

BY THE SEA

Adrian Ford

This poem is not psychedelic. I did not attempt to imitate any recorded responses to hallucinogenic drugs. I have experimented with the fusion of some cinematographic techniques and a basically free-associative style. I hope I have achieved some unity of effect by the integration of symbols rather than any logical sequence of the "paragraphs." I generally have placed words in the sequence in which their visual, auditory or tactile connotations would be experienced in real life. I have tried to sustain immediacy by using throughout a kind of catapultive present. A.F.

towering sections of metal hull lie on wet sand—boltless pieces
curved arms black against storm at sea—mice peeled of skin and
fur pink anatomical charts of muscle scuttle behind sections to
escape salt spray

two young men walk among small boulders pebbles up over dunes—
shadows exaggerated merge emerge float as one over boulders
pebbles even unto the wet sand—two men in round-hulled skiff—one
rows silently toward horizon center

wrestling angel of language—arms pushed into sand—arms giving
out letting go—tears brimming—chest of angel rock—his face against
my neck—jugulars cross—life pulsating to holy mind—arms spread
exhausted at my sides how long in supplication?

evolving existentialism—morality redeemed through centricity of
Christ

by the sea by the sea by the beautiful sea

I go down I go down

where the wet sand is rippled by the bound
of murmuring shallows whose slow depth the grounds
of a wave-blown garden makes the sand

where sea flower choruses stems interwound
wave in warm water tentacles of sound

two priests shove locked grand piano to one side of raft—raft dips
and for a few seconds their naked braced feet disappear—raft tips
sharply piano splashes—upside-down slams into ooze—faint ringing
spreads to surface

now the day is over night is drawing nigh shadows of the evening steal across the sky—small sea covered with round-hulled skiffs empty like pods—men and women sit around fires talking softly—deep night—only heavy thumping of unseen boats near and far out—

poets in file like monks to the lighthouse—up staircase circling smaller in language beacon—most ominous monument an unlighted tower at night—some to shatter the eye some to stand beneath beam dreaming of distance revealed

slumped in his seat on the train head to one side staring slumped head to one side looking in through the glass darkly riding gliding beside himself on rails through starry night—train derails car slams car sections jackknife in windows in twinkling of eyes handfuls of glass thrown in laps or out at night

monstrous infant of chance lost lowered held struggling beneath shallows—gray sheet of scream stretched over fetal bones where are the turbines?—where square-footed towers against blue space sentinels silent high-strung wires blown web-threads whirled twisted away scratches across film end-frames—on level sand an enormous dam a sculpture a monument a cinema screen

rails laid on sand—locomotive coming—cars huge coffins—between cars regular glimpses gray sea rippling sighing unheard—coffin-car last leaves no sea view—solid screen white cracked with yellow incandescent

clouds drift west swept sky-skull images bank smoldering shot through with golden witness to sinking Son—in a formal garden sea wind lifts spears of lilac

winter twilight settles over city—5 o'clock—elevator doors slide open in lobbies—sluices loose streams strain steam homeward—rivers to the sea to depots to ports in Connecticut New Jersey Indiana Kansas Iowa—towers trickle checkered against bruised blue—through a turning door of glass everyday X must pass—X strides across lobby raises hand to push door—door stalls—X stands transfixed hand flat against space—salutation benediction moments catch us with conviction—all people in tower in lobby in city vaporize—elevator doors slide open—two men in black overalls step out of elevator saunter to entrance and proceed to unscrew section of door—glass fused over wedge of floor and curve at side—prismatic coffin lifts out easily—corpse to carry to the depot? door-to-door at a bad time disturbing feasts in Greater Thebes? nobody home nobody home has gone—instead placed courtesy of hand raised in corner of municipal maritime

museum—do not touch the glass—you shall not pass
back bay backbrain—rectangular raft floats by—young men on stools
around both sides of narrow bar—glasses of beer lifted taste of beer
foam torsos lean on bar intensified whispers eyebrows twist meet
shoulders shrug—lemon sun sinks in cocktail green sky—floating
carpets of water lily—dredging apparatus mounted on barge putters
past—above cattails in sedgey shallows brontosauri elevate snaky
heads glare

sad eyes of men standing in line portholes of ship remote in deep night
ennui stares through a tavern window through car streaks
through night drizzling through tossing trees in park opposite—
fragments of glass mixed imbedded in white stucco villas on cliffs
catch earliest sea light diamonds

gods of Atlantis sit on granite thrones ajar—eyes slimy stone bulges
unfeeling open beneath stiff fins

dazzling sunshine—man in gray uniform and sunglasses pulls his way
up huge telephone pole—from his perch above canopy of trees roofs
streets he can see blue band of ocean several miles off—body dark
against sky silhouetted amid wires insulators cross-arms—man takes
and replaces tools from looped canvas belt—completes repairs and
then connects portable telephone directly to one of the wires—calls
headquarters and reports having seen the sea—then draws open
pair of long-handled clippers and cuts all wires

fog rolls in spreads from sea horizon—His cross on a misty morning
a telephone pole strung with wire fine hysteria screaming slander
and greed

Cape Cod—white cottage smolders amid curling blue wisps of smoke
—one room somehow protected exposed intact behind hot crumbling
wall—on a table a transistor radio pours out melodies of Debussy's
“La Mer”

two boys stand half turned to each other in dark musty
corner of gambrel-roofed barn—inversion of huge raftered barn ark
shored on fertile sands of Indiana Iowa

adoration of Angelus—ever-recessive chant slapping shore unseen
miles off—sweating upright pause in day labor under burning Sun
dark spinning shapes dot beach—streamers from fog like bandage
drawn around spools—gauze of nightmare tightly wound hideous
and abstract as a mummy—tide swells in inundates huge cocoons—
saturated bundles bobb mindlessly beneath bloody sun

synod of fish heads rot on wharf—stare at heat lightnings out at sea
clitter clitter cars strain up roller-coaster—monument stark on plain
of red sand—haunted dream coaster only—echo-ghost of that noise
rises to black space—goes through and behind ringing spheres like
hollow brass balls colliding

bent youths with sunken eyes emerge tapping white canes along
charred supports of crackling half-gone roller-coaster

on the beach—at monstrous Victorian desk amanuensis scrawls short-
hand suicide notes of possible understanding—folds notes like planes
and aims them over water—sheets blot sea enlightened ink blurs
azure jelly films cast ashore

motorized line of same hooks in and out—split fish desires on com-
mas hung hooks into freezer hard eyes

resolution of pure ablation

huge waves of chemical fire collapse and explode—tongues of flame
leap hundreds of miles from surface—entire seas in time drawn up—
lovers awaken reach out in warm mid-morning light

sea caves flooded with slant sun ear tunnels opening to after-dinner
diminished din of crowds downtown—the stone had been rolled back
vicarious vicarious all is vicarious

the dance—congregation of neon spines mingle float around each
other—light blue hum in vertebral sequence head to tail—skeleton
leans over tipping rounded skiff—throws nerve net through night—
draws to the side heavy net full of jelly

memories of youth—stripling in narrow streams conscious naked
feet rile obscurities from which dart swarms of minnow images—
these streams also through time to the sea

Romantic dreams of pre-adolescents—clipper ship sails stretched skin
waiting on waste of water—no clipper ships today—masts sawed
down planed shingles for sea cliff shacks

clambering up clamorous brain folds Roland lifts a conch

There stood at haven with curved prow,

Shining and ready, the prince's ship:

The people laid their dear war-lord,

Giver of rings, on the deck of the ship,

The mighty by the mast. Many treasures were there,

From distant lands, ornaments brought;

Ne'er heard I of keel more comelily filled

With war-like weapons and weeds of battle,

With bills and burnies! On his bosom lay

A heap of jewels, which with him should
Into the flood's keeping afar depart:
Not at all with less gifts did they him provide,
With princely treasures, than those had done,
Who him at his birth had erst since forth
Alone o'er the sea when but a child. . .

crises knots in God's line of reasoning rope repeats fathoms in,
newly discovered lagoons of time coral closed

slippery quays rain-wet sidewalks

waves without sound break in faces waiting on curb to cross street
rusty pebbled metal door of street freight elevator pushed open by
are of bolted steel—quiet hum of motor beneath sidewalk—half-
ellipse stops halves straight up at sides—on the platform young man
in lotus posture nakedness covered with rivulets green seaweed
streamers like leeches on arms and breast—music and colored lights
float upward—crowds clatter over rusty door halves seeing hearing
nothing

two toss papier-mache masks each like a discus one by one
over waves—eyeholes ringed red black gilt bob face down staring at
sand—mascara runny with saline tears?—eyeholes of one mask face
up to sun intense oval mirrors

they saw Him on the shore cooking fish

flashes of light around bodies of friends swimming

black curtain hung through clouds waves heavily just over waves—

thunder—curtain is ripped apart hung again—again thunder—cur-
tain is ripped apart curtain hung ripped apart curtain hung ripped
apart curtain hung ripped apart—on the beach—man enters voting

booth pulls lever clangs curtain closed open as man steps from booth
back wings away dove on parallel tracks locomotives chug into posi-
tion at water's edge—smoke of other trains seen in distance soon ring-
ing rail thunder roars past then brakes—enormous engines and
coaches alleys darken with passengers unboarding—men help young
women step down—more cars buses limousines pull up on packed
sand—chartered bus pulls in front of me—behind green glass skel-
etons rest heads slumped to one side hold magazines or pivot death-
heads to observe those below—somehow sense that all have arrived

sweeps crowd as hush—all stand in darkness for a long moment—
then the great single eye of each locomotive is switched on then the
headlights of the lined-up cars—gray sea rippling exposed slaps the
shore