

An Asphodel

O dear sweet rosy
unattainable desire
. . . how sad, no way
to change the mad
cultivated asphodel, the
visible reality . . .

and skin's appalling
petals—how inspired
to be so lying in the living
room drunk naked
and dreaming, in the absence
of electricity . . .
over and over eating the low root
of the asphodel,
gray fate . . .

rolling in generation
on the flowery couch
as on a bank in Arden—
my only rose tonite's the treat
of my own nudity.

Fall 1953

Song

The weight of the world
is love.

Under the burden
of solitude,
under the burden
of dissatisfaction

the weight,
the weight we carry
is love.

Who can deny?
In dreams
it touches
the body,
in thought
constructs
a miracle,
in imagination
anguishes
till born
in human—

looks out of the heart
burning with purity—
for the burden of life
is love,

but we carry the weight
wearily,
and so must rest
in the arms of love
at last,
must rest in the arms
of love.

No rest
without love,
no sleep
without dreams

of love—
 be mad or chill
obsessed with angels
 or machines,
the final wish
 is love
—cannot be bitter,
 cannot deny,
cannot withhold
 if denied:

the weight is too heavy

 —must give
for no return
 as thought
is given
 in solitude
in all the excellence
 of its excess.

The warm bodies
 shine together
in the darkness,
 the hand moves
to the center
 of the flesh,
the skin trembles
 in happiness
and the soul comes
 joyful to the eye—

yes, yes,
 that's what
I wanted,
 I always wanted,
I always wanted,
 to return
to the body
 where I was born.

San Jose, 1954

America

America I've given you all and now I'm nothing.
America two dollars and twentyseven cents January 17, 1956.
I can't stand my own mind.
America when will we end the human war?
Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb.
I don't feel good don't bother me.
I won't write my poem till I'm in my right mind.
America when will you be angelic?
When will you take off your clothes?
When will you look at yourself through the grave?
When will you be worthy of your million Trotskyites?
America why are your libraries full of tears?
America when will you send your eggs to India?
I'm sick of your insane demands.
When can I go into the supermarket and buy what I need with my good
looks?
America after all it is you and I who are perfect not the next world.
Your machinery is too much for me.
You made me want to be a saint.
There must be some other way to settle this argument.
Burroughs is in Tangiers I don't think he'll come back it's sinister.
Are you being sinister or is this some form of practical joke?
I'm trying to come to the point.
I refuse to give up my obsession.
America stop pushing I know what I'm doing.
America the plum blossoms are falling.
I haven't read the newspapers for months, everyday somebody goes on trial
for murder.
America I feel sentimental about the Wobblies.
America I used to be a communist when I was a kid I'm not sorry.
I smoke marijuana every chance I get.
I sit in my house for days on end and stare at the roses in the closet.
When I go to Chinatown I get drunk and never get laid.
My mind is made up there's going to be trouble.
You should have seen me reading Marx.
My psychoanalyst thinks I'm perfectly right.
I won't say the Lord's Prayer.
I have mystical visions and cosmic vibrations.
America I still haven't told you what you did to Uncle Max after he came
over from Russia.

I'm addressing you.
Are you going to let your emotional life be run by Time Magazine?
I'm obsessed by Time Magazine.
I read it every week.
Its cover stares at me every time I slink past the corner candystore.
I read it in the basement of the Berkeley Public Library.
It's always telling me about responsibility. Businessmen are serious.
Movie producers are serious. Everybody's serious but me.
It occurs to me that I am America.
I am talking to myself again.

Asia is rising against me.
I haven't got a chinaman's chance.
I'd better consider my national resources.
My national resources consist of two joints of marijuana millions of genitals
an unpublishable private literature that jetplanes 1400 miles an hour
and twentyfive-thousand mental institutions.
I say nothing about my prisons nor the millions of underprivileged who live
in my flowerpots under the light of five hundred suns.
I have abolished the warehouses of France, Tangiers is the next to go.
My ambition is to be President despite the fact that I'm a Catholic.

America how can I write a holy litany in your silly mood?
I will continue like Henry Ford my strophes are as individual as his automob-
biles more so they're all different sexes.
America I will sell you strophes \$2500 apiece \$500 down on your old strophe
America free Tom Mooney
America save the Spanish Loyalists
America Sacco & Vanzetti must not die
America I am the Scottsboro boys.
America when I was seven momma took me to Communist Cell meetings
they sold us garbanzos a handful per ticket a ticket costs a nickel and
the speeches were free everybody was angelic and sentimental about
the workers it was all so sincere you have no idea what a good thing
the party was in 1835 Scott Nearing was a grand old man a real
mensch Mother Bloor the Silk-strikers' Ewig-Weibliche made me cry
I once saw the Yiddish orator Israel Amter plain. Everybody must
have been a spy.
America you don't really want to go to war.
America it's them bad Russians.
Them Russians them Russians and them Chinamen. And them Russians.
The Russia wants to eat us alive. The Russia's power mad. She wants to take
our cars from out our garages.

Her wants to grab Chicago. Her needs a Red *Reader's Digest*. Her wants our auto plants in Siberia. Him big bureaucracy running our fillingstations.

That no good. Ugh. Him make Indians learn read. Him need big black niggers. Hah. Her make us all work sixteen hours a day. Help.

America this is quite serious.

America this is the impression I get from looking in the television set.

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 turn lathes in precision parts factories, I'm nearsighted and psychopathic anyway.

America I'm putting my queer shoulder to the wheel.

Berkeley, January 17, 1956

A Supermarket in California

What thoughts I have of you tonight, Walt Whitman, for I walked down the sidestreets under the trees with a headache self-conscious looking at the full moon.

In my hungry fatigue, and shopping for images, I went into the neon fruit supermarket, dreaming of your enumerations!

What peaches and what penumbras! Whole families shopping at night! Aisles full of husbands! Wives in the avocados, babies in the tomatoes! —and you, García Lorca, what were you doing down by the watermelons?

I saw you, Walt Whitman, childless, lonely old grubber, poking among the meats in the refrigerator and eyeing the grocery boys.

I heard you asking questions of each: Who killed the pork chops? What price bananas? Are you my Angel?

I wandered in and out of the brilliant stacks of cans following you, and followed in my imagination by the store detective.

We strode down the open corridors together in our solitary fancy tasting artichokes, possessing every frozen delicacy, and never passing the cashier.

Where are we going, Walt Whitman? The doors close in an hour. Which way does your beard point tonight?

(I touch your book and dream of our odyssey in the supermarket and feel absurd.)

Will we walk all night through solitary streets? The trees add shade to shade, lights out in the houses, we'll both be lonely.

Will we stroll dreaming of the lost America of love past blue automobiles in driveways, home to our silent cottage?

Ah, dear father, graybeard, lonely old courage-teacher, what America did you have when Charon quit poling his ferry and you got out on a smoking bank and stood watching the boat disappear on the black waters of Lethe?

Berkeley, 1955

Sunflower Sutra

I walked on the banks of the tincan banana dock and sat down under the huge shade of a Southern Pacific locomotive to look at the sunset over the box house hills and cry.

Jack Kerouac sat beside me on a busted rusty iron pole, companion, we thought the same thoughts of the soul, bleak and blue and sad-eyed, surrounded by the gnarled steel roots of trees of machinery.

The oily water on the river mirrored the red sky, sun sank on top of final Frisco peaks, no fish in that stream, no hermit in those mounts, just ourselves rheumy-eyed and hung-over like old bums on the riverbank, tired and wily.

Look at the Sunflower, he said, there was a dead gray shadow against the sky, big as a man, sitting dry on top of a pile of ancient sawdust—
—I rushed up enchanted—it was my first sunflower, memories of Blake—
my visions—Harlem
and Hells of the Eastern rivers, bridges clanking Joes Greasy Sandwiches, dead baby carriages, black treadless tires forgotten and unretreaded, the poem of the riverbank, condoms & pots, steel knives, nothing stainless, only the dank muck and the razor-sharp artifacts passing into the past—
and the gray Sunflower poised against the sunset, crackly bleak and dusty with the smut and smog and smoke of olden locomotives in its eye—
corolla of bleary spikes pushed down and broken like a battered crown, seeds fallen out of its face, soon-to-be-toothless mouth of sunny air, sunrays obliterated on its hairy head like a dried wire spiderweb,
leaves stuck out like arms out of the stem, gestures from the sawdust root, broke pieces of plaster fallen out of the black twigs, a dead fly in its ear,
Unholy battered old thing you were, my sunflower O my soul, I loved you then!

The grime was no man's grime but death and human locomotives,
all that dress of dust, that veil of darkened railroad skin, that smog of cheek,
that eyelid of black mis'ry, that sooty hand or phallus or protuberance
of artificial worse-than-dirt—industrial—modern—all that civilization spotting your crazy golden crown—
and those blear thoughts of death and dusty loveless eyes and ends and withered roots below, in the home-pile of sand and sawdust, rubber dollar bills, skin of machinery, the guts and innards of the weeping coughing car, the empty lonely tincans with their rusty tongues alack,

what more could I name, the smoked ashes of some cock cigar, the
cunts of wheelbarrows and the milky breasts of cars, wornout asses
out of chairs & sphincters of dynamos—all these
entangled in your mummied roots—and you there standing before me in the
sunset, all your glory in your form!

A perfect beauty of a sunflower! a perfect excellent lovely sunflower exist-
ence! a sweet natural eye to the new hip moon, woke up alive and
excited grasping in the sunset shadow sunrise golden monthly breeze!

How many flies buzzed round you innocent of your grime, while you cursed
the heavens of the railroad and your flower soul?

Poor dead flower? when did you forget you were a flower? when did you
look at your skin and decide you were an impotent dirty old locomot-
ive? the ghost of a locomotive? the specter and shade of a once
powerful mad American locomotive?

You were never no locomotive, Sunflower, you were a sunflower!

And you Locomotive, you are a locomotive, forget me not!

So I grabbed up the skeleton thick sunflower and stuck it at my side like a
scepter,

and deliver my sermon to my soul, and Jack's soul too, and anyone who'll
listen,

—We're not our skin of grime, we're not our dread bleak dusty imageless
locomotive, we're all golden sunflowers inside, blessed by our own
seed & hairy naked accomplishment-bodies growing into mad black
formal sunflowers in the sunset, spied on by our eyes under the
shadow of the mad locomotive riverbank sunset Frisco hilly tincan
evening sitdown vision.

Berkeley, 1955