

# Leonard Cohen

THE ENERGY  
OF SLAVES

*The Energy of Slaves*

by

*Leonard Cohen*

*by the same author*

SELECTED POEMS

POEMS 1956-68

BEAUTIFUL LOSERS (novel)

THE FAVOURITE GAME (novel)

Leonard Cohen  
The Energy of Slaves

Jonathan Cape Thirty Bedford Square London

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## *Contents*

Welcome to these lines ...	9
I threw open the shutters light fell on this poem ...	10
I threw open the shutters: light fell on these lines ...	11
This is the only poem ...	12
All men delight you ...	13
I'd like to read ...	14
Portrait of a girl ...	15
My skin is made of stars ...	16
There are no traitors among women ...	17
Poetry begun in this mood rarely succeeds ...	18
I am invisible to night ...	19
It takes a long time to see you Terez ...	20
I did not know until you walked away ...	21
Overheard on every corner ...	22
Did you ever moan beneath me ...	23
I am no longer at my best practising ...	24
I perceived the outline of your breasts ...	25
I don't want you to know who I am ...	26
I know there's no such thing as hell or heaven ...	27
I try to keep in touch wherever I am ...	28
Your eyes are very strong ...	29
It is not to tell you anything ...	30
O love did the world come to you ...	31
There is no end to my hatred ...	32
I am dying...	33
cutting the hair ...	34
I left a woman waiting ...	35
I wore a medal of the Virgin ...	36
You are a much finer person than I am ...	37

--I don't know what to call it, he said ... 38

The silly girl, the silly girl... 39

I make this song for thee ... 40

Listening to her song ... 41

Each day he lugged ... 42

Scorpion ... 43

Stay... 45

If I could tell you ... 46

What character could possibly engage my boredom ... 47

She sat down at the piano ... 48

Morocco ... 49

I was lost... 50

There is no one ... 51

The progress of my style ... 52

I dream of torturing you ... 53

Leaning over his poem ... 54

Crying, Come back, Hero ... 55

You provide the furniture ... 56

Over there a little altar ... 57

One of these days ... 58

Beauty speaks in the third act ... 59

Picture of the artist and his room ... 60

Why is it I have nothing to say to you ... 61

This is a threat ... 62

Terez and Deanne elude me ... 63

You need her ... 64

How we used to approach The Book of Changes: 1966 ... 65

To the men and women ... 66

I sit with the old men ... 67

There was a veil between them ... 68

I will grow old ... 69

I dress in black ... 70

I walk through the old yellow sunlight... 71

Dance on the money ... 72

I have been cruel to you ... 73

Perhaps it is because my music ... 74

The sea-lions live a wonderful life ... 75

The Ark you're building ... 76

What has taken place in your body and your head ... 77

I let your mind enter me ... 78

Welcome home ... 79

I could not wait for you ... 80

They locked up a man ... 81

You are almost always with someone else ... 82

Dipped myself in a future night ... 83

Come down to my room ... 84

Valentina gave me four months ... 85

I have a sneer for you ... 86

It gets dark at four o'clock now ... 87

It was a while ago ... 88

You tore your shirt... 89

You want me at all times ... 90

Why did you spend ... 91

It is a trust to me ... 92

he whistled to himself... 93

His suicide was simply not a puzzle ... 94

I am punished when I do not work on this poem ... 95

Perhaps she would come again ... 96

the 15-year-old girls ... 97

On hearing that Irving Layton was kissed by Allen Ginsberg  
at a Toronto poetry reading ... 98

The poet is drunk ... 99

We call it sunlight ... 100  
War is no longer needed ... 101  
The killers that run the other countries ... 102  
Dear Mailer ... 103  
On leaving France ... 104  
Love is a fire ... 105  
Whenever I happen to see you ... 106  
The form of poetry ... 107  
Song for my assassin ... 108  
I don't know what happens ... 109  
I can't believe what they say is true ... 110  
O darling (as we used to say) ... 111  
I have no talent left... 112  
This is my voice ... 113  
This is the poem we have been waiting for ... 114  
How we loved you ... 115  
The poems don't love us anymore ... 117  
Layton was wrong ... 118  
I think it is safe to tell you where I am ... 119  
For a long time ... 120  
Any system you contrive without us ... 121  
Each man ... 122  
One of the lizards ... 123  
You went to work at the U.N. ... 124  
Every time my wife has a baby ... 125  
I see the ocean from my window ... 126  
There is nothing here ... 127

Welcome to these lines  
There is a war on  
but I'll try to make you comfortable  
Don't follow my conversation  
it's just nervousness  
Didn't I make love to you  
when we were students of the East  
Yes the house is different  
the village will be taken soon  
I've removed whatever  
might give comfort to the enemy  
We are alone  
until the times change  
and those who have been betrayed  
come back like pilgrims to this moment  
when we did not yield  
and call the darkness poetry

I threw open the shutters  
light fell on this poem  
It fell on the name of a man tortured on a terrace  
above a well-known street  
I swore by the sunlight  
to avenge his broken feet

I threw open the shutters:  
light fell on these lines  
(which are incomplete)  
It fell on two words  
which I must erase:  
name of a man  
tortured on a terrace  
above a well-known street  
I swore by the sunlight  
to take his advice:  
remove all evidence from my verse  
forget about his punctured feet

This is the only poem  
I can read  
I am the only one  
can write it  
Others seem to think  
the past can guide them  
My own music  
is not merely naked  
It is open-legged  
It is like a cunt  
and like a cunt  
must needs be houseproud  
I didn't kill myself  
when things went wrong  
I didn't turn  
to drugs or teaching  
I tried to sleep  
but when I couldn't sleep  
I learned to write  
I learned to write  
what might be read  
on nights like this  
by one like me

All men delight you

If you ever read this  
think of the man writing it

he hated the world on your behalf

I'd like to read  
one of the poems  
that drove me into poetry  
I can't remember one line  
or where to look

The same thing  
happened with money  
girls and late evenings of talk

Where are the poems  
that led me away from everything I loved

to stand here  
naked with the thought of finding thee

## *Portrait of a Girl*

She sits behind the wooden shutters  
on a very hot day  
The room is dark, the photographs gloomy  
She is profoundly worried  
that her thighs are too big  
and her ass fat and ugly  
Also she is too hairy  
The lucky American girls are not hairy  
She sweats too much  
There is a fine mist caught  
on the dark hairs above her mouth  
I wish I could show her  
what such hair and haunches  
do for one like me  
Unfortunately I don't know who she is  
or where she lives  
or if indeed she lives at all  
There is no information about this person  
except in these lines  
and let me make it clear  
as far as I'm concerned  
she has no problem whatsoever

My skin is made of stars  
that tell me what to do.  
Turn on the light. I am a dwarf.  
You could love me as an embalmed child  
if my legs were not so thick and short.

Your confessions of ignorance  
charmed me once upon a time.  
Teach me to be happy  
you said to everyone in bed.  
You bought them an expensive  
apple if they tried

I am a fastidious dwarf. You thought  
I could keep you beautiful  
with a lamentation. Even now  
you are ready to begin again  
but I am too busy washing.

I want to tell my past to a doctor  
but I want to tell it to a doctor  
who does not love the past  
who will not say at last: But remember  
you are and you are not a dwarf.

Keep the fire. Keep the fire.  
Your body is holy.  
Do not believe the truth.  
The truth is tiny compared  
to the things you have to do.  
You are long and thin and fair.

There are no traitors among women  
Even the mother does not tell the son  
they do not wish us well

She cannot be tamed by conversation  
Absence is the only weapon  
against the supreme arsenal of her body

She reserves a special contempt  
for the slaves of beauty  
She lets them watch her die

Forgive me, partisans,  
I only sing this for the ones  
who do not care who wins the war

Poetry begun in this mood rarely succeeds  
the girl wasn't at the cafe  
the poet has overeaten  
in fact he begins this poem  
at another cafe  
waiting for his second dinner  
we have little hope  
for his art or his evening  
He will probably have to  
buy an airplane ticket to Montreal  
and sleep one night  
with the mistress  
he plans to abandon  
I'll get the bill for it all  
in the middle of the winter  
Since I have introduced myself  
let me go on to say  
there are perfect heart-shaped leaves  
climbing the bamboo trellis  
of this small cafe  
When not admiring them  
from the naturalist's point of view  
they remind me  
of the lights on Broadway  
and if this entire small cafe  
became a World War Two fighter plane  
these brave green hearts  
would be stencilled on the fuselage  
instead of  
swastikas and the rising sun

I am invisible to night  
Only certain shy women see me  
All my hideous days of visibility  
I longed for their smiles  
Now they lean out of their shabby  
plans-for-the-evening  
so we may salute one another  
Sisters of mine  
of my own shattered people  
going after third-choice lovers  
they smile at me to indicate  
that we can never meet  
as long as we permit  
this order of things to persist  
in which we are the wretched ones

It takes a long time to see you Terez  
I guess you must be brushing your hair  
or touching your forehead to your knee

Take this song and clumsy melody  
Keep me waiting in Room 801  
like you did that night when we were young

the tomboy in lace and the jockstrapped girl  
and with your spirit lover  
on the cushion of your finger

moan for me  
as I will moan for you my love  
as I will moan for thee

I did not know  
until you walked away  
you had the perfect ass  
Forgive me  
for not falling in love  
with your face or your conversation

## *Overheard on every corner*

Sometimes I remember  
that I have been chosen  
to perfect all men  
the fireflies remind me  
the stream beside my shack  
If I was meant to be a poet  
I would not be able to blow  
the actual flawless smokerings  
for which I am renowned  
I would be distracted  
by the possible beauty of my pen  
but I am not  
I would lose myself  
I would have lost myself  
with the women  
I so relentlessly pursued  
but I did not  
I was meant to be  
the seed of your new society  
I was meant to be  
the courtless invisible king  
I am that  
the clearest example of royalty  
who serves you tonight  
as he makes a bed for the dog  
and the fireflies burn  
at their different heights

Did you ever moan beneath me  
Virgin of Amnesia  
If you surrendered I forget  
and  
let me be your bright new toy  
I am the first  
to wear your shackles like a  
bracelet  
first spy and traitor  
in the Board Room fields

I am no longer at my best practising  
the craft of verse  
I do better  
in the cloakroom with Sara  
But even in this alternate realm  
I am no longer at my best  
I need  
the mercy of my own attention  
Who could have foretold  
the heart grows old  
from touching others

I perceived the outline of your breasts  
through your Hallowe'en costume  
I knew you were falling in love with me  
because no other man could perceive  
the advance of your bosom into his imagination  
It was a rupture of your unusual modesty  
for me and me alone  
through which you impressed upon my shapeless hunger  
the incomparable and final outline of your breasts  
like two deep fossil shells  
which remained all night long and probably forever

I don't want you to know who I am  
I'm eating a juicy orange by lamplight  
but that's none of your business now  
now that you've got "Vietnam" and the "blacks"  
and no longer have to think about who  
scratched her dress off in the heat  
I have no electricity or power  
nor is it a foreign claw  
that tears this from my first and only heart

I know there's no such thing  
as hell or heaven  
I know it's 1967  
but are you sleeping have you slept  
with any of my friends  
It's not just something I want to know  
it's the only thing I want to know  
not about the mystery of God  
not about myself  
and am I the beautiful one  
The only wisdom I want to have  
is to know if I am  
or if I am not alone in your love

I try to keep in touch wherever I am  
I don't say I love you  
I don't say I worked it out  
The sun comes in the skylight  
My work calls to me  
sweet as the sound of the creek  
beside the cabin in Tennessee  
I listen at my desk  
and I am almost ready to forgive  
the ones who tried to crush us  
with their fine systems  
Your beauty is everywhere  
which we distilled together  
out of the hard times

You will never feel me leading you  
Forever I escape your homage  
I have no ideas to shackle you  
I have nothing in mind for you  
I have no prayers to put you in  
I live for you  
without the memory of what you deserve  
or what you do not deserve

Your eyes are very strong  
They try to cripple me  
You put all your strength  
into your eyes  
because you do not know  
how to be a hero

You have mistaken your ideal  
It is not a hero  
but a tyrant  
you long to become  
Therefore weakness  
is your most attractive quality

I have no plans for you  
Your dangerous black eyes  
fasten on the nearest girl  
or the nearest mirror  
as you go hopefully  
from profession to profession

It is not to tell you anything  
but to live forever  
that I write this  
It is my greed that you love  
I have kept nothing for myself  
I have despised every honour  
Imperial and mysterious  
my greed has made a slave of you

O love  
did the world come to you  
in the form of a woman  
and you  
were you training with mirrors  
to make yourself perfect

There is no end to my hatred  
except in your arms  
Strange as it seems  
I am the ghost of Joan of Arc  
and I am bitter bitter  
in the consequence of voices  
Hold me tight  
or I will have you sweating  
where I was

I am dying  
because you have not  
died for me  
and the world  
still loves you

I write this because I know  
that your kisses  
are born blind  
on the songs that touch you

I don't want a purpose  
in your life  
I want to be lost among  
your thoughts  
the way you listen to New York City  
when you fall asleep

cutting the hair  
and other forms of discipline  
rituals excluding cunt and wine  
I used to act so pretty  
when I was looking for a girl  
did you notice I'm not  
talking to you anymore  
you can rest now  
this is the most peaceful music in the world

I left a woman waiting  
I met her sometime later  
she said, Your eyes are dead  
What happened to you, lover

And since she spoke the truth to me  
I tried to answer truly  
Whatever happened to my eyes  
happened to your beauty

O go to sleep my faithful wife  
I told her rather cruelly  
Whatever happened to my eyes  
happened to your beauty

I wore a medal of the Virgin  
round my throat  
I was always a slave  
Play with me forever  
Mistress of the World  
Keep me hard  
Keep me in the kitchen  
Keep me out of politics

You are a much finer person than I am  
Your poetry is better too  
There is always blood on your apple  
and only sometimes on mine  
I act like a fool  
when I speak to two girls on yet another night  
the one cunt sunk like an imperial bathtub  
in my slippery conversation  
and the other an endless tribute to Helen Keller  
Choose me louder please  
if only in the moment that you fall  
We could be lovers begging together

--I don't know what to call it, he said.

--Call it your friend.

--My friend.

She held it, not as tightly as he wanted.

--God, it looks so archaic, she said.

The silly girl, the silly girl, o the silly goose, look  
at her gooseflesh!

She stood up.

As soon as the water was very shallow, she stood up, leaving  
the crouch with which she waded

Write with compassion about the deceit in the human heart,  
in my heart, about my appetite for revenge, how I hate you  
when others love you more than you love me, how I hope  
your art will fail, when others love you more than I love  
you, when others love you more than they love me, my  
unceasing struggle for fame and money, my lies, the lies I  
tell you in order to trick and eventually humiliate you,  
because this is one of my intentions

From whose point of view are you trying to love your  
body, composing special expressions for yourself when you  
consult the mirror, concealing your double chin even from  
yourself

You can no longer control the ones you love

Are you happy now that no one wants to undress you,  
wants to kiss and caress and handle your (you have no  
idea what to call it)

And is this what you wanted  
to live in a house that is haunted  
by you and me

I make this song for thee  
Lord of the World  
who has everything in the world  
except this song

Listening to her song  
I looked out the window  
at all the young matadors  
cruising the record shops  
on Clinton Street

I've lost my pride  
I'm not proud any longer  
It turned out that  
I was only a scribbler  
and not the slice of apple  
you would cut your wrists upon

There's a lot of music  
on Clinton Street  
There's some winter now  
in every sunny step  
Many dancing people  
found out about the winter

You heard me begging  
I put aside every ornament  
of my voice  
I heard myself  
forsaking beauty  
and shame drove out  
the appetite for music

Before I go  
I'd like to thank  
the singers  
in the basement  
on their knees confessing

Each day he lugged  
a hunk of something precious  
over to his boredom  
and once or twice a week  
when he was granted  
the tiny grace of distance  
he perceived that he laboured  
as his fathers did  
on someone else's pyramid

Thoughts of rebellion  
Thoughts of injustice  
New Year's resolutions  
The seduction of a woman  
All these he engraved  
numbly letter by letter

Walther PPK-S  
Serial No. 115142  
stolen from one slave by another

## *Scorpion*

O rare and perfect creature  
Who has made your nest in me  
I'm on my way home to you  
singing with the lips  
you bloodied out of jealousy  
I am your world  
I am your wall  
You are the last scorpion  
Who never longed to be a man  
It is only in my heart  
that you can dream  
of your relentless invasion  
of the sunlit plain  
when you moved among the numberless  
and a woman far more beautiful  
than I am  
was your invisible queen  
Scorpion scorpion  
master of the hollow stone I will not let them crush you  
I do not like their reasons  
My heart is numb and swollen  
from keeping you  
in the safety of your anger  
I never could foretell  
the loyalty that would claim me  
They will not wear you on a brooch  
they will not watch you  
in a paperweight  
I am your dominion  
I am your exercise  
You hate the world I visit  
and I am punished  
by your solitary truth  
Everything you say  
about the world is true

*Stay*

stay a little longer  
timid shadow  
of my repose  
fastened so lightly  
to the breath before  
my first question

Thou art the hunger  
can disarm  
every appetite

What embrace  
satisfies the child  
who will not kill?

If I could tell you  
the laws of my longing  
you would be here  
on behalf of your greed  
the witness of a hungry man  
who does not care  
if you are naked or shy

Because now that I  
can't use it or feel it  
I know for a fact  
that I am beautiful  
and more than anything  
you want a beautiful slave  
to make you cry

And long after that  
whenever I touched you  
whenever you undressed  
you would need to know  
what I was thinking  
and you would be as treacherous  
as you know you are  
you would be a spy

And then something would happen  
that would crush us  
and free us  
and destroy completely  
whatever had been  
we would have begun  
to signal one another  
each time before we lie

What character could possibly engage my boredom, that exquisite spoiled princess in the palace of my failure ? She refuses even to imagine him with whom I must inspire her hopelessness, and she barely speaks to me.

The story is already complicated by my indifference. I believe she longs for a woman.  
She does not want the gift to come from me.

She wants to wear delicate men's trousers and live with this woman in a port town where they will perfect sweet rituals such as walking together at twilight smoking cigarillos past shadowy retired fishermen who learn to accept them as another species of bird which they would judge no more fiercely than the seagull or the heron.

I could have created such a woman out of the one or two women who loved me, but in those days I had no taste for monsters, although I must say that they did.

She sat down at the piano  
the most beautiful pianist in the world  
dressed in a photographer's robe  
I was rambling through the yellow pages  
of my old slave's heart  
for something better than gratitude  
when upon the mucous she installed  
the tiniest royal sailing ship  
the sea has ever given back  
saying, Sometimes I am with thee  
sometimes I must go to where  
a man is stranger to his pain

## *Morocco*

I bought a man his dinner  
He did not wish to look into my eyes  
He ate in peace

I was lost  
when I met you on the road  
to Larissa  
the straight road between the cedars

You thought  
I was a man of roads  
and you loved me for being such a man  
I was not such a man

I was lost  
when I met you on the road  
to Larissa

There is no one  
to show these poems to  
Do not call a friend to witness  
what you must do alone  
These are my ashes  
I do not intend to save you any work  
by keeping silent  
You are not yet as strong as I am  
You believe me  
but I do not believe you  
This is war  
You are here to be destroyed

## *The progress of my style*

I rarely think of you darling  
Tonight I indulge myself  
remembering the beauty you lost  
in your thirtieth year  
but I can't get off on it  
I have no altar for my song

I'm living with a woman in Montreal  
My inspiration failed  
I abandoned the great plan  
Among other things  
I got wiped out  
by several charismatic holy men

I wish there was a tree  
and a cafe  
with my best friend talking  
Thighs from my old poems  
would help  
None of the items can appear  
for political reasons

Perhaps you can detect  
that I still try for music  
idle music for the very idle  
you might say unemployed  
working to reach you like a computer  
through holes in the paper

I dream of torturing you  
because you are so puffed up with pride  
You stand there with a bill of rights  
or an automatic rifle  
or your new religion  
I am the angel of revenge  
The flowers and the mountains  
the milky afternoons of childhood  
all innocent and abandoned forms  
have designated me  
the angel of revenge  
This machine is rubber and metal  
it fits over your body and you die slowly

Leaning over his poem  
from a standing position  
wearing underwear  
the bed unmade  
the poem half made  
he crosses out a line  
he stands back  
the serious worker  
the teen-age craftsman  
The poem is found later  
in a collection  
We are left alone the boy and me  
the boy and me are married by my will  
they retire unhappily  
to the unmade bed  
I arrange the divorce  
I refrain from comforting you tonight  
Tracherous girls hide my songs  
under drifts of make-up  
Leaving the company of great thieves  
I return to my solitary adventure

## *Crying, Come back, Hero*

Now we're tough enough again  
to speak for love alone,  
let politics go hang, we've  
had our try with twisted form:  
what good was it but training  
for a summer day, discipline  
to keep our manhood hard and warm.  
One man free to love his minute  
in the realms of flesh and sun  
breaks down more pain than ages  
of humane law or lawyers can.  
Speaking softly one last time  
let me say, You've made your laws  
too strong, good or bad, your laws  
have weakened many men, and I  
would rather haunt cafes on both  
sides of town than break my only  
heart for your millennium,  
my beloved falling through the numbered  
arms of weak and weaker men.  
It's panic in the eyes of girls  
that tells me I must speak for love alone,  
panic at their empty beds,  
at sanitary rows of monsters born.

1965

You provide the furniture  
if you want to live here.  
Do you like this song ?  
I wrote it in a mood  
that I would never  
be seen dead in.  
Put your chair  
where your mouth is,  
and I welcome your opinion

Over there        a little altar  
Over there        one city or another  
Over there        your miserable "sex life"  
Spare us the details  
You hide behind your nakedness  
When you are bold enough  
you impose it like a bad government

One of these days  
You will be the object  
of the contempt of slaves  
Then you will not talk so easily  
about our freedom and our love  
Then you will refrain  
from offering us your solutions  
You have many things on your mind  
We think only of revenge

*Beauty speaks in the third act*

And so your purpose failed  
you could not hear high music  
your mistress fell into a trance  
of everyday behaviour  
money found an honoured place  
at your expanding table  
and the city was your home  
I moved aside  
long before you sent a delegate  
to say you could not use me  
I left you for another hungry man  
who waited for me all his childhood  
as once you did yourself  
Now I bring you news  
of this other one

## *Picture of the artist and his room*

His first masterpiece, the painterly art  
invisible, detail photographic  
and accident, our newest rhetoric  
bravely absent, except that he had to start  
somewhere and it was this room that stopped him between women: that's all he owes to chance.  
He might be waiting for an ambulance,  
a naked woman, or the Seraphim  
of God. But he's not. He's going to get up  
and paint his room at midnight with himself  
in the corner saying, This is myself.  
This is the bed. This is the plastic cup.  
I am one, I am welcome, like the chair,  
the table, any of the objects there.

Why is it  
I have nothing to say to you  
Russian princess  
in 1920 furs  
coming down the steep steps  
careful of the ice  
on Ave de l'Esplanade  
You were extremely fragile  
in your hold on beauty  
and I cared so much  
you wouldn't slip  
that I had to kick you  
down the stairs  
just to savour  
unemployment once again

This is a threat  
Do you know what a threat is  
I have no private life  
You will commit suicide  
or become like me

Terez and Deanne elude me  
Terez and Deanne  
that is how great a poet I am  
SKYLINE  
and artist too  
I could grow to love  
the fucking in New York  
far from the soil  
but dreamy and courageous

You need her  
so you can get  
your boots off the bedspread

We who have always ruled the world  
don't like the way you dance

And she said, I for one  
am happy with the world

She seized the lapel of a cut-throat  
and said it again  
with all her small voice trembling,  
I for one am happy with the world

I don't know if I want to kill her or not

How we used to approach The Book of  
Changes: 1966

Good father, since I am now broken down, no leader  
of the horning world, no saint for those in pain,  
no singer, no musician, no master of anything, no  
friend to my friends, no lover to those who love me  
only my greed remains to me, biting into every  
minute that has not come with my insane triumph  
show me the way now, tonight, to possess what  
I long for, to ensnare, to tame, to love and be loved  
by ---- in the passion which I cannot ignore despite  
your teachings  
give her to me and let me be for a moment in  
this miserable and bewildering wretchedness, a happy  
animal

To the men and women  
who own men and women

those of us meant to be lovers  
we will not pardon you  
for wasting our bodies and time

I sit with the old men  
watching you dance  
We never found a way  
to outwit your husband  
I suggested a simple lie  
You held out for murder

I buy a yellow pencil  
for the sake of innocence  
I leave you to your husband  
and a Greek marine on leave  
who is touching you too much  
touching you too much

In my small courtyard  
the trees whisper to my soul  
I have been in love with them  
all my life  
their company is sweet they no longer rule the world

There was a veil between them  
composed of good thread  
not carelessly woven

therefore they did not ignore it  
or poke at it, but honoured  
what hid them, one from the other

thus they served their love  
as those old Spanish lovers served  
The One Who Does Not Manifest Himself

I will grow old  
the photograph will age  
I will die  
the photograph enter a museum  
Study the naked ones  
they too grew old  
even the naked ones  
even the abandoned ones  
The photograph tells you  
the way you hold your cunt  
is old-fashioned

I dress in black  
I have green eyes  
in certain light

If others try to write this  
death to them  
death to anyone  
if he or she unseal this poem  
in which I dress in black

and bless your eyes  
who hurry from this page  
Put a green-eyed man  
out of his misery and rage

I walk through the old yellow sunlight  
to get to my kitchen table  
the poem about me  
lying there with the books  
in which I am listed  
among the dead and future Dylans

You can understand  
I am in no hurry to make the passage  
The sunlight is old and yellow  
a flood of what I laboured  
to distill a tiny drop of  
in that shabby little laboratory  
called my talent

I stand here dreaming in my sweat  
(you would fall in love with me again)  
dreaming of a tie a shirt  
a white suit a life  
a new life in a warm city  
far from the envious practice  
of written speech

O look what the summer  
has done to the daisies in my yard  
Their skeletons must look like scrap and junk  
to many lovers of the cabbage  
(and to be perfectly fair  
even to many lovers of the daisy)

Dance on the money  
the heads of presidents  
red toenails

this "poem" is an I.O.U.  
for 10,000 drachmas  
on your step-smooth shoulders

My table rushes up  
to give you a marble stage  
black olives live forever  
in the tired oil of your grace

Sinking under needles of bazouki  
you threaten us with jobs in the Sahara  
or a salary of halvah  
oh the hair is real  
that pilots the thighs  
into the important satin theatre  
ruined like Greece by overuse  
but all we have of the Golden age

Your courting clothes sleeping in cedar  
your grandmother still alive on Hydra  
"Don't tell her that you saw me naked"

I have been cruel to you  
but that was when I was thin  
a fugitive from employment  
in your dressing room  
a critic of your veils  
and the stars on your nipples  
"Every man considers himself a connoisseur  
of Belly Dancing"

I join the jealous applause of kings  
each one at his lonely table  
with its white saucer satellite of American money  
there to honour you  
remembering our time last week  
when slavery peeled from the world  
like an old snakeskin  
as we emerged  
through the back door of the cafe  
into an alley off 8th Avenue  
hand in hand  
drunk and silent among the cold morning clouds  
as we moved toward our marriage  
in the unwritten history of New York

Perhaps it is because my music  
does not sing for me

I hate my music  
I long for weapons

Some men find strength  
by going their lonely ways  
let us be what we can to them

The sea-lions live a wonderful life  
I wish we could leave them alone  
They will cause us to make love in rubber suits  
It has been said  
that I am not the leader of my generation  
There is ample evidence  
Not only is the dog friendly  
he believes he is human  
My case is similar  
I want to be left alone  
in your great envious heart

The Ark you're building  
in your yard  
Will you let me on  
Will you let me off  
Don't you think  
we all should study Etiquette  
before we study Magic

*N.Y. 1967*

What has taken place in your body and your head that allows you to address yourself like this  
Surely you know  
And if you do not know  
as obviously you do not know  
how can I destroy the wretch who does not love you

*N.Y. 1967*

I let your mind enter me  
out of loneliness  
I was a house for your vision  
but I cannot do this twice  
Don't walk on your shadow  
Don't step on my broom  
I will keep your shadow clean

*N.Y. 1967*

Welcome home  
resume your kingdom  
the girls have forgotten you  
Marianne will remain  
a beautiful and mysterious name  
whenever you see it written down  
Come in now  
all the curious landscapes  
which you surrendered  
are still your own  
you could not trade them  
for priesthood or gold or revolution  
Walk down eighth avenue with me  
ask anyone for a cigarette

*N.Y. 1967*

I could not wait for you  
to find me dead in a rented room  
with my sunglasses dusty  
on the card table  
So once again  
I tried to set my throat on fire  
this time in silence  
and not thinking of you at all  
(I had so much time to kill)

They locked up a man  
who wanted to rule the world  
The fools  
They locked up the wrong man

You are almost always with someone else  
I'm going to burn down your house  
and fuck you in the ass  
If you have the presence of mind  
to look over your shoulder  
you'll see me swooning  
Why don't you come over to my table  
with no pants on  
I'm sick of surprising you.

Dipped myself in a future night  
like a long-armed candle-maker  
Came back too gross for love  
Useless as I seem in my coat of greed  
I will have an unborn woman  
when I am only print

Come down to my room  
I was thinking about you  
and I made a pass at myself

Valentina gave me four months  
of her twentieth year  
and then returned to a rich man  
who lived in the Plaza Hotel

She watched television all day long  
and she never told me a lie  
I loved to creep up behind her  
when she was engrossed in Star Trek  
and kiss her little ass-hole

It was a happy hotel room at the Chelsea  
We never let anyone come over  
(I do not think she minded my pranks)

I have a sneer for you  
I deliver it to the lapels of my overcoat  
but it belongs to you  
One of these days  
I'm going to try to stop them  
from killing you  
but it will be reluctantly  
In my speech to the jury  
I will remember if I can  
the fragrance of your skin  
perhaps you can get away  
with five years People's Field Whore

It gets dark at four o'clock now  
The windshield is filled with night and cold  
the motor running for the heater's sake  
We finally forgive ourselves  
and touch each other between the legs  
At last I can feel the element of welcome in our kisses

It was a while ago  
when I was still smoking cigarettes  
when I left women waiting  
and shopped at Le Chateau  
when I was still  
the sweetest singer I could imagine  
It's too dark in here  
the light isn't any good  
And stop asking me questions  
nobody's gonna notice  
if I never write again  
except that incredible  
natural blonde over there  
that all the boys are fighting over  
them roses are dangerous

You tore your shirt  
to show me where  
you had been hurt  
I had to stare

I put my hand  
on what I saw  
I drew it back  
It was a claw

Your skin is cured  
You sew your shirt  
You throw me food  
and change my dirt



Why did you spend  
another night with her  
when you could have slept  
with Naked Jane  
or bought yourself  
a twelve-year oriental girl  
Why don't they make Vietnam  
worth fighting for

It is a trust to me  
most holy out of my daydeeper than black opium  
that travelled me out of my lessons  
louder than the firereels of Cuba  
where I did not kill the man

It is a trust  
and when I find it  
(losing it losing it often)  
I am a banner alone  
I am a wise soldier  
I walk with my mouth shut  
into the drifting world  
gripped by the honour

*Havana 1961*

he whistled to himself  
in the millionaire's living-room  
he said something romantic to himself  
about a blonde girl of war and the iron rain  
he smoked a cigarette  
and stubbed it in a marble ashtray  
he didn't steal anything  
he left the news of a thief  
he said something romantic to himself  
about his solitary occupation  
as he climbed down the outside  
of the black Manhattan skyscraper  
the people will come back from the charity ball  
and never feel at home again

His suicide was simply not a puzzle  
even to those of us  
who photographed him  
with his mouth open  
behind a grime of dots

We saw him meeting a girl  
quite by accident  
the blue night of the estate  
upheld by lemon trees  
resembling small-faced orchestras

We stood by on the rim  
of a bullet hole looking down  
as he laced her huge new boot  
with a boa constrictor

Sing for him, Leonard,  
your love of honey qualifies you  
to wear his raincoat  
and his stinging shaving lotion  
for this purest of occasions

I am punished when I do not work on this poem  
or when I try to invent something  
I am one of the slaves  
You are employees  
That is why I hate your work

Perhaps she would come again  
perhaps she would come for the first time  
perhaps it was the girl  
who entered without knocking  
and saw in the courtyard a man  
whose genitals were sparkling in the sunlight  
with the semen of self-love  
and stared long before she fled.  
Let there be a Law that says  
she owes him one, one vision of herself to crack  
to smash to utterly disgrace  
the fortress plastercast of beauty  
that keeps her from him  
that keeps her in the song of other men

the 15-year-old girls  
I wanted when I was 15  
I have them now  
it is very pleasant  
it is never too late  
I advise you all  
to become rich and famous

On hearing that Irving Layton was kissed  
by Allen Ginsberg at a Toronto poetry  
reading

Not to alarm you Irving  
but I have it  
from a friend of  
the deceased Irish poet  
that soon after  
he received  
the blessings of  
Allen Ginsberg  
Patrick Kavanagh died

The poet is drunk  
He wonders what  
he will write next  
He has some notion of poetry  
girl's names and ages  
the weather in cities  
that's about it  
Now comes the miracle  
his absolute privacy  
violates itself before our eyes  
his absolute privacy  
forbids the violation  
Three nights at the Hilton  
a girl with round buttocks  
suntanned and cheerful, fourteen, Athens

We call it sunlight  
or the dove  
or a two twenty-two

It is my language  
my cunt my slave

your advice!  
your manifestos!  
the next hustle  
now that psychiatry  
has been disgraced

we call it "getting a tan"  
we call it  
"the British are coming"  
many names to match the amplitude  
of your ugliness

no instructions come  
on how to read this  
you would have to be  
more beautiful than your father  
and your mother  
and you aren't

War is no longer needed  
to teach you  
about torture and pain

Therefore don't congratulate yourself  
when the boys come home  
Your party did not win

It's the old arrangement  
the old party  
the one that deals in slavery

The killers that run  
the other countries  
are trying to get us  
to overthrow the killers  
that run our own

I for one  
prefer the rule  
of our native killers  
I am convinced  
the foreign killer  
will kill more of us  
than the old familiar killer does  
Frankly I don't believe  
anyone out there  
really wants us to solve  
our social problems  
I base this all on how I feel  
about the man next door  
I just hope he doesn't  
get any uglier  
Therefore I am a patriot  
I don't like to see  
a burning flag  
because it excites  
the killers on either side  
to unfortunate excess  
which goes on gaily  
quite unchecked  
until everyone is dead

Dear Mailer  
don't ever fuck with me  
or come up to me  
and punch my gut  
on behalf of one of your theories  
I am armed and mad  
Should I suffer  
the smallest humiliation  
at your hand  
I will k--l you  
and your entire family

## *On leaving France*

the blue sky  
makes the plane go slow

they say I stole their money  
which is true

let the proprietors of the revolution  
consider this:

a song the people loved  
was written by a thief

Love is a fire  
It burns everyone  
It disfigures everyone  
It is the world's excuse  
for being ugly

Whenever I happen to see you  
I forget for a while  
that I am ugly in my own eyes  
for not winning you

I wanted you to choose me  
over all the men you know  
because I am destroyed  
in their company

I have often prayed for you  
like this  
Let me have her

The form of poetry  
has been disgraced by many pious hands  
That's why I can't write it anymore  
I couldn't take the company

Just a while ago  
I rejoiced in the imagination  
but then I got to thinking

how few girls I know in Montreal  
That makes it hopeless

I blame it on me and Suzanne  
the death of poetry  
and the fucking torture that preceded it

The whole world told me  
to shut up and go home  
and Suzanne took me down  
to her place by the river

There's nothing like starvation  
It has even caused high-minded persons  
who wish to be known as poets  
to stand up and speak out against free love  
dressing up for the occasion  
in the clothes of honest men

We have earned the hatred of honest men  
We no longer merit their indifference  
The women were the first to know

You who knew very well you could fuck anyone  
but couldn't think of a beautiful way to put it  
you'll look fine with your throat cut

Song for my assassin

We were chosen, we were chosen  
miles and miles apart:  
I to love your kingdom  
you to love my heart.

The love is intermittent  
the discipline continues:  
I work on your spirit  
you work on my sinews.

I watch myself from where you are:  
do not be mistaken:  
the spider web you see me through  
is the view I've always taken.

Begin the ceremony now  
that we have been preparing:  
I'm tired of this marble floor  
that we have both been sharing.

I don't know what happensto you anymore  
the Bible poisoned my love  
A drunk goes by the window  
I wish  
that I could sing like that  
The Bible poisoned my love  
and many biographies  
haven't made things easy  
Tell me who to kill  
tell me who to kill  
cries the slave in my heartto anyone still standing

I can't believe  
what they say is true  
that you didn't shelter the poor  
that you didn't  
stand up for the weak  
Is it true  
is it true  
that you did not shelter the poor  
and is it true  
in your deepest heart  
you thought you were better  
Now what can you do  
what can you do  
for this crime against love  
You must  
give us your blessing  
you must  
give us your power

O darling (as we used to say)  
you are wide-hipped and kind  
I'm glad we ran off together  
We are not exactly young  
but there is still some pleasure  
to be squeezed from these leather bags  
Even as we lie here in Acapulco  
not quite in each others' arms  
several young monks walk single-file  
through the snow on Mount Baldyshivering and farting in the moonlight:  
there are passages in their meditation  
that treat our love and wish us well

I have no talent left  
I can't write a poem anymore  
You can call me Len or Lennie now  
like you always wanted  
I guess I should pack it up  
but habits persist  
and women keep driving me back into it  
Before you accuse me of boring you  
(your ultimate triumph and relief)  
remember that neither you or me  
is fucking right now  
and once again you have enjoyed  
the company of my soul

This is my voice  
but I am only whispering  
The amazing vulgarity  
of your style  
invites men to think  
of torturing you to death  
but I am only whispering  
The ocean is whispering  
The junk-yard is whispering  
We no longer wish to learn  
what you know how to do  
There is no envy left  
If you understood this  
you would begin to shiver  
but I am only whispering  
to my tomahawk  
so that the image itself  
may reduce you to scorn  
and weaken you further

This is the poem we have been waiting for  
n'est-ce pas  
Much returns to us when we read it  
which we do over and over again  
It is not inspired  
It took days and days to write  
You are a detail in it  
then you are the engine of the song  
If only your gorilla was dead  
we could be lovers  
You cannot accuse my poem of helping anyone  
You cannot use the tone  
for the construction of a new thing  
We like to read it slowly  
touching ourselves  
while falling asleep in the charcoal tower  
after the terrible goodbye  
We stop here and there  
to put up red curtains or change the cats  
but we come back  
filled with sweet gratitude  
O sweet gratitude  
to be the ones we are  
drivers of cars in the night-time rain  
toward the adult restaurants and the toughest of lives  
in Nashville and Acapulco

How we loved you  
our first poet  
who never knew what he was doing  
stumbling and swinging  
to embrace the pillars  
of the geodesic dome  
and bring it down  
on drunk and clever guests  
We loved your darkest days  
in delayed airports  
as you laboured to abstract  
the beauty of female fellow travellers  
willing at last to be ravished  
by certain Muzak adaptations  
The slow poem was everything  
It grew minutely  
like rust and wrinkle  
on the betrayed covenant  
You were tentimes faithless  
to every body but this one  
bored and dying  
whenever you turned  
your useless kisses to depend  
upon the shades of home  
But then it was broken  
then it was old  
you came back from your dead warm bed  
the rainbow veteran  
to denounce the gold  
to take my hand out of the fire  
in my pocket  
Welcome to this book of slaves  
which I wrote during your exile  
you lucky son-of-a-bitch  
while I had to contend  
with all the flabby liars  
of the Aquarian Age

The poems don't love us anymore  
they don't want to love us  
they don't want to be poems  
Do not summon us, they say  
We can't help you any longer

There's no more fishing  
in the Big Hearted River  
Leave us alone  
We are becoming something new

They have gone back into the world  
to be with the ones  
who labour with their total bodies  
who have no plans for the world  
They never were entertainers

I live on a river in Miami  
under conditions I cannot describe  
I see them sometimes  
half-rotted half-born surrounding a muscle  
like a rolled-up sleeve  
lying down in their jelly  
to make love with the tooth of a saw

Layton was wrong  
about the war  
He was right  
about beauty and death  
but he was wrong  
about the war  
I saw him sleeping  
beside Niagara Falls  
I don't think he's  
going to apologize

I think it is safe to tell you where I  
am. I'm writing at the old kitchen table  
listening to Bach, looking at the sky  
and then down at this page where the fable  
of this morning will be quickened by those  
tiny gods of unemployment who guide  
my curious career, who decompose  
my song before my eyes, my leap of pride.  
So I see it is not safe at all.  
I am not sitting at the old table.  
I did not come home. I am not fair and tall.  
Bach said he'd play but he was unable  
to leave the woman sleeping in his bed  
who fleshes out the tunes he'd lose instead.

For a long time  
he had no music  
he had no scenery

He killed three people  
in the darkness of his greed  
The rain could not help him

Pass by  
this is no vision offered  
this is his truth

Any system you contrive without us  
will be brought down  
We warned you before  
and nothing that you built has stood  
Hear it as you lean over your blueprint  
Hear it as you roll up your sleeve  
Hear it once again  
Any system you contrive without us  
will be brought down  
You have your drugs  
You have your guns  
You have your Pyramids your Pentagons  
With all your grass and bullets  
you cannot hunt us any more  
All that we disclose of ourselves forever  
is this warning  
Nothing that you built has stood  
Any system you contrive without us  
will be brought down

Each man  
has a way to betray  
the revolution  
This is mine

One of the lizards  
was blowing bubbles  
as it did pushups on the tree trunk  
I did pushups this morning  
on the carpet  
and I blew bubbles of Bazooka  
last night in the car  
I believe the mystics are right  
when they say we are all One

You went to work at the U.N.  
and you became a spy  
for a South American government  
because you cared for nothing  
and you spoke Spanish  
That was several years after we made love  
in the honey air of autumn Montreal:  
Athens was beautiful in the old days  
the drug-stores were free  
We knew ten great cities by heart  
Death to the Powers  
who have destroyed the style of travel  
Let them stutter their bland secrets  
over your long legs and tall fingers  
Let them have your wooden love  
Death to the Junta  
Death to the Passport Control

Every time my wife has a baby  
she goes crazy  
she sees the world clearly  
and she goes crazy  
We have to put her away  
so we can get back to the war  
Men and women are killed  
right in front of the baby

I see the ocean from my window  
it is very dull  
no whales today  
no tidal wave  
The fisherman fiddles  
with his air conditioner  
The sunset is slowly squashed  
by the huge forces of night  
I telephone my wife  
We watch it in each other's arms

There is nothing here  
except the shadow  
of an occasional DC-3  
nobody wants to be on

A Nazi war criminal  
visited us last night  
a very old man  
in a silk parachute

We still love beauty  
which the lizards express for us  
Spinnakers of red membrane  
blow from their throats

We'd like to write more often  
but we are busy with the disciplines  
psychic self-defence  
and other martial arts

We have abandoned free love  
and we have established the capital penalty  
for certain crimes  
There is no longer static between men and women

Our hospitality is simple and formal  
we use no intoxicants  
We salute those who come and go  
We are naked with our friends

THE ENERGY OF SLAVES  
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