

AUTOBIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA

When I was a child  
I played by myself in a  
corner of the schoolyard  
all alone.

I hated dolls and I  
hated games, animals were  
not friendly and birds  
flew away.

If anyone was looking  
for me I hid behind a  
tree and cried out "I am  
an orphan."

And here I am, the  
center of all beauty!  
writing these poems!  
Imagine!

*1949 or 1950*

## POETRY

The only way to be quiet  
is to be quick, so I scare  
you clumsily, or surprise  
you with a stab. A praying  
mantis knows time more  
intimately than I and is  
more casual. Crickets use  
time for accompaniment to  
innocent fidgeting. A zebra  
races counterclockwise.  
All this I desire. To  
deepen you by my quickness  
and delight as if you  
were logical and proven,  
but still be quiet as if  
I were used to you; as if  
you would never leave me  
and were the inexorable  
product of my own time.

*1951*

## HOMOSEXUALITY

So we are taking off our masks, are we, and keeping  
our mouths shut? as if we'd been pierced by a glance!

The song of an old cow is not more full of judgment  
than the vapors which escape one's soul when one is sick;

so I pull the shadows around me like a puff  
and crinkle my eyes as if at the most exquisite moment

of a very long opera, and then we are off!  
without reproach and without hope that our delicate feet

will touch the earth again, let alone "very soon."  
It is the law of my own voice I shall investigate.

I start like ice, my finger to my ear, my ear  
to my heart, that proud cur at the garbage can

in the rain. It's wonderful to admire oneself  
with complete candor, tallying up the merits of each

of the latrines. 14th Street is drunken and credulous,  
53rd tries to tremble but is too at rest. The good

love a park and the inept a railway station,  
and there are the divine ones who drag themselves up

and down the lengthening shadow of an Abyssinian head  
in the dust, trailing their long elegant heels of hot air

crying to confuse the brave "It's a summer day,  
and I want to be wanted more than anything else in the world."

1954

## MEDITATIONS IN AN EMERGENCY

Am I to become profligate as if I were a blonde? Or religious as if I were French?

Each time my heart is broken it makes me feel more adventurous (and how the same names keep recurring on that interminable list!), but one of these days there'll be nothing left with which to venture forth.

Why should I share you? Why don't you get rid of someone else for a change?

I am the least difficult of men. All I want is boundless love.

Even trees understand me! Good heavens, I lie under them, too, don't I? I'm just like a pile of leaves.

However, I have never clogged myself with the praises of pastoral life, nor with nostalgia for an innocent past of perverted acts in pastures. No. One need never leave the confines of New York to get all the greenery one wishes—I can't even enjoy a blade of grass unless I know there's a subway handy, or a record store or some other sign that people do not totally *regret* life. It is more important to affirm the least sincere; the clouds get enough attention as it is and even they continue to pass. Do they know what they're missing? Uh huh.

My eyes are vague blue, like the sky, and change all the time; they are indiscriminate but fleeting, entirely specific and disloyal, so that no one trusts me. I am always looking away. Or again at something after it has given me up. It makes me restless and that makes me unhappy, but I cannot keep them still. If only I had grey, green, black, brown, yellow eyes; I would stay at home and do something. It's not that I'm curious. On the contrary, I am bored but it's my duty to be attentive, I am needed by things as the sky must be above the earth. And lately, so great has *their* anxiety become, I can spare myself little sleep.

Now there is only one man I love to kiss when he is unshaven. Heterosexuality! you are inexorably approaching. (How discourage her?)

St. Serapion, I wrap myself in the robes of your whiteness which is like midnight in Dostoevsky. How am I to become a legend, my dear? I've tried love, but that hides you in the bosom of another and I am always springing forth from it like the lotus—the ecstasy of always bursting forth! (but one must not be distracted by it!) or like a

hyacinth, "to keep the filth of life away," yes, there, even in the heart, where the filth is pumped in and slanders and pollutes and determines. I will my will, though I may become famous for a mysterious vacancy in that department, that greenhouse.

Destroy yourself, if you don't know!

It is easy to be beautiful; it is difficult to appear so. I admire you, beloved, for the trap you've set. It's like a final chapter no one reads because the plot is over.

"Fanny Brown is run away—scampered off with a Cornet of Horse; I do love that little Minx, & hope She may be happy, tho' She has vexed me by this Exploit a little too. —Poor silly Cecchina! or F:B: as we used to call her. —I wish She had a good Whipping and 10,000 pounds." —Mrs. Thrale.

I've got to get out of here. I choose a piece of shawl and my dirtiest suntans. I'll be back, I'll re-emerge, defeated, from the valley; you don't want me to go where you go, so I go where you don't want me to. It's only afternoon, there's a lot ahead. There won't be any mail downstairs. Turning, I spit in the lock and the knob turns.

1954

## A STEP AWAY FROM THEM

It's my lunch hour, so I go  
for a walk among the hum-colored  
cabs. First, down the sidewalk  
where laborers feed their dirty  
glistening torsos sandwiches  
and Coca-Cola, with yellow helmets  
on. They protect them from falling  
bricks, I guess. Then onto the  
avenue where skirts are flipping  
above heels and blow up over  
grates. The sun is hot, but the  
cabs stir up the air. I look  
at bargains in wristwatches. There  
are cats playing in sawdust.

On  
to Times Square, where the sign  
blows smoke over my head, and higher  
the waterfall pours lightly. A  
Negro stands in a doorway with a  
toothpick, languorously agitating.  
A blonde chorus girl clicks: he  
smiles and rubs his chin. Everything  
suddenly honks: it is 12:40 of  
a Thursday.

Neon in daylight is a  
great pleasure, as Edwin Denby would  
write, as are light bulbs in daylight.  
I stop for a cheeseburger at JULIET'S  
CORNER. Giulietta Masina, wife of  
Federico Fellini, *è bell' attrice*.  
And chocolate malted. A lady in  
foxes on such a day puts her poodle  
in a cab.

There are several Puerto  
Ricans on the avenue today, which  
makes it beautiful and warm. First  
Bunny died, then John Latouche,

then Jackson Pollock. But is the  
earth as full as life was full, of them?  
And one has eaten and one walks,  
past the magazines with nudes  
and the posters for BULLFIGHT and  
the Manhattan Storage Warehouse,  
which they'll soon tear down. I  
used to think they had the Armory  
Show there.

A glass of papaya juice  
and back to work. My heart is in my  
pocket, it is Poems by Pierre Reverdy.

1956

## WHY I AM NOT A PAINTER

I am not a painter, I am a poet.  
Why? I think I would rather be  
a painter, but I am not. Well,

for instance, Mike Goldberg  
is starting a painting. I drop in.  
“Sit down and have a drink” he  
says. I drink; we drink. I look  
up. “You have SARDINES in it.”  
“Yes, it needed something there.”  
“Oh.” I go and the days go by  
and I drop in again. The painting  
is going on, and I go, and the days  
go by. I drop in. The painting is  
finished. “Where’s SARDINES?”  
All that’s left is just  
letters, “It was too much,” Mike says.

But me? One day I am thinking of  
a color: orange. I write a line  
about orange. Pretty soon it is a  
whole page of words, not lines.  
Then another page. There should be  
so much more, not of orange, of  
words, of how terrible orange is  
and life. Days go by. It is even in  
prose, I am a real poet. My poem  
is finished and I haven’t mentioned  
orange yet. It’s twelve poems, I call  
it ORANGES. And one day in a gallery  
I see Mike’s painting, called SARDINES.



SONG

Is it dirty  
does it look dirty  
that's what you think of in the city

does it just seem dirty  
that's what you think of in the city  
you don't refuse to breathe do you

someone comes along with a very bad character  
he seems attractive. is he really. yes. very  
he's attractive as his character is bad. is it. yes

that's what you think of in the city  
run your finger along your no-moss mind  
that's not a thought that's soot

and you take a lot of dirt off someone  
is the character less bad. no. it improves constantly  
you don't refuse to breathe do you

1959

## YOU ARE GORGEOUS AND I'M COMING

Vaguely I hear the purple roar of the torn-down Third Avenue El  
it sways slightly but firmly like a hand or a golden-downed thigh  
normally I don't think of sounds as colored unless I'm feeling corrupt  
concrete Rimbaud obscurity of emotion which is simple and very definite  
even lasting, yes it may be that dark and purifying wave, the death of boredom  
nearing the heights themselves may destroy you in the pure air  
to be further complicated, confused, empty but refilling, exposed to light

With the past falling away as an acceleration of nerves thundering and shaking  
aims its aggregating force like the Métro towards a realm of encircling travel  
rending the sound of adventure and becoming ultimately local and intimate  
repeating the phrases of an old romance which is constantly renewed by the  
endless originality of human loss the air the stumbling quiet of breathing  
newly the heavens' stars all out we are all for the captured time of our being

1959

## STEPS

How funny you are today New York  
like Ginger Rogers in *Swingtime*  
and St. Bridget's steeple leaning a little to the left

here I have just jumped out of a bed full of V-days  
(I got tired of D-days) and blue you there still  
accepts me foolish and free  
all I want is a room up there  
and you in it  
and even the traffic halt so thick is a way  
for people to rub up against each other  
and when their surgical appliances lock  
they stay together  
for the rest of the day (what a day)  
I go by to check a slide and I say  
that painting's not so blue

where's Lana Turner  
she's out eating  
and Garbo's backstage at the Met  
everyone's taking their coat off  
so they can show a rib-cage to the rib-watchers  
and the park's full of dancers with their tights and shoes  
in little bags  
who are often mistaken for worker-outers at the West Side Y  
why not  
the Pittsburgh Pirates shout because they won  
and in a sense we're all winning  
we're alive

the apartment was vacated by a gay couple  
who moved to the country for fun  
they moved a day too soon  
even the stabbings are helping the population explosion  
though in the wrong country  
and all those liars have left the U N

the Seagram Building's no longer rivalled in interest  
not that we need liquor (we just like it)

and the little box is out on the sidewalk  
next to the delicatessen  
so the old man can sit on it and drink beer  
and get knocked off it by his wife later in the day  
while the sun is still shining

oh god it's wonderful  
to get out of bed  
and drink too much coffee  
and smoke too many cigarettes  
and love you so much

*1960*