The American Inferno

The sun is beginning to set and the oncoming dusk seems all too dark and hazy. The twilight of every society is potentially threatening and its prevailing darkness want to realize it or not, on the minds of all its individuals. Our various styles of life which are manifested as the amalgam of our basic desires and society's values, are curiously powerful in their interaction and their strength comes from the fact that we are actors on the stage of life or not, our thoughts and deeds are the very fiber of the concept "society." The energy inherent in our apathy and concern will both permeate and influence the direction of our society.

I wonder if our society has not become too forelorn. If this statement is true, we ought to study our social face and where required lift it. If there is disagreement, I ask only that tolerance be given to what I am writing.

If our society has lost its direction we should analyze the cause of this social infection. In order to find the cause it would be necessary to examine the different strata of our society. I would like to introduce a superficial analysis of our society by inspecting the various characteristics. I have placed the clones of the concentric circles of Dante's Inferno with each circle representing a different social section.

"Midway this way of life we are bound upon, / I woke to find myself in a dark wood, / Where the right road was wholly lost and gone."

The inner circle of society's inferno is inhabited by the workers; so great in number and so indigenous to all societies. They stand as the innermost crust in our social inferno due to a contribution that is the matrix of our continuity. Their situation has constantly changed; the machine once served to man now casts an awful shadow above him. Regardless of this fact, they seem possessed of the same nature. They swarm to their factories; confused and hopeful, complacent and worried, honest yet watchful. Their days are marked by the endless pressure to procure food, clothing, automobiles, and the entertainment that will fill their time on earth. When these commodities are challenged they would immediately shout for change yet if they are plentiful their smiles are endlessly present.

This circle is surrounded by its concentric brother, the soldiers. The suffering of these men has constructed the protection of our present society. They are a great force in our society; being taught that killing is a tactic, not murder, if one wears a uniform. Of this fact no person is proud, yet from their victories we sense a deep pride and from their defeats stem hidden, spiteful lament. They have won the wars and consequently they have secured our land from foreign occupation. Ironically, they must send their offspring to foreign lands to protect the past laurels of victory, yet the taste of victory was hard won—and not yet lost. They stand in naked gaunt and eroded face with a reflection of cold steel yet their faces, anguished, scarred, tearful, reflect a strong hope that their conquest will portray social peace.

The next circle is represented by our harbingers of social innovation. This circle is filled with the educators of life; the high browed and informed. This circle is filled with the Podium spouting the knowledge that contributed to the construction of our present state. They have the knowledge and experience in their lectures, yet instructing in an age of different experience and greatly needed instruction. They dot the lives of everyone; captivating a moment of our past in either a good or bad experience. They discovered life echo with their concern and regret. They have tried, succeeded, failed, and they have left us with the message that it will soon be our turn.

The next circle is the church. They are educators also yet their purpose is directed at varying intentions. They were once a revolutionary body striving to place themselves in our society. Presently, its influence is indiscernible yet it has swayed from social change to social harmony. It is void of a once characteristic urgency and now we are faced with the admonitions of sin. They are sincere, hopeful, and possessed of a benevolent nature. They help us bear the frustrations and violence of life with a less painful grimace and they concern themselves with the passions and desires that could undermine our potential benevolence.

The next circle is our youth. I had intentionally hoped to place them as the outermost circle yet our obese and crippled political system has become too political. Our youth is undeniably present in some measure in every social crevice; our universities, business, and every corner of society. They exist filled with the burning knowledge that regardless of their own individual deaths they will someday be left with the responsibility of deciding a social direction. They have the hopeful hopes of what everyone desires; a better society. They have been mesmerized by the TV, hopeful of success, afraid to lose, possessed of different deficiencies—an odd fit to the awaiting social vacancy.

The outermost circle of this concentric circus is our ubiquitous political system. It is difficult to assay the power of this system in our bewildering inferno. It is an impenetrable mass of power whose control supposedly rests on the consent of the governed. They represent a way of life too obscure for the common man, yet too frustrating for the challenger. They hope that they are helping and they have contributed greatly to our achievements. Mr. Nixon, Mr. Agnew—different names yet I have seen their motives all too often. They subtly rob the wealth of a nation in order to reheat the fire of a past ideological struggle. They are too powerful, too ambiguous. They have been overfed with the confidence of a past era and their political boundaries are indistinguishable. The pinnacle of their power is greater in strength than the base of their support. They do not concern themselves with apathy or indifference. The defects of our society are found everywhere; no person can claim innocence, yet we are responsible to decide a commitment, if any, towards our lingering social problems. If we feel weak in our actions it is due to a loss of a once promised influence that has been inculcated in our government. The present need for change will not evolve from without and our apathy can only contribute to our deeply entrenched position.

Sam Miller

General St. Claire really did care who won. High in his saddle driving 7000 human cattle into the inhuman battle. The enemy line was bending St. Claire foresaw the ending just one last offence and his victory would be immense. Regrouping his forces he counted his losses and found only one blue clad ally. . . . himself.

"Six thousand nine hundred ninety-nine honorable deaths" he proclaimed as he led his troop over the blue and red field once green. Reaching the front he found the enemy had run. This his greatest moment he dismounted a black stallion and gingerly stepping over the bulges, the puddles, the pieces, he found a small patch of green and planted his victory flag, sweet victory!

Tom Magnier

Nightshade's Obligato

The buzzing, lightly trembling street lamp, casting my shadow thrice one night, blurs the orange, dawning bright sun casting hazy, anticipating shadows before the sad, long silhouettes of dusk and dies at the sun's elusive noon.

Paul McNiel

Sam Miller

General St. Claire really did care who won. High in his saddle driving 7000 human cattle into the inhuman battle. The enemy line was bending St. Claire foresaw the ending just one last offence and his victory would be immense. Regrouping his forces he counted his losses and found only one blue clad ally. . . . himself.

"Six thousand nine hundred ninety-nine honorable deaths" he proclaimed as he led his troop over the blue and red field once green. Reaching the front he found the enemy had run. This his greatest moment he dismounted a black stallion and gingerly stepping over the bulges, the puddles, the pieces, he found a small patch of green and planted his victory flag, sweet victory!

Tom Magnier

Nightshade's Obligato

The buzzing, lightly trembling street lamp, casting my shadow thrice one night, blurs the orange, dawning bright sun casting hazy, anticipating shadows before the sad, long silhouettes of dusk and dies at the sun's elusive noon.

Paul McNiel
If poets were a commodity which could be produced by following a certain formula, then one would have to say that Sylvia Plath was a combination of a certain amount of Emily Dickinson, intermixed with touches of Edgar Allen Poe. For Plath's composure certainly resembles the restraint, the serenity with which both of her predecessors wrote of things traditionally held to be horrible. Miss Plath has the same fascination with Death that characterizes these other two poets, and she brings the same underlying tension to her discussions of the macabre side of life. But poets cannot be created by combining certain elements, and for all the similarity between their themes, Sylvia Plath is a very different poet than either Miss Dickinson, or Poe.

Sylvia Plath's poetry as represented in her volume Ariel first may produce in the reader a kind of awed paralysis. One just doesn't know how to take these poems. They're clever, they're restrained, they fascinate like a cobra about to strike, slowly undulating, chang ing before its victim's very eyes, but most of all they challenge the reader to view the world through a glass darker than one he's ever dared look into before.

The first facet of Miss Plath's vision is that she is primarily concerned not with the centre of life, but with its marginal situations. For her life itself was one great duel with Death. Life is a vast tightrope everyone of us must walk in order to stay alive. And what most fascinated her about this tightrope was the crystal definition it gave to Death. While life was a constant blur, a vague uncertainty, Death seemed to offer complete peace. In her poem, Tulips, we can see just how great her desire to escape the constant challenge, the constant threat which life poses was. She says:

I didn't want any flowers, I only wanted
To lie with my hands turned up and be utterly empty.
How free it is, you have no idea how free—
The peacefulness is so big it dazzles you, . . .

These lines reveal the great sensitivity she possesses, a sensitivity so refined that even the tulips are "too exciting" for her.

But another aspect of her poetry equally as impressive as the sensitivity of her perceptions is the quality of the control which she uses to describe them. An example of this superb, half-a breath, then-squeeze type of control can be seen in these lines from her poem, "Cut":

What a thrill—
My thumb instead of an onion.
The top quite gone
Except for a sort of a hinge

Of skin,
A flap like a hat,
Dead white.
Then that red plush.

Perhaps it is this control which adds to her insights the power which makes them so chilling. For her perceptions of life appear at first to be so macabre, that they seem completely devoid of reality, but slowly and strangely the images and visions of this poetess sneak up on the reader and suddenly overcome him, so that he feels he has never read anyone more real.

Intellectually, a reader can realize that the sensitivity of this poet is so rarefied that it borders on the insane, yet emotionally, the reader must be won over by the great control which Miss Plath uses to express her vision of life. She convinces us that the world is so much dross, heavy, slow, paralyzed. And as these lines from Years show, Eternity would be no different:

O God, I am not like you
In your vacuous black,
Stars stuck all over, bright stupid confetti.
Eternity bores me,
I never wanted it.

Where, then, does Miss Patch find redemption, hope, or any kind of perfection? Not illogically, the poet finds it in Death:

The woman is perfected.
Her dead
Body wears the smile of accomplishment, . . .

And unfortunately for her readers, Miss Plath took her poetry too literally. She committed suicide February 11, 1963.

Michael Rybarski

Stew

It took an old woman to say
from her rocking chair:

"That stew ain't
no good
unless heatin' on the stove
or chillin' in the icebox.
Outside o' that
it'll just
get itself mouldy."

By J. Patrick Ellis

The day before
white pigeon would
CLASH
on the blue

Now they combine
fly around bird
dull
with the sky

I haven't the need
to feel the cold breath
which hides my sight to trees.

smile sun,
today is rain.

Gerard Egan

hope & consolation 1971

war deaths — this year's / ization +
exponentially escalating troop withdrawal
depletion configurations = successful
restoration of the geo-political balance
of objective power.

Dear:

In behalf of the Department of the Army,
I regret to inform you . . .

" . . . at least he was part of a two-week low as
opposed to last year's six-month high . . ."

Good, then I won't cry.

Neil C. McNeil

Outer Flight

The noise
of a moon shot,
trembling
around the world,
might abort
the subdued conception
of our small-time wars;
but not
the premature agony
of a mother cat,
licking the empty dust——
her litter,
silvery-metallic, space-suited
on the moon:
still, slimy with afterbirth.

Some umbilical cord
of inner space,
needed to tie
the ship to our creation;
else
flies the machine,
our grip on things
lost.

Paul McNeil

Paul McNeil
I.

Chased. Falling,
The sidewalk rips her knee skin.
The raw wound screeches,
And the chaser-devil pounces.

Like this, a government of guns
Will scrape the skin of a soul.
Then, to be free will be
To want to be left alone
To lick the scab in private.

And the artist, a skinny hemophiliac,
Won’t heal even to a scab-point.
Always wound open,
Dirt will be in the blood
To infect, to agitate, to make art.

II.

Sleeeeeep, sleeeeeep.
Stay asleep till twelve.
I don’t care cause nobody does,
So kindly GO TO HELL!

Like this, a nothing-governed state
Will blanket us one from another.
Then, to be free will be
To ‘take or be taken,’
Or ‘Kill the alarm, don’t wake me.’

And the artist, a bored fatman,
Will be insulated from the truth,
As a gloved hand from the cold is.
But waste bears boredom
Bears discontentment, bears art.

III.

We are short of the truth.
The truth is in a precise society.
Where deception, the hopping frog,
Is caught and squished like a pregnant grape.
Discipline, seasoning of the soul,
Is sprinkled to assist taste.
Art, the mirror,
Is unwarped by a false motive,
But is truth made.
And the artist? A perfect Greek mesomorph.
There is no one image to give you.
No place to take you to to show you.
There is only the feeling, that as we are
We’ll never fully climax.

Charles J. O’Neil Jr.

More or Less

Your more to you
Is only more if it’s more than I.
And the use of your more—
To make me less, oh!

Such a shame—
You make me beat back.

And when done,
You to you will be less than I,
And you will be as dead
As you tried to make me.

Such a shame—
You are already less to me.

Confectioner

I must know you breathe.
If physically you leave,
Spiritual as well will.
Though growing,
I’m small still.

Till I can tell another,
Unless I be a father,
I must know you breathe.

Till this isn’t my need,
Keep your living going.

Charles J. O’Neil Jr.

For Existential Mariners

Angst.
Ship sour-black, lead bird hanging,
Decks expose men dead.
The gestalt to the eye pains
As ammonia the senses stings.

Aid!
Genesis pre-built, but becoming to be.
Never now what was,
The bow is your own.

Shoot to obliterate or to wake to love.
If first wrong-shot, back pull the arrow.
Let all the world’s birds breathe.
The bow is your own!

Charles J. O’Neil Jr.

As a Seed

I got tossed wrong and
I fell to the sideland
Of a New England corn field.
While my sames grew together,
Wild hay raised me near a wall.
Those in the field jeered:
I rooted firmer.

Then the farmer came and
I’m the only stalk standing now.

Charles J. O’Neil Jr.
Thursday Night

I saw a man
in the library tonight,
who sat near to me
and proceeded to read a magazine.
He didn't sit back
on the seat like most
but sat haphly hunched on the edge
with his feet put somewhat apart.
He made all sorts of noises
as he sucked on a cough drop
and breathed loudly
thru his nostrils.
He reminded me of someone
trying to take a shit,
and reading a magazine
to help him along.
Forgive me mister
whoever you are.

---

Gerard Egan

Balder

As I saw the sun
winking at me from above,
I stretched towards it
my arms;
I began my dance
dating from the days of
Primitive sun-worshipping pagan tribes.
And so I felt like the Pied Piper,
disporting through
the streets of Hamlin,
followed by rats.
Or children.

---

Gary Bortolot

The Death of the Amerikon Achilles

Come one and all to this Arlington vault
Embracing the remains of the Amerikon Achilles.
Within, his warrior spirit abides
As the soul of his forefather in the second realm of hell.
Young Achilles once breathed of brimstone and fire
Fearlessly killing in the heat of the combat.
Weapons of war he mastered to perfection,
As great Achilles once cast his Pelian spear.
Clad in olive helm and garb, boots of ebony
Tiny trinkets adorn his green uniform.
While brandishing a gun forged of cold blue steel
Young Achilles charged across the plains of Ilion.
Death enveloped him like a shroud
Charging into the hell of battle.
Comrades and enemies fell all around,
Cardboard blown down in the wind.
The Amerikon Achilles in his frenzied charge,
Stained with human blood
Met face to face with the horseman of death
Concealed beneath the cold, clay carpet . . .
"AND THE SOUL FLUTTERING FREE OF THE LIMBS
WENT DOWN INTO DEATH'S HOUSE . . ."

The great Achilles of Homeric fame
Will be remembered for all time.
Being eulogized, all know his name,
In both ancient and modern rhyme.
Now, here lies the Amerikon Achilles
Alone, and unknown in his coffer,
Who will remember his glory and fame (or even his name)
Or anything he had to offer.

---

Childhood’s Dream

I lay down to sleep on the cool damp grass
as it tickles my arms, legs and feet.
Soon, in my dreams I witness
the transition.
The atmosphere presses
at my body—it's hard to breathe.
The moist verdant coolness
becomes warm, warmer, warmer . . .
I become a vapor
free in the air around me.
I melt and flow; I blend
into the universe,
as I decompose
a net of reticulum
catches me . . .
surrounds me . . .
adding to my microcosm.
As I expand I
dominate all.

After conversing with the stars,
discovering that
they are not so far away after all;
I decide that they are not
very nice people.

---

Gary Bortolot '73

People don’t see the SUN
the MOON
They just know it’s there
People don’t see the shaven Rasputans
Trying to catch a subway
somewhere
They don’t see the gutter man
pass right on
They don’t see a siren, a scream, a paperboy’s voice
pass right on
People don’t see a grand central
grand no more
They don’t see the pretzel man
only the pretzel
People don’t see whores or flesh stores
They don’t see a topless town with topless joints
They don’t see the money makers all wound up
They see themselves—a world of them
Oblivious to ALL
I see
and more
Jesus, What a cornucopia of decayed fruit!

---

Joe Piergrossi

The wind,
the moaning, sounds
of spring wind
filled his ears
as he made the journey.
He hiked his lips
over her mountainous breasts
leaving a few red flags
where he'd been
all around them.
Down and across and around
the flat lands
where the grass
that's small and golden grew,
all on the plain
the young man roamed.
To the oasis
at the head of the valley,
and there their thirst was filled.
and replenished.
for the journey
they slept.
“Peter and The Aberration”
—dedicated to my brother
Lillian without whom I
would never have developed
a limp . . . and to Peter’s
mother Martha.

Peter Mitchell had a giant Chiquita banana which he worshipped
every day and of course he kept it refrigerated (so it would stay
moist.) It was the most beautiful banana in the world with its soft
smooth yellow skin and you won’t believe it but this banana didn’t
have a blemish (nor any teeth marks from a hungry person) just an
oval blue sticker with its brand name on it. One day Peter sat down
and cried; he was twenty-five, rich but he wasn’t married. He lived
a lonely life worshiping his banana but a banana isn’t too good
care of course, as bananas don’t talk, walk or do anything constructive.
So Peter cried louder. He opened the refrigidator and hugged his
banana and really loving it he kissed it right on the blue seal. Sudden-
ly to Peter’s amazement the banana turned into a beautiful girl, a
perfect girl (pimple free) with a figure that was kind of cosmic.
He stared for a moment and then shouted with joy, “Will you marry
me?” The stunned Banana-girl stuttered and paused, but knowing
the care that Peter had bestowed upon her while she was a banana
(which was the result of a 2000 year old family curse) she answered,
“You bet your ass.” Pete was so happy he ran at her and kissed her
square on the mouth. BANG! she turned back into a banana. Pete
cried, “What have I done?” but being so sexually frustrated started
peeling the banana trying to figure out a way to carry it up to his
bedroom.

J. Patrick Ellis

THREE POEMS

1. Psalm
He will hold me up
if I let Him
Carry me back
and home
Where I ride on
a little pallet
I worked up
out of clay and straw
If I lean back quickly
He may let me fall
I will catch me
with a new way of twisting
till I win a prize
for falling clean and true
and knowing all about it.

Look to the left
neither to the right
The patient is resting quietly
he will sleep either way
leaning or falling
Carried in that good lap
with a treat of spoiled milk
God do not let me go
Take care
it’s not like turning me loose
I’ve gotten used to the stairs
no vertigo now
But I don’t know where You are
And I walk with my feet hung down
peddling the air with my feet
Are You holding me tight
meaning—am I?
But how can I hold
what I do not know to hold
or to love
where You lie in me clumsy?
I am warm and weaker now
Take care of me please.

2. Wocturne: Charles Street
Oh, my head and hands
have wounded trees
and little girls
Have opened eyes of rocks
where salt was once
before the body shrank from love
Small talk about Venus
how she wont turn much
her face burned up on the sun
her bottom cold as books
brought in three times a week
and laid on the window-sill
We’ll dig up Max
and let him play for coffee
I wonder why the walls
wont let me love my old friend
Johann Sebastian Adderley
who crawls in knocking sin
and wonder drugs and falls
at my feet like a burglar
We’ll mention death and God
go under kicking His Name around
my five dry wounds

3. Magdalene
It was a green flask in her hand
with a stain on it like copper
Earth underneath
the stain till the hot liquid
called it to be green
and to be a place
where perfume could make a stand
to sweeten somebody sometime
He was there
before she knew who He was
and let her cry like a little girl
the mascara ran a little
and she had to wipe it off His instep
In the second act He got up
and fought this guy
to save a worthless name
Then he turned around
and gave her His own

Dominic Rover, O.P.

A GOOD PASTIME

Today you can go to America
Admission there is free;
And, ‘oh’, so is called the land!
It just dawned on me.
Anyway, you can ride it
You stand, and feel it seep from under you;
and, it’s free!
Or maybe you like hide and seek?—just let go hands!
Sorry folks, the Statue of Liberty is ‘OUT OF ORDER’

But there are always those enjoyable times for you;
The times you get to see the waters, in colors—
and, it’s free!

America is a good pastime.
And at mid-day you go to replenish your supply of air
Then back at play—-to wonder perhaps why America
buys such unlively animals——and,
in bunches!——and, wonder why
America has turned the heat so low;
and, wonder AMERICA.
It makes you giggle.
America is a good pastime.
And everything there is free;
But you mustn’t stay too long
For fear of awakening them.
America is a good pastime.
Seats are limited so
Please stand in line for tickets!

by Larry Nadeau
John and Marion bought a dog. It was a mongrel because his coat was shiny and his nose was wet. They named him Zabu. One day John began scolding him because he wouldn't fetch and chased Zabu. They taught him to do all sorts of doggy tricks but they couldn't get him to fetch a stick. They tried hard, but even gave him doggy treats, but he refused to fetch. God knows they tried to teach him this, the most important trick to them.

Zabu did not want to fetch when they tried to force him. He was a mongrel because his nose was wet. He wouldn't fetch his coat. Marion cried. But they couldn't get him to fetch a stick. He ate John who was on his way to school. Marion cried and Zabu came home to fetch sticks for her.

Two degrees to freeze and I'm freezing. I sit my ass down on a bench, a bench kin to winter toilet seats. People shop past my eyes like bees to flowers, dropping pollen in the money machines. "Love Story" is in all the windows but I haven't any money. Why doesn't spring come around the corner?

I knew a little midget man
Trying a life somewhere
Dejected Rejected Projected a queer
Little midget man
Plodding a life somewhere
A stockman in a lonely town
Little midget man
Fighting a new life somewhere
Open yourself to a new day

In the moon's rise watchman for the resting sun
and I'm alone to the stars that owl above my head.

My KITE reached the SUN
Today
I pulled the ripcord—it floated UP
Between the sandy grass I sat
A turtle rock my sitting mat
People look up to see my SUN
Taken aback with my playing
God

Before my hands full to original powers
sore one-to-five fingertips give
again in silence hours
six-to-ten, the alphabet
safe as I mislay a shovel
buried my numeral name and adjective
face with merds of air from zoos.
The hours of my palms, a penny pays
each second hand if days long to live
where four and twenty command ten
and more, cant roll the sun
set up the sky or touch twenty-five.

Downtown Yet Not Spring

Two degrees to freeze and I'm freezing.
I sit my ass down on a bench;
a bench kin to winter toilet seats.
People shop past my eyes
like bees to flowers
dropping pollen in the money machines.

"Love Story" is in all the windows
but I haven't any money.
Why doesn't spring come around the corner?

I knew a little midget man
Try a life somewhere
Dejected Rejected Projected a queer

In the night I stand
and breathe the evening
into my lungs, into my veins.
The moon rises watchman for the resting sun
and I'm alone to the stars
that owl above my head.

My KITE reached the SUN
Today
I pulled the ripcord—it floated UP
Between the sandy grass I sat
A turtle rock my sitting mat
People look up to see my SUN
Taken aback with my playing
God

To be our own,
We must be funnel-free.
But by knowing alone,
The funnel won't release.
We got to decide
To leave what is the funnel's,
And snap the lock
Of the trunk with our maps.
Maps read and decided,
Then we have to act.
This choke-hold:
We got to break it to breathe.

red worm
for i am sore and suffering worm
these leaves your green body is more than mist on you this is me oow
not for a while yet
i am lost off this green
land oh you are not a land
you blush you are an amazon
as black as hair as sharp as green as leaves
the sea is nearly your color
my red skin
comes in the air over your treetops again
my worm again and again for you
—in memo (rousseau, henry)

My KITE reached the SUN
Today
I pulled the ripcord—it floated UP
Between the sandy grass I sat
A turtle rock my sitting mat
People look up to see my SUN
Taken aback with my playing
God

To Go
A funnel with sides of electrified guilt
Sucks us, makes us live don't.
Never narrow enough for it,
We grow narrow down the funnel,
Till down too far, we touch a side and die.

To be our own,
We must be funnel-free.
But by knowing alone,
The funnel won't release.
We got to decide
To leave what is the funnel's,
And snap the lock
Of the trunk with our maps.
Maps read and decided,
Then we have to act.
This choke-hold:
We got to break it to breathe.

red worm
for i am sore and suffering worm
these leaves your green body is more than mist on you this is me oow
not for a while yet
i am lost off this green
land oh you are not a land
you blush you are an amazon
as black as hair as sharp as green as leaves
the sea is nearly your color
my red skin
comes in the air over your treetops again
my worm again and again for you
—in memo (rousseau, henry)