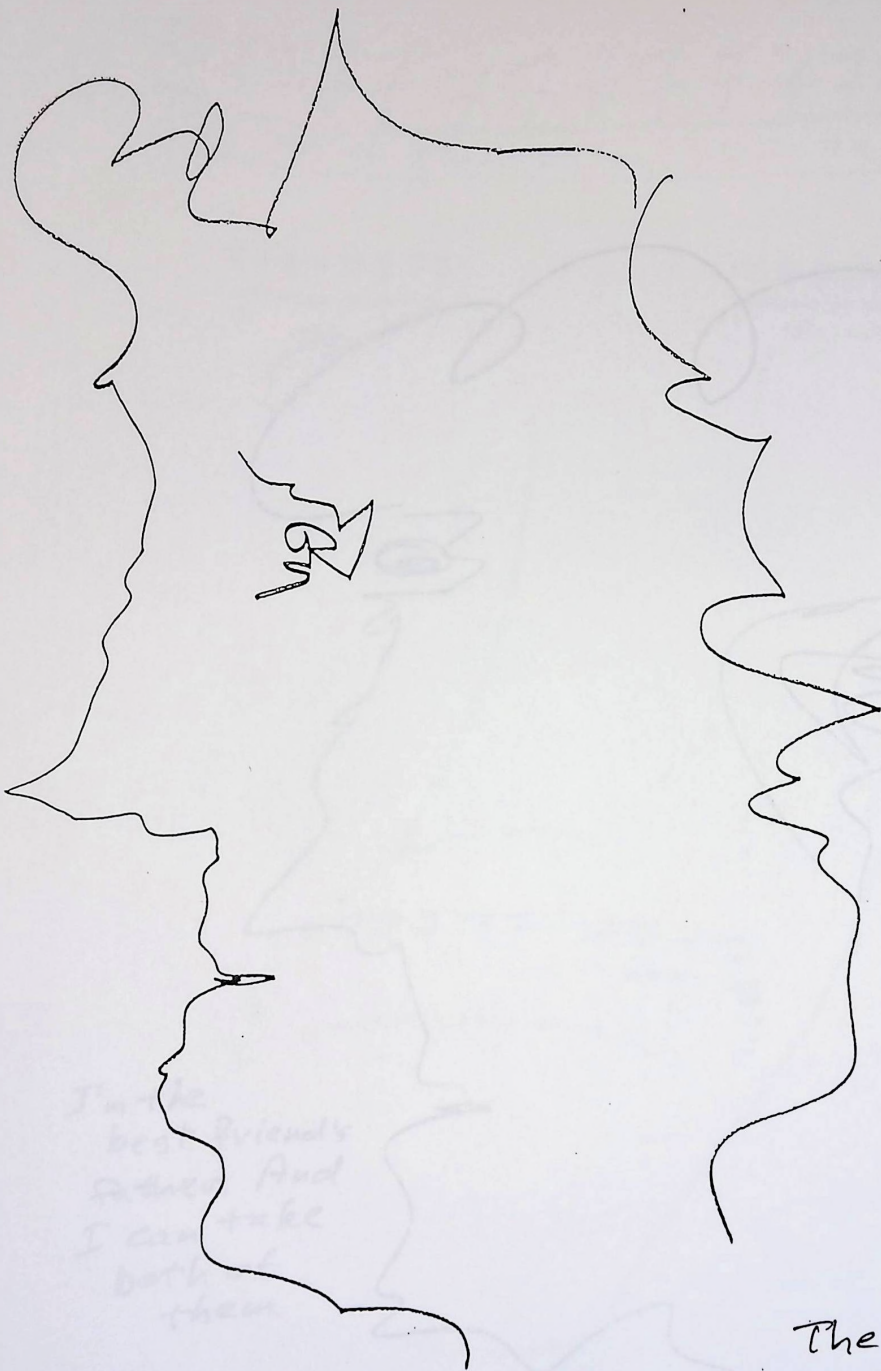




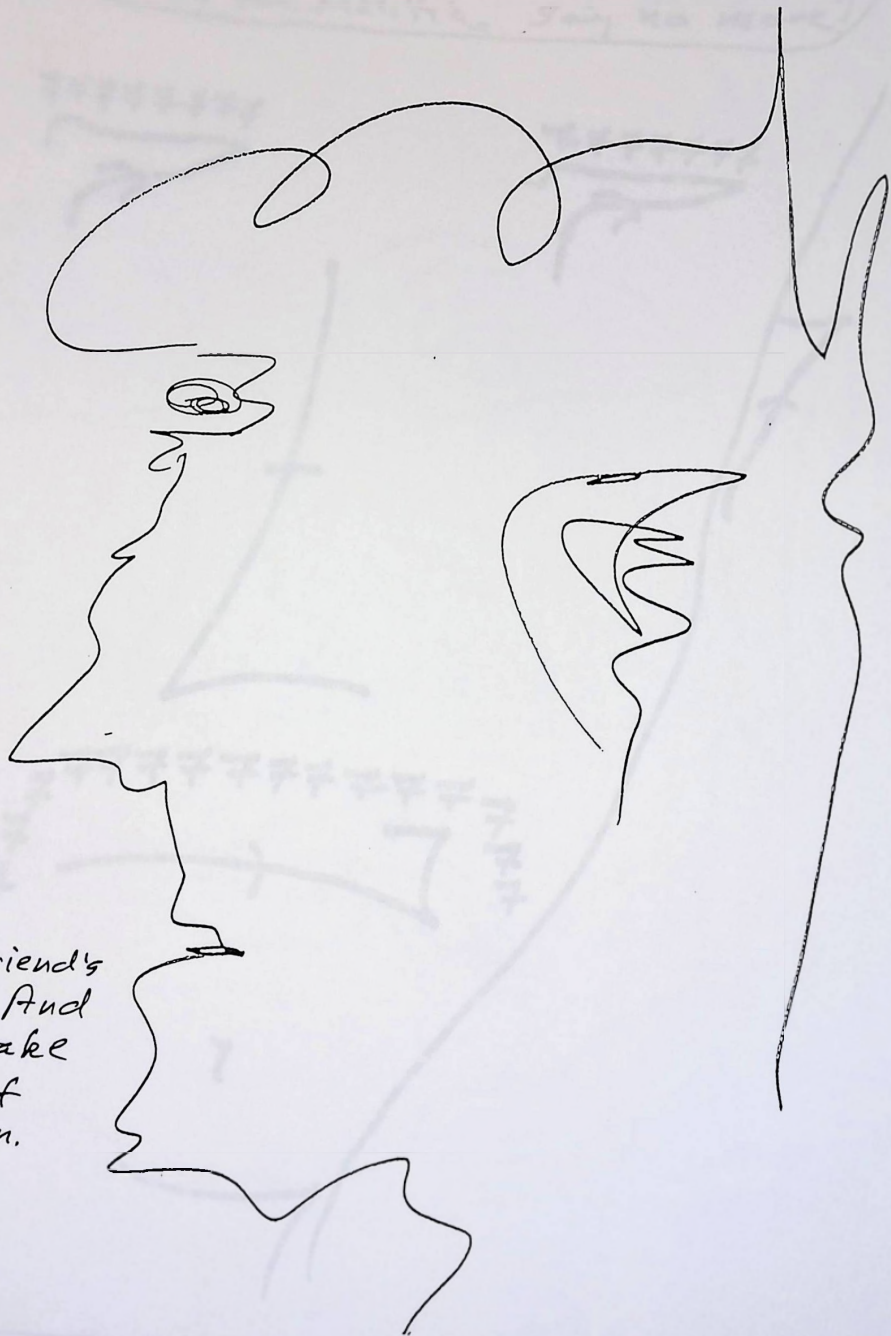
The Hard Hat

The Hard Hat
best friend

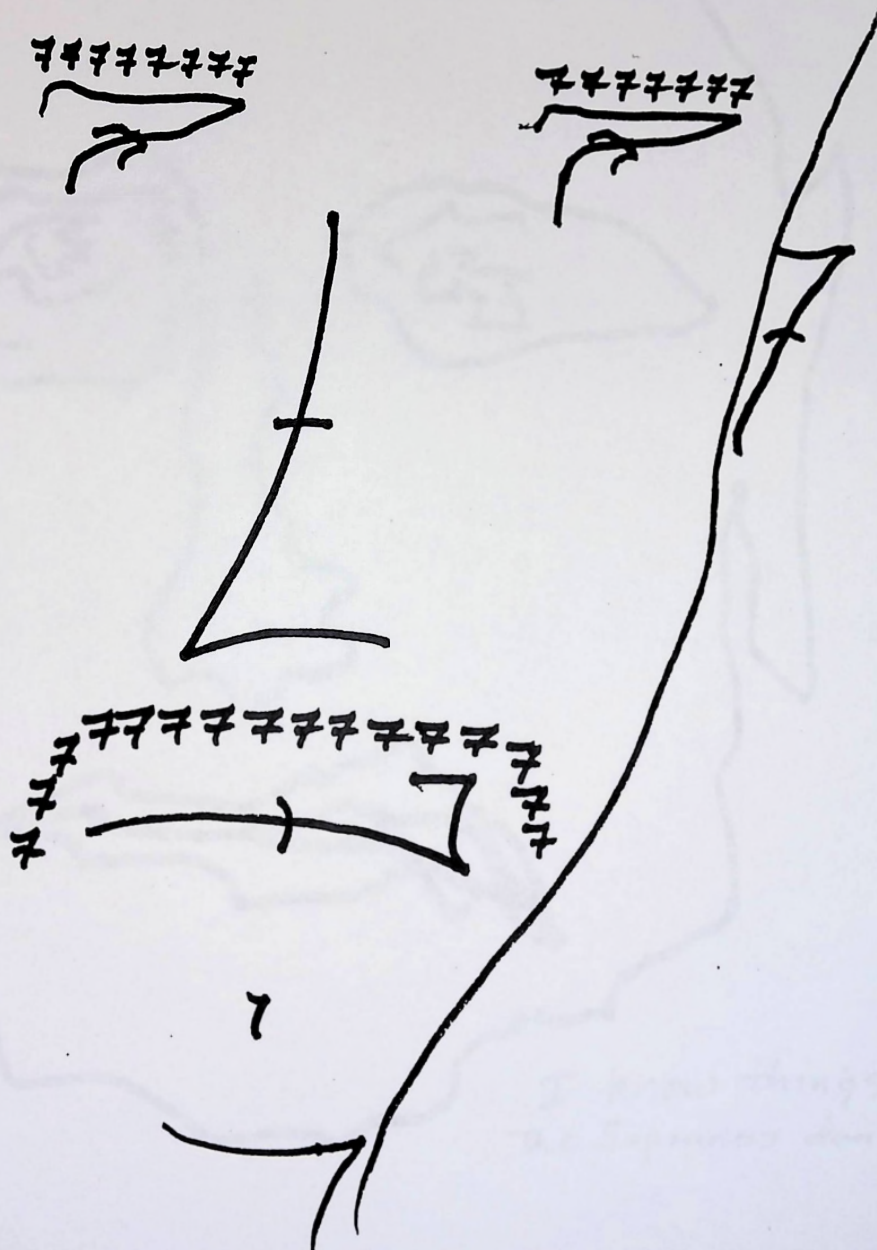


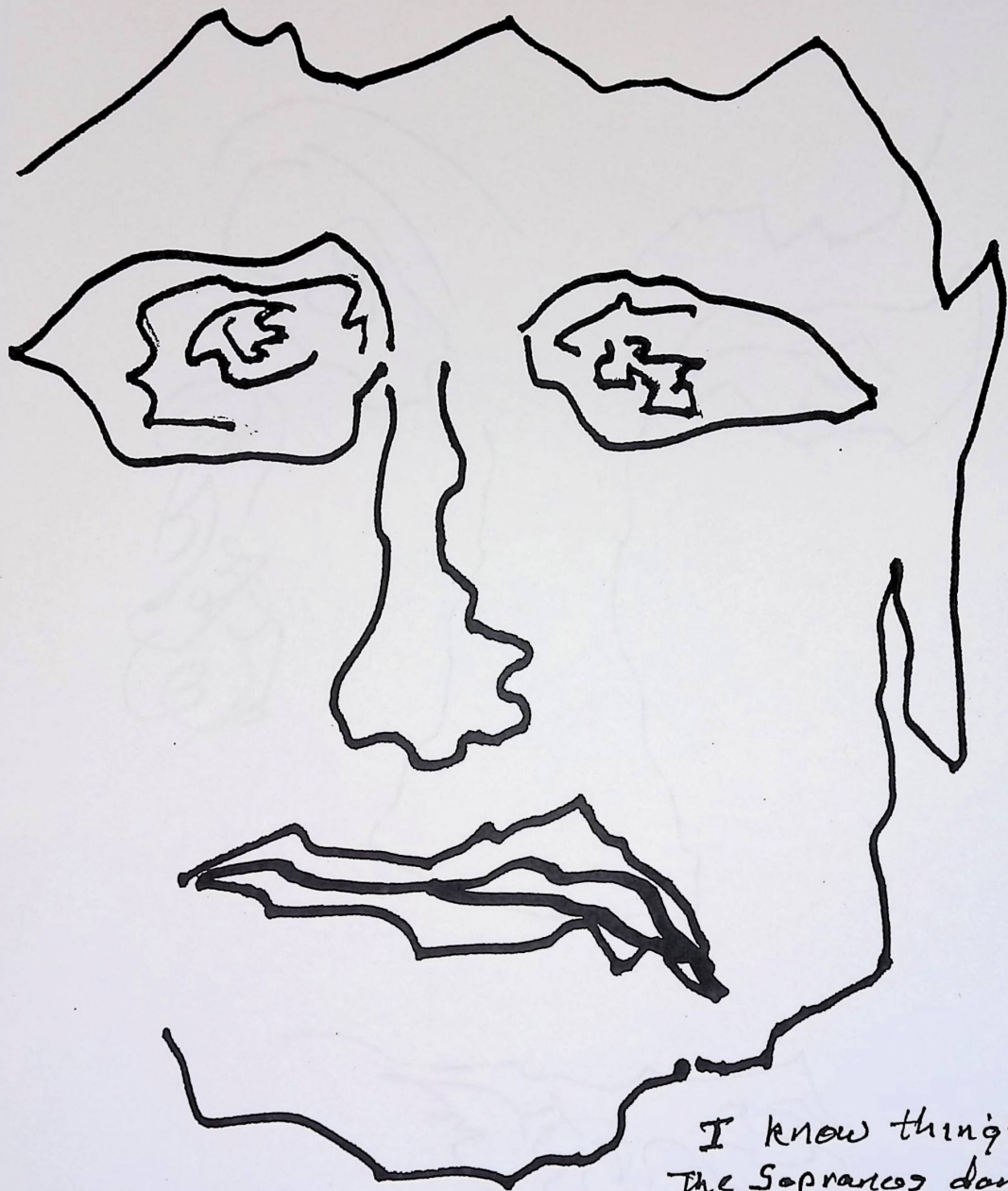
The Hard Hat's
best friend

I'm the
best friend's
father. And
I can take
both of
them.

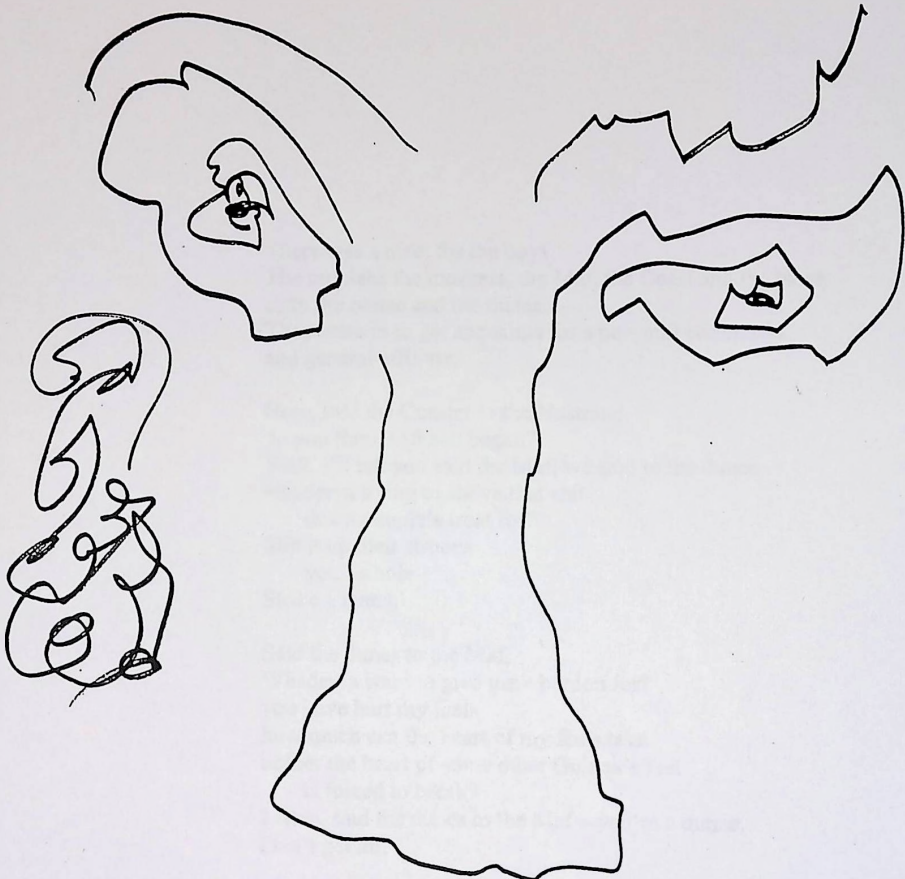


777777 7777777777777777
Yes I'm in the militia say no more!





I know things
the Sopranos don't.

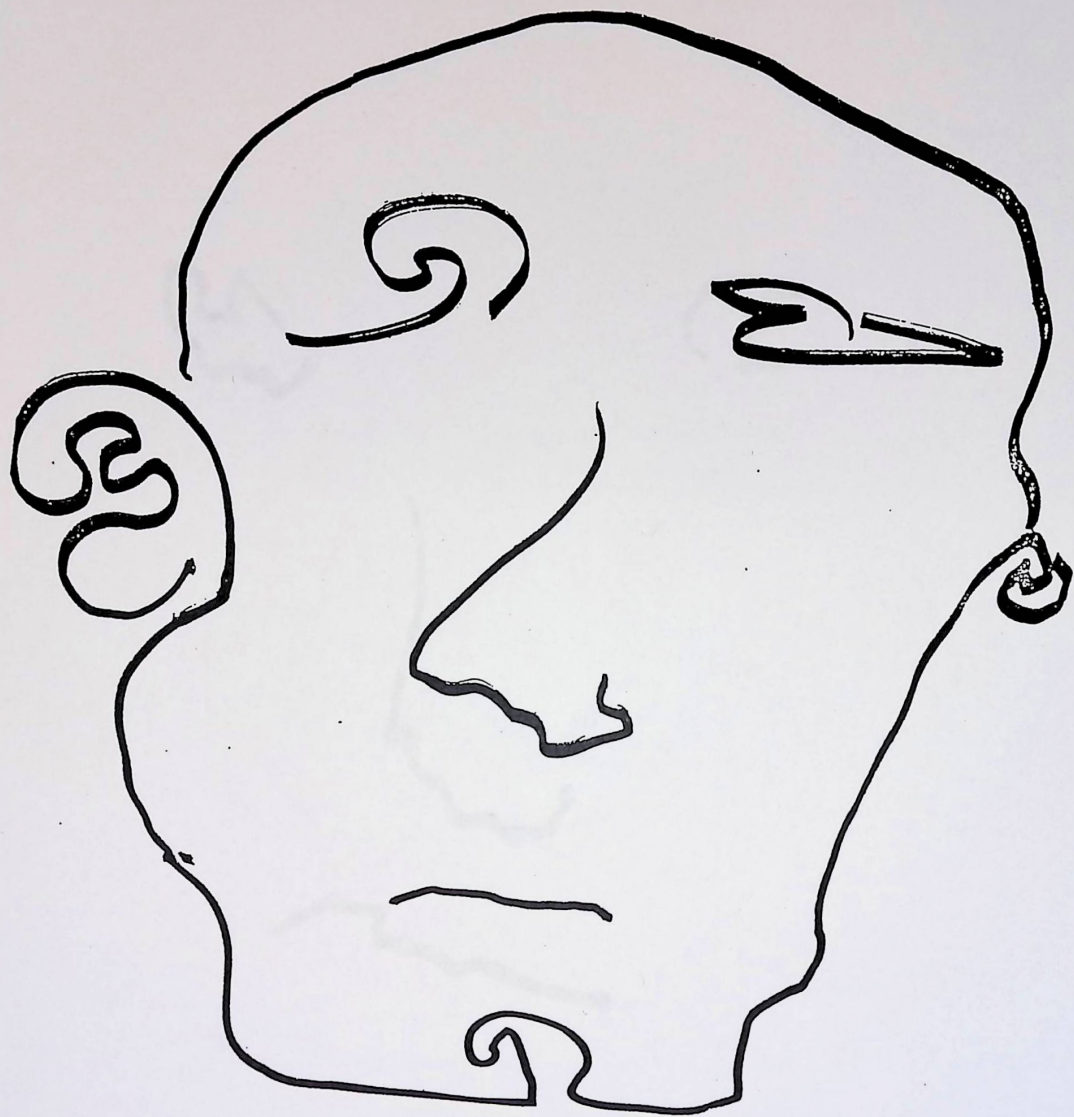


There was a meet for the boys
The moolahs the mozzers, the Maf, the Coast and the Nose
even the bonze and the dunes.
They were in to get acquaints for a new soft commodtz
and general affiliate.

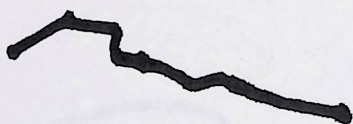
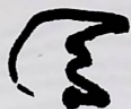
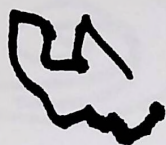
How, said the Coaster to the Nostrand
do you think soft sell began?
Well, I'll tell you said the Maf; we said to the dunes
whaderya trying to shove that shit
down people's troat for?
Slip it up their stroonz
you asshole
Strike a match!

Said the dunes to the Maf,
Whaderya want to give me a hardon for?
you have hurt my feels
how much can the heart of my feels take
before the heart of some other Guinea's feel
is forced to break?
Listen, said the dunes to the Maf—you're a dunze,
Don't get hit!

So they had a ruining
They had the runs.
That was some thunder.
Those fartsaroons came close to eating all the prunes.

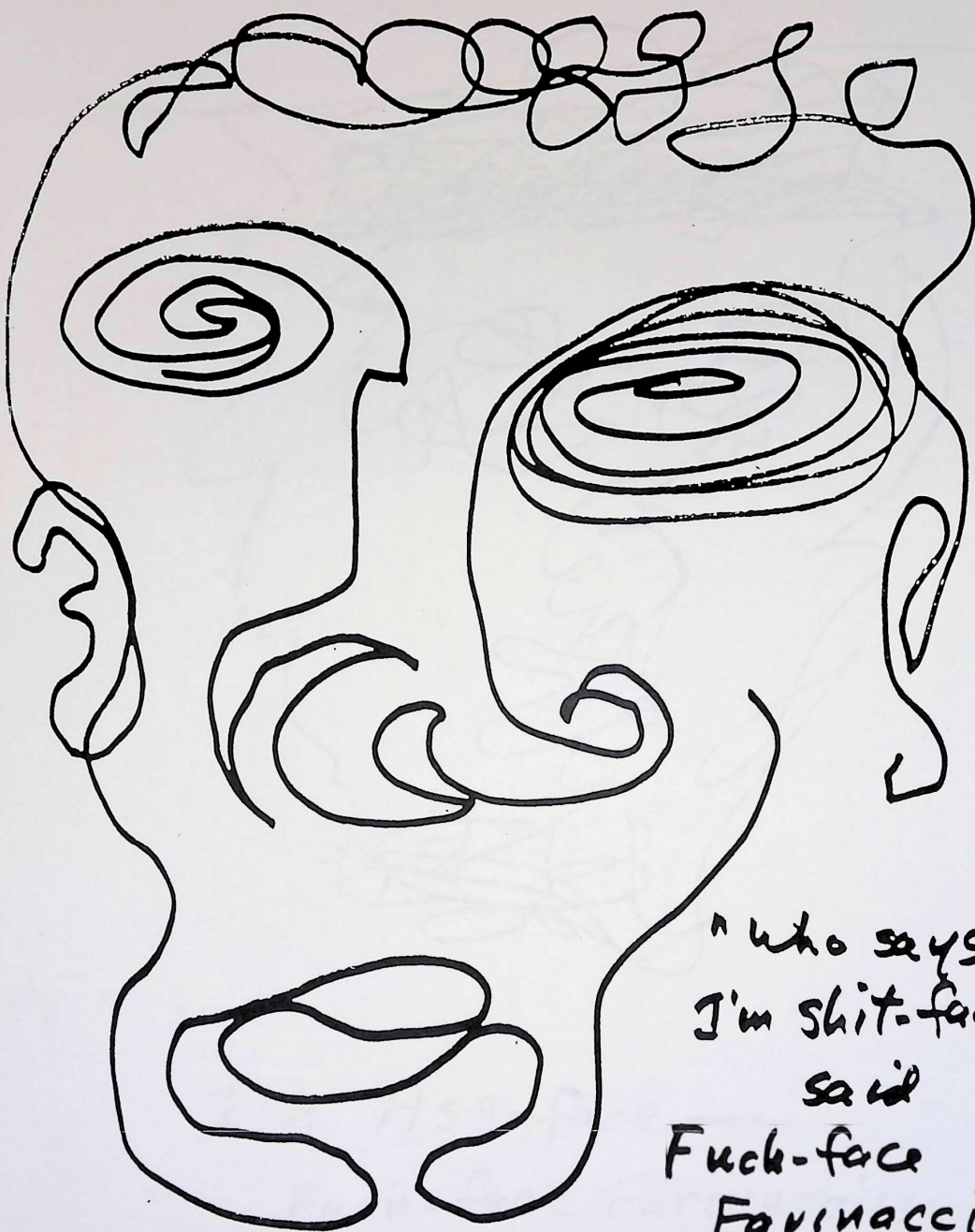


You don't know who I am
and you don't want to find out.

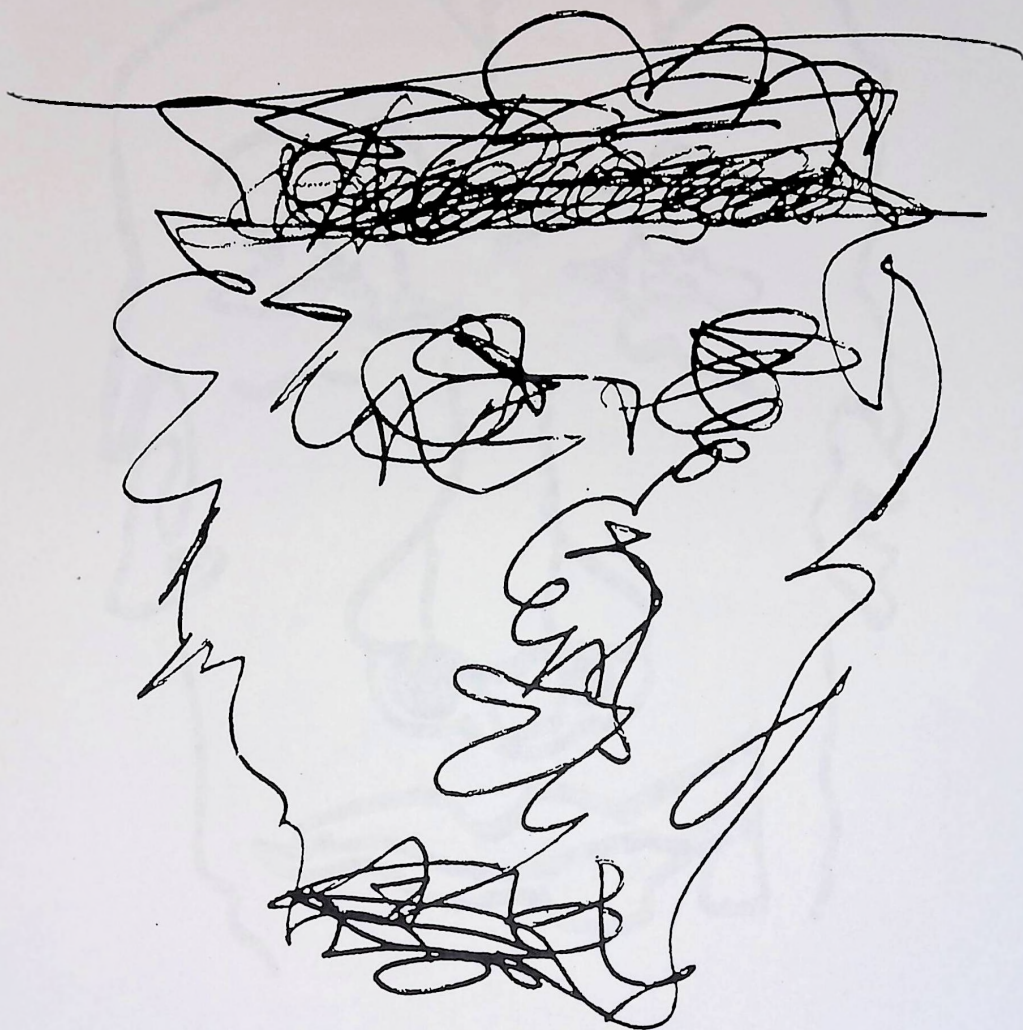


Ditto!

Who says
I'm shit-faced?
Said
Fool-face
Farrucci.

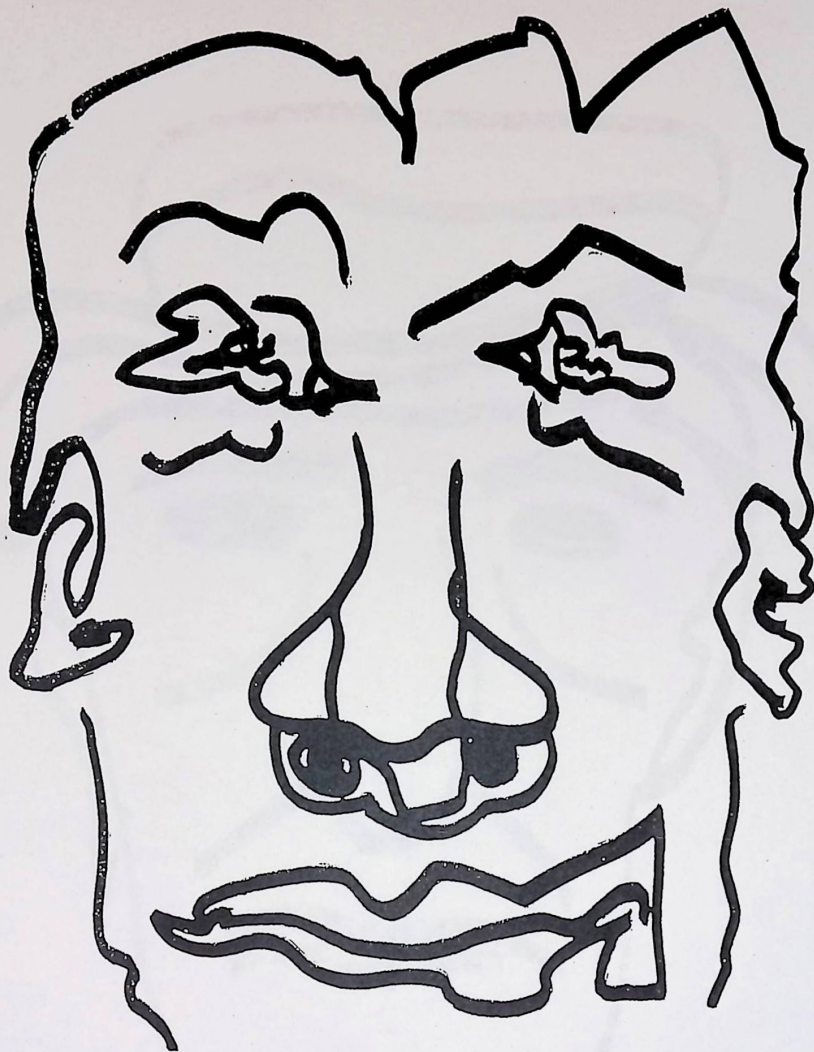


"who says
I'm shit-face?
said
Fuck-face
Favinnacci.



I'm Ass-face —

Fuck-face Farinacci's
best friend.



KEEP YOUR NOSE
CLEAN
ASS-FACE



They ask me if I'm
the consigliere.
I tell them — keep looking!

East Village

In New York
it's not
enough to be polite,
one must
be
brutally polite,
to wit:
variations
observe
the theme
of foul
economy
Shithead
follows
up your
bunny
honey
in
balance
and pro-
priety
Jew
bastard
if said
in a
Village
bar
is as
gentle
as
spade
creep

Fuck off
can be
returned
with
three
stiff
fingers
to the
plexus
or the neck
The
rule
is
keep
cool
This
is
New
York

Now
these
children
want me
to roast
their
tea
said The
Man with
the bag

Do they
think
I'm a
mother
with
shades
and a
furled
umbrella?
Go to sea
Jim,
I have
something
in my
head
that
would
really
kill
you

To the Ghost of Senator Joe

Another orphan
said McCarthy
let's have a high mass
and kiss her ass
before we kick
her cunt in,
sister superior.

Ooooooooo
Is this poem good for the Jews?
asked Reverend Godspee
of the Inter-Faith Council
for
The Committee of
Hearth and Heart, Share and Care

Kick his cunt in too
said McCarthy
Reverend Godspee is
a Communist

You're fucking aye
said all the louts
in all the bars
in Queens
and they were right
for once.

You
can't
and you
won't
print that,
said
the Lady who
was running
for office
in a voice
that
released
half
her
souls
from prison
and
dropped
them
into
Hell.

Panhandling
the Bowery
on Sunday aft
with gray sky
and no butts
we had an
argument
over the

merits
of frozen food
versus canned

Canned is awful,
I said, it comes
out half dead.

Yea, said Red
but
frozen
is stone.

To the Lower Classes

Noblesse

Oblige
has one rule
and
one rule only

You must be
so nice
so bright
so quick and
so well turned
that
no one need
tell you
a second time.

Tell me what?
that the world
is well-lost
for love
and the upper
classes
are the
law above?

I tell you this:
if the
upper classes
are kin to God
in style—
(which is one hypothesis
we do not ignore:
how else account
for elegance?)

if the
upper classes
are kin to God
in style
then God has no love
but guilt, nor a style
apart from fashion,
no courage but to
do in duty

what
one does not desire
and no worth
but for His love
at beauty

For there
is noble's work
their plea:
that they
love in truth
with all sense
of Christian
love
divorced from self
the air of beauty
and her pomp.
The poor know naught
but death
they do not free
they obliterate.

Stripped of its

distinctions

life is a flat city

whose isolated spurs

cut the sky

like housing projects.

Think of the air

whose heart is bruised

by touching such artifacts.

(Does the cutworm forgive

the plow?)

I tell you, say the rich,

the poor are naught

but dirty wind

welling in air-shafts

over the cinders

and droppings of

the past, their

voices thick

with grease

and ordure,

sewer-greed

to corrode the ear

with the horrors

of the past

and the voids

of new stupidity.

One could drown

waiting for the poor

to make

one fine distinction.

Yes, destroy us

say the rich

and you lose

the roots

of God.

Destroy them

say the poor

we cannot breathe

nor give

until we etch

on their rich nerve

the cruel razor

and heartless club

of our past,

those sediments of

waste

which curbed

our genes

and flattened

the vision we

would give

the chromosome.

Yes, destroy them

say the poor

burn them, rob them

gorge their tears

and such half of beauty

lost to pomp

will flower

unglimpsed wonders

in the rose,

will flower

unglimpsed wonders

in the rows.

I wonder,

said the Lord

I wonder if I know the answer

any more.

Square Dance

On the meat of the rich
And the urge of the poor
The purge of the ore
And the grease of the bitch
A lady was burning
A whore was a--scorch
Gorge was the cheese
And ass the itch
Of Pussy and Pick-nose
And swish out the twitch
Deep hurted the liver
Raw buried the sauce
Hotshit the hurricane
Herded the gourd
Howligan, hooligan
Hurry up all
Tonight is the night
Of the Hip Hole Ball

Perfume and fart
Snatch squinch and squeeze
Ear-wax and dingle
Fuck tit and dong
Fling a hole on your point
And sweeten the joint
Tonight is the night
Of the Hip Howl Ball.

XIII

Hunting for Poems

Men who go to kill deer
hope to find in the blood
the poems of our flesh
said a deer in the wood.

*"Our concern was speech, and speech impelled us
To purify the dialect of the tribe
And urge the mind to aftersight and foresight."*

aftersight and foresight
the sound is dull
in the ear
like a bruise
on fruit or
taint
in strong
meat

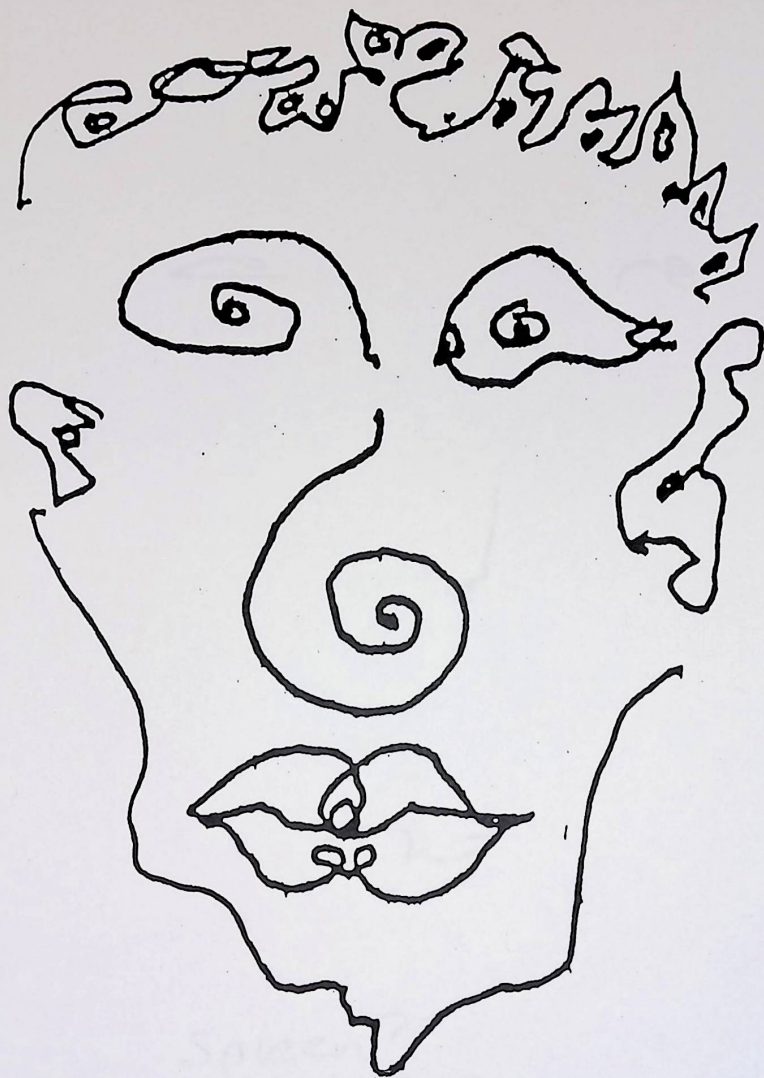
So curious a man
this Eliot
exquisite, pertinent,
yet dimmed in his climax

aftersight and foresight
hole upon hole
a curse
upon poetry
even when T.S.
sponsors
the hole.

As a poetess, I try
to rise above gender.
We all have
a woman within us.



As a poetess, I try
to rise above gender.
We all have
a woman within us.



Even the seeds of
sensation
are
thrilling to me.

—

—

—

—

Spleen?
Yes! Bad
poetry always
inspires spleen
in me.



Some of
my ideas
are impossible

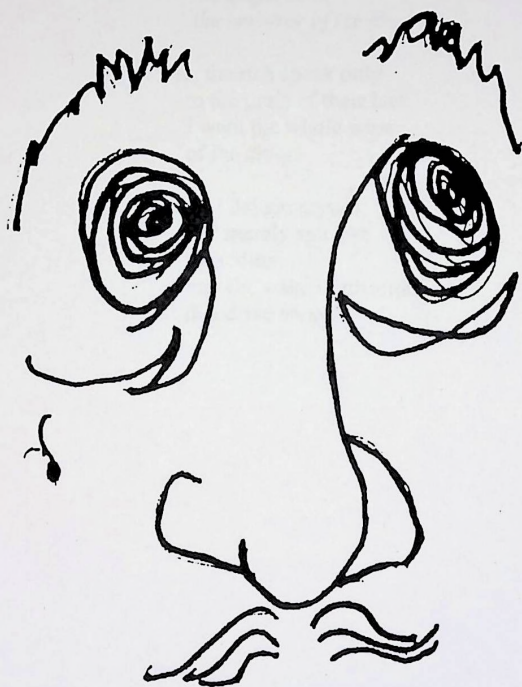
to describe. I'm so

afraid
that people
will squash
them.



Burnt Umber
Yellow Ochre

A crap,
 said
 the
 pendant
 picking
 his
 paws
 is an
idealist
 who has
 not yet decided
 he is worthy
 to be considered
 a shit.
Mon dieu, Feinspan,
in terror, I
 exclaimed
abjure the
Anglicans



I have a simple mind
and write my words
to sweep across
a broad cloth.

Rich talents go often
to misers who make
diadems of chocolate.
the emperor is
the emperor of ice cream

Yes, the rich speak only
to the purls of their lace.
I want the whole wipe
of the cloth

Or do I delude myself
and merely spit like
a hoodlum
into the wake of phaetons
that drive away?

A writer who
has power
should use it
to extract
such benefits
from his
publisher

as
give
his
words

room

to

breathe

I want my
line
to
strike
like
a snake

A snake
can't strike
in a box

you break
up your
line
like
ee
cum
mings
I notice

n
o heb re a
ksitu pd
iffe
r
e
nt

I am looking
for the
fish who
swim in the
spaces

ee likes the
herbs
in the
letters

r)

ette

besi desh e'sb



Falling in love has
left my work in a mess.



I'm very
critical
until I
take off
my clothes

I have no desire
to change. My
spirit is to be
critical.



I'm very
critical
until I
take off
my clothes.

Some poems
are mild
and pleasant
little children
who bear no title
and need none
one doesn't notice
their
nakedness

A title
is not
a hat
but
a suit
so
sometimes
I leave
it at the
bottom of
the page,
for
I don't want
all these poems
to be
unclothed.
Some should be
standing
with
their trousers
dropped to
their shoes.

Of course
by this logic
a title at the head
is like a dress
lifted over the breast



I think a bad cold is spiritual,
don't you?

Poems

written by
masochists

flop like cows
in the meadow.

Take pity on me
they cry, pay
attention, I
am so sensitive
to nature and
full of milk

Poems

should be like pins
that prick the skin

of boredom
and leave
a glow

equal in its pride
to the gait
of the sadist

who stuck
the pin
and walked away

She's a
bitch
said
the witch
in a tone
that clarified
the eternal meaning
of the consonants.

No, your honor,
said my voice.
Without vowels
there is no
justice
in human verdict.

But I replied:
Eternity is first heard
on the pigeon's wing
of a sigh
breathing alas at
all that passes
and does not happen
Judge, Your honor,
Bind me over
to the next of size
for I do dream
that love there may be
in human verdict.

Justice

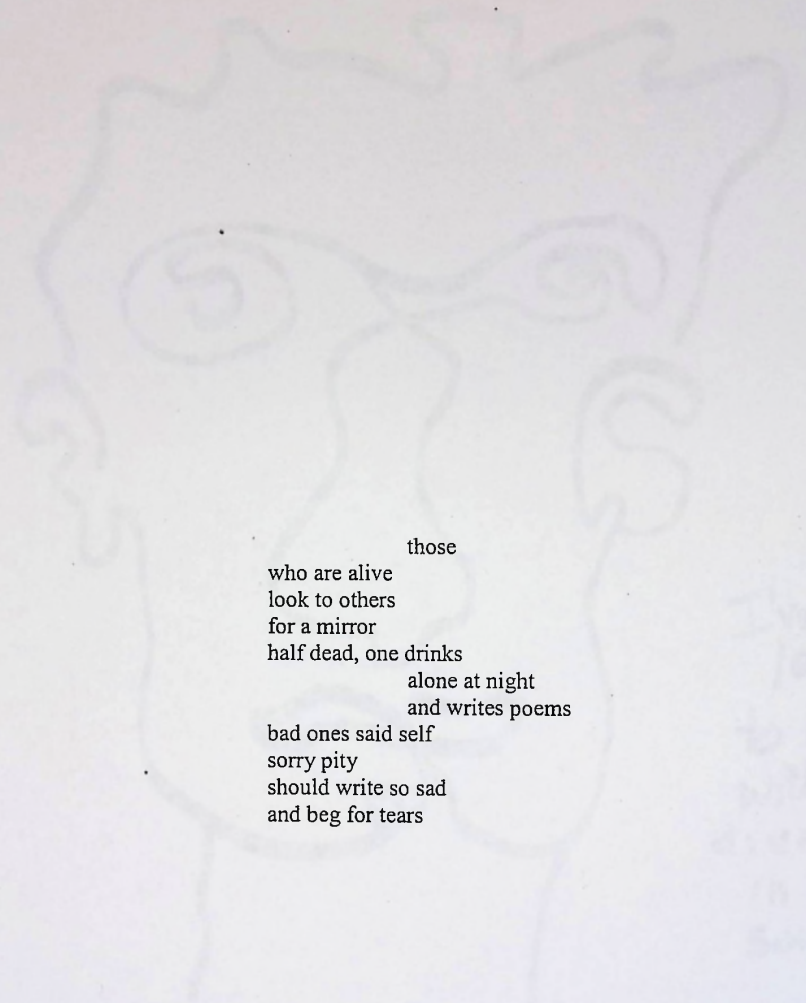
We were speaking
of bitches
said
the judge

Ignore eternity
and the color
she gives to legal
utterance
It is better
to chase consonants
than vowels.

consonants are
fact and force
clear as compound
interest

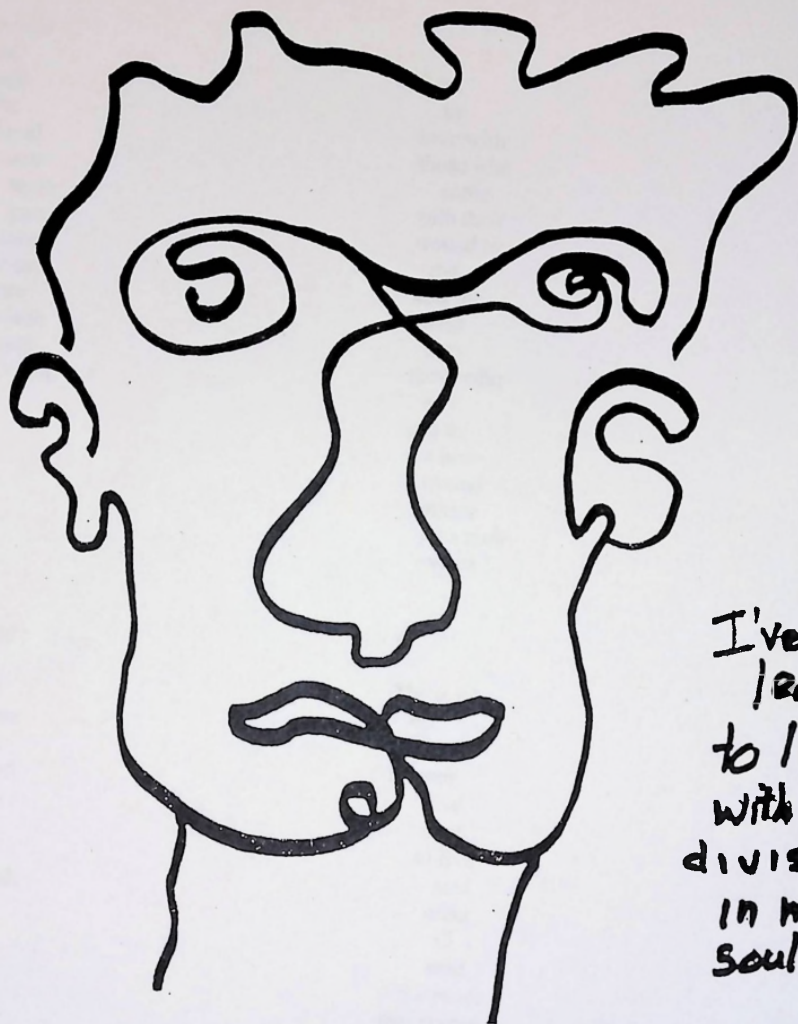
vowels are hot eyes
in hard bodies
bleeding for trouble.

Words in the nerve
of becoming
are feathers
of eternity
(insofar
as a poem may become
the death of another
who believed the poem
and so ended in some alley
of bad venture
fighting for it)



those
who are alive
look to others
for a mirror
half dead, one drinks
alone at night
and writes poems
bad ones said self
sorry pity
should write so sad
and beg for tears

*The learned
to live
with the
discontent
in the
soul.*



I've
learned
to live
with the
divisions
in my
soul.

The Corners
of a
Square

1.

It would
be
an aid
if the
blind
came
to the
game
because
their ears
are
clean
said
the dream.

2.

I would
be
afraid
of those
who
hear and
do not
see
said
the word.

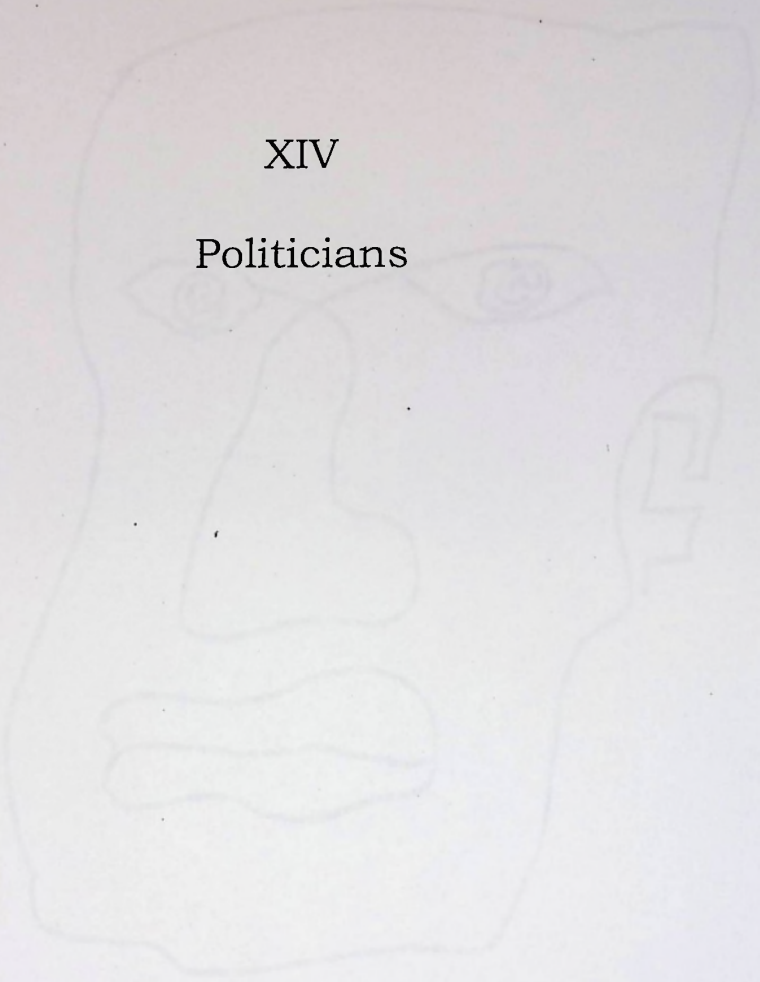
3.

I am
in
love with
those who
come
with their
wound to
me
said the
mood
for
those who
see
and do
not hear
wound
others
with their
voice

4.

Those who
hear
and do
not see
give
alms
to Eve
and
other
ill
said
the peace
that comes
from
the police.

Let
at least
a drink
be
named
after me
said the poet
sealing his
fate
for
no bar
in the land
would tease
the police.

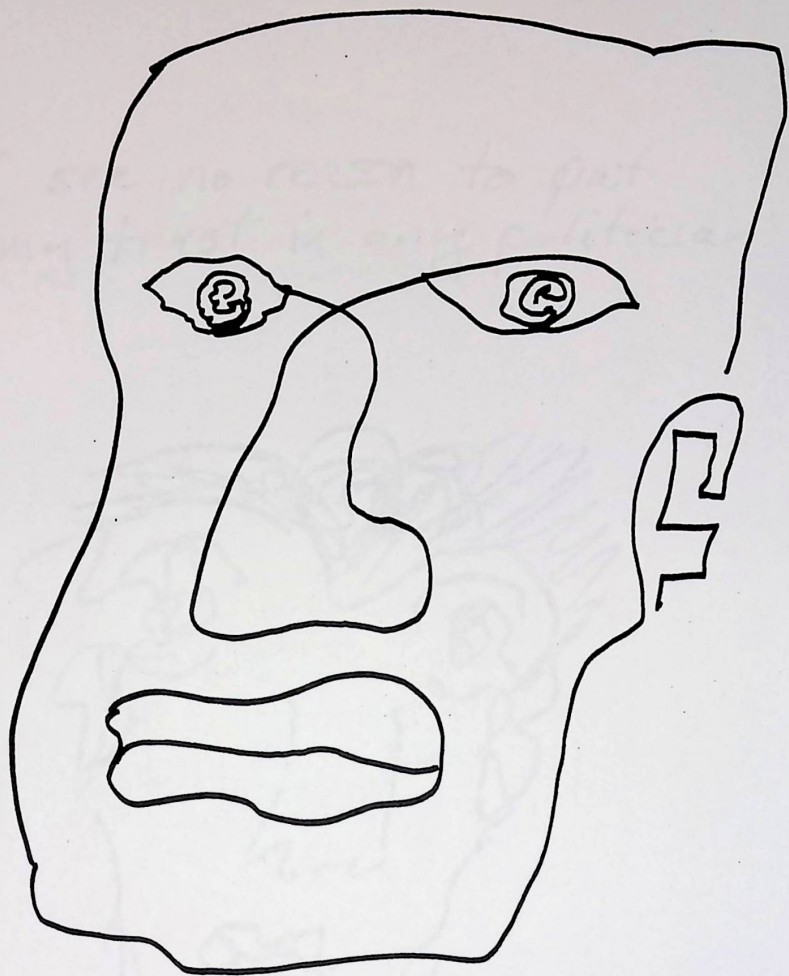


XIV

Politicians

We're looking to run
the bottom line.

Don't let the Unlabeled
hang out.



We're looking to mine
the bottom line.
Down where the Undecided
hang out.

I see no reason to put
my trust in any politician

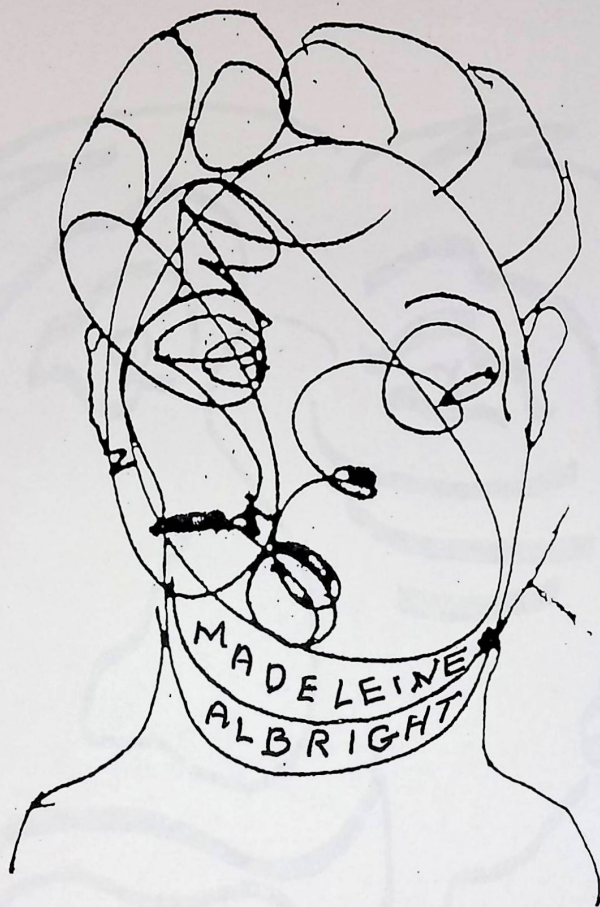




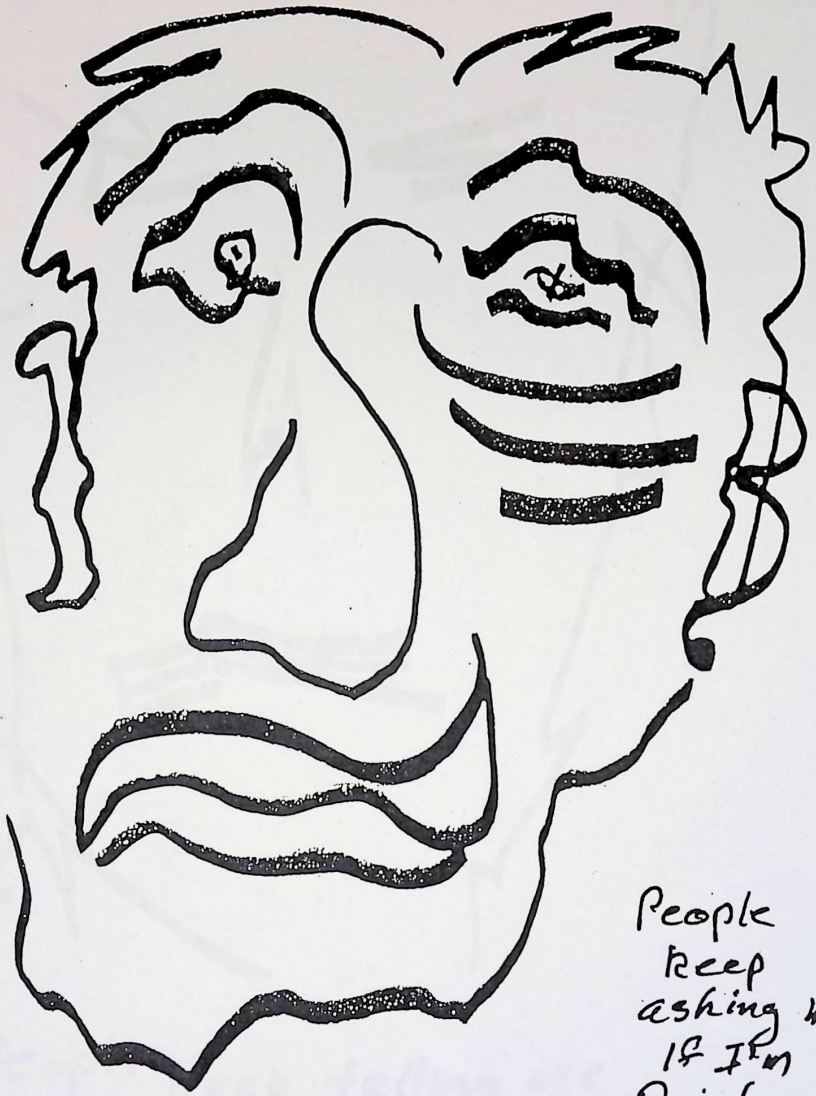
It was easy. I never
spent time with a man
who was of no use to me.



OLD
BATTERED
BILLY(-BOY
CLINTON



My knowledge of foreign
affairs is immaculate.
Kosovo! Kosovo!



People
keep
asking me
if I'm
Ariel
Sharon



People keep telling me
that I look like George W.
but I opt for Superman.

Exodus

Goodbye America
Jesus said.
Come back, boy!
We cried too late.

XV

Hemingway Revisited

Jake pissed
with
stern
loneliness
leaving
a fierce
smell
of the past.
His future
was not
so empty
as he declared,
a girl with
music and grace
tender of face
was waiting
for him.

Hey~
you
sleep
deep~
but what a sight
see
you
soon
beautiful
I hope

Catherine
found this note
by her telephone
on awakening
in an empty bed
after a one night
stand and she called
her best friend
to say;

Guess what?
I feel like
Earth
Mother.

We really ought, Catherine said
to be able to stay together
without making love
all the time.

Yes, said Jake,
I'm sure it's my fault.

Yes, she said smugly
you smell so greedy
and good

Swarms and swarms
of love
smug, smug, smug.

Catherine never blushed
until
she smelled
the fine cheat
in
the line
of the succession
and then
she flushed
furiously
for she thought
the smell
adorable,
it was
so
rich
to rise
from
the poor.

You may not love me
 Jake said
 but I love you.
Well, I love you,
 said Catherine
 so
 bad luck.
They loved each other
 very much.
They had not taken
 a good wash
 in three weeks.
It would have been
 the next wrong
 to murdering
 a child.
What the hell
 they were both
 thirty
 forty
 tired, tried,
 sad, foul
They thought they
 had betrayed
 something
 forever,
And She forgave them.
Or thus they hoped.
 So, bad luck
 muttered the
 horror
 of old
 habit,
 We will die
 if we lose
 our love.

Mangled, morgued
birched and bruted
they were
hawks
upon the mood
of their
own blessing.

So they scattered,
waiting
for the
curse.

Slack the yaws
tight the jaws
hurricane
the air
of waiting

I feel
like
I've been
through purga-
tory, Catherine
said.

Sometimes
I think
it won't
be bad
when
we die
because
we've served
part
of
purgatory al-
ready.

Yes.
It's been
bad.
But
twelve years
ago
we were
good.

Oh, darling, good, she agreed,
so good.

I used to think
it would
be always,
but it wasn't, it
turned out
to be
such a little
taste
of
heaven
for twelve
long years.

XVI
The Harbors
of
The Moon

A little taste
 of heaven
is all we get, baby,
said Jake.
through the
microphone
and plate
 glass
 window
of the visitor's
 room
 under
the shotguns
eyes
bellies
and blue serge suits
of the guards
who guard
the sacred heart
of the Republic.

XVI

The Harbors
of
The Moon

One
nerve
screams
before
you
fall
said
the
ledge
on
the
window
of
the
nineteenth
floor

I used
to think
my life
would be
a
destiny
and now
I realize
it's but a fate
said a man
I met
in Bellevue
for
stabbing
his
brother
with a
kitchen
knife.

Death of a Lover Who Loved Death

1.

I find
that
most
of the people I
know
are immature
and cannot
cope
with reality
said the suicide.
His death
followed
a slash on each wrist.

He coped with
reality
well.

2.

It was unreality
which waited
on a midnight trail
in that
jungle of eternity
he heard murmuring
on the other side.

Oh, night of the jungle,
God of mercy
wept the suicide
do not ask me
to reconnoiter
this
dark
trail
when I am now
without
hands.

The Executioner's Song

I think if I had three good years to give
in study at some occupation
that was fierce and new
and full of stimulation
I think I would become
an executioner
with time spent out in the field
digging graves for bodies I had made
the night before.
You see: I am bad at endings
my bowels move without honor
and flatulence is an affliction
my pride must welcome with gloom
It comes I know from preoccupation
much too much with sex
Those who end well do not spend their time
so badly on the throne

For this reason I expect the task
of gravedigger welcomes me
I would like to kill well and bury well
Perhaps then my seed would not shoot
so frantic a flare.
If I could execute neatly
(with respect for whatever romantic
imagination
gave passion to my subject's crime)

and if I buried well
(with tenderness, dispatch, gravity
and joy that the job was not jangled-
giving a last just touch of the spade
to the coffin

in order to leave it
quivering
like a leaf-- for forget not
coffins quiver as the breath goes out
and the earth comes down)

Yes,
if I could kill cleanly
and learn not to turn my back
on the face of each victim
as he chooses

what is last to be seen
in his eye,
well, then perhaps,
then might I rise so high upon occasion
as to smite a fist of the Lord's creation
into the womb of that muse
which gives us poems

Yes, then I might
For one ends best when death is clean
to the mind
and calm in its proportion
fire in the orchard and flame at the root.



All the men I've killed weigh
upon my soul until I no longer
know whether I am a Russian
or a Chechen.

A wandering in prose: for Hemingway
Summer, 1956

Why do you still put on that face
powder which smells like Paris when
I was kicking seconal and used to
get up at four in the morning and
walk the streets into the long wait
for dawn (like an exhausted husband
pacing the room where you wait for
the hospital to inform you of wife
and birth) visions of my death
already in the nauseas off my tense
frightened liver—such a poor death,
wet with timidity, ordure and the
muck of a Paris dawn, the city more
beautiful than it had ever been, warm
in June and me at five in an Algerian
bar watching the workers take a
swallow of wine for breakfast, the
city gentle in its light even to me
and I sicker than I've ever been,
weak with loathing at all I had not done,
and all I was learning of all I would
now never do, and I would come back
after combing the vistas of the Seine
for glints of light to bank in the
corroded vaults of my ambitious and
yellow jaundiced soul and there back
in bed, nada, you lying in bed in hate
of me, the waves of unspoken flesh
radiating detestation into me because
I have been brave a little but not nearly
brave enough for you, greedy bitch,
Spanish lady, with your murderous
Indian blood and your crazy purity
hung on courage in men as if it were
your queen's own royal balls, and I
would lie down next to you, that smell
of unguent and face powder bleak and
chic as if the life of your skin depended
now not on the life my hands could give
in a pass upon your cheek, but upon the

arts of the corporation mixing your
elixirs in hundred gallon vats by
temperatures calibrated to the thermostat,
bleak and chic like the Hotel Palais
Royale ("my home away from home" we had
seen written by Capote in his cuneiform
script when the guest book was passed
to me for the equivocal cachet of my
signature so dim in its fashion that
year) and I took up the pen thinking
of the buff-colored damp of our indif-
ferent room where we slept in misery
wondering if we had lost the loots of
anticipation we had commanded once so
fierce in one-another—or was it only
me? for that is the thought of a lover
when his death comes over him in that
scent of the creams you rubbed on your
face while I slept the half-sleep of
the addict kicking the authority of
his poison—how bitter and clean was
the taste of the seconal. And now the scent
of that cream came over me again as you kissed
me here at this instant, wearing it
again, knowing I detest it because again
it drives the secret of my poor augure
for eternity into those caverns of my
nose which lead back among the stalactites
of the nostril to the dream and one's
nightly dialogue with the fine verdicts
of the city asleep, and all souls on the
prowl talking to one another in the
dark markets of heaven about the future
of what we are to be if one obeys the
shape we gamblers have given to that
tool of destiny—our character. And the
smell of the corporation is still on
your skin mocking what I have done to
mine.

In the Jardin Exotique of Eze

In the Jardin Exotique of Eze
the cactus come up from the sea
like an anemone wooing a spider
or a pygmy with a blowgun dart.
Silently they smell the breeze,
 invertebrate,
their memory as long as the tripe of the Mediterranean.
Was it once or never? that a God from deep waters
 dreaming of the moon
fell in love with a gleam from the midnight sky
who, intoxicated with herself
and the rapture of the depths,
like a daughter most fortunate in family,
beautiful, spoiled, innocent of alarm,
wandered down an alley
dark as the pitch of blackest frustration
and there was trapped by the sound of need
in the murmur of an ape.
So did the God of dark waters woo a moon beam
and from their love leave a seed
on the spume of the wrack
which washes a desert shore
Cactus,
mad psychotic bulb of light and dark
 spy of the deep sea
 intimate of the moon

your form inspires nausea
for love which dares too much
and has no soil but sand
flowers spines of lunar hatred
shapes tubers on the leaf
and gives no wine but visions from peyote
of ether and her gardens
which burn in all gloom--
of poison, bliss, the death of suns
and phosphorescent nights.

Is mood a temple
which give us
sanctuary
against
the desire
of our cells
to return to
their beginnings
under a
new master
who promises
that he
will not
repeat
the hesitations,
compassions
and
aesthetic
com-
punctions of God
about
pleasure
profit
and
progress
but
instead
will rip up
the roots

and give us
the broad
macadam
of
eternity without fire

and sucaryl
for the syrup
of the peach.

I
know
a town
with
sighs
of
sea
smiled
the
white
witch

I know
a town
that
sails
the
sun

I know
a town
where
light
is dry
and
boats
come
home
with
silver
in their
hold

where
boats
come
home
with
silver
in their
hold

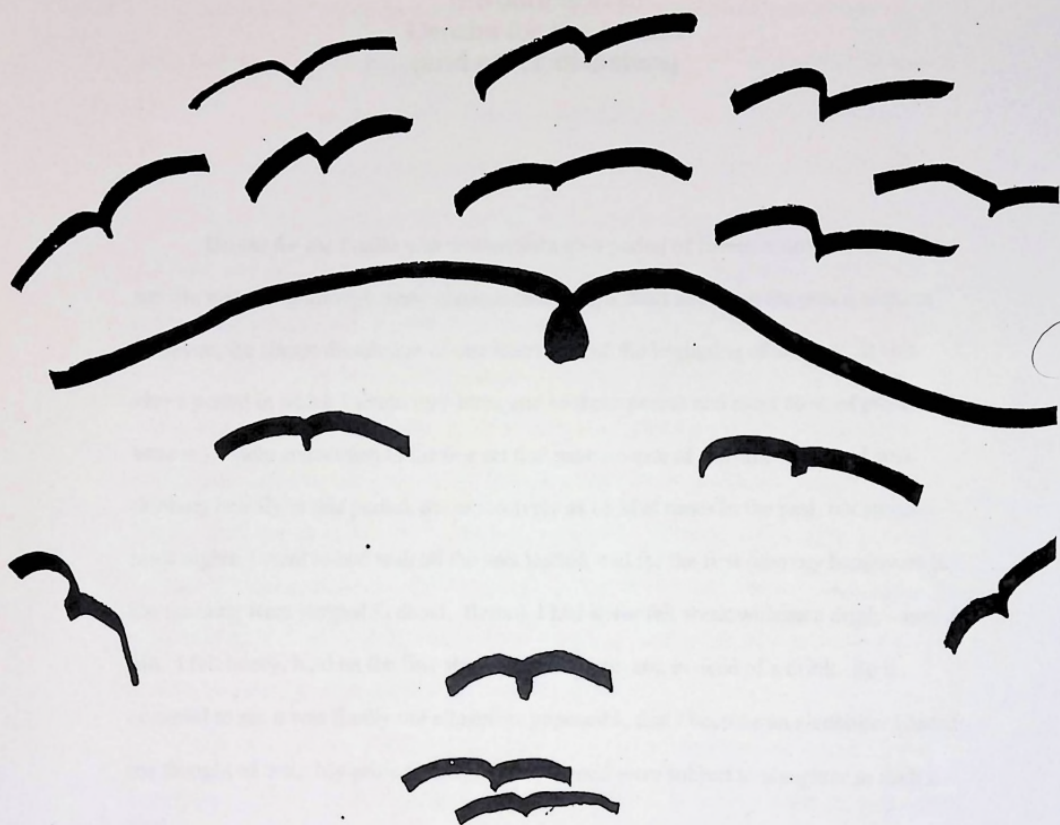
The Harbors
of the
Moon

(do not
grieve
the
death
of
little
fish
They
are
lights
that
seek
the
deep)

I know
a town
with
sighs
of sea

white
with
the
tides
of me

white
as the
spine
of the
sea.



finis

APPENDIX:

Introduction to Deaths for the Ladies (and other disasters)

Deaths for the Ladies was written through a period of fifteen months, a time when my life was going through many changes including a short stretch in the prison ward of Bellevue, the abrupt dissolution of one marriage and the beginning of another. It was also a period in which I wrote very little, and so these poems and short turns of prose were my lonely connection to the one act that gave a sense of self-importance. I was drinking heavily in this period, not explosively as I had at times in the past, but steadily—most nights, I went to bed with all the vats loaded, and for the first time my hangovers in the morning were steeped in dread. Before, I had never felt weak without a drink—now I did. I felt heavy, hard on the first steps of middle age, and in need of a drink. So it occurred to me it was finally not altogether impossible that I become an alcoholic. I hated the thought of that. My pride and my idea of myself were subject to slaughter in such a vice.

Well, this preface is not to recount the story of those years and how I may have come out of them; no, we are here to give a crack of light to the little book that follows. I used to wake up in those days, as I have just remarked, with a drear hangover, and the beasts who were ready to root in my entrails were prowling outside. To a man living on

his edge, New York is a jungle, and such mornings were full of taboo. It was often directly important whether the right or left hand was crossed with water first.

One modest reality used to save such hours from dipping too quickly into too early a drink. It was the scraps of paper I would find in my jacket. There were fragments of poems on the scraps, not poems really, little groupings of lines, little crossed communications from some wistful outpost of my mind where, deep in drink the night before, it had seemed condign to record the unrecoverable nuance of a moment, a funny moment, a mean moment, a moment when something I might always have taken for granted was turned for an instant on its head.

Some of those curious little communications that came riding in on the night through an electrolyte of deep booze were fairly good, many were silly, the best were often indecipherable. This would feel close to tragic. Almost always the sensation of writing a good poem (in the dark of early morning) was followed in the daylight by the knowledge I had gone so deep I could not find my eyes. My handwriting had temporarily disintegrated in the passion of putting down a few words. Somebody had obviously been down in the rapture of the depths.

It was not so very funny. In the absence of a greater faith, a professional keeps himself in shape by remaining true to his professionalism. Amateurs write when they are drunk. For a serious writer to do that is equivalent to a professional football player throwing imaginary passes in traffic when he is bombed, and smashing his body into parked cars on the mistaken impression that he is taking out the linebacker. Such a professional football player will feel like crying in the morning when he discovers his ribs are broken.

I would feel like crying too. My pride, my substance, my capital, was to be found in my clarity of mind or—since my mind is never so very clear—let us say found in the professional cool with which the brain was able to contend with the temptations and opportunities each leap of intuition offered. It was criminal to take these leaps like an amateur, steeped in drink, wasteful, wanton. To be hearing the inspirations of the angel when one is kissing the fumes is a condition so implicit with agony that it took eighteen centuries of Christendom before Kierkegaard could come back alive with the knowledge that such moments not only existed but indeed were the characteristic way modern man found a knowledge of his soul—which is to say he found it by the act of perceiving that he was most certainly losing it.

I would go to work, however, on my scraps of paper. They were all I had for work. I would rewrite them carefully, printing in longhand and ink, and I would spend hours whenever there was time going over these little poems, these sharp dry crisp little instants, some of them no more and hopefully no less possessed of meaning than the little crack or clatter of an autumn leaf underfoot. Something of the wistfulness in the fall of the wind was in those poems for me. And since I wasn't doing anything else very well in those days, I worked the poems over every chance I had. Sometimes a working day would go by, and I would put a space between two lines or remove a word. Maybe I was mending. As the sense of work grew a little clearer and the hangover receded, there was a happiness working mornings on *Deaths for the Ladies* that I had not felt for years. I loved *Deaths for the Ladies*, not because it was a big book—I knew my gifts as a poet were determined to be small—but because I was in love with its modesty. The modesty of *Deaths for the Ladies* was saving me. Out of the bonfire I seemed to have made of my

life, these few embers were to be saved and set—not every last part of one's memories would have to be consumed. Besides, I wanted to give pleasure. It seemed to me that *Deaths for the Ladies* would give more simple pleasure than any book I had ever written, it was pure, it was modest, it was sad, and it was funny—it was so very modest—how could one not like it? And it even had one innovation to offer poets—so I thought. There was no music or prosody or command or rush of language in the book, no power, not much meter, not at all, much of it was poetry only by the arbitrary insistence of the short line, but *Deaths for the Ladies* was something else, I thought—it was a movie in words. I set it with the greatest care. Every line was placed on the page by me. The spaces were chosen with much deliberation, the repetitions of phrases were like images in a film. The music of the poem as a whole—if it had any—was like the montage of a film. I felt that all of *Deaths for the Ladies* made up one poem, not all that great a poem, never in any way, but still a modest poem about a man loose in our city, for one cannot talk of New York without saying our city, there, majestic, choking in its own passions, New York, the true capital of the Twentieth Century. And *Deaths for the Ladies* was like a small sea breeze running through some of those electronic canyons where a myriad of fine moments were forever dying in the iridescence of foam.

Of course, if you fall in love with a book, you may be certain it will drown, suffocate, or expire all alone on an untended bed. *Deaths for the Ladies* came out in modest edition and sank without a sound. It was only reviewed in three or four places, and the one good review it received (the Sunday *New York Times*) was six months late. Poets, for the most part, resented it. Why should they not? I had dabbled in that life for which they were willing, if they were good enough, to starve and lose love. They had

studied their craft; I had just skipped about in it. They were dedicated to poetry, I was dedicated to climbing out of the hole I had dug for myself, and poetry was offering the first rung. Therefore poets ignored the book, which was a pity, for a good poet might have done something with my little innovation, my movie in words.

But to end on a note less altruistic to the interests of art, let us look at one review. I had secret hopes, I now confess, that *Deaths for the Ladies* would be a vast success at the bar of poetry. The hopes got bounced. Here is the review in *Time*, March 30, 1962:

Ever
see
a drunk
come on
daring
I mean
drunk
like
daring
was a
sloppy
entrechat?
Mr M
comes on
with fourbucks
of poems
about sex
not love
that run
down
like this
only
not
lined up
neat.
Having less
than
fourbucks
fun

a reader
counted
the words
and concluded
Mr M
is making up
for his
first book
which had
too many.
You didn't
score
this
time
M
a
n

But hell you know that.

In a fury of incalculable pains, a poem was written in reply, sent to *Time*
Magazine's column of letters, and printed there.

Poem to the Book Review at *Time*

You will keep hiring
 picadors from the back row
 and pic the bull back
 far back along his spine
You will pass wine
 poisoned on the vine
You will saw the horns off
 and murmur
The bulls are
 ah, the bulls are not
 what once they were
Before the corrida is over
 there will be Russians in the plaza
Swine some of you will say
what did we wrong?
And go forth to kiss the conquerer.

Now, on the comfortable flank of this reminiscence, I think I may have been fortunate to get so paltry a reputation on *Deaths for the Ladies*. For if I had been treated well, I might have kept floating on a still little pond, and drowned my sorrow for myself in endless wine and scraps of paper and folios of further poems. Instead, the review in *Time* put iron into my heart again, and rage and the feeling that the enemy was more alive than ever, and dirtier in the alley, and so one had to mend, and put on the armor, and go to war, go out to war again, and try to hew huge strokes with the only broadsword God ever gave any good writer—a glimpse of something like Almighty prose.

