

# The Cave of Hypnos: Early Poems



**Charles W. Bailey, Jr.**

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Digital Scholarship  
Houston, Texas

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# Mnemosyne

Men dream into flesh  
between long nights,  
weaving their breath  
into memory,  
and believing  
that memory  
mirrors the world,  
as if men's names  
were not just water  
singing softly  
to be heard.

# Tide

You move  
like a winter tide  
rolling on a belly  
of sand.

Swirling over me,  
fondling  
the broken shells  
of my sighs.

Lick my skin  
with salt  
and silt  
before I  
die.

# Karma

That dark carpenter  
is building the rooms  
where we will spend  
our future lives.

Here is the next room.

It is papered  
with our words.

Its bed is framed  
with our desires.

Its mirror  
is smoked  
with our hate  
and our love.

We will meet suddenly  
in its doorway,  
entangled again  
as if  
never parted.

# The Salt Stone

I have licked  
the salt stone.

Run mad  
as a mushroom cap  
bobbing in the rapids  
of a dark stream.

Leapt up  
the oak ladder  
to circle the  
crescent moon.

The wind  
lies languid  
in the ivory caves  
of your  
morning  
mouth.

The dawn wraps  
your shadow  
turning slowly  
towards me.



# Panikon Deima

Night flows  
through the streets.

The stream rushes faster,  
the trees are swallowed.

The moon drifts  
into blackness  
like a butter balloon.

Silvered by moonlight,  
a god walks.

His horns are knives  
that rend the soul.

Men see him and flee.

Forever seeing  
their own eyes,  
they are lost  
in a maze  
of mirrors.

Fleece falls thick  
over his shanks.

His hands move  
in an alphabet of light.

Night moves before him  
like an obedient tidal wave.

Hush.

If we listen closely,  
if we listen closely,  
we will hear  
his cruel laugh  
roll from our own lips.

# White Rooms

Morning  
slips  
into  
white rooms.

It gently  
glides a  
sun smeared hand  
over  
hazy figures  
undulating,  
speaking  
silent  
words.

# How and Why

In a former life,  
I was a fish,  
eyes wide,  
gulping  
meaning.

Now I wait,  
empty,  
a pinpoint  
of breath,  
a sliver  
of infinity.

# Come to Me

Come to me  
before the dawn  
dims the stars.

The same wave  
that washes  
the clouds  
moves in your  
fluttering breath.

Let me see the  
play of shadows  
on your breasts.

Let me part the rose  
that roots  
in your heart.

Let me bathe  
in the warm sound  
of tears.

Come to me.

We will let the moss  
of unknown paths  
grow between our fingers,  
let the closed door  
of the future  
fall to  
the sky.

# The Dancers

It is because  
I fear to wake them  
behind the bolted door  
of dreams.

The starving eyes,  
the fragile ribs,  
hollow gourds  
on Shiva's belt.

They dance as  
he dances  
upon the  
withered plain.

It is because  
I fear to  
name them.

The night whispers  
their names,  
calling their  
twisted faces  
to me.

Will you hide with me,  
fornicating  
with the future  
between the pages  
full-color ads?

Here they have no names.

They are  
shadows of rags,  
shifting dots  
on the television screen,  
dancing,  
dancing.

# Last Laugh of the Rainbow Dancer

The black candle of night  
is reversed and lit  
as Annie stumbles  
through the kitchen door  
blue terry cloth robe  
untied, rubbing her  
dream crusted eye.

The stove flickers on  
in the frost tinged shadows  
as Ichabod, the half-blind  
alley cat, slips between  
her ankles, begging for a  
little warm milk.

Annie drops  
freeze-dried coffee  
into the cup,  
which melts  
into last night's  
lover's face,  
and she drifts back  
under his back before  
he danced out  
the morning door  
without waving  
goodbye.

The toaster grates  
like a hinge, and  
Annie swings over  
the linoleum floor,  
humming, smearing  
butter on toast.

She catches a glimpse  
of two glasses, wine stained,  
and feels empty as a  
dry wind.

Dew has risen into  
frozen flowers  
on the windowpane,  
and Annie stands  
startled.

Ichabod has smashed  
the sugar crock,  
the grains  
are pouring  
in white waves  
out on the  
floor.

Inexorable,  
innocent waves  
right there  
on the  
floor.

# Elysium

The transparent doves  
die slowly  
in your fingers.

Wings,  
thin as blades of grass,  
scrape against your palm.

So this is heaven,  
you pray,  
hoping you are wrong.

Thin men  
wedged in the eyes  
of needles,  
faces blank  
as wet cement,  
congratulate you  
as they pry  
the gold filings  
from your teeth.

Several dwarfs  
chisel your name  
into the sides  
of new cars  
and smile.

Everyone  
you have ever known  
is there  
armed with  
butcher knives.

Suddenly,  
the lights  
go out.



# Confession

Only because  
we are  
candles  
burning  
at both  
ends  
do I say  
this word  
love  
and fall  
silent.

# Dukkha

Your eyes are scarred,  
pain twisted and knotted  
like a macrame cross.

Your hands are maimed,  
the nails clinging  
to the flesh  
like some broken Huguenot  
on the rack.

Your mouth is hard,  
the narrow trenches  
the years have dug  
bind it  
like a gilt frame  
strangling a dark  
medieval portrait.

So many eyes  
are light and clear  
like dew reflecting  
the morning sky.

So many hands are  
soft and warm  
like a cat against  
a naked thigh.

So many mouths  
are shaped to smiles  
like clouds  
releasing the sun.

Why do the silent demons  
grapple and sweat  
like insane Apache dancers  
on the tangled stage  
of your mind?

# The Gulls

You forgot  
to remove  
his hands  
still stroking  
your breasts  
in slow circles  
like gulls,  
white bellies tight,  
as you  
so naked  
tried to light  
a smile.

# The Answer

Creating fireflies  
between the  
leaves of time,  
I stop to consider  
your eyes.

I swear that deep within us,  
tangled in the  
chains of memory,  
lies a dark answer  
to the bric-a-brac  
of thought.

It stirs  
like a panther  
uncurling in  
the jungles of night.

If lightning would streak  
the skies of our lives,  
if dawn would  
mix her colors  
in the small dish  
of our hopes,  
we would be  
incandescent.

The dull moths  
of our days  
would fold  
their mottled wings  
and die.

Oh temperance,  
murderer of the  
wild dreams  
of children,  
sleep.

# The News From Saigon

The turning world,  
a river of blood.

We whisper  
words of love.

The radio rasps  
"today in Vietnam . . ."

My hands move through  
waterfalls of hair.

Our moans are not,  
no not,  
like theirs.

# Gypsy

His eye is slow and sensuous;  
it lingers on your breast.

His fingers weave the wiry thread;  
the beard flows to his chest.

Gypsy, lost in plate glass skies,  
will I pass the test?

Gypsy, fondling inner lies,  
will I here find rest?

His arm slips slowly round you;  
the tree grips the earth.

His gaze cuts through your sighs.

He knows you will forever thirst.

Gypsy?

Yes.

Gypsy?

Yes.

Gypsy?

Yes.

# Job

Job before  
God's wailing wall,  
eyes consumed by fire,  
prays the blood's  
tormented call,  
echoes my desire.

# The Bed

Hollows map  
your body  
gone.

My body drinks  
your fading  
warmth.

Your ghost  
is mute.

I smoke.

A touch,  
did I feel  
a touch  
of a wrapping  
thigh?

Silence deepens.

I sleep.

Night scraps  
the window.

The bed  
is silent.



# The Bureaucrats

They are pencils,  
starting sharp,  
ground down  
each day  
between grey  
file cabinets,  
never knowing  
the hand  
that writes  
with their  
numb bodies  
slowly  
as the  
hour hand  
goes  
by.

# Bedlam

Mad eyes,  
glazed and deep,  
slice slowly,  
dissecting each  
motion.

Lost in  
phosphorescent seas  
whose waters  
we have  
long since  
forgotten.

# Ice

Water freezes,  
ice thaws.

A man is born,  
a man dies.

# The Voyeur

A photograph as fragile  
as a necklace of ivory  
carved in a World War II freighter.

We carry the sea inside us  
and the memos of dreams  
we write ourselves  
augur the future  
as surely as  
the dark dreams of angles  
build the nine circles  
of hell.

Five lies you told me.

Five.

I will tell you one.

The coupling of phantoms  
can only give birth  
to a stone.

# The Yellow Brick Road

I never lived in Kansas,  
but in 1966 I met  
the Wicked Witch of the West.

"The world is a dream  
refracted in billions  
of eyes," she said.

Taking a diamond  
out of her belly button,  
she held it to the sun,  
"See."

Treading water  
in the Sargasso Sea,  
I notice that  
the North Star has  
gone out.

Dorothy, where are you?

I have been calling for years.

Soon my bright eyes  
will be mirrors  
for fish to write  
cryptograms on.

Goodbye, Emerald City.

Like all dreams,  
you can only  
shallow us whole.



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