*****Nefertiti***

The crescent moon, a tilted, courtly smile,

Hangs from its little chain above the Nile.

Guards march between the columns in the hall

Or stand with spear in hand along the aisle.

Pharaoh has nodded off; the harps have ceased.

You share your bed with me, a lowly priest!

How with your nakedness you bless my body!

But look: the god is reddening in the east.

You know, my Queen! His Greatness, AKHENATEN,

(Madman, my brethren whisper, misbegotten!)

Has eyes and ears in every palace nook:

To these, a wall of stone is thinnest cotton.

So I must leave you now, Beautiful One.

They’ll miss me at the Temple of the Sun.

The slave they send will find me in the tavern

Draining a bowl of bitter oblivion—

How could I see you seated on your throne

Beside this thing that claims you as his own?

Tonight, I swear it, at the edge of town

I’ll carve a curse into his boundary stone!

***From the Reading Notebook***

 ***My Egyptian Dream***

1.

Oh, yes, in thine Egyptian Age

 Mascara hast thou worn, my Soul.

 How many a papyrus scroll

Of spells, or transcribed on a page,

Have thine umbrageous eyes divined,

 And how much lore and sophistry

 And poems of divinity

Have those eyes darkly underlined!

2. *Parts of Bodies, Parts of Souls*

Simon Magus, how foolishly

 You claimed that you could levitate

 Above the Law, the Church, the State,

The plain facts of humanity!

The curse of Peter the Apostle

 Of Queensberry plucked you from the sky.

 Now in the gutter do you lie.

But in its wreckage still colossal

Your body in four pieces breaking

 Enjoys four separate resurrections,

 Quartered and drawn in four directions,

And each a different tongue is speaking,

And yet they all seem somehow Greek.

 And in these tongues the pieces, each

 A complete Magus, still o’erreach

Themselves, not knowing what they seek.

3.

*My* soul broke into at least five

 Parts—or could it be six? The *Ba*,

 The *Ren*, the *Ab*, the *Sheut*, the *Ka*,

The parts that act when we’re alive

Together to compose a soul:

 The *Ab*, the intelligent red heart;

 The *Ren*, the name, the frailest part,

And that without which none is whole;

One’s shadow or *Sheut*; the spark

 Of life, the *Ka*, rejoined must be

 With *Ba*, the personality,

To form the *Akh*, that from the dark

Of death strikes an immortal fire,

 A magically effective, wing-

 Footed, Hermetic, thinking thing

Free in its Kingdom of Desire.

But if the fusion of the pair,

 The *Ba* and *Ka*, should somehow fail,

 How bitter grows the *Akh*, and pale,

An evil spirit of the air.

Of my Egyptian joy, *Awt-ab*, Awt-ab*, heart-wideness; happiness.*

 What’s left? Barely more than a smudge,

 A faded glyph transcribed by Budge.

And far into the night I sob.

I have outgrown my flesh! Upon

 The plank bed of my earthly *Khat*

 I have seen my body rot and rot.

I have become my skeleton.

4. *The Murder of a Name*

The King’s cartouche is empty. Low

 Are laid his statues, once so splendid.

 His sun has set. His reign is ended

Or never was. For who shall know?

***My Egyptian Dream (II)***

 *That childish mirror turned out*

 *to be another wall. This time I*

1.  *The Name Or ‘Ren’, in ancient Egyptian.*

Your name becomes you, so you hope,

 For you become the name you’re given,

 A thing so frail that it must live in

The confines of a magic rope

(Cartouche), a cell wall or membrane

 Strong, but no more impermeable

 To intrusions than a god’s temple,

Which thieves, or its own priests, profane,

Prompted by greed, or need, or change

 In the political weather. Where, oh

 Where is *thy* name, once-mighty Pharaoh?

A blank cartouche… How void and strange

This stronghold frangible must seem

 To whom it housed once, with its splendid

 Glyphs of a king whose reign is ended.

Gone is his power, like a dream,

His vocables no longer trouble

 The air, and nowhere are they spoken,

 And all his images are broken,

His world a child’s toy, a burst bubble.

Like an old scroll in pieces, rotten,

 Lies that dismembered and forgotten

 Thing that was once King Akhenaten,

Who upon all that is begotten,

Born, and dies smiled once like the sun

 Whose son he was. For him why mourn

 Not dead, since he was never born?

Yet from that waste oblivion

Where his *disjecta membra* lie

 His *Ren* somehow itself remembers,

 As from a dying star’s last embers

A new star opens up its eye.

2. *Akhenaten*

Artistic and effeminate

 King wedded to the Beautiful One,

 Thou shining Individual, lone,

Untimely, thus beyond all date,

In a god-overcrowded world

 The monotheist, sure and proud,

 Who scorned conquest, and all things loud

And vulgar shunned, in thee unfurled

The flower of a vision made

 Of marble and granite by the Nile,

 Serene like thine archaic smile,

Smiling in brightness and cool shade.

O aesthete-king, thou artist-seer,

 Thou sacred scandal of androgyny,

 Doomed in thy visions and thy progeny,

I know that thou art with me here.

4.

I hardly minded it a bit

 When they removed my *Ba*, which we

 Would call the personality.

I had too much; relieved of it—

This excess nearly infinite—

 I felt a lightness. And yet oft

 I hear the echo of a soft

Disgruntled bleat… Ah, where is it,

The Soul of souls, my vital spark

 They call the *Ka*, its hieroglyph

 Two arms, right-angled, raised as if

In protest ‘gainst the gathering dark?

4.

Some claim they have glimpsed a Pharoah’s ghost

 Wandering inconsolable

 Over the desert wastes, his Hell,

Seeking the glorious name he lost,

Unable to remember it,

 The aching nomad of his *ackh*,

 And him the sandstorm’s demons mock,

Mirage of sorrow infinite.

(In the empty looking glass of you

 I see the absence of my own

 Reflection. Is it in a stone,

My image? Blank, and all-too true?)

Thou Unknown Victim of a shameless

 Vindictiveness and cynical

 Politics, thy name I will call

He-Who-Shall-Henceforth-Remain-Nameless!



***Osiris***

Hell in the bosom of Osiris

 Is Heavenly Elysium,

 A sunniness to which we come

At evening. Unroll your papyrus,

Read out the Blessing of the Night.

 Osiris keeps his children warm

 Beneath the rock and wave. His form

Softens, he rests from his own light.

\*

*I am Osiris, I am Pharaoh.*

 *Death cannot do me any harm.*

 *Horus the Hawk perched on my arm*

*I cross the River of Reeds, an arrow*

*Of Ra. Ra’s Ferryman, I take*

 *My seat, my oar, and row Him over*

 *The sky, gold star and the Sun’s Lover.*

*I am Sobk, the Crocodile, I bake*

*Serenely in the mid-day Sun.*

 *The glittering eyes upon the lake*

 *Are mine, the Dreamer’s, ever-awake,*

*The Truth the Seer looks upon.*

*My mouth, my eyes, my ears, my nose*

 *Are each a god. I am the Auroras,*

 *The Music of the Spheres when Horus*

*Opens my mouth. My body glows*

*As cleanly as the morning star.*

 *My eyes unclose, and it is day.*

 *The world is anything I say.*

*My dream of you is what you are.*



***The Pyramids at Giza***

 A

 sad

 site:

 lone and

 level sand,

 a half-sunken

 clutch of bowls

 with only its voice

 less vowels to offer,

 polished by wind Inside

 me cadaverous priests curse

 the dark. The tombs: thieves’

 plunder, empty. Still, I could

 outlast you with my patience, Death,

 if only the stones could bear the wait.

O

so

many

bones

fractured

so much rock

to lift up above

these sands *me* the

name **CHEOPS** into

place in this white

space from which I stare

out at you from my huge

 granite tomb All that weight

 pressing down hard, pressing down

stoneuponstoneuponcornerstone

 *I have no*

 *secrets.*

 I

 eye

you, O

rion, with

the tip of my

stone finger You

are my Star Brother

 pierced by my pointed

stare my clairvoyant soul

Each of us dies into the other

to live again transforms to stay

 himself Conformation of these rocks

 perpetuates us brother Up and down on

 these enchanted stairs moves the traffic

 of the Mystery O Light: Be astonished,

 a martyr of stone Stone: Make light my upward way