and me I am like the leaf
and me i am like the leaf

Mr. Jones,
Thanks for the interest.

Wili

by
H.L. "Wili" Otey
For Gail Herzog,

sometime between genesis and your apotheosis we met and I began to learn
about life, without you I would not care to be, for to hope you are wonder, to
promise necessity, and to life infinity: thank you.

This chapbook would not be had it not been for Bill Roundey, Anne Cognard
William Kloefkorn, Terrie Bullard, Joe Munshaw Ms. Shelly Younger, and
Sherry (when she's in the mood), plus many other human beings. I thank you;
I thank God. Cindy Dodson, you're a "real" sis, tears are not necessary (for
now).

The voice in these poems is that of an individual isolated but never entirely
alone; the voice, honest and undisguised, calls out to be understood, to be
recognized, to be loved.

Perhaps above all else, the voice in Will's poems reflects a restlessness that
will not allow the poet to roll over, close his eyes, and remain silent. The open-
ing poem in this chapbook (Will's first collection) indicates the writer's per-
sistent inability to lapse into any permanent state of non-action or non-thought:
"if I were stupid / I would follow orders blindly ... / I would not want a mind / I
would be considered normal." If stagnation is indeed the state of normalcy,
Will fights it with all of the poet's strength he can muster.

The battle does not give him total consolation, by any means, but the fact
that he fights it is in itself a measure of victory. He is an individual reaching
out, an individual aware that process is a form of life, and that the form,
though it changes, goes on and on:

in the sphere of emptiness
comes the realization
the leaf one day shall
fertilize new beauty from its
place on this earth
and me I am
like the leaf...

This same sense of process is evident in "Unfinished Poet," especially in the
final lines, when Will writes, "I don't want a special favor just / love / un-
pretentious unenamed unprogrammed & / unfinished."

And the final poem in this collection continues the search, giving the reader
the impression that much is yet to be thought, to be felt, to be experienced, to
be written down and passed on. "I'm scribbling sad words on unpainted
endless walls," Will concludes, "trying to know myself and / find a reason why
..."

The reason why? Who knows? But Will is searching himself (and others,
too—note those poems here that talk about the poet's relationship with friends
and loved ones), and I for one wish him the best of luck on his road to finding
out.

William Kloefkorn
Lincoln, Nebraska
Sept., 1981

Special acknowledgements are proffered to the New Age Community, the
Greenfield Review, the Nebraska Committee for the Humanities, and the
Southern Coalition on Prisons and Jails.
there are durations
when i lay back
inside this concrete
stare into the single
lightbulb (the only thing still living here)
and wish that
i were stupid
if i were stupid
i would follow orders blindly
i could believe unquestionably
i would be manageable
an automaton i would be
i would not read
i would not write poetry or myself
i would watch general hospital on tv
i would be considered
normal.

lamentation

(i exist in a real world -- made real by death and dying)
tonight i lay on my bed of concrete
and move my thoughts (softly)
i ache, yet pain is not concern
i hurt, but medicine will not cure
for tonight anonymity cloaks my pathos
i speculate on hope for
one person who'll perceive my tears
and smother its flame with sensitivity
i grow imaginary, feeble -- waiting (i guess i want too much)
so tonight i continue to live out the today
without
anyone knowing (that)
the cruelest aspect of friendship is knowing not
knowing when to respect the anguish of timeless
time.
sherry

my eyelids blink
to ease the burning sensation
of blind emotion that should not be
so here so sad sitting on the riverbank
watching life go by dreaming
i planted an idea it became
my sun i wanted to touch it to be
hurt by it so i could draw nearer to it
& the sun & peace & the earth
are not so large after all
for no matter where
i turn to run to hide to slow down the
train is an early morning express going nowhere
but back to the fact that love
is cruel & real & sitting on the riverbank
& laughing at me daring me
taunting me reminding me that to get off
you need a ticket & i got a ticket for
running a redlight for feeling and
needing freedom and air and sunshine 'cause
tomorrow can only be as real as is today.

i sit on the ubiquitous concrete and
wait word of another world

i think love is war
the art of shadows fulfilled
deaths relived
to love the aggressor spoils
in love the winner loses
with love i write words
silhouettes within my mind
scampering ideas fantasized
a war with words
i love you sounds so
simple you believe it is
unreal but i touched it
(not you . . . just it -- love)
it burned it destroyed it
loved you
it is my heart
that never sees (but)
lives each buffet
to love
in love
with love
i write words that i
rend from my heart
'cause love is war
and lest you neglect the battle
i love you.
birthday on deathrow

i dim my eyes (to shut them could be cataclysmic)
to greet one more birthday
replete with
paper hopes, plastic thoughts
and twinkled-square tomorrows

reminiscing (i am)
the sweetened smiles
mama's hug
the former ole man's shrug
and ice cream on the linoleum rug

impractical (we were)
sweat-money so thriftless spent

to march in step
with the equilibrium
of common now abuses
just to prove that
one day each year
we forget
about dying here
in this boxed-in today.

tree

the sun is sad

to touch with my eyes
the steel cold  iceness
of friends who are not
alone  the sun is sad

remember the tree dying isolated
in the field of arid dry khaki-colored
disappointments where them and me play happy
whenever more than one future statistic
would seek freedom from the tree
unrealistically

the sun is sad

she stood

there giggling that night in the dark

(i wanted to play football) the giggling
stopped  no seriousness allowed so

i went to bed  whispering  alone

the sun is sad

and though  the tree has lost its
branches  i am still learning

how freedom is to be played (in isolation)

for here it doesn’t rain rain
it rains threats of

"you’ll never be free . . ."

"you’ll never be free . . ."

"you’ll never . . ."

and anger fights dignity while
shame wants a compromise (and)
alone the sun is sad for

i the prisoner

am alone and sad

and playing basketball on a dirt field
right after it rains
is easier than being yourself

in prison where

the sun is sad (because)
the tree struggles to exist.
for joe, thanks

red white & another ism

like the leaf which has fallen from
its root of life i sit here
metamorphosed
at thoughts
that do not move
i see the hands
that wave at the wind
groaning to feel something
i touch the lips
that chafe the prisons
which constrain my reticence
i taste the briny malaise
that withers the thought
after the “if...”
in the sphere of emptiness
comes the realization
the leaf one day shall
fertilize new beauty from its
place on this earth
and me i am
like the leaf.

it must be magic
because the 4th don’t mean
reality to me (even in July)
it don’t mean that freedom’s
here and nurturing tomorrow
(today even) is staggering
beneath the politics
of isms that
recite kate smith’s god bless
amerika as long as there is
they them and us
embracing freedom of &
freedom is & freedom can
be distracting like
music red wine thighs
and finger popping
mine eyes
are uncaught (alert)
and roaming
searching & glancing
to and fro
wonderin’ whose dream
it’ll be to commence
the next pogrom so as
to preserve their
independence day?
sister (for cindy)

drifting into pathos flailing crying out to
life to provide somewhere a thought
wearied & loved you saw
sensitivity naked unashamed aware
that giving to receive meant
life becoming beckoned you stayed
lived where the drifting began.

ms.

like crushed snow
tasting the sun's smooch
this dance
has no path
no future
just now
rolling to wherever
dreams go (when)
spirit free
entices
the wind &
innovation sings
like the laughter
at a wedding &
you are woman.

ad nauseam

my friend
the epitome of life
in prison is
no life at all
it is a ride
(on a wagon without wheels)
& we passengers are faceless (some lifeless)
the driver thoughtless (rabid)
experimenting to control
the wagon is
wreckless journeyless
& destination
masked (not well) effected humiliation (termed rehabili-a-s
only men survive
the rest are . . .
they come leave return
(mentally they're buried here)
my friend
the epitome of life
in prison is
no life at all
it is . . .
(termination and the futility colluding).
no love for me

repatriation is complete
dreams jingle no warranty
love true is unreal
i’ve lost the will to live

let’s dance drink be
merry it’s hallelujah time
pass the bottle again

again and again the lady
remanded one lifetime she
crippled my lifeline
for today i
retreat to an empty morrow of
infinite yesterthought
wooing original misery &
mendicant happiness (on crutches)
cannot shield me

(even things are loved)
let’s laugh joke pretend

that truths are lies and
being hurt rationalizes that
i should hurt ’cause that’s
cool that’s cold that’s why
a new me can be saw in the bottle
& lost in reality

i was bigger than the sun
cooler than the moon &
master of then & now

I swallowed her in a gulp
to dull yesterday
to bury it to humiliate it
like they mortify

a ghetto child
da mixed marriage
my mother brother friends & last year’s lover

this memory
that cannot die
it keeps from dying literally
like the consort who loves with his/her clothes on
like the mother-in-law who says i told you so
like the hate
like the prison
like ...

it destroys
me and dreaming

like the fancy dancer the wino the fool
and i feel foolish
sad dejected rejected
not loved not alive not dead
caught in the bottle
lost in the bottle
there’s death in the bottle
no answers in the bottle just questions
like why
not love for me?
unfinished poet

we don't love each other
make him our go between
our screen
hurts God) God it hurts!
God do you hear me God
i have feelings
real and poignant
alive and human
feeling
i don't want a special favor just
unpretentious unenameled unprogrammed & unfinished.

gail

don't know why i didn't tell her
she beautiful
i was sitting there
i sipping tea and loving her
eyes which radiate her heart's
memories
don't know why i didn't
tell her
the ocean is gentle, thoughts are rough and
moonlight talks only when people are silent and
fires don't burn, nearness does
don't know why i didn't
only wish she knew
my eyes are fixed
crystal clear when my thoughts
are you.

another poem was
supposed to be here
but it's waiting on
another poem.
don't cry

to acquiesce to the sentence
is
to acquiesce to the crime.

haywood

lil bro,
pain done caught me
riding these tracks
nowhere fast
destination forgotten.
this mind's shocked
delusive delirious
losing, vanity's
the game, for in
respect my comrade
i fear
not for i thought i
was the man the lady a
bitch selfish a rogue (ours)
a simple relationship:
hers of fame
mine of pain
(a new york deuce now's
an Omaha half a "c" note) so
she sells herself
prostrates the stronger world
as they seek lights
to pacify their blindness
but she's pitiless
formless dust: "ashes to ashes,
dust to dust" and lil bro,
a mind's a terrible crux to blow.
i know.

i'm sitting here
reminding my self
that there is a
reason why i am
alive.
then why am i
sitting?
today i had a visit

the picture is clearer now
poetic realism
music too tender
rhythmic felicity
yearning
affection butterflies have birthed
i'm so ecstatic
sleep will not relax
i hug the pillow
taste my enjoyment
tickle my heart
it's springtime in winter
i'm captivated by this love prison
that i volunteered to be in/it's freedom
i'm childlike silly
raptured in fancy
i kiss my pillow/wiggle my toes
jelly my thoughts
i'm in love.

macadamized

i wonder if it is selfish
to want to be loved
touched desired and sometimes
asked why
(instead) eyelids fall
like curtains closing the
final act before i touch the lonely heart
that lived
before i think this time
i won't have to hear "i'm sorry"
to calm the silence
that magnified "whatever will be will be"
which is ignoble immature and sounding
monstrous and me
i'm scribbling sad words on unpainted endless walls
trying to know myself and
find a reason why.
Harold Lamont Otey, Will (to friends), lives — and that is the misnomer —in the west cellblock of the penitentiary here in Nebraska where men condemned to death are housed. Midway into the tenth grade, (in Long Branch, New Jersey), Will was expelled from school for mischievous behavior. He left home, and for a job began grooming horses at a nearby racetrack, beginning— at 16 — a traveling career that spanned 11 ½ years. In 1977, at the track, Ak-Sar-Ben, in Omaha, (Nebraska), Otey was charged with first degree murder because "someone" related to baffled police "that he's the only one who might've did it." Otey was found guilty and sentenced to death by electrocution: "... Till you are dead." read the judge. Otey, maintaining he is innocent, faces his "now" by laboring to keep occupied, he reads, thinks, writes "... just what I feel," what others call poetry, and he hopes . . . .

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