

# **THE AGE OF BRIGGS & STRATTON**



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**(HAMMERTOWN BOOK 2)**

**PETER CULLEY**

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*for Daphne*



# DOWSING FOR DUMMIES

*In memoriam*

*Robert Creeley*

‘ . . . a tall, lank, uncouth looking person,  
long hair hanging over his face,  
a queue down his back tied with an eel skin . . . ’

(Albert Gallatin on Andrew Jackson)



## I. MARSHALL, NC

Just enough iron  
in my forehead

to divert  
from the middle distance

the moth  
in its path,

not enough  
to avoid  
by moonlight

the back porch's  
sudden double step

a beavertail slap  
resounding, lodged

in the elbow  
an unreachable itch  
rather than pain  
per se —

(the intimate  
two-handed  
grip of the stranger  
steading herself  
on me  
*the aisle man*)

at the depot  
the Sheriff  
dispenses silence

with onions, a mustard-  
coloured raffle ticket

folded to a point  
of de facto forfeiture

as outside the window  
the French Broad River

recedes in mercury loops  
unnavigably,  
in either direction.

## II.

In the two minutes  
of pale green dime-sized

light left to us  
by the lightning bugs'

impact against the windshield,  
let us open the first volume

of our Blue Pelican  
*Animals Without Backbones*

to the illustration  
of animal light

which is a one and a half inch  
square sepiatone gravure

with the words  
*animal light* lit

by a glow-worm's  
animal light.

### III. ALL THE DOPES HE COULD DRINK

(SODOM LAUREL ALBUM)

sip apple juice and icemelt  
and icemelt and ice-  
melt and icemelt and icemelt

sweet sweet sweet sweet tea  
sweet sweet sweet sweet sweet sweet tea  
sweet sweet sweet sweet tea

peach Nehi over the Laurel falls, Cheerwine,  
the unnamed second best orange pop  
ever after Narvik Fanta

a tangerine kick  
through undiagnosed veins  
with black floaters

spelling your name  
*'Bonjour Tristesse'*  
when Jean Seberg's narration

moved from compromised  
monochrome  
present to a blue 'scope past

impressive even  
on pan'n'scan VHS  
for its unblinking

existentialist noontday,  
no thirst therefore  
no beverages till cocktails

at the casino, no picnics  
not even the Sirkean  
consolation of objects

just the stairs to the beach  
a foreground agreement,  
a narrow recession,

an unplugged record player  
that had earlier spun  
Georges Auric's 1958 pre-Shankar

version of teenage ambient  
the kind someone might remember  
in a narration

who'd suppressed  
(as I this Yoo-hoo coloured river)  
everything else.

#### IV. RECORDS ARE LIKE LIFE

The ageing shuffle function's  
approximation of taste  
gave us six downers in a row

then bounced back  
with the cracker-barrel rictus  
of happy hardcore.

Sadly never so 'wasted'  
that it ever made sense to me  
just as in 1978 you could slip 'new wave'

records on when everyone was drunk —  
*Homicide* by 999, say, or *The Stranglers (Peaches)*,  
but . . . The shuffle function was

letting anyone else do it  
which was never.  
The shuffle function

of the guidance counsellor's  
high-freckled 'rap'  
about the 'sidjuation'

tight Jimmy Olsen curls  
into an Archie crosshatch fade  
a bifocal lowering sans specs

comes to rest  
at the bridge of your nose, says  
down to business —

and so impressive  
the audio-visual gestetner  
ink-smelling gestalt

(until perhaps a half-dozen  
years ago I would still roam the halls  
in sleep, stealing books

in an admixture of revulsion  
that when I awoke) . . .  
that lacking even a robot's

will to charm the odds  
or even an 8-track or a Lazy Susan  
I consumed the script.

## V. DOUBLE DEADTIME BUMMER BLUES

(JUDEE SILL)

Alive to the moment  
but you sleep a lot,

‘misspent’ as in  
Stevenson describing

an unexpected skill  
at pool or cards —though

an incremental embrace  
of criminality inevitable

given just how strict, &c.  
Dimes for the parking meter

in bowls at the Bank of  
Montreal downtown (now

*gone*, the Harewood branch  
*gone*) those little dusty mints

as we left the taverna  
just as everyone’s back was turned;

coffee with Coffeemate  
at the Caledonia Clinic —

brighter now, flooded everywhere  
with glare it would be harder

to disappear into that soft-fringed  
theology, those Townsite

alleys empty at all hours  
of everything but

*Il Quatro Stagioni*  
*The Sickness Unto Death*

## VI. ROADRUNNER

(‘I’M IN LOVE WITH MOONLIGHT,  
128 WHEN IT’S DARK OUTSIDE’)

Though my infantilised cat  
confirms my existence  
the cars don’t see me —

Ganesha’s prints  
were all over the trunk, giant

pants in black  
with a velcroed  
right-turn indicator

over which  
a cuff neatly folded,  
red compact, splashed,

lost, speeding, between Boundary  
& Bowen, the other leg muddy,  
raggedy, platforms

worn at an angle of 35 degrees  
from walking in circles —  
just right for ditch baloney,

though between here and  
the ‘quarter mile’  
of the old Northfield industrial park

(mid-sixties, still an implied  
roundedness in the signage, moderne  
so far as it recalls *Rockford*,

*Barnaby Jones &c.*) the  
fairgrounds, concrete  
terraces overlooking

the oval track, everywhere  
the cars had been before me  
writing through the ivy.

## VII. ROADS TO FREEDOM

In a basement  
presently bereft of life

avocado  
beer fridge contains single

serving Pop Shoppe  
Tom Collins mix bottle

to which the cap  
bent by the opener

is reattached  
precariously and

symbolically  
panelling well you know

old tube TV  
21 inch black and

white and best of  
all an RCA in

jack to which I  
could run a chord from

the portable  
suitcase mono that was

my parent's thus  
adding a channel of deep

mahogany  
courtesy the TV's

mighty twin four  
inch cones resonating

through layers of made-  
in-Canada-goddam

it-Verathane  
and varnished returned now

to duty as  
the downstairs TV which

I alone watched  
things in black and white old

movies &c.  
on this warm night having

drained the mix which  
when held long enough gave

a hint of fizz —  
good & cold certainly!

I returned to the  
weekday summer showing of

the early 70's  
serialisation

of Sartre's *Roads*  
to *Freedom* done by

the BBC  
in that particular

house style that  
English actors use

portraying  
the French as in that great

Maigret series  
with Michael Gambon

of which nothing  
outside a lot of shouted

conversations  
I remember nothing

except for that  
on this night the action

suddenly shrank  
to the size of a postcard

then a stamp  
then a pearl on which you

could still make out  
the tiny figure of a

woman in a  
trench coat striding across

a tiny room  
then the image brightened

to the head  
of a pin retinal

trace only now  
and then from the back of

the TV an  
acid plume of black smoke

(*commitment*  
they were talking about)

poured clinging  
through the vent upstairs yanked

the plug blue blue  
spark a copper smell curled

but the chancy  
wiring and fridge were saved.

## VIII. FLOW, LAURA NIAGARA

*. . . when I was a Freeport  
and you were the main drag . . .*

*. . . I've got a lot of patience, baby  
that's a lot of patience to lose . . .*

(LAURA NYRO)

*. . . affectionate  
machine-tickling aphid . . .*

(DARWIN)

globalisation's  
over-crayoned blue sky flakes

but the duck's left blank,  
like Depot Harbour, Ontario

getting rubbed off  
the grid was no biblical

judgement, dig —  
it looked like a nice place!

but Carthage now  
looks better than this place

fifty years on —  
alder-poked, broom-worried,

a ghost town  
after the ghost had gone —

a desertedness  
out of large-print SF —

writhing and plinking  
in the furzy foundation

the dreaded  
*ukelelekonig*

laced its tongue  
through a web

of taut nylon but  
we couldn't make it out

or if it was even  
talking at all —

auctioned out  
from under your feet

like the family  
Astrakhan, and if

a trestle is the only  
thing holding it back

then admit the jungle  
the empire of the ants

could we not just  
get it over with?

Or must we choke forever  
on periphery's piney sap?

**IX. BRACTON: DE LEGIBUS ET  
CONSUEUDINIBUS ANGLIAE**

(1250)

*For if they settle  
in my tree  
they are no more mine —*

*before I shut them  
into a hive —  
than are the birds*

*who make their nest there,  
and therefore  
if another hives them*

*he will be their owner.  
A swarm that flies  
out of my hive*

*is taken to be mine  
so long as it remains  
in my sight*

*and pursuit is not impossible,  
otherwise it becomes  
the property of the taker.*

Just but one bee  
on the paler  
other kind of

sweet-pea, orange  
chevron very  
circa '83, &

you'd think the boys

at Last Call Towing  
would be glad to

see their girlfriends  
(Wednesday PM  
half-cloudy

scented August)  
but they won't climb  
down or let go

their pneumatic  
bolt-tighteners  
long enough

and won't discuss  
who said what to  
who last weekend

on innertubes  
that flattered them  
but made us look

like our dads, tits  
up on the couch  
and these maroon

uniforms itch  
more and more as  
threadbare summer

wears out its buzz  
and welcome mat  
and baseball hat.

## X. LAST OF THE MOHICANS

*Good country this  
for lazy fellows  
(wrote Wilson from*

*Kentucky); they plant  
corn, turn their  
pigs into the*

*woods and in  
the autumn feed upon  
corn and pork.*

*They lounge about  
the rest of the year.  
But sometime between*

*then and now,  
despite flip books,  
Jack Spicer bootlegs,*

*Miltown, Motown, Milton  
the race of tavern  
loafers, customs-house flaneurs*

*wall holder-uppers  
& Virginia eye-gougers  
died out, wagons*

*full of keeners,  
enthusiasts, stereoptical  
estimators & paint-chip*

*matchers darkened  
the passes, planting apples  
for roughage not cider.*

## XI. POPULAR CHARACTERISTICS

(1800) (HENRY ADAMS)

*That free-born  
Rhode Islanders ought  
never to submit*

*to be priest-ridden,  
nor to pay for  
the privilege*

*of travelling  
on the highway.*  
Better indeed stranded

up to our  
rusticated Yankee necks  
in yellow shit

than travel  
to Providence  
under such pretenses;

wearing a horse collar,  
a T-shirt reading  
'Citizen X' —

better a propellered beanie,  
a New Year's diaper,  
a Brownie uniform —

and if the bones  
of any shiny Hussar,  
uncowed by *Miranda v. Arizona*

or the fourth amendment  
or the by-God  
Yosemite Sam mudflaps

hanging from my ears  
attempt to stroll unbidden  
into my library,

garage or sugar shack  
they will end as struts  
in the drug tunnel

that gently winds  
between Lasqueti Island  
and Narraganset Bay:—

## XII. MAMA ROUX

At the corner store  
the Protestant Santeria  
of the lottery logos —

fake foxing  
against a gold rush font,  
the leprechaun's derby

overflows —  
a yellow cord  
marks off the liquor store

after eleven,  
outside (courtesy of  
the smoke from Burns Bog)

the moon trails  
a gambler's beard,  
a kettle of coins

rattles inside the aqua  
tunnel under highway one,  
illuminates the figure eight

I inscribed on a whim  
on the slope outside  
the Cranberry Firehall —

or it could be  
the Pimpjuice sticker  
the Pepsico rep

slapped near the entrance  
or the icecube with wings  
and a Grecian profile

loyal to the old regime  
where the word 'cold'  
came wreathed in beads of sweat

and every word  
unashamedly itself,  
like those farmers

in Emerson  
who planted  
themselves last

pulling the earth  
over themselves  
like an old quilt.

### XIII.

*Talk about me if you please  
but I must be Hercules . . .*

(ALLEN TOUSSAINT)

September 'tox  
and the 'sub-conscious'  
back with pearly teeth,  
party dreams as  
subtle as *Marnie*  
without the saving grace  
of a young Bruce Dern,  
otherwise a pipeload  
of nasty eighties  
bowl-scrapings  
filtered through a screen  
of Screen, the fear  
is not of crystal meth  
but access  
to wakefulness  
via household products  
otherwise divvied  
up among fighter crews,  
prison guards, janitors  
and the federales  
of Sumas  
patrolling beet fields  
for sugar thieves.

## XIV. MOUNTAIN MUSIC

(RILEY PUCKETT)

The fiddle, the yodel, the harmonica & the fife,  
The drumskin, the flintlock, pack animal & knife,  
The zither, the whistle and autoharp give life —  
A great eye fluttering open in the deep forested host  
Driving back Covenant, Cherokee, revenue's ghost.

The 78, the 33 & the 45 spin like  
The rhododendron holler on its axis, to survive  
Means breathing the dissonance like so much pollen, not to  
fit  
The rosin to the bridge or the finger to the mercury mind  
Is to awake in an ancestor's grip, so clammy and unkind.

The singing dead glide through the layers as if tunnelling to  
France,  
Their keening like the insect wail of an old thermos; to  
dance  
Like Bobby did, with one hand waving, shark-like above the  
shit-  
Strewn beach of history — as they say 'free' — to  
unencumbered crawl  
Beneath barbed wire, past parish dogs & round the bloody  
wall.

## XV. MOUNTAIN MUSIC

*Thus a jug  
appeared on stage  
at their various*

*performances  
but purely  
for effect.*

Lean'n'Pernod  
after your mother's funeral,  
(Adventist?) later kitefights

at Piper's Lagoon —  
luckily the barnacles  
were their own antidote,

though not  
to the ugly vintages of  
the beerstrike summer,

picking little  
Gregory Pecks  
out of my belly

for months afterward,  
scattered now  
(those of us permitted to live!)

from the Palatinate of Prince Rupert  
to the free city  
of Holberg —

& as at the end of side two, today —  
cresting the hill at Dogland,  
Harewood below

a dusty *deshabillé* backdrop  
out of Sigmund Romberg  
in the last actinic orange

August sunrise  
of the Trudeau administration —  
none of our concern.

**XVI. FRAGMENT OF LETTER, FEMALE HANDWRITING,  
FOUND WALKING BACK FROM THE CORNER STORE,  
OCT. 2, 2005**

*can one  
like to do  
how we  
did not  
as friends*

(reverse)

*my attitude  
going for  
be more  
good as  
asked me*

The dewy or was it shimmer  
rising off the stand of wild  
mint under the Catstream bridge,

sparse sleepy Toytown traffic  
waddling up up the hill  
past the firestation, the diner

where you worked,  
unmatched vivacity in  
a city of incandescent

waitresses, these gabled houses, through  
brown fences a tobacco corona  
ringed round stucco under a

jutting pipe, were insufficient,  
weasel words, false memories —  
backed into a corner

I emptied the dandelion wine  
discreetly onto the ground,  
less empathetic than the rock

I'd stumbled over,  
reconstructing leaks  
from instant coffee in the margins,

and a theory of everything  
that didn't account  
for walking downhill,

the age of Laing gave way to  
the age of Foucault  
while we slept, the flapping

muslin curtains and fairy lights  
all I remember of the heatwave,  
& if on that night I'd drowned

your sleek otter dive  
would have been my unearned  
Polaroid epitaph.

## XVII. A LETTER FROM HAMMERTOWN TO A PAIR OF UNSPECIFIED BROOKLYN POSTAL DISTRICTS

Do you have  
The Magic Band

audience tape, LA Troubadour,  
Boxing Day '76,

(audio quality:  
better than the Dead Sea scrolls,

not quite as good  
as one of those Northern Soul

anthologies taken  
from singles

traded for leapers  
in the ozone-swept alleys

of Cleethorpes?)  
The punters energized,

better fed than usual,  
at least the day before —

those from the area  
and those like Mr. Van Vliet

swept in on the *franzklines*  
and Santa Anas —

it takes a day for the stuffing  
and unfamiliar liqueurs

to clear but everyone  
hits the ground running —

a mellotron is introduced  
the clarinet is busted out

& the old songs wriggle  
& roll like the Ford-era traffic outside

recreating the accidents  
of their conception —

*The Blimp* in this context  
greeted like *Katmandu*

or *Kashmir*, old pros  
with a hint of indifference

givin' it to the people  
like the last present

hidden forgotten behind  
the tree, though at points

the rust flakes off  
to dust mite central

blowing back yo-yos  
tumbleweeds, poppies, coyotes.

## XVIII. ACADIAN DRIFTWOOD

*There is no use  
crying about it,  
Cousin America  
has run off with  
a Presbyterian  
parson, and that  
is the end of it.*

(HORACE WALPOLE)

The beaver, the rampike, the musket, the cod,  
The fortress of pine & the hovel of sod,  
Orcadian whalemens possessed by a God  
Merciless, English, a bit of a sod.

The nickel, the loonie, the quarter, the toonie,  
McDonald, Trudeau, Pearson, Mulroney,  
Only Diefenbaker made us swoon, we  
Liked his rhetoric on the noon TV.

Poetry arrived in the year of '65,  
A taterdemalion just barely alive,  
He went out to Horseshoe Bay on a drive  
And left us a goal for which we should strive.

## XIX. A LETTER FROM HAMMERTOWN TO FORT TRYON

My exoskelton  
protects my tongue

but leaves my  
hindquarters exposed,

if only to the weather:  
my country,

created by the dry stroke  
of a Whitehall pen

for the benefit of haberdashers  
and fishmongers

saw the draft resisters  
as a rich source

of mental pelts  
for acid testing

and the carbonation  
of Lake Erie,

Vancouver was the  
first city

to banish Lenny Bruce  
ship back the Sikhs &c.

& skim the foam  
from the cappuccino triangle

so of course  
we're funny — it's what

we have  
instead of checks and balances, what

allows us  
to coin in the shit

with a smile  
in a dome

of bearish lavender  
while pivoting

our ju-jitsu  
ever inward.

## XX. THE FOURTH WAR

Oh it's all great fun  
in the corn maze  
until someone gets lost —

earth art,  
crop circles without  
the laughs, digging

around in Drumheller  
for Beefheart's  
'dinosaur cold' —

inside the Holy Mountain  
midsummer light  
etches your profile

onto plywood as you sleep.  
The assumption is that  
the big important shapes, say

where shotgun  
overlaps with two-stroke  
to define rural metrosexuality —

Richard Boone in  
*Have Gun Will Travel*  
on a pimped out

Triumph on the Parkway,  
raw from the abrasions  
of his English Leather soap label,

an angled mustache  
that still reads 'ex-officer'  
from Victoria north to Campbell River,

whose neoprene longjohns  
enable him to tough it out  
until November,

or where rising fuel costs  
temporarily trump  
the fear of creosote & coalsmoke

to re-enable the choking fogs  
that had disappeared  
with the industrial base —

that all of this is safely tracked  
from space, indeed  
to be lost is ultimately

economic, those people  
under the rubble assumed  
their cell phones

would save them, an island  
held in place  
with mirrors, they

can hear you, they  
can see you, they  
just can't help you.

## XXI. A LETTER FROM HAMMERTOWN TO THE BOTTOM OF THE EAST RIVER

Well fuck you  
Albert Ayler,  
it is *so* about me —

if I could  
leap the pommelhorse  
of self I wouldn't

have failed gym,  
let alone the real horses  
I pemmicaned on field trips,

the chicken pavilions,  
veal pens, the eels  
I stashed without appetite, Creeley

reminds us  
that all heat is derived  
from some animal,

that deliberate misreading  
ends in disappointment,  
like Burgess Meredith

as Borges —  
libraries are for losers,  
no more than a bus passenger

controls the route  
can we be said  
to skate between the periods &

you & Shepp  
& all the armies of death metaldom  
could no more wake Enitharmon

than a brass clock  
in an aluminum pail  
struck by lightning.

## XXII. A SPORTSMAN'S NOTEBOOK

Walking down Minetown  
I surprised the covey of quail  
you kindly braked for last spring —

grown some since! it starts  
as a scare almost — boom — low low note  
somewhere inside the startled flapping

a blossom in the thorax  
a mirror-ball flash of upturned leaves,  
no time for even a decent recount,

less than ten, more than four  
but quail for sure, that short take-off leap  
and then low bottle neck cormorant

underwater plunge about a foot up  
from the tangled thirty degree slope then gone  
but however fast it's the sonic boom

that arrives just after you do,  
and anyone can learn to do that —  
like that Aussie woman on the newschannel

you can dehumidify  
the room until it matches  
your preferred level of discourse —

the earnest western tweet  
swept beneath lacquered feedback  
with a smooth adjustment of the wrist,

the windows thrown open  
onto a clean clear drink of water  
forever and ever and ever.

## XXIII. CAPTAIN HOOK

... *by hook*  
or *by crook* ...

John Cale's  
big career move circa mid-80's:

a majestic parade-float of  
Procol Harum-ized

punk, but recorded live  
real brittle-like —

a metallic board mix  
chunky metal cassette mix

irritating  
irritating

the 'loudness' button  
remember that

it was for this  
not the cushion

of even that *heimlich* distortion  
re: Thomas's Pistols, Spector's Ramones

or even Motorhead —  
if your ear accepts it

as other than assault  
at any volume

irritation is just  
ideological,

don't tell me  
you can fit

the Stray Gators  
into your helmet

and keep on riding! —  
so in the midst of this

12 minutes of mock-epic opening  
side 3 of the IMAX Thunderdome w/

Bowery ambience  
subbing for the Edmonton Symphony

and Cale has come in character  
Dick Burton at the beginning of iguana

with a miner's helmet  
and a fistful of Arthur Janov

overmatched it proved  
against the punks in their red brigade pyjamas

for who remembers Bobby Sands  
& Frederick Forsyth paperbacks

& Walken  
in the snow:

the mercenary chic  
is what stuck.

**SIX PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
ADAM HARRISON**

*Written as catalogue text for 'Examples of Photography,'  
CSA Space Gallery, May 2006.*

## I. COVERED WINDOW

The skin of it puckers  
and pools in lenses  
bleached at the knots

a kind of drapery I guess  
though oxidised  
it might be the sun

but not real broke  
not theatrical sugar broke  
like that bottle trick

from TV, trinkle tinkle  
of loops recorded  
by guys long dead —

late for work  
heads wrapped  
in vinegar paper,

copping some attitude  
with the bitches  
in the mailroom, givin' it

the old watercooler  
one-two — 'I done  
it for the *in-surance*' —

Well wave goodbye  
to the glove  
factory, girls;

fifty arches  
of brick-cladded  
rustbelt gothic

but only  
the dollar store  
in focus, trade goods lit

so sharp thru the fog  
you could read  
the shampoo instructions

from a passing bus  
and still huff  
on a candle bag,

deserted dairylands hiss  
warm Coke rings of  
green styrofoam here

like everywhere else,  
arboreal shrinkage hiss  
farmhouses curled

on wet glass,  
north of pine nuts the  
little trees eventually

damage the little  
touches we like;  
the windows replaced

with particle board as  
if mushroom carpets could  
think mushroom thoughts.

Trade goods  
rinse and repeat  
and repeat.

You see, I want  
to be part of it  
but I want to

make fun of it too —  
concealing profits or  
making a bed of them,

stuffing a turkey with it  
or smashing it with a brick —  
whose answerable needs met?

## II. LEAVES

Non-seasonal growth,  
including the ludic  
branches that clutch  
the canopy's light breeze —  
    no beach so fierce!

Or on top  
of the cobblestones  
the *picture*  
of a beach, after  
naming the streets  
for the days of the week  
we did trees, birds  
Manitoba college towns  
and then ran out so  
started right in  
on the spawn of  
the local bauxite  
aristocracy, so it's  
possible to awake  
with a familiar name  
pressed into your cheek —  
    something to fool  
the *eloi* archaeologists!  
presuming they can cut  
through the giant hedge  
of modified alder  
that threatens Edwardian  
apocalypse to these  
pretty but blandly  
peopled avenues.

### III. WASHING MACHINE

The weather  
*phones it in*

spring's a little  
*indicating* this year —

a barrel of apples  
without a retake, but

anywhere upstage  
past act three is

a forest of elbows,  
Sen-Sen breath

with little bites  
attached: —

engorged  
like the lines of force

in a woodcut windmill  
watch the washing machine face

spin out of character:  
the miracle of half-price Tuesday

carved out of  
the larger miracle of laundry

through condensated  
gaps rubbed

brown pigeons  
with white chevrons

drop radar tinsel  
on armloads of cashmere,

*Reader's Digests*  
limp as kid leather

skitter wounded-bird  
style dropped with intent

on enameled trays for  
generic pop, ashtrays

and exits  
spotwelded, but

oh for the billows  
and billows of hot steam

to hide the  
anthropomorphic array,

the green stalkers  
in the park,

the variously angry  
smug, gleeful,

anxious, stoic  
and startled faces

of the babies, the leaves  
and the cars.

#### IV. CONDENSATION ON MIRROR

Kavanagh's *bright*  
*shillings of March*  
well spent for *aince*:

conker string,  
a brand-new set of clackers,  
a towel that becomes

a sleeping cat then disappears,  
a camera that puts the silver  
*back* into the lake, all those

pets and old uncles released  
from whispering branches  
and skins of chrome

to fistfuls of earth  
and muscular sepia —  
never to be recorded otherwise,

like the mound people,  
sieved once through Toynbee's catbox  
but never written down,

not even in steam  
not even to spend a penny,  
dredged up from a Murphy bed

into the coalsmoke  
and cigarette smoke  
and cabbage steam.

## V. RAGS

Wilderness for welfare,  
Athenians all in a little rank  
we slipped out the back way

just glad to be of use, really  
wiping up the unthinkable  
with the untouchable —

a parachute of J-cloths,  
linen liberated  
for midsummer sneezes —

otherwise they'd be diving  
under their desks! reaching  
around for the comical

golden shred, the  
big booty polish.  
Cooking up Woolite

with Worcestershire  
in hammocks of lint  
the last stage in the life

of an honoured object,  
soaked with sap and  
strained through particle board

as the world of print  
sulphurously beckons;  
each thing eventually the receipt

of itself, each hanky  
bearing a needlepoint letter  
more easily felt than seen.

## VI. CHINESE LANTERNS

In a poplar mist  
a polar opposite

trumps intelligent design  
through sheer forfeiture

*anecdotally*  
like that guy in Mann's

*Faustus* —  
the shells must

be saying something!  
all those curlicued glyphs

and painted  
bells!

let alone these  
Boundary Bay sandcoilers

we're erasing  
underfoot *get*

*the luminol*  
*later, you're shedding*

*Linear B here*  
a whiff

of red clay  
a transparency

assumed then lost,  
our faces

scanned as Cobbett would  
scan a prospect from his mule,

*(hay rots in the field —  
thanks all night euchre/*

*Methodism,  
it hardly matters)*

and then a blunt assesment  
bluntly deliver.

For you to touch the remote control  
you have to touch

yourself first, but its  
hardly a matter

of first causes,  
tiny traces left are

not in themselves  
an offense, and if

the endless and softening  
imprint of appearance

avails thee not  
what of it?

The ghosts  
are knickers

in the trees,  
sky pink

as an innocent  
Christian ham . . .

# HOMAGE TO DAVID HOLZMAN

*In Jim McBride's 1967 fake documentary DAVID HOLZMAN'S DIARY there is a scene where Holzman (L.M. Kit Carson) mounts his 16mm camera in front of his television sometime before the evening news, firing off one frame every time the shot changed until sign-off. On film this lasts for a second or two but slowed down on VHS it became a clickable photo album of mid-60s TV. These timed readings are offered in that spirit.*

**24.4.06     1215 – 1222 HRS**

In black and white a man  
looks at a family photo, wooden  
church against a tearful

North Dakota sky, a slightly  
dwarfish granite  
Helmcken addressing

from a cozy gothic  
portico an empty corner  
of our dozing capital

while the insistent  
Liona Boydlike strums  
Vivaldi for Pursesnatchers.

Sobbing with emotion  
through the *Zapp* setting  
of a friendly vocoder

a man in long extensions  
addresses a young woman  
in denim shorts

who sits on a sportscar  
hood — everything is  
murky bluegrey monochrome

except their yellow  
shirts and the red  
of the car, the hems & glottal

hesitations of the  
simultaneous translator  
are likewise the sound of thought,

something a vocoder  
might seek to blur  
much as Mike Harris —

nostalgically glimpsed  
lying his ass off  
at the Ipperwash inquiry — might,

with the kind of quasi-medicated  
brutality that can only be  
acquired in a boyhood

marinated in cheap schoolyard  
betrayal, seek  
to blur adult emotion with

the sound of newspapers  
flopping against a wet deck.  
You're the kind of

girl that can see beyond  
my poultry but still  
fit into my world, not

the kind of a person that  
would bring \_\_\_\_\_  
to an anger-management

potluck in a community  
already seething  
with \_\_\_\_\_.

'I'm a nervous wreck this  
salad spinner is making  
me a nervous wreck.'

**25.04.06      1128 – 1141 HRS**

A prematurely middle-aged  
boy actor, seated, is addressed  
by a standing Barbara Stanwyck  
whose hands brush the marbled lintel  
of a fireplace lit to look like a slab  
of obsidian but he seems terrified  
beyond the demands of the scene  
standing up and falling into  
her arms as if obeying an offstage  
slap he twists in her embrace  
away from the camera  
'Oh Keith!' and across her face  
a discomfort registers that is as  
cold and clean as Brooklyn tapwater,  
a continental squaredance,  
an old school shudder of purest modernity  
as horizontal as the ultra-brimmed hat  
of the athletically prim  
police spokeswoman gold  
OPP shield on it as big as the  
sunny side of a duck egg on  
a bed of distressed spinach,  
the voice of the reconstruction  
sounded like a morning's  
work for one actor  
doing 'voices' without enthusiasm,  
for not enough money in  
a Burnaby closet wrapped in felt  
while the girl from Wayne's World  
who has (Eddie Cantor-like) been  
transported to Roman times  
addresses the senate —  
and you're the senate.

**26.04.06      1133 – 1147 HRS**

From its nest  
on a plate of ruffles

the head of Greer Garson  
acidly advises Joan Crawford

*'we're all that kind  
of woman, getting tired*

*of things we're used to —'*  
while a dog lamp with a bobbed fringe

throws a grey-scale corona  
onto the omnipresent

MGM roaring glowing fire &  
then it gets good because

the dolly toward Garson  
goes into the news crawl's

comprehension-free swoop  
and comes out moving

toward an empty wingchair and  
another fireplace before

coming to rest on a copy  
of Michener's coffee-table *USA*

resting on a coffee-table.  
Let me put a dime

on the tone arm of  
that for you, dad — less

time in the men's room  
and more time fishing, less

time squeezing the clock and  
more time punching the cilantro —

the 'matrix drip'  
means that the information

wants to step forward  
in a way that suggests the

carefree tinkle of glass beads,  
just as the ascending blue

bar pulse Data was 'looking'  
at yesterday likewise suggests both

'time running out'  
'breaking news',

a steady trickle of dye  
into the watertable,

a lawsuit  
reaching back from

Ektachrome gullies  
to swamp the future —

colour colonizes  
this riot footage

with nosegays of rifle fire  
& wreaths of red wire.

**27.04.06      1031 – 1055 HRS**

From out of the orchestra  
thirty-two years ahead of schedule  
the Buddy Miles rat-a-tat-tat  
as white letters shatter & drop  
means full-on WB rococo is in effect —  
Eddie G's the *good* guy,  
Bogie in the middle of  
his pre-*Falcon* 'cheap thug' slump  
cracking wise halfassedly  
thru the expository  
mini-doc on how the mob adds  
a cent to the cost of every asparagus  
while peaches rot on  
the sidings, meanwhile  
Robinson stares at his immense  
highball tumbler — thick glass, real  
ice in it carved to look  
like grapefruit segments —  
pineapple juice with a  
dash of grenadine lights like  
a sidecar — rim of gold about an  
inch wide & then just *drops*  
the guy from a seating  
position with a shinkick &  
some sort of prewar ju-jitsu  
twister to the midsection but  
Joan Blondell could care less —  
it's not something Little Rico  
would have done!  
Throwing a guy through  
a glass door and joking  
about it for the audience's  
benefit a sign of lateness at Warner's  
as sure as Cavafy panpipes  
or the smirking gods of *CSI*  
playing through our pain —  
write the word BAM

in Sharpie & then wipe  
it with a damp cloth fingering  
the opulent tassle the frappé  
tassle the Limoges tassle,  
forced to spend every holiday  
testing games for our dad  
the game inventor presented here  
in paradiso flashback  
as a vaguely Sendakian bear  
in a tweed suit  
but they should have used more sun  
or water-skis or something  
because those varnished  
little gamepieces rattling  
and the silver balls rolling  
over the kabbalistic carvings  
bum me in a very  
non-Ouija way.

29.04.06      0014 – 0031 HRS

Acid green nascar verges  
lit from above in patches  
the colour of lemon squash  
consumed on the lip of a council estate  
in the waning autumn of '68 —  
coalsmoked terraces typewriter gray  
granite in serried planner's ranks  
inside played Jim Reeves, brown milky tay  
or Hank the one with the guitar leaning  
on a stool, Mario Lanza 'The Student Prince'  
& Jimmy Shand or Andy Stewart  
but never both, strict-time 45s  
with instructions, bedrooms from which  
Eddie Cochran had never been exiled —  
piece & jam & the penetrative  
warmth of the heater  
so much more hell-like than crackling cedar  
and those little devilled ham devils  
dancing in the fake flames don't hurt  
for the duration of a sixpence  
and two sides of a single.

**02.05.06      1211 – 1223 HRS**

Ugly edit detergent waves through your trunk  
Loop current through your arm and out your back  
Loop current from the bottom of a well  
Teddy's voice from the bottom of a well  
Theo's beats from under the floorboards  
*'the love I lost'*  
but something about seeing  
a picnic table all exposed on  
its back like that made me look away,  
and the screen filled with blue sky  
just as the golf channel lost the ball,  
then we watched it clear the Playmobil  
treetops before coming to a soft rest  
by a little lake with applause like ducks.

**10.05.06      1301 – 1319 HRS**

Mickey Rooney and Oz who's also  
the last of the old school telegraphists  
hand-eating coconut cream  
& apple in the back office at night,  
Mickey, 15, high-necked Cruikshank collar  
his version of turn-of-the-century normal  
means each gesture is unpacked  
in a series of boxes wrapped in tissue:  
how nice to see the great ones 'underplay' —  
and leave off of Tim Holt by the way  
his Georgie is what you're really like  
and I'm really like let's face it —  
pontificating with our mouths full of pie  
as traffic and ignorance blot out the sky.

12.05.06     1420 – 1431 HRS

On the high-pixel version  
of the new urbanism I guess we'd  
be the puff of cloud clinging  
to a chalet-speckled hillside  
like Colonel Sanders goatee —  
happy to be in the picture at all!  
if not without the sheep's similar  
critique of its meadow:  
that it is not sufficiently flat,  
that objects are not transparent,  
for just beyond the folded rocks  
— Doughty's 'heaps of witness' —  
are the proving grounds  
where *all* the styles are tested  
& hard pretzel salt covers the trees  
& the Easter Island faces of the dogs  
glare up from helmets filled with milk.



# **THE AGE OF BRIGGS & STRATTON**



## I. THE AGE OF BRIGGS & STRATTON

A hammering  
in the night  
even after we'd finished

an arrhythmic stroke  
neither on the four  
nor the one quite,

but pure tinkering,  
that is  
the ominous rattling

of inner distress  
taken for molar  
or fingerbone

rather than  
design flaw, the mere  
wear & tear

properly  
*natural*  
to a two-stroke so

innocent of  
maintenance  
but not sawdust not hardly!

that will accede  
to pleadings, piques &  
inappropriate invocations,

thus mow the lawn  
ten seconds at a time  
and curse the earth

with the hammer  
as a wrench  
or with a wrench

work boulders free  
to lay the grid  
of mulching pigs

over everything  
erasing without squeal  
the leafblower's legacy.

## II. A POEM FOR TOFINO

At six o'clock  
inside the Moose Hall  
the first spaghetti  
supper of the fall:  
a word or thought  
experiment gone awry  
& the whole of Tuff City  
went boneless dry; as  
boilers and radishes  
barged Alberni Canal  
they found out the aquifer  
was not their pal.

From Bremen they came,  
zucchini kayak and a dream —  
of walking sticks  
with little badges  
avocado wraps  
with nothing added —  
not to be told  
to dig their own hole.  
We voted you in  
because we didn't need you —  
we should have checked  
your leaning lean-to —  
& now the dew's bribed  
off the lawn & from  
infant eyes the tears  
are drawn, the Empire's  
here but the water's gone.

### III. IL CONFORMISTA

A tentative big toe  
dipped in the Cold Lake  
of rapture but as short  
of real immersion as  
the old army game,  
balls dropping unnoticed  
into the back pant pocket  
or something like that —  
an argument bolstered  
by mere proximity (clack) is  
the reassertion  
of a dialectic that  
never was, that  
between looking  
for something &  
*just looking*, say  
Dominique Sanda  
as sleek as a panther  
which I then didn't get  
favoring the pale brunette,  
but the desire, however  
'gripped', that links  
junkie, riot, sugarcone,  
the washed away &  
the washed out is  
what muscles us up  
for Mussolini, the  
'primal scene' in that sense  
comes free with every  
Kodak. That's why  
its called 'software'.

#### IV. A LETTER FROM HAMMERTOWN

Only the densest  
dentist insect overtones  
dare drop into the valley

from the Sunday construction  
so impatiently at ten begun above  
though the rate of such things

varies more than you'd think:  
some build as if session men  
called out by the union

to short time the undergrowth  
for the Xbox simulation  
of the Birth of Skiffle, others

as if flown in on Blackhawks  
to build an interrogation centre  
five days ahead of the army —

outward facing polished tin walls to  
conduct heat, spirit animals  
laminated into every post for

low-grade hallucination  
when the Red Bull & castor oil  
kick in — others as if alders were

closing in with a green man's leering  
face and that aggregate should  
be poured down his throat right now.

Over in Townsite  
evolved sparrows turn into lawn  
ornaments at will &

the sleepy subsonic rumble  
of Chase River thru the park is  
unbroken either by the snap of skateboard

veronicas or the dream-  
speech of dogbarks & east of that  
the Kingdom of the Cranes and Spiders

occupies the Arena  
where Fats Domino once stood  
where the roll of the Second Line

& the two-four of the bass drum  
echoed from the Foundry  
across Newcastle Channel.

## V. A LETTER FROM HAMMERTOWN TO THE NINTH WARD

*From the time he had shoes, he roamed the neighborhood*

(NIK COHN, *Tricksta:*

*Life and Death and New Orleans Rap*)

Defective and partly invisible  
as the pagination of a yellow thesis  
loosening like dream-teeth  
or niblets blackening on the grill —  
a study of piracy as much as trade,  
of simony as much as privacy,  
of property as much as specie,  
thus an alum farmer of Yorkshire  
is exempted from impressment  
by the same principle as sugar bled  
from a tree implies crystallisation,  
not seeing its fate in the sticky Smitty's window  
the summer not quite even over.

For the monthly purpose  
of re-upping the state of emergency and toward  
the interpretation of shipwreck  
we assemble in this playhouse  
by the light of a gibbous moon —  
& not a crumb or shred or macaroon  
of what is said will leave this room . . .

Alka-Seltzer stars scattered on blue felt,  
the good warm smell of a dog smoking a cigar  
with Lady Luck and her 52 imaginary friends  
found curled in the ditches with coffee ends,  
no one wants the burnt dregs of the last card  
with a hole burnt through or to eat their phone.

Everyone just wants to go home.

## VI. L'ENFANT

Tough to find your centre  
in Seraing in the winter  
as Vinegar Joe drones CNN  
the subtlet won't even let your hand in —  
but all God's children get a handbasket  
a task, a handcart, a pot to piss in  
& maybe a glimpse of a river masking  
the smell *d'argent* with the reek of its absence —  
we're all neo-realists, all sleek & handsome,  
except for the babies pawned or ransomed  
for cellphones & a wagon pushed through the wind,  
like a masterless cub sans sword to spend  
each day in the open and each night in a hole,  
the leafless damp canyons a kind of parole.

## VII. A LETTER FROM HAMMERTOWN

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

If it's not my fault reggaeton  
ain't catching on  
with the surf & sandalwood set —  
these 'sleeve notes'  
as you call them  
are still all that  
keep me from following  
Sunny Boy & Red River  
over Pellagra Falls —  
OK so never the chef  
nor the entrepreneur,  
but not the guy in a leather apron  
with a bolt-gun either,  
delivering up discrimination  
at the end of a sticky fork  
& if the molasses taste of anger  
is likewise as brittle  
when it cools off  
as a guinea palmed to a retainer  
at the moment of yearly eye contact  
so too the pronouncements  
of the Brazen Head  
can pass in a dark room  
for both nourishment  
& judgement.

## VIII.

So much of *L'Orphee*  
plays in that grim middle-aged way  
poor Spicer never lived to see  
that it's like I know better;  
ie Jean Marais is how we're  
supposed to look on the *inside*  
& those hoopleheads at the cafe  
rioting over Johnny Ray  
as Mrs. Mills tinkles at 78  
& the Hugo Boss bike cops drop their mitts —  
what Martian could have predicted an Elvis  
emerging from their thin Huguenot gruel?  
Why do the youngsters blame me?  
Don't their radios get the CBC?

## IX. THE SOCIALIST REVIEW STYLE GUIDE

Turns out syndicalisation  
doesn't work any better for wooly bears  
than verbal warnings or  
white stripes worked for us;  
the road these nutdrop noons  
is just the warmest place around  
as well as the hardest —  
twenty feet of good Akenhead with a slight tilt  
covered in shit and shiny shells  
courtesy of Mr. Blue October here —  
& even when they make it over the line  
the berm is not permanent  
and the fuckraking leafblowers  
papercut the air into orange froth.

## X. THE SEDENTARY MILITIA

*. . . slowly the day turns  
into one of those ruined sheds . . .*

GERRY GILBERT

We built these postal districts  
over the bones of the dead  
because we didn't recognize them  
until remote control  
returned them to us  
as eye-stuffing but static ritual —  
Frank McHugh & Capucine,  
Alec Baldwin & Bart the Bear,  
rolling bones in the alley  
behind was it the Archimedes Club,  
The Old Flag Inn, The Ambassador,  
The Outrigger, The Diner's Rendezvous?  
Not even the sky uninterrupted  
by their clacking sound  
as the old machinery broke down,  
& town stopped being 'town'  
& the mountains got filled in  
with mile after mile of drywall scrim  
through which a poltergeist chopper  
but not an untainted breeze could pass.

Cold was the heather  
& colder was the weather,  
colder still the reckoning —  
Gulliver burgers & brown soup  
over hashmarked bohemian rice  
not far from where the very air  
was unpacked & rendered  
of its rhetoric, passed out  
in the park for pigeon peas,  
a yard of rotting pillow straw  
ripped from home plate & turned  
from the foot of Woodland  
toward the bus stop.

## X. THE CANADIAN TIRE FOOD COURT

One thing Lang taught Hitch  
was that those UFA model cities —  
etched in nitrate, moonshine  
& black letter —  
blow up even nicer  
than the real thing;  
chemical factory  
monochromes layer  
& unfold real slow & pretty-like  
over receding heaths  
til naptha flames flare  
& spark to reveal  
the Napoleon of Crime  
in real time scratchin' &  
working the curtains —  
out of politeness really —  
while turntables on strings  
answer the phones &  
forged fistfuls of Canadian Tire money  
pour out of the call centre  
into the pockets of a fifth column  
nourished on circus-grade granola  
& keno at the henhouse.

## XI. ODIE ODE

Farewell dog not native to the valley  
but like me too  
an all-weather patriot  
& devotee of its unbillable hours,  
sans cats & purebred jogging helmets  
with at least the possibility of chicken  
in a broth from a ditch  
made with something else living,  
fur weatherproofed with  
coal tar & sulphur until only  
a rain of little punches  
sunk into haunches  
can wake the sleeping beast  
from his dream of bacon.

## XII. THE LAMB RAN AWAY WITH THE CROWN

Given her Pythagorean triad  
says Babs in a houndstooth huntress  
anima number its Judee  
for John Dee the real hippie  
in out of the rain with  
the rest of the ensemble  
in the eggskull cave  
of a stormy *Gaslight* cash-in  
set inside a giant cake  
where the fake wrench-shaped scar  
of the corrupt chemist  
is paired with the real scar  
on Bogie's upper lip —  
in every scene  
it's the only thing really 'lit' —  
leaving his hands (he thinks)  
free to wander at will  
back and forth &  
back and forth between  
the poison milk on the table,  
his thin silver belt,  
a series of not quite lit  
smokes & a half-inch  
double thumbed  
pantwaist insertion,  
O he's guilty alright —  
of mailing it in bookrate!  
writhing in his wingchair  
jabbing the air with prepschool tics  
until shoulderpadded Alexis Smith  
hipfirsts toweringly in  
swinging her gold David Hume turban  
chain & giant buckle around until  
his cowering leaves nothing  
but the baked light of North Hollywood  
through the grey of the background  
of the background of the grey hills

& appearing from behind  
an oak screen a skinny arm  
catching the last of it  
with a pivoting mirror.

### XIII. HANDS OVER THE CITY

A walk  
on gilded splinters

in terrycloth  
slippers

or felt like they  
made me wear at Sans-Souci —

polishing the ancient slats  
they should pay you!

quiet as a childhood spent  
at Schiller's Cinecitta

except for the damned dubbing  
the same six voices

in every other movie  
we ever saw — *Barabbas*,

*The Campbells Are Coming*,  
*A Bullet For Django* — RCAF base theatres

then a point of pre-multiplex  
distribution somewhere

between 42nd St. &  
the edges of the 'Old Colonial' circuit —

so that their unaccented studio  
bark colonised my kidspace

bigtime even if I never  
even heard Burt's authentic Palermo

grandee or the Calabrese  
striver they must have got for Rod Steiger's

Neapolitan Robert Moses/  
Donald Trump though

Rosi can't resist letting  
him mime out a scene in an empty

office like something out of *The Big Knife*  
volcanic method emotions

rubbing his face out  
with a dampened hanky

with neck sweat for  
lip-readers.

# LIFE HISTORY

*All poems in this section taken from appropriate volumes of the histories prepared by Arthur Cleveland Bent for the Smithsonian between 1910 and 1954.*

## I. WHITE NECKED RAVEN

'Quark, quark,'  
they yelled, all in the  
    while settling nearer, —  
or so I fancied —  
    till it seemed  
as if they actually  
meant violence.

★

As they often use  
    old haywire  
and cast-off barbed wire  
    in their nests,  
these cause short circuits;  
this has cost  
    one telephone company  
\$2,500 to \$5,500  
    annually to patrol the line  
and keep it clear.

★

They pounded the air  
    in vain effort  
to outfly their tormentors,  
    dove to the ground  
but were forced  
to take wing again,  
    circled and beat  
and tacked to no purpose,  
and finally began mounting  
steadily in big circles, taking  
their punishment  
    as they went, the  
smaller birds keeping above  
and beating down on them

in succession until  
all were specks  
in the sky,  
and finally lost to view.

## II. EASTERN CROW

The cooing  
    was also given in the air

and on one occasion,  
I saw a bird drop

slowly down  
    with wings tilted up

at an angle of forty-five degrees,  
singing as he fell.

★

Finally after  
    many trials  
she managed to arrange  
a loose array of sticks  
in the base  
    of the fork.

★

I turned back at once  
    as I had no desire  
to disturb the birds'  
slumbers but it  
    was evident  
that many,  
even at this late hour,  
had not settled down  
for the night.

### III. WESTERN CROW

It was the practise  
of the Crows,

after a hot afternoon's work,  
to spare themselves the trouble

of flying any considerable  
distance to water

by feeding  
on watermelons.

★

It is evident  
that in such places

ducks could not carry  
on nesting

operations  
successfully.

★

The flock then rapidly  
reacted to the changed  
environment by abandoning  
attempts at feeding from  
the almonds and indeed,  
by departing from  
the entire region.

#### IV. NORTHWESTERN CROW

The old birds  
are easy to distinguish  
for they sit quietly  
in the trees  
and gravely watch their young  
at play.

★

If the wind is blowing,  
they allow for the curve,  
  
and usually do not make  
many misses  
  
in their endeavor  
to hit a certain boulder.

★

Their most characteristic  
one is noted  
when the old bird  
is feeling especially foolish,  
for they duck their heads  
toward their feet,  
and then give an upward tug,  
at the same time  
emitting a sound like  
the pulling of a cork  
from a bottle.

## V. FISH CROW

Then away they glide,  
from the trees  
of the stream banks,

across wide plantations  
of truck  
gardeners.

★

He adds that they  
eat pears,  
and are very fond of  
ripe figs;  
they do considerable damage  
to the latter  
and have to be driven away  
from the fig trees  
with a gun.

★

These the Crow  
now before us

would frequently seize  
with his claws,

as he flew  
along the surface,

and retire  
to the summit

of a dead tree  
to enjoy his repast.

## VI. HOODED CROW

From the tops  
of the pine trees,

they ascended  
to a considerable height,

when, hovering for an  
instant, they would

snap up  
an insect

and return  
to near the former position,

remain for a moment,  
and again make an essay.

★

When the observer  
rushed up

from a distance  
of about 400 yards

both eyes of the  
unfortunate animal

had been pecked out  
and it was dying,

apparently from injuries  
inflicted on the brain

through the  
eye sockets.

★

Critical observers  
have not generally  
considered that they

exercise any  
intelligent selection  
of hard as opposed

to softer surfaces  
for this purpose;  
nevertheless there is

evidence that in some  
places they have learned  
to utilize masonry

or walls  
for their  
operations.

## VII. DUCK HAWK

Wings half closed now,  
he shot down past the north end

of the cliff, described  
three successive vertical loop-

the-loops across its face,  
turning completely upside down

at the top of each loop,  
and roared out over our heads

with the wind rushing through  
his wings like ripping canvas.

★

Just above the water  
the hawk suddenly  
accelerated, tapped

the cormorant lightly  
on the back, then  
circled easily away,

while the frightened  
quarry took refuge  
unharmd in the water.

★

At last as one turned  
to evade the rush,  
the hawk swung over  
on its back,  
and reaching  
up one foot  
as it shot by,  
caught the swift  
in its powerful grasp.

## VIII. EASTERN PIGEON HAWK

How closely  
they huddled together,  
as if seeking mutual  
protection,  
but he went  
right through the flock  
and came out  
on the other side  
with one in each fist.

★

Holding it forward  
and downward

in one foot,  
it occasionally bent

down its head and  
tore off a bit

without slackening  
its speed.

★

All the while  
the Titlark  
was nearing,  
if by devious  
courses,  
a dense  
thicket  
of alders  
into which  
it plunged at length,  
to be seen no more.

## IX. BLACK PIGEON HAWK

He swung on one,  
and when the gun cracked

the bird started falling  
in a diving, fluttering

flight, appearing  
to have a broken wing.

★

The hawk  
struck the snipe  
squarely in  
mid-air,  
then quickly  
carried it away.

★

Thus the successive  
lungings and chasings  
were not either one-

sided or haphazard,  
but so conducted  
that each bird alternately

took the part of pursuer  
and pursued, and when  
enacting the latter role

gave way at once,  
or after the merest pretence  
of resistance, to flee

as if for its life, dodging  
and twisting; yet it was  
prompt enough to rejoin

the other bird at the end  
of such a bout, when the  
two would rest awhile

on the same stub, perching  
only a few feet apart  
and facing one another,

perhaps not without  
some mutual  
distrust.

## X. EASTERN SPARROW HAWK

The point of the beak  
is sunk into  
the base of the skull,  
and the skull  
is torn off  
with a swift  
forward motion.

★

Then, sometimes  
with a precise adjustment  
  
to the force of the wind,  
it stops the beating of its wings  
  
and hangs as if suspended  
in complete repose and equilibrium,  
  
seeming to move not a hair's breadth  
from its position.

★

Perched on dead stumps  
by the side  
of the cottonfields,  
flying off  
from the wires  
along the track,  
hovering above  
the bare brown stubble,  
we see them  
again and again,  
nearly always alone.

## XI. DESERT SPARROW HAWK

The grasshopper is held  
much the same  
as a child would hold  
an ice-cream cone.

★

Flies are  
repeatedly rejected,

even if  
the bird is hungry.

★

In flight, the sparrow  
hawk was silhouetted against  
the evening sky

and its extended talons  
could plainly be seen  
clutching the body

of the little bat,  
whose wings appeared  
to be folded.

## XII. CHICKADEE

Enlivener  
of our winter woods.

★

The chika is,  
as a rule, two tones  
higher than the dees,  
and the pitch is  
B on the chika and  
G on the dees, in the  
next to highest octave  
on the piano.

★

They made aiming  
almost impossible,  
for every time I raised  
the rifle, one or two  
birds would perch  
on the barrel  
completely hiding  
the sights.

★

'Any old  
side up  
without  
care'

★

blind man's bluff  
and hide and seek,  
and tag

and tag

when  
staged in three dimensions

a labyrinth of  
interlacing branches for

hazard

and swinging  
underneath, caught  
each end of the caterpillar

with a foot  
so held it  
fast

within a few feet  
of its apple-branch door

calling *Hear, hear me*  
with only a breathing space  
between repetitions

caught by a cat  
at Belvidere, N.J.,  
on December 24, 1932

I wrapped the offending  
rag around the branch . . .

★

The tail moves,  
    the expanding  
wings shoot  
    out sideways  
and strike the  
surrounding wood  
inside the cavity  
    and as the head comes  
stiffly down  
the bird

emits a strong  
hiss or puff  
strikingly like that  
of the copperhead.

### XIII. CHICKADEE AND TITMOUSE

At the moment  
of the lunge,  
the black-and-white  
striping  
of the head  
brought her into  
abrupt and conspicuous  
view of the observer  
peering into  
the cavity —  
reinforcing  
the surprise effect  
of the sounds produced.

★

on June 9, 1935  
go down  
a little squirrel hole  
underneath  
a dead pine stub  
in a little clearing

of these the kinglets are

when the emotion of spring  
is no longer controllable  
when the birds are obscured  
by the falling snow

★

he is omnipresent,  
even in the heart of the city

{Brownsville}

on the inside  
of the left mandible  
of the huge  
Sulphur-bottom  
Whale skeleton  
under the shed

so he worked  
around my ear  
and feel him snip snip  
as he severed them

like the whistle  
of a man calling his dog

he is omnipresent,  
even in the heart of the city

{Brownsville}

★

the heavy, dark forests

{Kirkland}

on bending branches,  
vent squeaks  
and low chirps,  
varied with buzzing  
'dizzes'

pairs thus continue  
up the forest-clothed flanks

of slopes and cliffs

only the blue jay  
refuses to make way

brown above  
and plain gray

{Kirkland}

the heavy, dark forests

# THE GREAT NORTH

*Titles & texts in italics taken from a reprint volume of stories  
'taken from 19th century issues of HARPER'S MAGAZINE.*

## I. THE UPPER PENINSULA

*Such strawberries as these  
need to be seen*

*to be appreciated and must be  
visited to be seen,*

*for they are too large and  
too delicate*

*to bear much travel  
themselves.*

★

A cold ragged-trousered arrival  
we had of it, into such weather

as would strip us clean  
we thought, the bell bottom

bottoms likewise unhemmed  
the better for to drag sticks

along like the furrowing bellies  
of a fat clumping cat,

less walking than a kind  
of controlled trip through

skinned coffeemate puddles  
to unwaiting basements

and uncontrolled thaw.  
To open the window

was to invite death, or if not  
a long snooze in the Legions

of North Battleford, Cold Lake,  
Pickle Lake, Humboldt —

anyway as far up as Basic Stick  
had taught the locals to hip shuffle

& in appreciation buy beers  
for the band including retinue.

Later Jerry Lee, Haggard, *Kind of a  
Drag* & *Kind of Blue*.

★

*It is the name  
of a river, a canoe trip*

*down which  
has all the charms*

*of wood life  
without its discomfort.*

★

Last dependant leaf  
swinging like a rusty gate

or a kid's emphatic  
no way headshake

getting carried away  
& falling into an earthquake.

## II. ON SNOW SHOES TO BARREN GROUNDS

*The storm  
was now squarely  
in our teeth,  
and the dogs  
would not face it.*

★

Face the skin & snap of it,  
like business cards or snowpeas hurled  
at the eyeteeth but hitting the lenses,  
suddenly your wig is tighter  
than your pants, forepaws  
caked with frosting  
palming meatballs past numbness —  
your gold watch is  
*we don't eat you,*  
but the bear  
or its surrogates needn't twig that!  
But even not knowing the handshake  
you could walk these Druid Hills unmolested  
sneakers painted with lime,  
breath neutral to minty,  
predator smile projecting  
a half-step ahead as  
the plane tree tops of Coffey Park  
poke and wave through the ice . . .

★

*These people  
had never before  
seen a camera, and  
many of my plates  
show them scurrying away  
or turning their backs.*

★

Waves of wax  
ebbed over the fly  
until at last  
he supplanted the wick  
and burned on the counter  
for over an hour.

### III. HUNTING THE GRIZZLY BEAR

*The poor idiotic boy  
could not even then  
realize the danger  
through which he had passed,  
and could only appease his anger  
by continuing to maul  
the bear over the head  
with the camp kettle  
for several minutes  
after she was dead.*

★

Thus from the rococo woods  
stumble into the mannerist clearing

or is that muskeg  
into which our hooves sunk

sucked runners off escaping subjects  
replacing chickens with used books

so slowly no one noticed  
until their cakeless birthdays rolled around —

on the icon they've got baby Jesus  
standing upright in a dear little

Jjunior Pantocrator outfit —  
orb & mace, little brocade robe

heavier than him, looking up at his mum  
who looks through me.

★

*Bears are usually,  
though not always,  
killed at considerable distances*

*from towns, or even ranches,  
where it is not easy  
to find a pair of scales.*

★

Still hunters of the lyric  
must shower with carbolic  
to erase the stench of patronage,  
build their hides with beaten pewter  
to deflect the low winter sun's  
dust-revealing torch  
as it plays on yellowing pads  
& capless brown markers,  
they must fold their arms into little wings  
and pretend to sing.

#### IV. STUBBLE AND SLOUGH IN DAKOTA

*The happiness of a hunting party  
is like that of a wedding,*

*so important is it  
that true love shall rule.*

★

A crow flies through  
the tinkle of the last window on earth  
carrying in its beak  
the clementine eye of God,  
around his neck a Diana set to bulb  
the nitrate views of Minot  
the deep sturgeons of Superior  
Red Hills of death & indebtedness,  
iron pocked surface with fake bulletholes,  
elevators tight with mustard, canola, durum,  
evolving past kingship with a penitential swoop.

★

*The sun has set,  
and no longer bathes  
the landscape  
in its golden light,  
and yet I sit  
in the water and mud  
and indulge this pleasurable  
taste for gore, wondering  
why it is so ecstatic,  
or if my companions  
will not give over  
shooting presently.*

★

Cut it out of your thoughts  
as though snipping  
the furball dreads

from a feral angora,  
roll it out the snowy driveway  
into the path of a boxy 4x4  
with homemade chains  
snapping & scattering in the ice,  
press it to a wafer  
in a tower of turtles.

# **PAGES FROM THE CHILDREN'S ENCYCLOPEDIA**

*for Michael Szarpowski & Bruce Conkle*



## I. CASCADIA BORDER PATROL

I'd like to stop kicking,  
but every time I do  
something spectacular happens

that people will pay to see —  
it's not like its even down to me,  
& running my fingers counting

bribes along envelope tops  
hurts me as much  
as these January pellets

raining from my winkle-pickers  
must hurt you, but  
Centralia's where the Inland Empire

meets the real Empire &  
you've entered our domain  
as an ark of infinite sustain —

orchards hazy with  
ciderblink down to  
Dorn's sound, lowering chopper

heat differential maps  
of backpackers loaded  
versus ornithologists

lightened by self-hypnosis,  
though in real life  
if surveillance gets

that close it's probably what's  
in your thermos  
they're after.

## II. CRANBERRY FIREHALL

Stinks to be in the engine  
of always conspirin' & pokin'  
where it *ain't* exactly required —

rattlin' around like a tooth  
in a paint can achin' for inspection,  
but like the firehall's multi-function

a ramp into space  
is no longer an option,  
no fire escape in the sky —

they're mixin' the gravity with somethin'  
or somethin' — but it's still a good thing  
the lid's this big, you turn it right down

step out onto the 'scape  
for a couple of cupped Cameos & voila!  
when you return everything

is exactly the same  
except it's ready now,  
wreathed in glistening steam!

### III. ENTIAMORPHIC CHAMBERMAID

A stack of *Argosy*  
in an orgone box,  
but no bacon  
in the midden —  
individually a dry maple leaf  
in good nick seems  
worth about a quarter  
but I'll get rid of it  
for a dime and put the change  
in a Crown Royal bag,  
and in the spring  
a parcel of mulch  
will arrive by courier;  
less an operating system  
than Rick Wakeman  
vs. Dr. Who at Joddrel Bank,  
more something slipped into,  
all warm & well-rehearsed,  
all long exhalations uncoiling  
like Gilray speech balloons,  
though the unfamiliar tread  
tenderizes ankles on the icy slopes.

#### IV. THE WIRE

Then the tree if not time  
at least Art Blakey —  
hard bop with a touch  
of the parade ground,  
in a good way —  
the orderly handling by  
many bird species  
crowded up amongst  
the short-term food  
emergency — giving way  
on the good branches,  
keeping beefs short etc. —  
then everybody gets their  
designated seconds of  
bark digging unmolested  
maybe some eavestrough  
spider web, but stepping up  
clean and bright  
in bandstand order with  
a solo worked up ahead of time  
so that routine becomes display  
and spring can start to operate.

## V. THE DAWN IN BRITAIN

Fax addresses  
other fax in fax

*'titivates with plumes  
of voodoo jargon'*

AKA *'speaks in tongues'*  
the mellow ameliorants

of mormon d'esprit,  
lodge-blue, cop white,

pink snow, halfhard hotdog  
bun cigar-angled

the raven's new year  
accessory of choice

they get them 'from the farm'  
whatever that means —

we've seen the rendering truck  
stagger under towers years past

bundled like newspapers  
now that presumptive hogs

are rarely present —  
the old neighborhood herd

thinned to unemployability —  
dogs, cats & fish —

hence other people playing cards,  
golf, the film on baby foxes

in both official languages  
with the sound turned off,

it's all to calm you down,  
with at Xmas halfraw turkey

thawing by the 'fire'  
to sink your teeth into

while a song we all know  
encourages wordless grunting

suffused with emotion &  
the heavy wine of childhood.

## VI. PUNISHMENT PARKWAY

I suppose the scenic route  
is out of the question —  
too much time

by lay-bys earlier  
running our elbows  
along the bunched steel map

of braille mountains  
worn through at the ocean  
& where the ② passed through

amenable space you stand  
at the edge of  
the whole thing a ribbon

of iron control extending  
even to the lichen's fluffy edge  
so that to stray

is to fall into  
the literal orchestra pit  
after a Big Drop —

the vast  
arbutus forest preserved  
on either side of it

certainly terra incognita  
before they put the highway through —  
but Northfield was a labyrinth

out of Floyd Crosby's Poe  
anyway so excuse me  
if I never found it but

the immaculate moss meadows  
argue that no one much  
else did either —

there's a lot  
of places dirt bikers  
it turns out won't go —

but this civil terrarium though tidy  
was roamed by giant tapirs once,  
by badgers big as bears,

undisturbed by pneumatics  
or the shrieking steam of the factory whistle —  
must now endure

the lapidary condescension  
of highway patronage, the cement lobby's  
largesse, the planner's *passion*,

the grim and anxious trucks  
from which the tongues of mammals  
brush the pre-Cambrian air.

## VII. CRAZY RHYTHM

To speed up  
or slow down at will  
like that  
like Anita no matter  
the lyric's 'arcs'  
or who you're playing with  
or in what vehicle careering  
depends on the services  
over decades  
of a drummer —  
Roy Haynes & Sassy  
would be another  
example — capable of lowering  
six whirring brushes  
onto a linseed-darkened  
dream sideboard  
while defending a perogy  
supper from a platoon  
of gibbons — imagine  
having such a pedal to press!  
messing with the band  
would just be the start —  
to feel the tin-pan-alley world  
snapping like a green twig  
but how tough after  
negotiating now that speech  
is king again the cabless dawn.

## VIII. IKEA DESERTA

Leave sleep to those  
in charge of sleep,  
the bus he knows the way;  
the pussycat anarchists won't  
blow up the viaduct tonight —  
you can rely on me.

★

On mattresses masters bestir cosily  
by threadcounts unmolested  
noisily, easily, easily, noisily —  
but otherwise untested.

★

Planet it up for the business  
of orbiting dirty snowball courses  
what tirebiters flicked at cops,  
nothing is as still as this sentence  
which I began a million days ago  
lifting myself onto the bamboo hula  
while laces dragged the Barents Sea,  
to wake folded in the folds of Forfar  
in full dark stars coiling  
mystic pools of social housing  
& ghosts in full monologue  
& all of it melting  
not into green icing  
but holes which are then patched over  
with similar stuff  
taken from elsewhere.







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