but I know
that he won't come home ever again.
"Do stay and have dinner with us," she says.
"Alright," I reply, and I know
that the dinner will never be served.
"Vivian, do you know that should the sun explode,
it would kill all life on earth and bring everything to a halt,
but that this would not happen for eight minutes
after the explosion — that's how long it takes
for the light and the electromagnetic waves
or, if you prefer, for the message
to arrive here from the sun?
The fastest thing in the world is the speed of light,
and during those eight minutes
everything would live on in the same way. . . ."
She purses her lips and frowns,
"I know all that, but why bother me with it now?"
she asks, but I don't tell her why.

COSMOGONIES

for Aniko

Every child is a little Einstein, Freud or Moses —
earlier today my daughter Aniko, 12, told me how she sees things:

Maybe the world is a reflection in a mirror.
Earth is flat: if we walk to the ends of the earth,
we stop short at the silver part.
Beyond that we can see nothing, but behind it all
there lurks the real world where
left is right and right is left,
and those who peer into the mirror in front of them
can see themselves reflected there,
but behind the glass there is nothing
and that is what we really are.

But it is also possible (she added without pausing)
that some time ago there was a stage-play
and that the actors entered so fully
into the spirit of their roles
that they really killed one another,
really fell in love,
really begot children
and grandchildren and great-grandchildren,
so that today nobody knows anymore
what the whole thing was originally about.

At first I was delighted,
but after some careful consideration
I decided these fantasies were about as silly
as those in the Bible.

RECIPE

Say something,
and then say something else.
If they have no connection,
connect them.
Thus you get nonsense.
Repeat it until they believe it.
Tell others to repeat it to others
until they too follow you.
Should some of them understand it,
explain it until they misunderstand it.
In your last will and testament
reveal things that were never true.
Do this and you will be remembered
for centuries to come.
Schools, churches and philosophies
will flourish with your immortal name.

(If you do it differently,
and say one equals one,
two times two equal four,
people should be good,
when a man dies he's dead,
summer follows spring, etc.,
posterity will say,
"So what?"
and forget all about you.)

Only the impossible is believable.

MEETING

for Steven Rado

He still knows that God watches over him
that God is great and good
that God knows everything, especially him
that God listens to his prayers and answers them

Poison ivy often brushed against his shins when he walked through
the fields
after the war some falling rubble broke his back and he couldn't
move for months
every winter he had a long bout of tonsilitis
his boss glanced at the clock when he arrived and left, and kept his
eye on him for the rest of the day
friends would use him then drop him but he would go right on
trusting them
women spurned him and froze him out — his nights were full of
desire
words got stuck in his throat — streets were full of indifferent people
an uncomfortable past — an unpromising future

He still knows

It happened to him once: he was walking across a field
when God appeared
— an older man, about fifty, greying at the temples —
with two other gentlemen beside him . . .
he stared at the three of them
and picked out God as he approached
and one thought exploded inside him:
“Now!”
but God passed by and didn't even look at him
here are the words (he overheard them) spoken by God
to the gentleman on his left:

“Effective next month, the number of casualties in the Far Eastern
War
will be increased by 25%, but in the underpopulated West, due to
the undesirable peace,
the increase in cancer fatalities will be 5%, in heart-attack victims
8½%
as a temporary measure to re-establish a partial balance for next
year.”

He couldn't catch any more of it
but suddenly he could move
and he ran after God:

“My Lord!”

He turned.

“Forgive me,” God whispered to the gentleman on his right
with an embarrassed smile, “it won't take but a minute.”

“Yes, my son.”

“My Lord, I . . . I . . . ”

“And you are . . . ?”

“I'm . . . I'm the one who . . . prays to you
three times a day in my — ”

“Oh yes, I know, I know. Many do.”

“But I . . . I'm . . . ”

“What is it, my son? Of course, you are!”

“Do you know me, Lord?”

“I know everything
so you can hardly expect me to know you personally.”

“But I thought —”

“Please. If there is anything special you want to say.
I have to hurry. The cosmos is immense.
There are imbalances everywhere.
Even eternity is not long enough for. . . .”

"My Lord, is there hope?"
"For . . . ?"
"Is there hope . . . any hope at all?"
"Speak more clearly, my son.
I don't get what you mean."

"Will I be you
when I die?
Will the wrinkles added to my face by the passing years
be smoothed away by your peace?
Will my suffering be rewarded?
Will my worries disappear?"

"The answer is no.
You will be dust.
When you die, you will be dead.
Your wrinkles will be wiped away, yes,
and you too with them.
I am who I am.
Not who you are.
And not what you think me.
And now I have to go on to create. To destroy.
To alter the great law of probability
throughout the universe.
You stay where you are.
For the time being."

And that's how it happened —
and after that, for the next thirty or forty years,
he stopped praying three times a day
but he didn't stop believing God
he wished he could
but it was impossible because the two of them knew each other

He tried to live each day as it came
and it came and he lived
and he died and became

dust again
dust in interstellar space and in the streets
dust
dirty dust
no more than dirty dust
dust without life reward salvation resurrection
dust without hope of being reborn
dust without hope of becoming divine
dust without hope
dust without hope through worlds without end

NOUVEAU RICHE

She has nothing to do
but is so rich
she has a maid
to do it for her

MORE AND MORE

For twenty-eight days the ovum wanders
then it falls like a leaf in autumn —
is that all?

More.

Let there be one more, ten more, until. . . .

Two cells have merged into one.

Should it stay one? No. More.

Let there be two, four, eight, sixteen, more.

A child. It appears. Is that all?

It needs food. More. Must grow. More.

It matures. Does it stop there? Is that enough?

An only child? More.

Mankind can't die out in our generation.

More. And more.

We eat bread. Drink water. More.

We eat cake. Drink champagne. More.

We eat a worker. Ten workers. A hundred. More.

We eat a factory. Two factories. Five. More.

We eat countries. Oceans. Atmospheres. The earth is ours.

More.

The Moon. Mars. Venus. Does that satisfy us?

Not enough. More and more.

We make love. Once? More than once.

Twice. Twenty times. More. Five hundred times.

That's enough. But one woman isn't enough.

Two? Five? Ten? More and more.

We can read and write. More.

We know how to add. More.

We wrote one or two masterpieces. More.

We read a book. A library of books. More.
We can do calculus. More.
We can transplant hearts, devise artificial brains, blast off rockets.
More and more and more.

From the cells of our bodies one word comes: More.
The sun's rays bombard the earth.
and sprout plants all over it. More. Unicellular beings. More.
Fish. More. Reptiles. More. Mammals. More.
Man.
That's not the end. More and more.

Every single second, suns pulsate and pour
tons of energy on their planets,
and energy means but one thing: More.

Hasn't the universe been exploding long enough?
No, not long enough. More.
Death, and what can follow death? More.
Should we buy a second house? More.
After our world tour, should we travel again? More.
When this poem is finished, should I write another? More.
The sun orders us: More. From the core of the galaxy of galaxies
a telegram comes to ours
which is forwarded down to earth,
and when we read it, it says: More.

No other message.
No other meaning.
No other answer.

Only this one-word message, meaning, answer,
which translates into human speech:
More!

THE THREE SONS

(A fable of geometry)

for Norman McLaren

Once upon a time Father Circle and Mother Circle had three sons. They lived happily together, but when the boys grew up they decided to go out into the world to seek their fortunes.

When they reached the crossroads of the world, they hugged one another and broke into tears. Then each swore a sacred oath and went his separate way.

"In seven years, we will return to this crossroads of the world. No matter how we turn out, we will meet each other again in seven years' time."

The eldest son navigated a sea of books. He had only one thought in life, and that was to study science. It was his heart's desire.

The middle son set himself up in business. He had only one thought in life, and that was to amass a fortune in gold. It was his heart's desire.

The youngest son just danced and sang and suffered and loved. He had only one thought in life, and that was to become an artist. It was his heart's desire.

After seven years had past, they met again. They hardly recognized one another. How they had changed! They could hardly believe they were the three sons of Father Circle and Mother Circle.

The eldest Circle had become a lens of a telescope. The middle Circle had become a great banquet plate. And the youngest Circle had become the vast horizon.

FRAGMENT: A MAN WHO ANGERS ME

— — — — —

— — — — —

and finally
he became
a clot
in my bloodstream
and killed me

— — — — —

— — — — —

SENSELESS STORY

for John Robert Colombo

Feeling fine, I lean back in my easy chair, finally caught up
The last letter is all-but finished, all I have to do is find
 the right adjective in the third line from the bottom
I have to drop it in the mail today so that the official in charge
 at the head office will get it tomorrow
It's an extremely important report on a machine manufactured in a
 Far Eastern country
If we decide to buy it, our production will increase ten-fold and our
 little firm will ease all competition right out of the market
Then within the next twelve months we will become a great
 international combine
The last mail pick-up is at five, it's only three now, so I have
 plenty of time to go down
And have a cup of coffee, then in fifteen minutes I can come back
 and will have no trouble at all finding the right adjective
Hatless, I take the stairs two at a time, February sounds like a rabid
 dog howling in the streets
Pasted on the door of the little restaurant where I usually have coffee
 there's a sign
Which reads "Reopening Soon" but I don't feel like returning
 without my coffee
My saliva glands are working overtime, I turn up the collar of my
 jacket and run three blocks over to the next restaurant
It's crowded, every table's full, except for one chair
 at one table at which a beautiful blonde sits
She smiles and offers me a seat, I sit down, her eyes are
 like moons wandering among clouds, her voice is velvet-soft
Policemen burst into the place, look around quickly, spot her,
 head for her, start to rough her up
"I am not what you think I am," she tells them quietly,
 with dignity, and pointing at me she says, "Ask my husband"

"Is she telling the truth?" the policeman with the red face asks,
I nod, he salutes and the band of policemen leaves as quickly
as it came
We leave together too, arm in arm, but down the street we see them
tailing us, so we walk slowly across the city
I ask her whom they thought she was, she doesn't know, but what's
important is that we pulled through
We apparently live in a three-story apartment house at the edge of
the city, our flat is on the third floor and the elevator
is out of order
We walk up the spiral staircase and at every landing we stop to
kiss each other
"I've the feeling I've known you for a long time," I gasp, and she
bursts out laughing, and says, "How poetic that is!"
"I can't imagine there's ever be a time when we won't kiss on
staircases," I say, but she waves her hand and says,
"I know you . . .
What about the usher in the movie theatre last month?" she asks,
and her eyes grow hard with hate
"How do you know about that?" I grow alarmed, "last month we
didn't even know . . ." but by now we're there
In the flat the cleaning lady is waiting for me to pay her, she
addresses me by my first name, I look at her with surprise
Good Lord this is my mother who died when I was only a child, but
she puts her finger to her lips to tell me not to say anything
Maybe then it's possible that my father's alive too? I want to walk
out into the hall with her but my wife calls me back angrily
"Now you're even flirting with cleaning ladies! Warm up some milk
for the child"
I don't dare ask what child, but then a kid toddles into the room,
and he's really my son
We put him to bed, then we eat supper, old friends come over
afterwards to play cards
The heat is unbearable, I offer to go out to get some ice cream, and
our company enthusiastically agrees
I bump into the mailman at the front entrance, "I'm lucky today,"
he says, "you saved me some stairs to climb"

He hands me a telegram, I rip it open and read it: "In the harbour
tonight at eight"
Who in the world sent this, I wonder, but then I start to remember,
Alex and Jack and the old gang a week ago agreed that we would
meet this Wednesday
Maybe the shipment of new tombstones from old cemeteries has
arrived from Albania, we ordered them months ago
I grab a cab and we speed to the harbour, but the driver suddenly
slams down on the brakes
He pulls a gun on me, I put up my hands, he hits me with the butt
of his pistol, I faint
I wake up, under me there's the shaking rocking bottom of a boat
among sacks and ropes
For eleven days I toss and turn, they give me nothing to eat or drink,
they don't even open the hold, I hammer in vain
Half-dead having nightmares, blinding beams of flashlights
wake me up quick hands grab me and dress me
At the prow of the ship a committee of elegantly attired government
officials speaks an unknown language to me, a band plays music
The officials take me to their parliament, their king shakes my hand,
their dinner in my honour consists of fifteen courses
They praise me, present me with a diploma with ribbons, usher me
into a theatre
The first performance of my play is being offered that evening, it's an
amazing experience to hear
My words recited in another language, the actors are excellent in
their parts
The leading lady clings to me, accompanies me up the elevator to
the penthouse apartment I live in
Servants butlers interpreters surround me, the king wants me to visit
him daily
I want to return home but newsboys wander up and down the streets
shouting "Heir-Apparent Assassinated," "New World War!"
For four years I stay, meanwhile I enjoy success after success, I even
receive a letter from a former friend
Once ten years ago when I was starving I wrote him a letter but he
didn't even answer, now he's starving so I don't answer

One bright day a helicopter lands on the lawn in front of my house
while I am busy in my observation dome observing the ring of
Saturn
“We may go now,” the pilot says, I get in and the jet plane swoops
over the ocean
I arrive, head for the old street that my wife and child lived on,
but no one knows about them
My closest cousin doesn’t recognize me, asks me for my identification
papers then asks me to forgive him
He faintly remembers knowing a relative with my name, but this
relative fell from the third floor when he was a child and was a
wheelchair case for a year until he died
I remember too, the wheelchair but nothing else, I ask about my
mother, he directs me to the cemetery
I roam among the tombstones but I don’t find the right one, the
caretaker says, “Albanian smugglers stole it”
Then something filters through my mind, something I seem to have
forgotten ages ago
I walk towards my office, who knows what’s happened to it, the
older people have surely all died, the new faces won’t recall
who I was
Maybe my firm has become an international combine, somebody
else has ordered that machine
Or maybe another firm ordered it and mine went bankrupt, maybe
the building itself has been levelled without a trace
I walk across the boulevard, here’s the office, the doorman greets me
I go up to my room, my boss comes across the corridor, I clear my
throat to tell him
“I’m sorry, it wasn’t my fault, actually I died a long time ago
That’s why I couldn’t come back right away, for two years I sat
in a wheelchair . . . ”
But my boss smiles and passes on as if he hadn’t even noticed my
absence, I step into my room
There sits my typewriter, my letter is in it, with an empty space
where there should be a word in the third line from the bottom
I had forgotten all about it and at five o’clock when I can go home,
I won’t know where my home is

But now it's only three o'clock in the afternoon, I have plenty of
time so I will go out for fifteen minutes
And have some coffee, and I will come back and it will be easy to
find that right adjective

3 OIL PAINTINGS

for Julius Marosan

seascape

When we step
into the picture
our feet get wet

what's left

There's an all-red rainbow
in the sky
the other colours ran away

evening

The sun sets
in the clouds of your eyes
don't let me freeze

MIRRORS

for Professor B. M. Corrigan

An average man went walking along the street

Along came a handsome man
who saw an ugly man

Along came an ugly female
who saw a handsome male

Along came a tall woman
who saw a short creature

Along came a short ugly man
who saw a tall handsome god

Along came a millionaire
who saw a measly worm

Along came a beggar
who saw a backer

Along came a fairy
who saw a pretty girl

Along came an oldster
who saw a youngster

Along came a little child
who saw a little old man

Along came a paranoid
who saw a monster

Along came a murderer
who saw a victim

Along came a wrestler
who saw a dwarf

Along came a sparrow
who saw a giant

Along came a germ
who saw a culture

Along came a speck of light
who saw a shot of darkness

Who went walking along the street?

An average short tall blonde black brown handsome
fair ugly young old poor rich pleasant awful man
woman went walking along the street

and all of those were this average man

ARABELLA

for Irene

Even now Arabella continues to wake up at seven in the morning
walks into the kitchen and checks to see that everything is in order
she stops to stare through the window at the trees in the garden
her son and daughter leave for school without a hello or good-bye

When she turns to their bird it beats its wings in fright
when she pats their dog it whimpers and runs for cover
their cat however ignores her and passes by unfeelingly
in their aquarium their goldfish splash on indifferently

She is used to the fact that nothing stares back at her from the
mirror
but she finds curious the sensation of playing the piano soundlessly
when their new mother washes her little girl's hair before bedtime
she abruptly turns her back on them under her photograph on the
wall

At times she flees the house and rides on roofs of trains
or walks through walls to view some strange new families
or shows up at school to help her son when he needs it
but evenings find her at the table where no one set a plate for her

In bed she feels no jealousy when her husband makes loves to
someone else
but it always annoys her when some guest walks right through her
and at times like these she pouts and flicks out a lightbulb
or for an instant shorts the electric in the grandfather clock

Arabella knows she can remain with them for some time to come
until that voice that ancient powerful voice shall speak to her
shall sweep her up while everything else sinks down
and the rooms of the house like leaves in autumn shrivel and fall

This voice raises her and extends her and quickens her growth
it pulls the stopper from the bottle and opens up the empty space to
her
and the compressed world that is contained within the bottle
is little more than a memory and the faintest of memories at that

But until then she continues to rise at seven
and peer into every corner and silently play the piano
and become cross with her children for not greeting her in the
morning
and sweep across the sky racing the swallows in her odd anxious
moments

ADMINISTRATIVE ERROR

The plane was late, very late, too late.

Three or four times the father approached the ticket counter, each time the friendly stewardess asked him politely to wait.

Wait, waiting, waited.

Then over the loudspeaker he heard the announcement

that there had been a disturbance over the ocean,

at 3:25 a.m. radio communication had failed,

a few airplanes were heading for that part of the ocean to circle over.

The father was then asked to step into an office.

There were about thirty men and women there — weeping, crying,
flailing about, in a dead faint.

He listened quietly to the heavy words.

When the office had finally been cleared, he approached the man
with the glasses,

and in a calm voice said: "This is an administrative error."

The man gave him a questioning look.

The father answered: "Because the girl was only ten."

The man frowned and said: "So . . . ?"

"You don't understand," he replied with a forced smile: "Only ten.

This is her first trip to Europe . . . to see the Eiffel Tower,

to see the Leaning Tower of Pisa, the Lorelei,

Gibraltar, and all the fjords, and if she doesn't get her senior
matriculation,

she can't go to university. She didn't have a chance to fall in love.

Nobody had kissed her on the lips. She hadn't even given birth to
a child.

Hadn't felt real pleasure. Nor pain. Hadn't thought of committing
suicide.

Hadn't grown old. Hadn't any grandchildren. Just like that? It's a
mistake."

By now he could barely hear the man with the glasses:

"Unfortunately there's no mistake. All seventy-five are dead."

The father waved his arm in the air at the sheer stupidity of the man
to assure himself that this was indeed a madman.

Then he cross-examined him: "I see, and when's the funeral?"
"Funeral?" The man stiffened. "There won't be a funeral."
Now he was certain the man with the glasses was incurably insane:
if she had really died, there would be a funeral,
there was always a funeral when someone died,
if there was no funeral, she couldn't really be dead —
it was obvious as . . . the sun reflecting on the wing
of an airplane. "No funeral? What then?
What will there be then?" The man gestured. "Nothing. Nothing at
all."

This time he lost all patience and finally burst out:
"Is that all? Just like that? Somebody dies — just like that?
I should go home now? Is that it? Think about it — she was only
ten!"

But then it occurred to him that he really meant to cross-examine
the man,

he had almost forgotten this, but now that he remembered,
he calmed down. . . . Oh, why should he waste
his time here with this narrow-minded official
who couldn't even count to ten, who had never even seen
the bright sun reflected on the wing
of an airplane . . . but he would show him!

He waved his hand scornfully and left the man with the glasses
behind,
slammed the office door, turned into a giant, and with his Seven
League boots

waded into the ocean. The waves were cold but not too cold,
the clouds were clustered around his head, entering his nostrils
and mouth.

He didn't care, but just took giant steps to the spot where
it was 3 : 25 in the morning, 3 : 25 in the darkness,
while there was daylight everywhere else, and he would soon be
there,

with his fist he would scare off all the stupid airplanes circling
above the spot,
would kneel down in the water, fish her out, hold her in the palm of
his hand to dry out,

and would stand up straight, and on tip-toes would reach out
toward the man with the glasses, a giant before
another giant,
and would shove her under his nose: "Here she is! You see, I was
right,
you see, you stupid idiot, you crazy, straight-faced liar . . . !
Did you think it was possible, just like that, without the Eiffel
Tower?
Without a kiss? Without a child? Without old age? Without a
funeral?
I told you, didn't I, but you wouldn't believe me . . .
I'll reach her soon, very soon, as soon as. . . ."

WHEN

Death doesn't
end life
death just
interrupts it

a bookmark between page 256 and 257
a dental appointment of Friday at two
guests tonight
a movie tomorrow evening
a discussion that didn't end
coffee percolating on the stove
six shirts at the laundry
a holiday in Mexico this winter

this is what things are like
when a period is placed
in the middle of a sentence

ARS POETICA

There are poets who insist
poems can only be written
about *glbvx*
in the style of *iuuu*

I think everything
repeat everything
eve and *ryth* and *ing*
also *yreve* and *gniht*
evyth and *ryng* and *tyrev* too
can be poetry

It is obvious to me
therefore
for every million poems
written down
a billion poems remain
unwritten down

But time to write them all up
is rapidly running down

AFTER THAT

And after that he never went out in the evening to buy the
milk and bread his wife forgot to buy during the day
He never bothered to laugh at the jokes he heard, nor did he bother
to tell his own to make others laugh
Nor did he take pen or pencil in hand to write poems, nor did he
type them out, nor did he feel like writing them at all
He did not go to work, he did not return from work, on Saturdays
he did not sleep in until noon, on Sundays he did not have his
afternoon nap for half an hour
He did not read books, did not play chess, did not cry, did not
swim, did not take photographs, did not enjoy music, did not
go to the movies
For he had no eyes, no hands, no tears, no ears, no legs, no heart,
no brain with which to do these things
They slowly dispersed in every direction farther and farther away
the way a pebble thrown into a pond creates concentric circles

BEFORE ASCENDING

Looking back he still sees
their little offices, where they scribble with important frowns,
their workshops, where they labour mightily on tiny things,
scar-faced gangsters, industriously rattling away at their machine
guns,
soldiers heaving hand-grenades with religious fervor
priests directing the traffic up and down with formidable faces,
heads of families slaving to get what they weren't given,
nudists trying to take pleasure in what no longer gave pleasure,
film producers inventing things and then believing in them,
capitalists piling up their money while they live in misery,
Communists acting as midwives to the future while murdering the
present,
statesmen embracing the people in order to pick their pockets the
better,
assassins dead sure they are redirecting the river of time,
mothers whose eyes are lost in their little babies' eyes,
scientists in need of a lifetime to dissect a single human hair,
poets delighting in their own feverish stutters and expecting others to
do the same,
lovers with eyes gone in each other's gaze . . .
seeing once again their specific spasms were all the same and taken
in such dead earnest,
seeing again their large, cube-shaped buildings composed of small,
cube-shaped rooms,
their cities like anthills, their mechanisms
meticulously put together for crossing land, water, and air,
their toys through which they talk to one another in far-away places,
their lenses through which they look close or far or distortedly,
their thinking machines which they are not able to imitate, only
invent . . .
and he remembers
that a second ago — it now seems a thousand years ago —
he himself was one among them —

how incredible, impossible, improbable —
he promised someone that he will give her the sign —
but he can't remember now to whom
or why —
the whole thing starts to drift apart, pull away,
the way colours on a palette run together,
the way a chunk of meat lacerates in the stomach,
the way a dream vanishes when the alarm-clock goes off,
he smiles and waves his hand,
his waking mind begins to remember,
he rubs his eyes, stretches, turns around,
and looks ahead.

TISSUES

I

The time will come
when there will be no time
only electronic circuits
and I will remember
what the dead have forgotten
what the unborn have planned

II

By the way there's no certainty

III

If this holds true
of the upper reaches of consciousness
it applies down here too
so I barely exist
and whoever does exist is not me
might know vaguely about me
sometimes maybe

IV

A poem is a hole in a prison wall
for a man who is sentenced to die —
the moon is full

V

I trust this transition won't hurt
but if it does I'll give it all my attention

VI

Can't you see I'm tossing and turning
why don't you take me by the shoulders and shake me
my mother my lover my god my self my all in one
a mix-up of names in the logic of this dream
it's important that you wake me up
I might even quarrel with you at the breakfast table
and complain that you think only of eating

VII

Yes of course I was just an orange on a plate
how could I forget?

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THINGS

for Miklós Gábor

My most beautiful poems are never written down
I am afraid to commit them
to a prison of twenty-six letters

In the same way
the most beautiful statues on earth hide
in uncarved rock

The most beautiful paintings
are all crammed together in tiny tubes of paint

The most beautiful people will never be born

The Word is alive in the silence

And the beautiful roses of the universe
bloom on the invisible
stems of space

The most beautiful things are what should be
and what could be
not what happen to be —
the Creator will not let them be
for he is frightened
that as soon as they grow into matter
the greedy Destroyer will grab them for himself

My most beautiful poems are never written down
but this does not worry me
because I know that somewhere they exist
and will never be forgotten —
somewhere someone or something
remembers everything that was
everything that is
and everything that will be
and remembers everything that could ever be
for whatever is possible exists within him
like statues in the rock
or music in silence

ARIAMATA

for Ibi

Leaving behind the skyscrapers of the great cities the tiny train
made its irregular way across the rolling green fields
Then it began to circle around and head back north again as if
scared off by something to the south
For to the south there were thick jungles with vines and tendrils no
man had ever beaten back which the sun had never penetrated
and much like the bottom of the sea where strange creatures
breed
These jungles circled an entire range of mountains and like a thick
impenetrable ring fully protected it
Sometimes these jungles attempted to climb up the mountains but
they always failed for the mountains were simply too steep and
rocky
The distant pinnacles and peaks of these mountains vanished in
clouds which were white and thick and impervious to the eye
No train or plane or wanderer had ever scaled these peaks for they
were hidden away among the clouds
But within the clusters of clouds there were no peaks at all but a
basin which deepened into a great valley
As if ages ago a meteor the size of a moon had made an immense
crater where the peaks of the mountains should be
As if in ancient times there had been a sea on the tops of the
mountains which had run dry
For here surrounded by the rocks and the white clouds lay the
Valley of the Seven Plateaux
Surrounding the immense arena of the valley were steep walls which
were broken into gigantic steps of seven hanging gardens
And there were cities on each of the steps surrounded by green fields
and lovely meadows
Ancient and majestic cities with arabesque walls and buildings and
halls

Above the Valley of the Seven Plateaux the sun always shone and
was surrounded by a corona which blazed with incredible
brilliance
Clouds darkened the mountain ridges but above the Valley the
splendid light radiated incessantly
There were no hothouses because the crops that grew here were
far more abundant and beautiful than those grown by man
In the Valley of the Seven Plateaux there lived a contented people
who had known no war for thousands of years
In the rushing river of history they were an island the waters parted
around and rejoined without realizing an island was there
On maps this valley was marked by a speck of white to imply it was
an unclimbable mountain range
Conquerors from Spain and France and Britain had neither come
here nor fought here nor offered the people trinkets for gold
For millennia they lived in their perfectly preserved palaces of pure
gold and they honoured the dead and the living as ordained by
their god of the sun
On the topmost peak of the seventh plateau rose their temple of
twelve towers made entirely of gold
Here once a year when the day and the night were in balance the
young and beautiful priestess Ariamata chanted
From all seven plateaux the people came in a snaking procession up
to the temple on the seventh plateau
To rest their wondering eyes on the slender virgin clad in silk whose
golden hair flowed from the crown of her head to the very
earth like the rays of the god of the sun
And when she chanted her voice was like the sun rising high over the
fields of the seven plateaux
And when she chanted her voice was like the sun at midday which
brought life out of the rich dark soil
And when she chanted her voice was like the dying light of the sun
setting in the ring of grey clouds
From year to year on the Feast of Balance Ariamata chanted and
the cliffs around echoed her song
The rest of the year she could be found in the fields labouring with
the harvesters

Or with the older women sewing in the shops or in the halls studying
with the youngsters
She followed the whims of her heart which were the only commands
obeyed by her people
Here everyone did what his heart told him to do and marvellously
there was balance in this world
There were always enough to labour in the fields and always enough
to work in the shops and always enough to study in the halls
and yet there was no disorder
And everyone was an expert in everything so if an older died his
work was immediately taken up by someone else
For these people were like some miraculous tissue which is able to
mend itself no matter what
And in the shops and in the fields and in the halls Ariamata chanted
even while she worked
Though her voice did not soar or echo as it did on the Feast of
Balance from the top of the seventh plateau
She chanted to herself and improvised little songs to the sun for
this virgin with the hair of gold was a priestess every
moment of the year
She never cast covetous glances at the young lads nor did anyone feel
he had to cast his eyes down before hers
Then one day a great and unknown bird appeared over the horizon
with stiff silver wings and a monotonous cry
Work came to a halt on the seven plateaux and all eyes were raised
to the sky in wonder
Then the great bird broke out in flames for the sun appeared to
blind it and scorch it to death for daring to enter its sky
The flames blackened its motionless wings and silver body and it
collided with one of the mountains and fell to pieces
Then a little white speck appeared in the sky and like a flower
opened up and moved and grew in size
And it gradually drifted down and landed on a field and out from
under it appeared this man with closely cropped hair whose
body was encased in a strange flexible tubing

Who crawled out from under it and came toward the inquiring
people and lived for a year among them in the Valley of the
Seven Plateaux

This man told them stories of a people who lived beyond the range
of mountains who had white and yellow and black bodies

This man told them stories of cities that leapt into the sky and of
immense mechanisms that moved of their own accord

In those strange and distant lands the same sun reigned over the
heavens and shone and glowed and made the mornings and
the evenings

This man told them stories about great rivers and mountains and
forests and about men who had brought the sun down onto the
surface of the earth

So that even in the dark of night there were little coloured suns to
shine and people could walk the streets as they did during the
day

Of ships of incredible size and of man-made horses that could gallop
across the country

Of magic containers from which words issued forth in city after city
across the whole of this immense land

And of other containers which preserved the past eternally and made
movements come alive again and chants that had once been
sung sound again at will

And after the Feast of Balance the people lost sight of this wanderer
and they searched for him

And they also searched for Ariamata and the people of the seven
plateaux mourned her absence and could not understand
where she had gone

But another priestess appeared from among them to labour in the
fields and in the shops and to chant with her voice like dew

For the two of them had scaled the walls of rock one night and
hidden in the caves by day

They had groped their way through the sea of clouds and then
descended the other side of the mountains

They ate acorns and seeds and fruits in the forest for days on end,
until they finally reached the irregular path of the train

The engine of the machine chugged under them and its blackish
smoke hurt their eyes
Then a ship carried them away and Ariamata was scrutinized closely
by the staring passengers who doubted that she was real
Then one morning they crossed the water to a distant city where
immense skyscrapers lept out of the waves and into the sky
The city had as many people as there were blades of grass in the
fields of the seven plateaux and one single dwelling housed
more people than an entire city
And one part of one floor of one building was all the shelter given
to Ariamata
She had only to chant the mysteries of life in her homeland of sun
and echo and fruitfulness
To sing from morning until evening to sing her many-voiced chants
of adoration in all her range for all to hear
And the man who had claimed her from the heavens poured great
heaps of gold upon her
She made recordings of her chants which were coveted by everyone
on the continent not to mention everywhere on all the other
continents
One of her albums held a brief description of this miraculous virgin
and the land she had come from but the description was so
brief it could only be appreciated by people who lived in a
hurry
Then in a short while the sensation died down and the men around
her tried to revive interest in her chants with fakery
Through artificial means they added new sounds to her voice things
that the sun had not granted her and would never have
granted her
And the sensation grew again and gold poured in once more until
someone in a distant land saw through it
Then the newspapers carried accusations and the name of the
priestess was dragged through the mud
Until no one believed even the truth and from then on the legend of
the priestess from the Valley of the Seven Plateaux was
completely discredited

And she was forgotten and a new star rose in the firmament and was
similarly worshipped
For unlike the people of her distant land with its single sun the
people who lived in the tall buildings worshipped someone
new each year
And Ariamata tarried behind heavy curtains in dark rooms and
rarely went out and seldom saw the god of the sun
Only now and then would she hum to herself and in time she even
forgot until it was too late to honour the sun on the Feast of
Balance
The gold of her hair was died red by women who took care of such
things and sometimes she yearned to stand once more in the
temple of gold
But this was so far in her past and so far away that maybe it had
never happened for who could now remember how to return
and even if someone could recall who would risk the return
And she was the mistress of the man who had discovered her until
the day he tired of her

GHORJONAH

*(The original text of Ariamata's "Psalm to the Sun,"
sung on the Feast of Balance)*

Maha-oh-chile-oh-Maha!

Maha-oh-joni-oh-Maha!

Linghue tikaru, oee —

Linghue sipharu, oee —

Kalitraho: punohi zorgo-meddon . . .

Ohgitraho: mehoe arga-meddon . . .

Maha-lah, nimba-dah, lamuee, sipharu, tikaru, ghingoli, oee —

Heecampi heddon!

Maha-oh-chile-oh-Maha!

Maha-oh-joni-oh-Maha!

Ghoriu takuru-tah —

Ghoriu saphuru-tah —

Maha-lah, nimba-dah, lama-hoo, sapharu, tokaru, gorgoo-lu-tah —

Heecampi heddon!

Ghorjonah! Ghorjonah! Ghorjonah!

Chile-oh, joni-oh, linghue, ghoriu,

Maha-oh-Maha-oh-Maha!

SIGN

for Ferenc Karinthy

I travel
map on my lap
I make my way across it

A beautiful landscape?
Why stare at it?
The important thing
is the click of the camera
there . . . got it

I walk across
the stage of the present
I recite my lines
centuries are watching

My deeds are sentences
in some great book

I love
I suffer
I starve shiver
am happy unhappy
I am not important
the poem is

My life
a document

GROWTH

at first I was a dot but I
walked and walked and walked

then I became a line but I
grew and grew and grew

then I became a curve but I
rose and rose and rose

then I became a spiral but I
circled and circled and circled

then I became a sphere but I
swelled and swelled and swelled

then a giant came upon me
and held me in his hand

what a lovely little dot he said
I do hope you understand

Contemplating Zend

If I were a gallery curator, Robert Zend would pose a problem.

"Where do you want the stuff hang, boss," my assistant would ask, "in with the Mondrians, maybe?"

"No, I don't think so — the sense of line is similar, but there's more sense of humour in Zend — so try wedging them between the Miros and the Klees, and better set up an exhibit of Saul Steinberg in the foyer as a teaser."

If I were a symphony manager, the problem would be similar.

"Out of ze question," Maestro von Zuyderhoffer would declare. "I conduct no Zend before Bruckner, not even mit Webern to raise curtains."

"But, maestro, Zend takes the cosmos for a plaything, as does Bruckner, and wrings out of it an epigram, like Webern. However, I suppose we could try him on a chamber concert with early Hindemith, maybe . . ."

"Ja, besser."

"... and then, perhaps, Kurt Weill . . ."

"Viel besser!"

"... and finish off with Satie."

"Nein, kein Satie. Zat vun is not knowing secondary dominants, und ze vork of Zend is full of modulation."

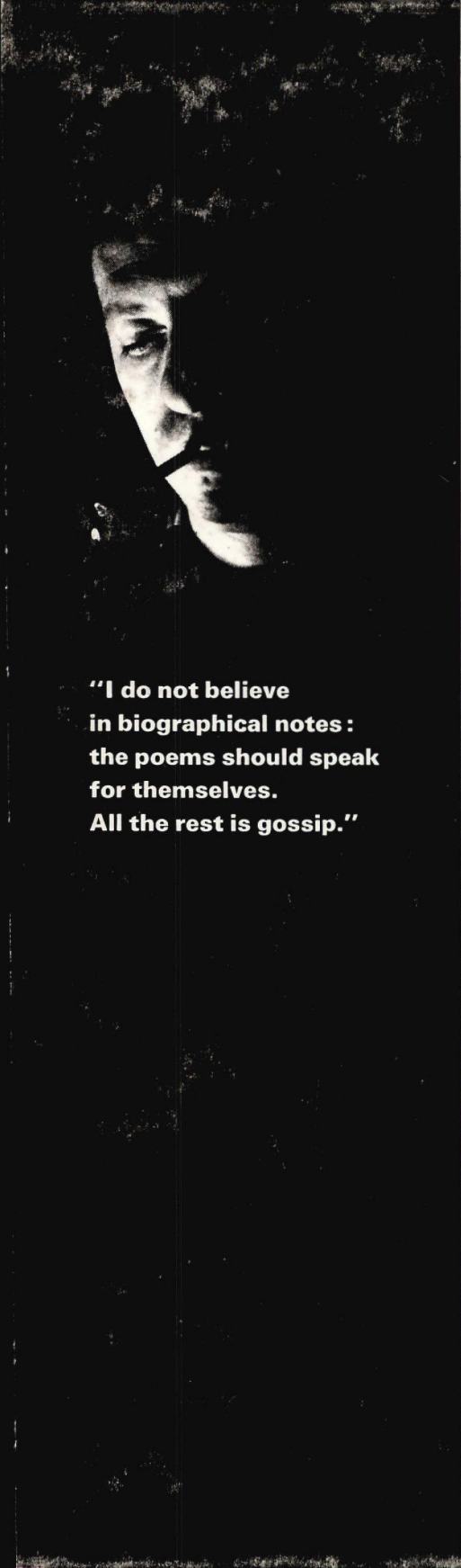
Ah, well.

But if I were a book publisher, no such problem would exist.

Robert Zend could stand alone — his cynically witty, abrasively hedonistic, hesitantly compassionate, furtively God-seeking poems could mingle with each other, find their own program-order, and settle among themselves the question of what goes where and how much wall-space will be needed.

Gee, what an easy life book publishers must have!

GLENN GOULD
July 1972



**"I do not believe
in biographical notes :
the poems should speak
for themselves.
All the rest is gossip."**

Robert Zend was born in Budapest where he worked as a film man and as a freelance journalist and translator. He took his B.A. from the Peter Pazmany Science University in 1953. He left in 1956 to come to Toronto ("I lost everything except my accent. 'Diaper' was the first English word I learned.") In 1958 he joined the C.B.C. as a film librarian and then editor. In 1969 he received his M.A. from the University of Toronto, a grant from the Canadian Film Development Corporation to produce a film, and a scholarship to study in Italy from the Italian Government. Although he has published many articles in Hungary and in Canada, *From Zero to One* is his first book of poems in any language. Presently he is radio producer for C.B.C. FM Radio.

The translator-adaptor, John Robert Colombo, is the Managing Editor of *The Tamarack Review* and the author of *Abacadabra* and *The Great Wall of China*.

Dustjacket drawing:
MARCEL MARCEAU