

# **An American Papyrus: 25 Poems**

Steven Sills



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# **An American Papyrus: 25 Poems**

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### Steven Sills

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AN AMERICAN PYPYRUS: 25 POEMS

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## Post Annulment 2

Afferent, the city bus cramps to the curb and brakes  
through  
Solipsistic muteness  
With an exhalation startled and choking.  
As the sun blazes upon the terminal's  
Scraped concrete  
The shelved rows of the poor men  
Hear the sound die on the pavement  
In a gradual dying echo.  
A cigarette succumbs to the voice as  
Carrion brought to life; all the tattered people  
awaken;  
And a man spits toward the tire of the bus,  
But misses.

And as he watches his own spit vanish  
From the hard crest of the world,  
And silently scrapes his lunch pail against  
A corner of a metallic bench as if expecting the pale  
to bleed...  
And hoping it would bleed...he tries to remember the  
angles  
He and his wife stood to project  
The intermingled shadows that both  
Had labled as their marriage.

He enters the second bus:  
Its coolness sedating the skin that  
Overlaps his troubled mind.  
His thoughts pull together  
Like the light, cool flow of the air conditioning.  
He feels a little pacified.  
He knows the shadow's intangible depth:  
Its vastness having overpowered him these months  
Until he could not reach the logic that told him  
To find himself outside its barriers.  
As he stares out of the window  
He wonders why she has left.  
How could she have left without indication  
When he has remained angled toward work  
So that he and his wife can stay alive?

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In the bus window he sees his diaphanous face—the  
windows  
Of the Hilton, where he has a job in maintenance,  
Piercing solidly through its head. He rings the bell.

The idea of her not home, and legally annulled  
From his life—her small crotch not tightened to his  
desperate  
Thrusts—makes him feel sick. He gets down from the  
bus.  
He goes to work. He suddenly knows that being in love  
is not love.

## Earth

I use her earth to plant my seed—  
My limbs twisting around the collective molecules,  
Trying to dig in.  
Only the obscurity of my body  
Presses so fully that it is neither  
Body nor bed nor the intersection of both,  
But euphoric traction;  
And then, planted and repulsed,  
Only the seam of backbone minutely faces her,  
That bed of earth.  
With all conscious force  
I breathe the aloneness that untangibly defines the  
Air. I swallow its ambrosia  
Of depth and ask myself  
Why I ever married the woman.  
There is void.  
Then a hollow answer calls my name and says “it was  
time.”  
I realize myself in movement, parting the scene.

I use what has been planted for the reaping—  
My suit tucks me into its structure of cotton;  
And soon a building will be again the structure  
Around men of cotton suits, pushing a product.

Lost, I drink my coffee alone on the stoop.  
She had asked to fix me breakfast  
But I would not let her.  
My miniature is one and black.  
I drink me in when I am not  
Pressed by the coffee's steam.  
Cars' casketed phantoms of people  
Chasing up and down Dunlavy Street of Houston  
After something—their whole lives after something—  
Come and go from consciousness like respiration.  
The people plant and reap.  
Who can count all of their  
Insignificant names?—  
Animals that are not created sensible enough  
To propagate unless lost to frenzy,



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Caught in structures without meaning.

## Bar–Room Buddies

We Mongoled Human experience.  
We pushed it into our mouths  
As the crisp pretzels of which the shape became salty  
dust  
At our tastes: the crispness of life,  
And we Mongoled human experience.

The tequila, that Sandras or Cassandras, or whomever  
it had been  
At the moment of malevolently blessing our heated and  
Maddening consumption, was what we left  
Our wives for; and then hardened ourselves on  
The springless cushions of the sofas of our friends  
Whom we eventually forgot the names of:  
The wetness of human experience that we Mongoled,  
And felt the bladed emptiness  
Of stomachs that could not consume food  
On mornings after. But the Angels of bar rooms  
continually  
Appeared before darkened stages where, in front of  
guitars,  
We played. They appeared at various stages to the  
weeks of the years.  
They came, silently whispering themselves off  
As Sandras or Cassandras;  
Stared up at us for two hours; and disappeared.  
The reappearance of their light enamored us, and we  
left  
And followed but found bats that offered  
No shelter, and often caves we could not fit into  
Or were forbidden from entering.

We invested our capital  
In the Silicon Valleys of this great nation.  
Third–world bitches, in factories, became sick for our  
chips.  
We held power.  
We bred metals and bought the ownership titles  
Of properties, but could not find a home of the world.

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We married again and brought forth children  
Whom were duplicate strangers of ourselves.

## The Retarded

Legs clamp around the rim—  
The whole seated body sticking slightly  
As moaning howls come from his  
Paralyzed mouth.  
It is after having  
Put him to bed for a nap, and then the pot,  
That this woman who would dab the bile  
From his bed like one who napkins a spill from  
A tablecloth, does not clean away  
The substance behind the smell  
Which predominates over the bathroom urinal  
And aggravates his senses.  
No woman to do these tasks,  
And then to rim her hand  
Under the butt;  
No woman to drag him from  
The pot,  
After she has had his body bent  
Toward her for the wiping,  
And flop him onto the bench  
In the shower; no woman...

She sits, cigarette limp in her mouth,  
Thinking that the day has almost ended.  
And the stars she stares out at  
From the living room of the group home  
She remembers are other earths limping  
Half-free in the grips of other  
Dying suns.

## Houston

In Houston's summers the gods  
Use the clouds as urinals  
For three minutes daily.  
In Houston the Boat-People  
Come from planes.

Inner-city—intermingled and alone  
Like its green Buffalo-Bayou  
Strewn only in the imaginations  
Of those who run along it briefly.

A mile from the bayou  
The settled imagination of a  
Nine year-old Vietnamese girl  
Allows a mangled brown horse  
To elongate and flatten out  
To the reality of the rolled up carpet  
(All because of the rain).  
She feels the wetness now beginning  
To seep into her clothes;  
She raises herself; she sees the old Cuban  
Walking from the house with hands  
To the sky, as if to make the heavens appear a little  
longer  
In the manner that the downtown buildings,  
From Dallas Street on, by their  
Stories of windows draw down  
the sky's enormity from measurement  
Both extensive and inadequate;  
And she follows him.

Apart  
And yet they both think about the Vietnamese  
Teenager with curlers in her hair  
Who yells “boo” behind doors  
That are entered;  
The Cambodian boy who  
To the view of the Montrose area

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Pours on the bare shrubs,  
And then strips and pours upon himself,  
The water from a hose, and that both animal and plant  
Glisten in the sun  
As if they have been greased;  
Falling into Houston's world of high buildings  
From the descending planes  
While hoping that the big world would  
Not overpower their memories;  
And the Cubans, in house #2 always yelling of "Miami."

They believe that Cambodian refugees  
Always clean house #1,  
That Africans never clean themselves,  
and that Laotians often pour rice down the drains  
Causing the faucets of the house to stop-up;  
And that the welcome-center Manager  
Does not care to bring over a little clothing  
And a little food or take them on little trips  
To the Social Security Office or the doctor's office  
Past 5 p.m.—  
But of different seconds in that minute,  
Different lengths, and various perceptions.  
She remembers the ugly man  
In Vietnam that ran from the police  
And then a scar around his eye  
Opened from the clubs and the blood  
Tried to escape him completely  
As the body attempted to pull itself  
From the street, and could not.  
He remembers thinking that the  
Cranium of an old man is always heavy  
On the neck, and that his  
Is becoming like this.

He desires to clasp the gate  
That is around the Hispanic cemetery  
And watches the cars on Allen Parkway, below,  
Curve and toward the sun  
Become a gleam moving endlessly  
And instantly gone.  
He desires to arrive there and  
Read a few tombstones  
Before and after watching.  
She desires to imagine horses  
Carrying her away from here to the West,  
And other horses following with her family behind.

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She desires to follow the Cuban that she fears  
Since he is moving away from the refugee houses.  
There are no horses in inner-city; and  
The Hispanic cemetery cannot be found  
To souls wanting to rest there.  
“Este cerca de calle Alabama?”  
He wonders,.

The rain stops. The hammers and saws  
peel their sounds from a roof.  
And he notices her steps  
Despite the stronger sounds; halts;  
And glances behind him as shingles fall ahead,  
While wanting her to completely leave him  
And wanting her to come with him.

In Houston's summers,  
At certain areas, shingles like  
The god's shit falls from housetops  
And the dung dries in the air,  
Flattens, and ricochets to sidewalks.  
In Houston Cubans pack  
From refugee houses  
And plan to fly away into America, and depart  
Far from the Castilian hot-dog vender  
Of Herman Park waiting for  
The thirsty and hungered  
And those ignorant of what they want  
But know that they want something  
And so come to buy from her  
Who wants people to come to her  
For more than the chips  
Because the hotdogs are overpriced,  
Who formulates  
That she is unskilled

And that a computer course would answer it all;  
Far from the Netherland psychologists who  
Stares at her ebony reflection  
In Rothko Chapel's dyed pool;  
Apart from others, and no-one, all  
Pulling alone for humanity to both  
Come and go from their lives.

## The Politics of Herb's Woman

Waitresses lightly frisbeeing out  
Dishes of breakfasts  
Catching glimpses of Colonel North's  
Photos on the front sides  
Of customers' papers and  
Formulating judgements  
Of rebel or martyr  
From an appearance  
And a few words that  
Drifted in when the  
Hands relaxed plates to table mats;  
Farmers wishing the seeds  
To suddenly open to be plucked up faster  
So that they are not  
The last ones laid in  
By their hands;  
Little "third-world" nations of people hoping  
For the great debtor nation to continental-drift  
To bankruptcy, painless and alone;

And nearly empty of thoughts—Herb's woman, Jeanie,  
Behind the Ellison Building standing  
With concrete drilling its stiffness  
Through her soles.  
There had been a time—  
With face raised from her age-smelted pose  
To the ever firm stories of that building—  
That she would think of receiving  
her paycheck so she could  
Go to K-Mart and have something.  
But now years on top of each other,  
Uncountable to her,  
She continues guiding  
The few of the masses of cars  
That turn into the lot  
Where to park: in winters  
Conscious of the visibility  
Of her cold breathing,  
And summers with the scents  
Of greased telephone poles  
And sights of light gleaming off  
Car windows, she thinks



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Of buying old junk from garage sales  
For her yard sales, with the same prices,  
So as to recall the sounds of human voices  
Other than her own.

## Brumfield

His job was a novitiate where there was no operator's  
manual  
With which to have faith in, and no rules  
But to move with the dustmop pushed before him  
Along the empty corridor, and then down a staircase  
Where he could descend to more passive depths in  
cleaning.

At home he would smell the odor of his bare feet  
coming to him;  
Would see the blue under his toe nail that looked like  
marble;  
And these would be dominant sensations  
Though he would be vaguely aware of them.  
Beneath his bended legs he would sweep his hand  
To capture a fuller scent as his fingers would flick  
To capture a fuller scent as his fingers would flick  
His unshaven face. Then in his only room where the  
bare mattress  
Was lain along with his leather jacket  
And the dirty underwear cuddled around a clean  
toilet—  
Where the Rosary hung on a wall  
And the guitar leaned in a corner—  
he would do his push-ups.

Most of those early mornings some train  
Would pour its breath to the weeds  
At the edge of the tracks, losing them  
In sound and mist of a voice  
Screaming out, alone,  
Through the cold and the living.  
His arms would tremble  
With the body weakening, and then demobilized, to the  
floor  
Before the count of fifty.  
Through the fogged condensation  
Of the upper corners to a window  
He would glance up at the train—  
Each car imagined as the girlfriend, Cindy,

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Or the seminary, which he never  
Grasped or rejected and so  
They slipped away;  
Or his mother, who with cancer  
Began to close herself off to him—  
Grasping one of those trains appearing at the time  
With the familiarity of two strangers  
Who recognized each other's desire to remain such.

## Oracion A Traves De Gasshole

(Patron Saint of Respiratory Therapy Workers)

Saturday. All the same:  
A silvery grey  
Thin and undistinguishable  
From skies to parking lot  
In exact shadow; and he finds his car.  
The lid, laced in rust,  
By the turn of the key,  
Parts the grey as it pulls up;  
The grocery bag is dropped into the hole;  
And the ground beef slaps down on the floor  
Of the trunk as if a second slaughter,  
Its grounded nerves convulsing it  
A couple of inches nearer the oil stain.  
That meat, in body, that last moment  
After consciousness has severed itself;  
Skin peeling under the fur, hidden,  
But not from the last hot beams ahead  
Of emerging dusk, becoming crisp  
And then soaking up the hot blood, as the trachea,  
With the last of the air drawing in,  
begins to fold its walls; and he could imagine it  
Like he could imagine, from unexact memories,  
The woman, last night  
At the hospital, whom he began to like—  
her body pulling cell by cell  
Apart before he had a chance  
To finish the rescue with the hose

Descending the nostril as a rope,  
and then flushing out mucus.  
He gives the ground beef an air-born sommersault to the  
bag  
And closes the lid that is connected to the vague  
light bulb of the  
trunk.  
The Gasshole's reflection on the trunk lid  
Is lank and curved; the appearance of his face  
With its facial tip of the nose and its greased  
Separation of hair like a wet muskrat in a metallic  
reflection.

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His face moving away, he sees an old Hispanic man  
Who walks from the area of cars carrying two bags  
Of groceries in an embrace that could be  
For weighty children; he thinks “The senescent,  
Careless, careless baws—turd! A campesino!”  
And he envisions himself as that: having to pull out  
the thorns  
That pierce through his tennis shoes as he shovels  
scattered cacti leaves from out of the back  
Of the pickup to his animals;  
And living in the dry ravine surrounded by houses made  
of wood  
That had been patted loosely together like adobes,  
beside  
The families of the kiln workers  
Whom with him eat out Land's blessings  
And piss and shit out onto her graces,  
But himself happily not knowing the language of the  
Mexican people...  
Himself not wanting to know the language  
Of any people that his sister, Cindy, and college pal,

Dave Broom–Up–The–Butt  
Echo.

He does not wish to think of them  
Or the vaginas that are not his to put on  
Or the illusive woman who would be sick with him  
like a child lying on the sofa in fever and hoping  
That in the shadows on the wall and the  
Passing sounds that are concentrated on her mind  
One will bring deliverance—only placing the  
deliverance  
On him and yet loving him for himself  
Beyond that need. And while unlocking the door of his  
car  
He feels that the recreation in life is also a  
routine:  
A routine of sharing and parting,  
And at the end one is grounded and tossed  
Before the validity of his own  
Perceptions is resolved. But he is alive,  
Now; and he will put away his groceries;  
Read a chapter of his Biblia,  
A cenotaph of the dead..  
maybe a verse; think of forgetting mass  
and mailing in his tithing

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And to veg' himself away a few hours  
Before he would have another night  
Of throats, lungs and  
The air of the masses.

**Come  
(Camp Wonderland for the Retarded, Lake of the Ozarks)**

Grabbing the already read letter,  
Slipping out hot and wet  
From the bare mattress—  
Like Sweet Pea's turds  
Right before  
His psychomotor seizures,  
Only without a softness to stub myself  
Into—stiff and hard I drop  
From the cold rim of the bunk  
(Even if I awaken  
The idiots below).  
With non-syllables and vowellessness  
A pitch that is language enough  
To keep this man, Jim,  
From wherever  
The unassimilated disappear  
Howls "He does not want me here"  
While its flesh of Jim beats the plastic urinal  
On the walls barricading a pillowed head.  
The joke is on him this time...  
All over him for the next hours.

The letter's impression  
Writes and rewrites in my mind:  
Come, my sister calls to our father  
Like Ronnie's suppositories butting back.  
Only suppositories are meant to do so.  
Come, she speaks to me,  
And the shrink  
Shall put in touch  
All that he did to us.

Tripping over Keith's mattress  
I step out in humid silence  
And wipe my cheeks.  
Two cabins, beside ours, simultaneously fry

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Bugs in blue, electric lights.

Keith, a crippled rocking horse of autism,  
Scrapes the feet of his vibrating body  
To the bench where I sit.  
Sit, Keith; go back to bed, Keith;  
Go to the bathroom, Keith:  
In this camp I shape the minutes of his life  
To some acceptable pattern.  
He rubs his hands together  
As if trying to spark fire  
For the inhabitants  
Of his imaginary world.  
Stop that, Keith, I say. Sit, Keith.  
Keith sits: There is no coming out  
For him after twenty years  
This way,  
Or perhaps for me.  
The pale gas lamps are strewn around  
A small area of limbs  
In a corner of the sky—  
All but patches are aflame  
Like a roof of a tent around  
The stakes, ready to break off  
And fall.

Rock, Keith,  
As the sun is stroked  
So far into the lap of the night,  
Suffocating and as good as gone.  
The folding and unfolding  
Of a crinkled letter into squares;  
The imagining of the counselor  
Of cabin four  
And what a pulse would have created  
If her head had drowsed  
To my hand on the back of her seat  
On our way here;  
The general silent howling of “Come!”—  
Keith does not cripple to this.  
He has no sister that calls a stranger back  
To erase and draw back  
Them both.  
He does not say “come!”  
All hours.  
He comes.



## A Gentleman's Right

He must have thought  
That there was some covenant of the old  
That bound each to move around it  
In a square orbit.  
he was fifty now, so there  
Must not have been any question:  
Lessen the speed at the train tracks;  
Stumble his car over their ribs;  
Swerve closely to the drive  
At a slower pace, and hope

That where men dodge the bumping  
Of their tails from Parks  
For a private club,  
That one would come  
Out from the doors, partnerless.  
If not, he would have  
To go around the block  
Another time  
Like other old fags before—  
The railway crippling with  
Its iron in each return raising,  
Cracking up from the skin of the street;  
Limbs of that bar's tree  
Waving down (some  
To the windshield), warning.  
Thoughts that the energy of youth  
Had some pivotal focus  
Made each imagined man to him  
Like a lollipop,  
but the parks would not do:

There the man with the smashed fender  
Might be obligated to 69  
A winner without a face—  
a drag race ending in the winner's backseat,  
And on his tools which would rib in.  
And inside that bar where women snuggle  
Away their faces in equality,  
And where men rotate hips on the dance floor

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Like an earth's axes...this would not do:  
For there were no friends to affect  
Mutually and faggishly in embraces;  
And the young and sensitive  
Were Oriental and fonder  
Of the cigarettes  
They put in their faces  
And the beers that suddenly appeared  
Before them. This would not do:  
Mouth-hugging the earth  
On its bulge of life  
Or moving to songs  
Where the dances never end.  
He was an old fag and must retain  
A square orbit.  
It, at least,  
Was a gentleman's right  
And in accordance with the  
Manner of the fags.  
The block was long.  
In the shadows and oblique actualities  
He felt its length. His stomach tightened  
In fear of the length.

## Transitional Mendacities

No, the supremacy of having been split off from  
A larger entity by being spit out  
From pussy lips while  
Reeking pain and havoc  
Like a living tongue pulled  
From aperture and den  
Is not sign enough  
That he is meant  
To be sustained  
As an integral part of the world,  
Unique and indispensable.  
Thinking about how much longer  
He will need to play out the day  
That issue is not his, and never has been.  
“The job was done”  
He could say, later,  
After the storm.  
Hand-limp,  
His broom dance sweeps  
Upended under an empty park bench—  
Dirt caught under  
The tongues of his feet—  
So his paycheck  
Will come in the mail  
And become bank figures  
He can suck from  
To keep he and his woman  
Housed and fed, and well enough  
To legally rape each other in embraces,  
Forgetful of their lives.

The man has a son,  
and stands nights  
aching behind an assembly line,  
Sleeping the days away  
While his son goes to school.  
The son thinks his father  
Is thoughtless and dirty  
And his mother a grease-bitch

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For marrying him.  
The son grows up  
Between his college books,  
And begins to put it together:  
A society of men  
Wanting to take a variety  
Of stimulating produce—  
Though some were more the makers  
Than the takers;  
The image of rightness  
In a man putting his hormones  
To the making of a company  
In a family; a family  
That needs a provider to survive;  
A man honorable and trapped

And there are nights  
He awakens, gagging at the  
Sudden thought of a man  
Next to him  
Who had engaged his body  
In a lower form of sharing.  
And he wonders if embracing a world  
Of ideas can be done  
When all things cannot be believed;  
If humanism is  
Energy vented  
To avoid futility;  
And what grossness  
He would have to justify next—  
All on those nights  
When self-perspectives  
Are swept under in change.

## Man of Coal

You knew it was coming:  
Twenty–three years and the mine  
Would notice you one time,  
Photocopied.  
A voice below bellows  
Your name, Dave,  
Into the settling air of coal dust.

After you shut off the engines  
And descend beneath the dragline's skeletal  
Nose which canopys like a skyscraper on  
Its side in mid–air  
You confront a face  
You cannot see in the descending sun. Shadow–still,  
Enormous might engulfing over you  
To the height of  
The dragline's triple–tank wheels,  
You see him—  
The heels on his leather boots  
Locked in the train–track grooves of dirt.

As he hands the notice to you  
Its stiffness shakes  
In your calloused hand.  
You know that what is left of the day  
Is becoming cold; and despite the smell  
Of dirt there is a scent  
Of watermelon in the damp air,  
Although you do not know it as that smell  
Or that there is a smell at all, really.  
And yet a faintness of some half–knowledge  
That touches its weight lightly in your mind  
Drags itself into places you cannot touch.

Pulling out of his shadow  
You think of how you might hand  
This sheet to your wife  
Like a child presenting to his mother

## An American Papyrus: 25 Poems

An award from school:  
Your wife screaming laughter of relief  
As she hugs the paper to her breast;

Or how your strong hand might sweat  
As you pick up the receiver of the ringing phone,  
Expecting that after saying "Hi"  
That one of your college children's voices would end  
The conversation there  
For you to hand the vibrations  
To your wife—but instead  
That child  
Congratulates you  
For no longer destroying the land.

The noon hour whistle  
Vibrates the walls  
Of the hollow heavens  
To the cab; the thermos—well  
Of soup, sitting on your lap, you cannot see, but  
You feel its stillness  
Stagnating and absorbing  
The contaminating minerals  
Of the tin, walling in the contents;  
And still you want to turn on the ignition  
To finish out one more complete day  
In the twenty—three years here  
Of hard work.  
The quandary then snaps, and you escape.  
When out of the valley you enter the truck  
And close the door—  
The second time harder, and it latches.  
You turn the key  
And the truck bounces to the highway.  
You stop at the sign;  
Stop the motor while  
Still on the dirt road;  
But in the end turn left, again,  
Home.

**Maddog  
(Or Death to the Barbie–Dame Image)**

You said that it happened—that day you ran away  
From a self you buried underneath the ice–packed snow,

All those cold years ago—when your last friend, then  
Had put an end to the Gabriele whom I've never known.  
This  
Friend, like yourself a Barbie Dame, became totally  
lame and  
Withdrew out the door when you needed more hands to  
keep  
Your epileptic roommate  
From smashing her head on the floor.

Gabriele, held together by the stitching of hate—  
The plastic–eyed polar bear with the stiff arms  
That the factory of the human race mutantly created—  
This time it will be you who shall feel the wall of  
artificial  
Fur ripped from its threads, and your stuffing falling  
out.  
For a little maddog on top of four joints  
Makes a person see the unsealed human fragments  
That had been smoothed over in time  
Like a million and some bone fractures  
The milk of approval had swum into and covered over  
for looks.

For me fragmenting came yesterday when I saw a welcome  
mat  
Iced over and yet I entered:  
Your house was hot and your oven smelled of baking  
meatloaf  
Although you had said that you could not be  
domesticated.  
And then I saw your bottle of wine  
Standing at attention before two glasses.  
The pledge that bowing to anything or anyone was

## An American Papyrus: 25 Poems

wrong...that people  
Were only needed to gain the most bare  
Of physiological and psychological needs (pitstops to  
being  
human)—this was  
gone.  
Gone with your hair brushed and your skin smelling of  
perfume  
For some other man than me.

Come on Gabriele, the gal that used to chew tobacco  
and  
Spit it into an empty beer can...  
The gal with the deep dark—ocean eyes...  
The maddog gal, grip that wine glass now.  
For Gabriele, you smile at everyone with meaning  
You are as together as a feather when a hurricane is  
in town,  
And when the hangover's over and your own insight has  
Fragmented you from a million pieces to a billion,  
My stiff polar bear arms  
Shall poke and not embrace.

I sit back at this party I am hosting—  
My back firmly pushing against the back of my chair,  
And my head and eyes cocked.  
You all are the performers this time...  
And Gabriele, you are the main attraction,  
Attracted, after this night, to the omni—present sense  
of your  
Smashed self; and me—  
Sensitive little me in no man's land  
Where no man wanted to grasp me from...  
And no woman—  
Mended back together in thy survivalistic polar bear  
image.



## Becky's Demon

“Something happend.  
i don't have those visions anymore.”  
And you believe with a mind like Papa believed with  
When i told him i could see things  
Clearly before they actually  
Were.

His back and forth pacing from those same two  
windows—  
Which had been like a toy soldier powered on a human  
battery  
With a three minute's stand at one, and then the next,

Suddenly stopped. For i was different. You annointed  
me  
And cast me out. i was alone. You caused me to hide  
Beside a pitchfork in the shadows of the corners of  
the barn.  
Yes. Papa stopped. His eyes moved. i'd never seen  
his eyes move  
Before.  
They stared down at me. My child's eyes  
Below—and he aimed his for them as a fisher for prey  
in clear waters.  
i backed up behind the pipe of the kitchen stove..  
But with one stretch he reached his arm over  
Like a bear's paw that in force comes down like a  
Redwood.

my knee aching as if broken, i crutched up  
From the other side of the room, beside the door....  
Then, bending on my knees the next conscious second—  
Feeling the blood of knee caps sticking to hay and  
dirt—  
Seeing the sun poke like sticks through rafters and  
cobwebs—  
Thinking i grabbed a hold on the sunlight which could  
Lift me

## An American Papyrus: 25 Poems

Up like a rope; but grasping the pitchfork—  
Raising the pitchfork—  
Pitching the pitchfork—  
After hearing the creaking and scraping of the opening  
barn door  
Plowing  
The top soil of the dry earth. Thinking: he would  
never kill  
my shadowy corner.

### II

And in this plush chair of the Bishop's office i sit a  
decade  
And a half later—a Salem witch of the west explaining  
her  
Dull, trembling self before three Mormon men bending  
above  
me.  
But you don't understand me, as if anyone ever has.  
i had psychic abilities. But you don't want them, so  
they're  
Gone;  
And i'm good. i no longer believe, Bish'y, that I saw  
Benson  
Dying  
And Yourself rising above the  
Twelve.  
But You're still scared of me. You only want to  
annoint me  
And cast me out. You only want me to hide in a barn,  
And belong to shadows.  
You call my abilities a possession of a demon.

Papa doubted i could see; and you see me as perverted.

But you do see that i see...  
That i have something with some power.  
You and the Missionaries lay your hands on me...  
me who left my Protestant roots so as to be rooted in  
your  
Family.  
You put your cold hands on my forehead,  
Trying to vacuum out my psychic abilities,  
Which i tell you are no longer—  
Trying to take away my saying that i'm okay...

Becky's Demon

An American Papyrus: 25 Poems

i'm good. Speak to me. Don't cast me out and leave.

## Where, Oh Where, Did The Mall–Lady Go?

They wanted her to drop her thoughts  
As naturally as her underpants fell, after they were  
Over the hips, so the steaming winds of her daily  
showers  
Could clear her of encroaching stain  
As she had been cleared away.

They were a function, ignorant of their thinking,  
charting  
Charts. She felt she would have to ignore these  
doctors and  
Nurses in the mental ward.  
She would have to ignore the pacing patients  
Asking cigarettes from her.  
The hall was rectangular.  
Everyone moved rectangularly.

She would go to dreams of past realities  
Where she was watching the shoppers' reflections  
As they passed mall's little fountains—  
Different types of people–reflections but all silvery  
In the still of the waters,  
Happy and part of the lives of the mall.  
She would imagine herself sitting on a metal bench—  
packages of her new clothing pulling on arms and chest

Like the recalling torpor that came more easily  
To her lower legs; the weight of the mink that arched  
Her aching shoulders more like a lady;  
And a small sack of chocolate stars  
Touching her upper neck—  
Wondering what packages her fellow–creatures  
Bought to be brought home and to whom  
They brought them to.  
And then, as the locks of solitude clicked in her  
consciousness,  
Came the wondering of where, oh where,  
Did the Mall–Lady go?

Where, Oh Where, Did The Mall–Lady Go?

## Savior–Searcher In The Bible–Belt

I can see you in those dry moments, then  
As clearly as if I were there: staring at the cracks  
Of the white ceiling above the bedpost, wondering if  
You will slip down three flights to the outer darkness

Like your ex–Mormon roommate, here. Your visual mind,  
Against your will, probably thinks about your squirm  
That a few moments ago squirmed you of your juice,  
Wiggled her skirt back on, resurfaced the lip–spit  
Crackup in her concrete of makeup, and wordless,  
Walked like a princess out the door.  
As the last of the ecstatic vibrations tides you in  
the rear  
You arise from the raft of the mattress.  
Then you cover up your nakedness,  
And move to the light of the living room.

And then I actually see you, Don, in the hour that you  
had told  
Me to step back in. You are bending over the  
end–table stained  
In the blood of wine. Sunlight, stripped silver from  
the grey  
Clouds, pours through the window to the table.  
To your right a nine of swords card of a man pierced  
in the  
Back gleams as it walls the card of your future  
lovers.,  
And the redness of Doctrines and Covenants to the far  
left of  
That table also looks pure in the light.  
You do not see me. Your mind is racked in screwing  
the pack  
For an answer. You turn another Tarot Card  
In the order your destiny is to be read.

Your sad eyes look up  
And your languid voice says that you are late

## An American Papyrus: 25 Poems

For your meeting with the local Bishop...  
A meeting to straighten up your fucking life.  
I laugh! In bitterness that shakes my intestines, I  
laugh!  
Another hillbilly man  
Has lifted his head above the rest—a foot up from the  
jug—  
And has blown his breath into the air  
Which 'naps another young and fragmented one  
To the call of being holy.  
But before you arise  
You turn the gleaming card of number four—  
Your eyes in a more motionless trance than before.

## New England Washing

(Mental Account, Some day of Gorbechev, 1987)

Another hour.  
There is no circulation  
Beneath the steering wheel for my feet.  
Outside myself  
There is the last of the sun at dusk  
But like the conquering Hsuing–Nu  
Pushing themselves beyond a  
Great Wall and through an eternal  
Gathering, it is hardly felt.  
There is nothing great to trouble me  
And nothing substantial descends on my senses,  
Giving me thoughts other than the fact I'm thinking  
nothing:  
Only  
A flock of birds in the corner of my left eye  
Blend down with the grey skies  
As if the fence barricading  
The farm land does not pertain to them;  
Thoughts of the center line  
And not going over it.  
Days of Gorbechev, the radio speaks of,  
But not his nights—where, one time  
He may have smashed  
A big, red cigarette in an ashtray  
With an action stiff and slow;  
And as he stood up the mattress of his bed may have  
Raised to touch his rear, again,  
Like a quick and soothing give–me–five handshake;  
And opening a window of the embassy  
To escape the stuffy dryness  
Of electric heat to his suite,  
He may have let the cool American air  
Attack him with the smells and sights  
Of its diplomatic car exhausts,  
Grey and orange from street lamps  
And store lights...and how  
The nation breathed for once as it moved.

The third: road; cows, like islanders;  
Multi–tinted bladed fields broken by acres

## An American Papyrus: 25 Poems

Of forests and pastures; a black-sun scene with  
Car lights; a vision blurred and pebbled  
Through the windshield—  
A truck passes my pinto;  
Muddy water slapping its face;  
Its stick eyes smoothing it  
To a duller complexion.  
It isn't yet Christmas  
And I am going home.  
My parents one day drooped  
In front of all, and were old—  
We should be having much to say...  
I, thinking like them, with  
The mind of the world,  
And us smiling unhappily  
And speaking none of that:  
But a lot will be said.  
I am a bum.  
One of their hearts shall give in  
And their marriage will be a farce...  
Even in car accidents the married  
Die separately. And then the widowed  
Mother, smoking the cigars of her husband,  
And coughing them as the husband had done  
But in the apartment of the son, might  
Visit away her life: I would  
Bring her there, thanking God for a reason  
Not to try hiding all of me in some pussy  
As in daylight the main part  
Goes into underwear.

This is their town  
Far from trays with saucers  
And plates and spoons and forks  
(Sometimes hardened in scalloped potatoes  
Or bent) and knives and glasses  
(Glasses sometime with folded bread inside)...  
But forever coming down the belt for the  
Dumping and washing...the trays that disappear  
In a square hole and come out clean  
Will continue regardless if I am there.  
Men fuck virgins; a child-worker  
Is born and all is holy.  
There is nothing great to trouble me:  
The rains that drop and drift next  
To streets in gutters, take away  
Smashed Pepsi cups and beer cans  
Without intent, bound God knows where,  
But out of sight.



## The San Franciscan's Night Meditations

When I am at a dead-lock  
In your rear and the  
language of my body  
Will not come from  
The third element of the soul,  
What am I to say?—  
'ALL BUT ONE DEAD:  
Mexican immigrants celebrating the  
Stowing away on a 120 degree boxcar  
With urine in their stomachs,  
Acknowledging capitalistic thirsts...  
Sigue sobre pagina”..  
Double hubble  
The peso is in trouble  
And to Mars  
America plans  
Jumping over the moon,  
And all this has disturbed me!”

The night is full of impulses  
To live and to run and seep heavily  
Into its dark robes of  
Silence and morbid rightness;  
And as I, again, try to thrust on dryly—  
A log without a river traveling it  
To the product of lumber—  
and hope to create love in  
The smackings of night,  
Like anyone else, I know that soon  
I am to appologize for lack  
Of an ejaculation,  
And will promise to have a counselor  
Tame me to the exclusion of  
All but work and lust.

Sounds of people  
Kicking around the  
Night of early morning  
Beneath my lover's window;  
And I withdraw under the sheet,

lying flat with the dead moonlight.

## The Philosophy Of Rita And Herb

Staring fixed at the rows  
Of flowered  
Wallpaper a pale gray  
In the dark efficiency—  
The three walls still absent  
To her consciousness  
As a shadow of silver lightning  
Fades the greyness  
Of one portion in her view—  
The “schizophrenic” lifts  
up a cigarette hidden behind  
An ashtray and the flat ground  
Of ashes on the table, which  
Skid and resurface with her  
Hot breathing. She thinks they are  
Continents drifting, and herself  
Upon them.  
From feeling stiff and pushed under—  
Numb to the point of a corpse—  
With insecurity enough not to remember,  
Even, her ABC's, Rita runs into the night  
Where outside of a window  
She blesses the workers making  
Colonial bread.

An old man in a cowboy hat, Herb,  
Is saddled on the wooden railing of a porch  
To an apartment complex: seated there beside a  
remembrance  
Of a young woman like Rita.  
And in the spitting fumes; bad-muffler sounds;  
The rocking phallicism in radio music of passing cars,

He feels he has to move or die  
And gets down  
To his pickup.

And Rita, upon dawn and upon the end of rain,

## An American Papyrus: 25 Poems

Walks the streets again after tiring,  
Ready to go back and confront the curfew-conscious  
Group home, and the “zero” on her record full of  
Zeros. She worries about carrying in her womb  
A mini-Herb with scabs of grey hair  
And little pot-holes in his tiny face,  
Though she is still a virgin.

## Estivation

Weekends in Tranquility Park—  
With the downtown buildings, hallways of giants  
clustered,  
Exhaling the coolness echoed  
From the rectangular mouths of doors  
Opened and closed by cityers—  
A coolness came over my thoughts  
The way lack of wind contains  
The hastening of Yosemite's flames.

There, diurnal and punctual, she crossed  
That small area of grass, fountains, and cement  
Which were generally buffeted more fully by sun and  
adjacent  
Sounds, moving the park more than Bush and Dukakis'  
Presence. "WALK" was always lit when la chica  
Approached the street, carrying her library books.  
When would she, artificial and pneumatic,  
Who like Houston's miniature stop-lights  
While going to work, veer my movements  
To slide off a plane ticket and be led  
Through and from burning Amazons  
And green-house climactic changes—  
Through wasted ozone and my own depleted life—  
The breath of her mouth my only nourishment.

Masking tape  
From hurricane threats  
Remains at the edges of window panes;  
Palm trees, below, are hybrid to cement;  
Thuc Nguyen's business report figures  
Blend and bury themselves as distant sounds;  
The staff meeting and this cigarette industry are  
gone.  
Slid off a plane ticket caught in life's winds  
Restless No friends for real  
All wanting something from me  
The outside world has nothing  
Except life-ending amusements of  
Sex to escape void

An American Papyrus: 25 Poems

The dead have some solidity of truth  
About what happens after life  
Even if they are not aware of it,  
And the rest breathe in fables  
Everything is surely unchanged in  
Springfield, Mo., where I was raised,  
But none of it is mine  
Nothing is ours—humanity drifts along  
And intersects briefly in alliances My friends  
Are co-workers whom I must expire  
My life with civilly  
As we light cigarettes  
And bitch of no new raises

When would she pull on my arm  
Tugging me thoroughly into breaking glass  
Of the 12th floor conference room  
To fall, putting me out violently,  
When I can no longer dream

## Mid–West Hymn of Aten

Aten, where it is throned on the television beneath  
the window,  
Sees above and below and says nothing:  
It enjoys the woman secretary and the road constructor

Who from opposite shifts of the sun  
Come to it, the cat;  
Follow the roaming in its mansion;  
Pensively laugh as it clings to hundred dollar drapes;

Feed it holiday popcorn on the throne;  
And close the drapes that the cat, Aten  
Had opened by its tugging,  
And will open again:  
Opening below

Where the woman, statue of her liberty

Wedged in a mud layered hill of snow

Ankle–thrusts

The tilt of her body after a moment of standing  
still:

Face looking in the trash receptacle that her  
flabby

Breasts rest on the rim of and point toward; head  
bowed

To the tin; And mind distinguishing between good  
and

Bad trash. Her hands raise from the snow–blended

Mixture to push back the hair that was intimate  
with trash.

An American Papyrus: 25 Poems

She raises her head and glances up at the sky  
that

She had noticed a few seconds earlier; and  
wonders

Of the person who would throw away a nightgown

And wilted plants, dented but unopened cat food,

And scattered baby pictures—

But the cold wind pushes further into her rashed  
cheeks;

And she drops the gown before she can mentally  
conceptualize

The woman's possible image She digs further  
and...

And opening Above where  
Two crossing jet  
Had each made an element  
Of a cross in the skies—  
A third, now, and the  
Heavens appear to play  
Tick-tack-toe with their bad arts,  
Or do not know how to push out caulk neatly  
When hoping to seal out the heavens.



**McConico**

Through the hazy waters  
Of his hot bath, looking, he thought  
That his woman's pubic hairs  
Should naturally have come out  
More permed like his,  
Regardless of her color.

The door being shut and locked  
With a rifle in front—still he heard  
From the living room a forum of senators'  
Televised voices discussing laws of limits  
In openness and freedoms  
And ramifications. He did not understand—  
As the mirrors steamed, dripped  
Down from the air conditioning's touch, and resteamed  
When it shut off;  
And when he wondered what home owners  
Had used the bathtub before  
And what disease might be  
Dropping from the cracks around the faucet—that  
The fags would push down the American way of life.  
He did not argue that if they were isolated  
From the mainstream, their liquids might get off on  
any  
Products as they worked for the cost of their  
isolation  
In, for example, a barren region of Texas;  
And that the isolated would, by the testing of the  
Virus, be proven witches  
So there would not have to be witch hunts—  
No, he just felt their destruction.

And he thought of his woman  
In the bedroom, waiting, and became  
Forgetful of anything  
But the desire to have her.  
They had that freedom. The American constitution  
Said so—freedom to live and breathe  
And fuck and fuck..  
Fuck so hard that the penis would

## An American Papyrus: 25 Poems

Knife through the condom  
And spray-paint the man's name  
On the dull walls of the vagina.  
They had that freedom—those inalienable rights—  
Her to be banged and to squeal  
To her friends that she was in love  
And him to white pussy  
And a gal that he could call his own...  
His woman. And if the initial M got ready  
To graffito-crawl his way out—  
A problem for the rest of their years—  
She could erase it, not remembering it  
With any more significance than  
Having clipped a broken end  
Of a fingernail. She had that right.  
Her man said so, and so said  
The American constitution.

His shift in Toastmaster  
Had for that day ended,  
And so now he could rest in waters;  
Focus on the bubbles that rose  
When he farted; and let the memories  
Of the entire day be released to rise and fall  
Like the steam.  
He would have to scrub himself  
Good before going to his woman:  
She understood money  
With its charm of a cocaine high—  
Although the need for dominance  
And the breaking of rules  
Made her love him  
Who still did not supply her with all of her needs—  
But the composite smell of the factory and the drugs  
That he sold after each shift  
Would lessen the good feelings that made  
That understanding.

## Beauty Shop Motif

Taking the boat two hundred miles  
With her Ozark loving husband  
Not having the key  
And why I don't use  
The hair dye she perscribed—  
The one I had bought from  
Her last time—  
I say, "Yes, Honey  
And watch her lips through the mirror speed on.  
My back aches in the chair stiff as a board.  
Have I gotten as old as this?  
Have I started saying, "Yes, Honey?"  
Conscious of slight pains and discomforts—  
Words as silent racing of lips.  
Another shampoo is ground harder  
In the grey hair of my scalp.  
The long gray weeds that grow out of it  
Will be chopped off another two inches more  
Than what I asked her to do.

In a room of old women, like me,  
Who let the buzz of dryers  
And loud beautician speakers  
Keep their minds active from remembering,  
My bored and wayward eyes  
See in the mirror  
(Now seated in a once empty chair next to mine)  
A young one:  
Her fidgeting body willfully captivated;  
Hair held high and hostage;  
Curlers stiffly tightened;  
Bulges diluvial by Cylenderic Bottle  
Held ungodly above her head  
And squeezed by gentle but firm hands  
Of a male beautician—  
And I remember that the noxious liquid  
Dribbles under Cotton Crowns  
Around one's head  
As the eyes water from the sting  
Of this thing called love.  
Somehow I want to warn her  
Although she may not be a stranger

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To being whitewashed  
In a man's liquids  
And the click-of-the heels logic  
Of women, as if  
One's whole damaged life  
Can be bounced from a mirror  
In and to all women  
Like an SOS.

## Sculpting of Winds

It was as if certain people came in. Those disliked  
were  
Disregarded and the rest kind of circled in and out  
But at the time in and a small period out were  
associated with  
And considered part of that person's reality by  
himself  
The way a cat brushes against certain familiarities  
Agreeable enough as it goes for its meal,  
And so I befriended places.

Saltillo in Mexican mountains when the land shivers in  
shadow  
And the sun stretches through the air and beyond it  
With an intent to overpower what is closer to man—  
The River—walk and the Alamo and between both where  
A Philipino in green shorts eats the grass  
Where sidewalk and road intersect. There is a city  
where I  
Thought I could find myself less lonely,  
And so I have returned home. Snow embraces  
Springfield's earth to its death.  
Under the sounds of the rolling drips of water in the  
gutter  
I am frozen, though fingers tearing apart the wet  
leaves  
I pulled off from a tree, wishing they had been  
Dry to grind and become the physical appearance of the  
wind.  
Cracked and peeled back from a boot a portion  
Of the snow is removed but refreezes more heavily  
On one area of the dead. I stand as an outsider  
Imagining myself to allow a job section of today's  
newspaper  
To become the thoughts that crash along in the mind of  
the wind.  
I need money but cannot find anything worth doing.  
To change from a person to a commercial function to  
eat...this..

## An American Papyrus: 25 Poems

This day I shall sleep away  
As the night. In Springfield, Mo.  
The Great God may also await for his eviction.,  
Two hundred Indians in Houston bow down to Krishna as  
the gates  
Men lock around him are opened and closed.  
But in Springfield he probably awaits,  
His red-sock feet on his sofa  
As the furnace blows  
The Soviet flag on the wall before his feet.  
His walls may have many flags,  
And his mind thoughts of glasnost and communism  
Intermixed.. impractical thoughts  
He must sacrifice so that  
He can exist together more easily  
With the community of the dead,  
Unalone.

## Post-Annulment

Afferent, the city bus cramps to the curb and brakes  
through  
Solipsistic muteness with an exhaltation startled and  
choking  
[People are play-things in one's reality! One must  
look  
Into other eyes or he'll be reminded that he is a user  
too]  
As the sun-god, Aten, blazes upon the terminal's  
Scraped concrete—its graven image—  
Making the place an Amarna,  
The shelved rows of the poor men  
Hear the sound humbly grazing  
Through whispered reverence over  
The glass-speckled pavement  
In a gradual dying echo,  
A cigarette succumbs to the voice as  
Carrion brought to life; all the tattered people  
awaken;  
And a man spits toward the tire of the bus  
But misses.  
[Religion is a lie! Everything is a lie!]  
And as he watches his own spit vanish  
From the hard crest of the world,  
And silently scrapes his lunch pail against  
A corner of a metallic bench as if expecting the pale  
To bleed...and hoping it would bleed...  
He tries to remember the angles  
He and his wife stood to project  
The intermingled shadows that both  
Had labled as their marriage.  
[Marriage, that sanctified legal rape, fosters  
The child-man to be a destined societal function  
As he grows up in the family unit]

He enters the second bus:  
Its coolness sedating the skin that  
Overlaps his troubled mind.  
His thoughts pull together  
Like the light, cool flow of the air conditioning.  
He feels a little pacified  
[Come to thyself, human, the refuge from lies!]

## An American Papyrus: 25 Poems

He knows the shadow's intangible depth:  
Its vastness having overpowered him these months  
Until he could not reach the logic that told him  
To find himself outside its barriers.  
As he stares out of the window  
he wonders why she has left.  
How could she have left without indication  
When he has remained angled toward work  
So that he and his wife can stay alive?  
In the bus window he sees his diaphanous face—the  
windows  
Of the Hilton, where he has a job in maintenance,  
Piercing solidly through its head. He rings the bell  
The idea of her not home, and legally annulled  
From his life—her small crotch not tightened to his  
Desparate thrusts—makes him feel sick.  
He gets down from the bus.  
He goes to work.  
He suddenly knows that he is not in love.