



Sinister Decade

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Contents

1. a future reviewer
2. turn off the spell check
3. below
4. This eve I walk a crumbling street
5. America 2007
6. your smile awakens within me
7. get thee behind me
8. bare market
9. none of it is any
10. so I was asked
11. when you move from Oklahoma
12. Mission Accomplished
13. we didn't
14. the dog wants a walk
15. maybe, just maybe
16. exhausted
17. three cheers for the serious
18. the fundamentals are elemental
19. Queen of the Past
20. flowers with budweiser roots
21. and I'm just sitting here thinking
22. This
23. cliffhanger
24. wine
25. saturdays
26. watching the dawn on the hood of a car

1. a future reviewer

who picks up this volume
might wonder about the mind behind it

rest assured, dear reviewer,
that the mind behind this collection
will take no offense
if your right-handed interpretation
completely misses my left-handed point.

2. turn off the spell check

I try to find meaning in the great poets of the past
but sometimes their words are walls

so I sneak around them and pretend
that I too am literary
though I stare at books
filled with images that go so far beyond my ability to see them

what did allen ginsberg really howl for
what light was dying when dylan thomas raged
why was dickinson nobody
why did whitman sing of himself

and where did the road not taken really lead

the wreck of the human
inscrutably wasted on the sublime

where will I find my own road
that I can take to glory
my own delusions of grandeur
are the very chains that prevent me from moving

perhaps I really don't have anything new to say
perhaps the common wisdom is right
and everything has been said already

if this is true than we might as well all die now
because without creation all there is is destruction
without innovation all there is is stagnation

truth lies between the pages of the great books of history
but I don't know which pages in which books contain
the truths that will set me on the path of righteousness
and out of this hideous lethargic apathy
engendered by the now

it's so easy not to care
it's so easy to fall into it and just zone out
so easy to just take that drive to work
and work
and go home
and go to bed
it's so easy to get excited about driving four hours
to buy some cheap furniture
and some other knick knacks
from a big Swedish superstore
a consumer vacation
buying ourselves a little happy
and putting it together with a tiny wrench

yet when I rail against suburbia
I realize that I am suburbia
and I am railing against myself

one can only be ironic for so long
before the irony becomes the reality
and one is left stuck in exactly the comfortable vapidness
that made one shudder
when one was young and idealistic enough to think that hard

now I'm swimming in products
and swooning for commerce
and all I want is the latest thing
and the newest gizmo
and a stable job
and a steady paycheck
and a loving partner
and I have all of those things
and my life is a neat little box

still I can't help thinking that something's missing
but I don't know what

for god's sake
what do the bohemians really want exactly
you need the basic things in life – food, shelter, clothing

and the only way that modern society
allows you to get those things
is to fall in line
be content with
two weeks of vacation
and a small bonus every three months
a 401k and health insurance
a mortgage and a car payment
a lawn to mow and a gently roaring fireplace
the occasional vacation
and dinner with the in-laws
It's impossible to do what kerouac did
and cross the country on a whim
it's impractical and expensive
not to mention difficult and uncomfortable

adventure is for people
with too much time on their hands

still, I can't help thinking that I'm missing something
that I've squandered my own future
by being a lazy, unmotivated slob
because I am a lazy, unmotivated slob
and it's gonna come back and bite me in the ass

I need to write
to justify my existence
I need people to read what I write
I need to leave something behind
because if I don't
then I will never have existed

truth and freedom and all those lofty ideals
don't matter if nobody's around for you to enjoy them with

love is life

*take me, said the skeleton
but leave my bones alone...*
-A.G.

3. below

only twelve hours
till fretting the night
crawls forth without its
clothes on
nakedly showing its ever
the one thing it craves
is cricketsong
not the poison sword
of headlight.

4. This eve I walk a crumbling street

This eve I walk a crumbling street
and seek to learn of truths discreet
and as the lengthened shadows meet
the sky's great embers grow more cold.

And water trickles slowly by
in streams that have no alibi
that follow me with burbled sigh
and speak of what their depths enfold.

The sunlight fades from silk to ash
and shades of umber make a sash
I see upon this street, a flash
of crystal in the cracks of old.

The shimmered gem enshrines a dance
beholden to the whims of chance
a prism trapped within the glance
of he who sees with eyes of gold.

As blue black colors fill the scene
I stop a while, and sit, and lean
against a tree, whose limbs I've seen
in tales that sorcerers have told.

And as I sit I hear the cry
of night's frenetic lullaby
beginning with the willow's sigh,
the reign of moonlight soon foretold.

This darkness which must come at last
it cannot fell the lines we cast
it must not quell the dreamer's mast
held fast amongst the poets bold.

For sunset foretells not the end
and darkness, death does not portend

nor night the loss of beauty's trend
for all we seek, our dreams unfold.

This eve I walked a crumbling street
and sought to learn of truths discreet
and at the perfect sunset's feet
I reveled in night's sweet threshold.

5. America 2007

America I've given you all and now I'm nothing.
America two dollars and twentyseven cents won't even buy
a gallon of gas June 12, 2007.
I can't stand my president's mind.
America when will we end war?
Go fuck yourself with your Guantanamo.
Your Patriot Acts like a fool.
I won't write my poem till you're in my right mind.
America when will you be rational?
When will you take off your mask?
I'm sick of your insane demands.
I refuse to be reasonable.
America pragmatism is a compromise
between idealism and barbarity.
America realism is an excuse for barbarity.
Are you being barbaric?
I haven't read a newspaper for months;
every day another editorial tells me it's ok to torture.
America I feel sentimental about the Bill of Rights.
America I'm still a communist at heart I'm not sorry.
My mind is made up; there's going to be trouble.
You should have seen me reading Marx.
America are you going to let your emotional life
be run by People Magazine?
I hate People Magazine.
I'm forced to read its insipid cover every time I go to the grocery store.
It's always telling me about famous people.
Actors are famous. Athletes are famous. Everybody's famous but me.
It occurs to me that I am America.
I am talking to myself again.

Asia is rising against me.
What chance do I have?
I'd better consider my national resources.
My national resources consist of two computers, millions of brain cells,
an unpublishable train of thought that thunders
at a zillion miles an hour and should be kept in a mental institution.

Not to mention my cat, or the millions of uninsured Americans
who live paycheck to paycheck under the watchful eye
of the credit reporting agencies.
My ambition is to be President despite the fact that I'm a
left-handed gay Jew.

America how can I write a holy litany in Allen Ginsberg's silly mood?
My strophes are as individual as Allen's,
more so they're all stolen from him.
America free the detainees in your secret CIA prisons.
America get the hell out of Iraq.
America constitutional rights must not die.
America when I was twenty I went to the biennial convention of the
Socialist International in Paris I heard speeches
by Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder and Yasser Arafat walked
right by me and everyone was angelic and
sentimental about the workers even though none of them knew
what it meant to be one we had this one party on a
yacht in the Seine in fancy suits and got up on the roof and sang
the Internationale clutching champagne flutes and
million dollar smiles.
Everybody must have been a hypocrite.
America you really don't want to go to war again.
America it's them bad Arabs. Them Arabs them Arabs and them
North Koreans.
And them Arabs.
Them Arabs want to eat us alive.
Them Arabs want to take the crosses out of our churches.
Them Arabs want to blow themselves up in our synagogues.
Them Arabs are religion mad.
They want to fly planes into Chicago.
Them want to blow up their shoes in Cleveland.
Them need a copy of the Koran in all of our hotel rooms.
That no good.
America this is quite serious.
America this is the impression I get from watching cable news.
America is this correct?
I'd better get right down to the job.
It's true I don't want to join the Army or flip burgers
at a fast food joint;

I'm near-sighted and hyperactive anyway.
America I'm putting my own queer shoulder to the wheel.

-In memory of A.G.

6. Your smile awakens within me

nothing of great import, but
seeing the white flash of perfectly-aligned teeth
in synchronicity with the subtle cracks that define your lips
somehow brings to mind a curious
ambivalence
that can only be described as joy.
Why these sensations persist is beyond me.
Considering that I can never have you,
and you can never have me,
The sight of the piercing fire within the corona of your eye
still mysteriously arouses my interest.
It's funny how that is - you
exist for me only in pictures,
moving & still,
and yet the subtle lines of your form seem so
precisely what I'm looking for that I can hardly believe
that I do not have you yet.
Perhaps in some other time at some other place,
as the old cliché goes,
but I must sigh and go on my way and be content
to gaze at you with a curiously detached curiosity
as you sit and stare at me
through the glass-encased silence of my computer screen.

7. get thee behind me

walking toward the strip mall sunset
the concrete cowboy glanced backwards
to wave goodbye to that demented landscape
he had so long visited
but never understood
finding himself lost in its gymnastic spires
screaming itself toward inevitability
and shrugging he continued to mosey
the concrete cowboy
walking away and toward
the strip mall sunset.

8. bare market

I traded my soul on the
political stock market
lamented the pendulum-swung
neo
liberal
con
serve
ative
radical poet
I sold my shares in ideology
bought into
pragmatic
fatal ism
I went from b to s
from left to left behind
left the status
invested in quo
and I'm still waiting for my divide
ends
lending credence to the
current busyness cycle
left-handed promises and
right-minded exhortations
a sellout crowd
for the opening night
of my political closing bell.

9. none of it is any

good
says the grinning bearded mathematician
I can't
see the reason behinging
your mad internalized rage
directed hellmell at
fraudulized stacksmokes
be he whoseees three bees
congregating onthebacksof
two weary eyed bankers
hankering for a
cigarettesuicideplate
hating themselves
onestepatacrime
for the matter that splatters
when the three wisemen jabber aimlessly
at the jabberwalkietalkie
he screamed at the blue
mystifying skylet
me see the three bees
I will spray them with
chemicaldeath
one banker will befree
but the other will
dieslowly of mentalpoison
pumped out of
proletarianism
ust you use your
powers for only
and not for slowly?

10. So I was asked

to read a poem about
peace
honestly I don't know
if I have it in me
or what possible insight
I could give
I'm no soldier
and I haven't lost anyone
My only connection
is my humanity
burying its head in the sand
because it can't believe
where these kidnappers in chief
have taken this country
strapping us all to a chair
in their dank basement
forcing us to watch them
smear our best intentions
with their own special brand of bullshit.

11. when you move from Oklahoma

to the Pacific Northwest
you come upon a very different rhythm
no more the sudden thunderstorm
no tornadoes, no diving into bathrooms
no television shows interrupted with terrifying weather coverage
no trailer parks destroyed in seconds
no baseball sized hail
no wall clouds
no rotation
no hook echoes

instead you find a steady wetness
a very constant, faithful, consistent, reliable rain
a shared rain
a common rain
that everybody drinks together

12. Mission Accomplished

A fool
whose misrule
misconstrued the miscreants

attacked the facts
erasing the shame
of unjust war

but still the rifle
in white gloved hand
stands at attention

and the tense handkerchief
trembles, soaked
in unnecessary grief

as the mute draped boxes
silently march
one by one

hurrah, hurrah

13. we didn't

fall from the
dying towers
in the bubbling chaos
we saw God, the devil and a horrified man
clutching each other
we picked up the screams from the paper snow street
and threw them at the moon
but a year later they're knocking on our doors
and sentences don't
complete themselves
like they used to
and beyond the strip malls and
plastic incoherence
we find a turbid mind
churning with new definitions
and a diamond dropped
is a tear regained.

14. the dog wants a walk

she's kind of staring at me
with those big, giant, brown eyes
in that way that only a dog can stare
that imploring, pleading, stare
I suppose in a moment I'll have to get up
wrestle her into her leash and harness
and trudge around the block.

15. maybe, just maybe

my dog has it right
and the only thing that matters
is to roll around on the carpet and make contented noises
find a scrap of food on the ground to eat
and learn the twelve thousand smells that make up language.

16. exhausted

tired of lies
tired of seeing
good people buy them

compromising principle
we think we're invincible
while the invisible truth looms like teeth
sharp, inevitable

tired of numbers
body counts discounted
by the apathetic demographic

and it seems distance of death matters
massacres at home shock us and awe us
but massacres over there
well, we can change the channel

tired of timetables
fables of benchmarks
we're all marked

our outrage redacted
with the black marker
of unfair
and unbalanced news

17. three cheers for the serious

overwhelming the spurious

there's a very subtle
bubble
on the sun

the bubble pops
and stops the shock troops
of infantile squawking

and very slowly
the sun brightens

but I'm curious
to know what comes next.

18. the fundamentals are elemental

the sentimental is detrimental
and reality is a tease

nothing is quite what it schemes
and dreams don't make sense
in the cracked morning mirror

but the effects
of such nocturnal delirium
seeping into our skin
might be akin to an
anesthetic balm
shielding us from sharp corners.

19. Queen of the Past

These haunted halls we've walked before
alone and unafraid
We travel now, our footsteps sure
into the silent shade.

The mirror, cracked, reflects the light,
Enshrouded dancing notes,
While dust-caked windows once stood white,
Piano, void of notes.

I glance ahead and glance behind
at cold unyielding halls,
Searching, seeking, yet to find
that spark that life enralls.

And looking left I see a space,
A room of fleeting sound,
A past encounter leaves its trace
on cobwebbed dusty ground.

I turn and face the open door,
It beckons me within,
A glitter glimpse upon the floor,
I stoop to find a pin.

A simple thing, a trinket, yes,
This dusty trace of spark,
But it remembers one caress,
A scent of warmth in dark.

And keeping hold this crystal drop,
This fiery haunting eye,
My echoed footsteps find their stop,
I look upon the sky.

The darkened panes reveal the trees
long dead that shake like bone;

In stagnant wind they move with ease,
Macabre, they dance alone.

I turn back to the silent space
and look upon the void,
This endless hallway I must face
my mind cannot avoid.

Of opened doors and doors left closed,
regret I but a few,
And with new thoughts and questions posed
my footsteps start anew.

Enveloped in white satin gown
your shadow floats with me,
The dancing dust your ghostly crown;
Queen of the past, now free.

20. flowers with budweiser roots

in the dirt bed
flowers
planted, no doubt, to attract the eye of a customer
lie listless
some crushed
cigarette stems
budweiser roots
and above it all a sign
"no littering or alcohol on these premises."

21. and I'm just sitting here thinking

my ideologies have been deconstructed
my ideals have been parsed
I become fractional
I am focus groups and polling numbers
I believe the media
even as I mock them
I fear what they tell me to fear
even as I scoff at sensationalism
I sink into comfort
even as I fight complacency
I fall into sleep
even as I struggle to make a point.

22. This

dangerous cloud
of apathy
creates entropy

potential energy
demands empathy

limits eliminate the state
of debate

there is something to it

screw it – just
be the free one

23. cliffhanger

shadowed and insecure
she stands
ready
poised for the jump
all eyes focused on her trembling form
below her waves break
she closes her eyes against the glare of the pounding sun
as gulls fly around her
waiting for her to soar with them
the moment stretches
and contracts
arms flung outward
feet leave the cliff's face
toward the crashing waves
head first
she hits the water
dives underneath
comes back up
a perfect 10.

24. wine

there's a transparent sweetness
to a glass of wine

a mellow amber flavor
cold, sharp, relaxing

after the taxing
delirium of the day.

25. saturdays

there are few things better than
sleeping late on a saturday
it's a day without capital letters
a day without starch
a day when the sun is warm cotton
and the distant mountains
invite you to climb them.

26. watching the dawn on the hood of a car

feeling that bond that only connects when the breath of fire
touches the blue horizon
and looking over at each other we'll scan the sky for the last lone star
and claim it as our own
if only I could see it through the zirconium haze
but clutching your hand I'll look anyway
and look at you and smile
and we'll laugh it off as a silly reminder
of how silly this world really can be if it wants to
this is an odd sort of age we live in
full of explosions, death, chocolate sundaes and Lucky Charms
and cherry red volkswagen beetles
it's only the loneliest ember that never evolves into a poet
and only the loneliest poet that never evolves into light
and only the loneliest light that gets lost under the bedsheets
on a cold Sunday morning
and despite the oily residue covering its darker spots
I've still got this feeling the world will be alright.

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Food for the mind