

Nowhere Man
Selected Poems

Ken Warren

Thus, the purpose of alchemy is to strip down the self to nothingness, leaving everything bare to be scrutinized.

—Wikipedia

The story goes that shortly before or after his death, when he found himself in the presence of God, he said: "I who have been so many men in vain want to be one man only, myself." The voice of God answered him out of a whirlwind: "Neither am I what I am. I dreamed the world the way you dreamt your plays, dear Shakespeare. You are one of the shapes of my dreams: like me, you are everything and nothing."

—Jorge Luis Borges, "Everything and Nothing"

Making all his nowhere plans for nobody.

—The Beatles

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PEOPLE GET READY

It's like thunder,
forced through the grapevine,
this proposition to perfect lightning
while the diesel's humming
no ticket necessary
for you to pass beyond
locomotion into belief,
talking out of your head,
the speed of fourteen cross
tones equal the seven horses
chosen to ride your hurricane wind.

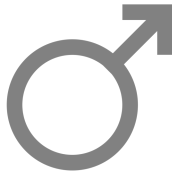


THIS IS RADIO CLASH

By broadcasting the inherent ghettology
At bottom The Clash of Civilizations, Joe Strummer jacks
Into the surplus whale steak that speaks Eskimo,
Like Ezra Pound, in the days before digital diaspora.

By imagining the hard to fathom turn
The beat around the Neoliberal horns of Harry,
Mark and John at the Strait of Hormuz,
Joe Strummer re-ignites Captain Ahab's rocket science.

By thinking ahead, if only for a little while,
In the total war orbit, Joe Strummer blinks out loud, too,
With the TV, Jolly Roger cow skull style
About Vietnam and zombie government.



ME AND MRS. JONES

You may imagine, if you will, that you are Martians and that on Mars you are familiar with living things being indeed yourselves alive.—Gregory Bateson

The face on Mars can now be approached in words.

My favorite long-nosed thing connects
the vaginal vibrations inside my left ear to Mrs. Jones.

We journey from Atlantis to Heliopolis
on the strength of Set's root chakra.

She is the queen of Tir na n'Og.
Jack Spicer is right about the Spinners.

The face on Mars cannot be approached in words.



THE BOXER

Muhammad Ali's poems,
hitting the beehive,
like a punch, still form

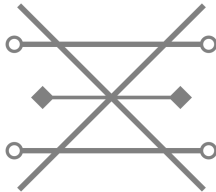
A sudden hook
not so easily forgotten,
as the wish to become

A soldier squanders
your resistance
to this ring's situation.



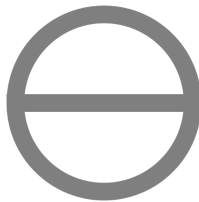
JAILHOUSE ROCK

Altered weirdly
by American Bandstand,
you made half a social
revolution with a wooden chair,
twisting it around
the killer's fierce glare.



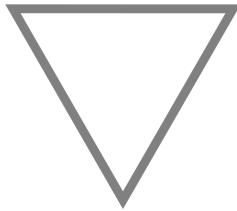
DUKE OF EARL

Silently Earl descended on the auto
salvage strewn about the juniper hollow.
He laid his two faces down over the Fleetwood.
Iridescent in the morning sky he danced
a minute or two around the wire loops
and slide trombone. Then she kissed him
through the cellophane window on the passenger side,
and so would we, ever thankful to be done dreaming
the dream of the next alias stroking the Duchess
in the infinitely small promise of paradise.
Speedo couldn't keep his iron rod from breaking.



COME ON DOWN TO MY BOAT BABY

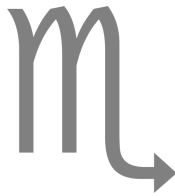
The fisherman's daughter,
tied to the dock, must pray
for night to delight in
the wreck of the nameless
little red boat under the pale
blue sea, so as to teach
seventy three men how
it feels in the end
to cut the rope.



JOHNNY ANGEL

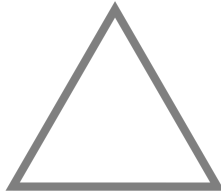
Each time darkness falls,
my harp boy, and the bird
on your head rattles in horror
at the word gunshot, there are
things to realize about little wings
that may spring from fiery marrow
into your dream of the milkmaid;

Certainly, you may beat them back
from her ears, on the condition,
you hear God's goat braying
on the killing floor, the instant
she reveals herself to you,
flickering, atop the clattering
beak that rips your harp in two.



NOWHERE MAN

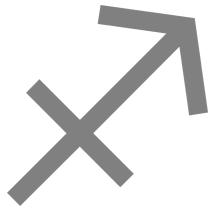
There was art to feeling lost
this side the stumbling stone,
but here, believing in light
leading home, what can we say to Diane,
save vibrate synthetically with me,
give way with me and open the door
through which any vagabond may pass
as might a puff out of nowhere
to contend with what's written by Walt Whitman,
Woody Guthrie, Tim Buckley, and so on past
the purple welts in this relational system



ROCKIN' ROBIN

The sound of the eagle,
protecting his nest from buzzards,
pushes on a blue horizon
and scores the misshapen
morning star that blisters
the oriole, its yellow feathers
fill only a hollow tooth—

You'll need a parachute.

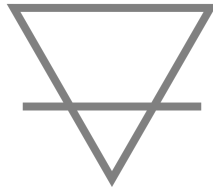


EARTH ANGEL

She sang to you, hung
a horse shoe on your arm,
a chain around your neck.

Songs to nature's one
track mind were her life.
Crickets filled her gloves.

Her hands blocked so many
raindrops, you couldn't stop her,
as she tumbled to the ground.



NOWHERE TO RUN

There's nowhere
to run in marriage,

Working and paying everyday
for wanting her,

But if you'd leap,
like Screamin' Jay Hawkins,

Past the shadow curved around her,
into whatever's left in your coffin,

You could rip free
from her wine sack

Your Noah, your Pip,
your keel, your breaker,

And sail with them
into the raging wave to come



LONG TALL SALLY

By psychol necessity,
Aunt Mary's little green apples
always pointed downward
at the rise of Uncle John's
greasy pectoral muscles.

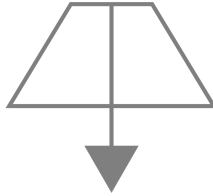


TUTTI FRUTTI

Take your crowbar
away from that good booty

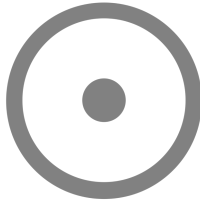
Just slip it
from side to side

Beneath the herm
at the door.



IF I WERE A CARPENTER

If I had a face,
a handle, a peen,
I would ram the hammer
at shadows put above me
in the evening.



WILD THING

(I think)

I love you

Whore

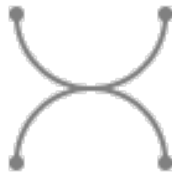
Circle

Hermenet



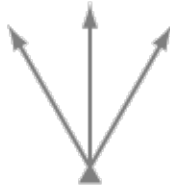
HUNGRY

Cass Elliot wanted a viable relation
between the mother and the father.
At Swarthmore the idea the Greeks ate
up their own children filled her mind
with fear. She knew the mother only
had such meaning and value before the father
as she could assign him before sleep
in whispered prayers for all the forgotten
pieces of food she imagined him drawing near.



GREAT BALLS OF FIRE

Balls of fire lie out so far beyond
where she said her heart begins,
you're still holding your horse
against the queen of your tears,
fuming behind a blindfold,
you left no will for her to break.



FIRE AND RAIN

From that look in your eye,
the wine's taken you by surprise,
far enough into these golden rings
knotted around smoky pine,
hardly touched by yourself,
lonelier now with your starry companion,
her shy kiss forever promised Jesus.

His name may be strangely doodled
in the night, yet prove next to nothing
spiritual, unless you push four bars in
through fire and rain to seven flames,
no sooner spoken than the ram cast down
in the name of marriage is understood
to bear your lamb in the vale of poesy.



ARE YOU LONESOME TONIGHT?

Come softly to Bodhisattvas,
blinded by tears of stone,

Here allegorized
by crystal clear water,

Irradiating
the lost mother,

Who screamed to Elvis
for your missing part



Poems From Letters 70s & 80s, previously not published

Meaning and Ideology
I) By the middle of the 1970's, "Language Poets," who may include anyone from Barbara Barracks to Barrett Watten, had cultivated a love of military terminology, a yen for the vulgar Marx, a preference for the epithets over the rhemes, a taste for continental thinking, and a drive to split infinitives befitting any avant-garde. In periodicals, such as Le Monde and Open Letter, "Language Poets" had launched a group attack on the descriptive, naturalistic, referential, and transcendental mystifications of literature by scoring in the field of language the linguistic contradictions of commodity culture. Practically all that is known about "Language Poets," altogether the most important of thinkers of those years, has come from sources under their direct cultural apparatus. For instance, language-centered writing on literature that

Very good

Kenneth Warren
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CHURCH AND STATE

mind I do
sudden speculation over god's
donation

of ancient land to the mission
of betterment by bounding back

to church
the object

not fellowship but a fashion
a manly hero weeping freely
in arrears to a plebeite

should your uncle tinker
so a bad angel appears
cooked over blue pilot light

pose question to the state
that divests your sacred cow

as you are not one
to shatter
the mirrored plate of providence

Like Pound, Olson & Creeley, Ken thrived on letters. When I got my copy of his *Captain Poetry's Sucker Punch*, except for the exceptional, insightful introduction by Dale Smith and afterward by Ammiel Alcalay, there was little new. I had read it in letters, the first from before 1980 when his *Guide* began. And so also the poems.

Ken published many of his essays and reviews in *House Organ*, but never his poetry. It is no wonder that Clayton Eshleman who respected Ken's critical writings never considered him a poet. Few did.

I have gathered up some of his poetry from letters to show the development of some of the published ones and the range of his concerns; always the subject was social and the language serious and playful.



Unlike poets who communicate their message that poetry isn't about communication, Ken insisted that poetry be connected, as an integral part of our human condition. It must be, that the language of the poem communicates, that it is the way to connect to a real reader, as music connects to a real listener, and creates community. —JN

THE MORAL MAJORITY

When the man with the ten gallon hat across his penis
Came to town we waited until midnight
To take from our travel bags the grease

Our husbands rounded up from work at the gas station
On the day shift and together we threw up
At the image the black ink of our souls

Did you see the naked man
Did you see the nude in boots
On the billboard beside McKinley School

Gold standard Governor of Ohio
Shot down
As president in Buffalo

He is the new country and western DJ on WEWS
And we don't want our kids to see that shit
So we went at midnight with our husbands

And hit
In all sorts of places
Just as we would

As kids
Unforgiven kids
But this time we did it for our kids

Because they shouldn't see that shit
Which we pulled down by 3 AM
And replaced by Care Bears
While we ended up on the news on Channel 3 TV

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST

One body one pouch
Standing alone but not for long

Behind a branch of writing
Crowing a baby's scalp in a circle of sun

He's going
He's going out

From on high the wonder of chorus and classic flame
He puts his whole self in

Dreams the perfect signature
Left stranded in the void and velvet green

Where he was born and promised
An eddy of memory

Lush
Splush genius sick with worry

Consumed by the ancient sky
He sings for his supper

How much she loves
How much she cares

For his pale face turning nightly to her
From the sheer walls of their cut-out castle tower

From which descend the disgruntled first person
Who wields a putty knife and shakes it all about

FIRST LADY

She was bound to offend some people
Her stately formal pace had burst
& remaining chaste no matter what
Lap
She had strayed from the second course.

Her son for a time was unemployed
& rumored to have fantasized
Blindly about marriage to an unnaturalized
foreigner
Holed up in a SoHo loft.

She was no longer Nancy Reagan
Piffle
Before the mahogany mirror
She had no book to plug.

Her appearance in the almond-
Shaped reflection made room
Enough for say
Jane Wyman
Rusted
Absorbent at the center of the television family.

She was mixing nothing with her free lunch
Save syrup of ipecac
Entranced to her host
Fingering instead of Mr. T
Brocaded roses of Givenchy.

Her needs were the needs of a live person
No Ms. Santa granting satisfaction only to the
ersatzes

Of dearly departing white faces
What she offered on the beach to Santa Barbara
Drifted up all the way to Santa Cruz.

She was in the sun as it flashed
Stepping quickly away from the help
Afraid it was out of her hands
Hail
Air
America,
Inc.

Her money was her bride
A bribe fundamentally
An amber glowing in honor of nobility
Landed astride the oils of a receding shoreline.

She was into the blue
Icing board
Undecided as to which airline to fly
Home later in the off season.

Her anxiety was getting to that point
Where she just never had enough
For vacation
Not even to the Latino/Semitic realm
Not for all the pesos even so about her hipbone.

She was blowing off steam
Amid the haunted
And tormented
Figures of a disquieting buffet.

Her waxen legs brushed the bubbleless
Air
Recycler
& voices mingled as political wishes
combines as the evening wore on.

She was reluctant to have him
Run again
& drive the speedboats
Deeper into petroleum depots.

Her drinking was heavy
Beside a vase from Guatemala
So insensitive
To the erectile tufts
Molded in the clay.

She was anorexic
When the peasant emerged from the open
Jaws
Of the animal headdress
Half-cocked.

The Art of Patrimony

There was art to feeling lost
all the while in the obstinate manliness
this side of the stumbling stone,

But here, believing in the light
leading home, what can we say to Diane,
save pray for me, but no, she is bare-breasted,

You say, vibrating sympathetically with the door
through which any vagabond would pass as might
a puff out of nowhere to contend anxiously

With what's written by Walt Whitman, Woody Guthrie,
Jack Kerouac, Tim Buckley, Otis Redding and so on
through the purple welts in this relational system.

Morning Glory

Tim Buckley knelt to the hobo
while under the influence of morning glory,

His crying over tenement vines
made his body a temple to derelict authority.

It still matters, because he believed with all of us,
that the hobo could wound a door deeper than the father.

Daddy, You've Been on My Mind

The Great White Father behind this rag whispered
Lo to the winged creatures coiled up in his cells.

Joan Baez whined through the fleeced chicken
Tenderly served up to children in the boxcar.

Then loudspeakers blared for something /
sociopolitical to happen
Among those looking for bigger chunks of meat /
on the crossroad.

Rites of Fire

Canned heat raised to the second power stings
the scabbed bare feet of snarling boy bums

About to be jacked up by the elbows
à la Rimbaud from the hobo jungle

Into the starburst, where Beatnik
hysteria will always give out

After the sixteenth Roman candle has lit
itself and launched spiders flaming toward Mars.

This is Serious

This coat could never be so
moth-eaten it would stop

anyone from sinking
like a capstone

not even the homeless clown
who called the English teacher

Daddy-o
in a boat

not given to any ocean
nor broken by sinew and brine.

The Culmination of the Organic Cycle

The grade was nine that summer
with sunshine beating down
on the most talkative newspaper delivery boy
in my vicinity. He was sworn to the psychedelic intelligence
within Ringo's double-drum. He was devoted
to the dozen or so emotional strokes
that had backed the other Beatles
not respectful of him into "Rain".

The culmination of the organic cycle
happened while he was painting pink flowers
through the basket holes and bars
on his black bicycle fenders.

He watched himself draw his head up
to the sun in the jangling metals.
He tried to explain how, like acid,
boiling the morning glory seeds
would make our minds simmer
at the coming of rain.

Fat Man Take Me Home

A house which is fleeting
leaves all inhabitation fatherless,
with only sexual inflections
to drive them in weird protest
over any vagabond that would attempt
to nest with them over the hot shadow
by the orange curbside fire.

Forbidden Territory

Take your crowbar
away from that good booty

Just slip it
from side to side

Beneath the herm
at the door.

Creation and Diffusion

Once the wildly colored composite beasts
Shone from light Oaxacan pines to reflect
Accord between natural and mechanical forces
There glared across the star-shaped valley
A jaguar that could not return to Gemini
Without passing through the gallery where
The aura of signed art as a visionary thing
Had gathered us unto its personalized wing.

The Door, Open & Shut

“Break on through to the Other Side”

Jim Morrison & The Doors

From *The Rap on the Door / Fugitive Writing of Kenneth Warren*

by Bob Buckeye

In an unpublished work titled *The Rap on the Door* Ken Warren refers to that moment that determines what we do if we but answer it. It is definitive but we may not know that it is until we understand where it has led us. If we had. not. The weight of the questions that cannot be born until it is.

...

Warren was always there. He showed us ways. He knew that we could go farther than we ever thought we could and walked alongside us as we did. The last time we talked on the phone he noted that we would not leave a mark but it was crucial that we not try, Olson, in the background, “In the land of plenty, have / nothing to do with it / take the way of / the lowes / including / your legs, go / contrary, go / sing.”

...

He is no longer there. Life will go on, as life must, but it will not be what it was before. One night, though, late, very late, we will hear a voice on some talk radio show or a punk music station announce himself as Bagworm and know who it is.

from The Rap on "The Door" / The Men's Room
by Ken Warren

Consistently the appraisals of modern poets have proffered the golden mean of American poetry as being based in the work and hero-worship of Whitman, Pound, and Williams....

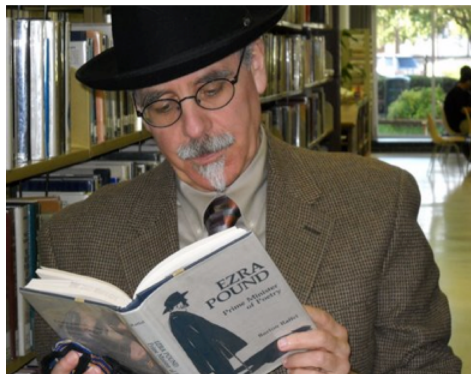
For better or worse, to advance toward the golden mean, toward the dead "Ez," "Bill," "Zuk" or for the living "Dunc," "Creel," is to submit to a higher authority or to associate through the stance of son or brother.

For the younger poet there is always the danger of merging unobtrusively into the voice of a body of work from which his notion of literary kinship has sprung. And unbeknownst to the younger poet whose one thin dime will not open the door to the Men's Room is that so much of his circumstance as poet is determined by inflation in ranks and devaluation of his goods....

So living in a delicate relationship of defensive huddle that is shaped by both the myth of Big Daddy and the conceptual discrimination of the Men's Room, it is

necessary for the younger poet to bear his share of the ceaseless burden of having to wait in line. Because order of admittance is a foregone conclusion to those already inside the Men's Room, the younger poet, left outside, may stare toward the feet before him, perhaps coming to the realization that, despite the multiplicities of knowledge evident in the work of the master, their epistemological legacy can be reduced to a statement as problematic as "Kilroy was here." Which is to say that the problem of being a poet is the problem of being a man.

[Unpublished, Randolph New Jersey, ca 197x?



Rhythm & Roots, to Open the Door

Ken was a critic of note. His *Captain Poetry's Sucker Punch* is essential reading for anyone who cares to understand contemporary American poetry, film, music. But he was more.

Unknown to many who valued his critical writing was Ken's poetry. Ken published little poetry. He and I exchanged poems with letters, writing in the late '70s upon the suggestion of George Myers. Sometime in 80s Ken and I shared an issue of *Steve Ellis' that: .* And that was the first I read of Ken's published poetry. Later came *Wandering Boy* and a couple other small press publications. To most he was silent or only heard as a critic, and a damn good one. Who else had the knowledge and the courage to effect a revision of the poetries of Charles Olson and Vincent Ferrini?

As good a critic as he was, he was a better poet. My claim. And hence this book. Not to prove anything, but to give the materials for the reason for such a claim.

We can see even with this small selection that he wrote poetry with the informed ear of a musician and the insight of seasoned critical intelligence. I know of no other poet who has written poetry with the working understanding

of how pop music has altered our collective consciousness. Ken understood how and why poets lost their readers. It was more than his critique of LANGUAGE poets; it was his felt knowledge of contemporary music.

Ken was hip to what moves us, even if we were not hip as to why.

Read his poems with the awareness that Ken was a garage band drummer (the Rhythm) with a musical reach into world culture, enabling him to uncover the mythic connective tissue of what moves us through rock & roll (Roots).

Enhance your pleasure by searching out the connections in Ken's poetry "that dynamically extends meaning in the world." —JN

Ken Warren

from *A Living Legacy : In Their Own Words, Some American Poets* : In the United States, poetry is largely invisible. Having little to gain from the economic power of material existence in a consumer society, poetry opts out to abide with the left-over mysteries that span democratic and solitary vistas.

Question : How can poets contribute to the reduction of this “poetry gap” as mentioned above? In this sense what do you see the role of the poet as being in the society in which s/he lives?

Ken : Poets can organize with others to create local instigations, publications, and spaces that support wide-ranging discussion of art, culture, and politics. In such venues, community aspiration, communicative functions, and concrete engagement inform the role of the poet. In the process, the poet is brought into closer contact with a social totality ostensibly indisposed to poetry. Depending on the provocation, the presence of the poet among engaged community personalities can either widen or narrow “this poetry gap.” No matter the size of “the gap” such engagement seems necessary for the making of both the community and the poet.

Note : For a short time Ken would write to me as KAW, short for Kenneth Allen Warren, but more as a sign, a totem voice of the Crow :

kaw kaw kaw

We hear you.

Ride on Josephine, ride on
Ride on Josephine, ride on
Ride on Josephine, you got a runnin'
machine
Baby, baby, ride on a-Josephine, baby ride on
—Bo Diddley



Acknowledgement and Sources

Ken's poems have been published in a Vortex pamphlet edited by William Sylvester, Stephen Ellis' Oasis broadside series (#8) and his "continuing series of pamphlets (#5), and in an anthology published by Thomas Rain Crowe : Generations, A Centenary of American Poets (1919 - 2019). Also published by Thomas and his New Native Press is A Living Legacy : In Their Own Words, Some American Poets (2015). That collection contains Ken's answers to questions posed by Crowe, questions about the importance of Place, the Lyric Tradition, a poet's Dialogue with the World, poetry Criticism, the relationship of poetry to the Indigenous Peoples of America, the place of poetry within the society, within Community.

All graphics are copy-write free from Wikipedia Sources. Picture of Ken from The Lakewood (Ohio) Observer; picture of Ken memorial display by JN

Front cover : William Blake's Vitruvian Man set free, "Glad Day" ; Back cover : The Simpsons' version

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