



THE
TECTON
ICS OF
MOONLI
GHT

POEMS BY KENNETH TINDALL

*Poems in this collection were published in
The Dead Language Press (Piero Heliczer), The Beloit Poetry
Journal, Home Planet News, and elsewhere.*

Cover graphic by Jennifer Ley

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ABRA WORD 2002

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Print novels by Kenneth Tindall:

Great Heads (Grove Press 1969)

The Banks of the Sea (Dalkey Archive Press)



Carla Scott-Donohue – who talked to the trees.

Woodstock, N.Y. 1968

The Tectonics of Moonlight

POQUOTT

The island is a mess of trackage,
the harvest done, fields scoured by winds.
We change trains at Babylon, old power.

The trees are showing their hand,
leaves printing quires of illuminated score
and the tugboat's slow score persists on the water,
the precipitation of time in recollection.

Night falls on the shingle beach
and in this light indifferently blazing at all hours
the stones give up their sugar.

My island Margot, where are the gulls at night?
Asleep on the turning basin,
rocked in the water-walking moonlight
and swans are with them.

Where do the fish sleep, my island girl?
Tin fish, flesh fish, codfish
asleep in the moon's sleeve.

SMILESHERD

Sparrowbush peeped fright into the trees
when you removed the timber from your lips
that I found hewn from rain.
Why are you skate clatter
passed down a side street glance?
Now nurse leaf, cool from the river racket,
creaks her gate
and I am on a strip of wind
waiting for your lights

GIT-LE-COEUR

She bridges wine in oiled cups
A spill of wind a soak of weed wrists
Drowning in their leap.
She candles haze lace
Flaming from a scratch of trees.

His animals are rust ash on your foot,
Your stocking purring flake of faces.
The compass blooms a spade,
Its sallow tillage maps an old wind.

BOIS COLOMBES

Birds on your eyesill
shrug for crumbs,
house of hair.
Windtails burst
in milk and mirth,
the cats are clasped in blackest heat,
our hands are wet with leaves.

I will not bruise her hair
nor wash my pale of miles through her flesh,
nor can I crouch now when her tender fowls
crash through my mesh.

WORDPLACE

My love, quit winnowing your spells
and think how long since
rain slept deep enough
to float our dream.
Milk draws lightning
as our lips flush
quail from the bush,
hot in the thunder clabber.
My love, don't touch our wings
or else their trill won't lift us through
the tangled purposes of dark and leaves.

BOTTLES OF RAGS

The year is leaning on its fruit
which if not feeds then sots the ground.
The seeds, anyway the seeds will split
at the sun's breech clout.
The trees, Indian-giving trees
blacken and be still.

The birds were upon us
logging the night in tossing galaxies
of wildflowers from their prow
while we, still too petalled to thunder
after the dump of summer,
tumbled laughing in their wake.

La Picaudiere

THE LANGUAGE OF TREES

My woman on the hill this time of year
has jackdaws on the leaves that were her hair,
jackdaws walking on the ground around her
waiting for her buds to green.
My woman is the oak tree on the hill
in attitude of wishing and beckoning.
I watched her grow that way
since love first crannied her all over.
The lightning made her to a ship of bees.
She's deep and strong and sweet as Easter beer.

It must take something for a man to cry.
I've seen him stand with heaven's tears
in his beard and hair all summer by the river,
favored more by rats than birds all summer
till it all goes over winds to under snows.
Then call him pured of rage or grief
or understanding.
My love he is a willow tree
down where our waters play,
he's slim and soft and tough.

THE COMMUTER

Duffel coat
– like mine –
blinks with alternate lids
– like myself –
girl with a beard
– like mine, but less –
just got up to get the window seat
– so would I –
but if I went to her side
I would lose mine.

I file my errors,
missing the train on purpose,
taking the next just to see you,
and I was on the clock-in verge of your lips
of asking your name.

THE RESERVATION

Soft as touching a girl,
the smell of her ear dancing,
a drift of leaves across the lawn.

You said the most incredible things,
our cheeks were sore with kissing,
my fingers smelled like you.

You don't love the water enough to drown yourself.
Think of her hair on your arm,
her hair across her lips like a word.

What is her name at this hour?
dreaming up storms for the sower of showers
and star-vined bowers.

NADIA

It was someplace on old US 1,
there were businesses, daylight
between the two and three-story buildings.
Her market basket was full of cupids,
he caught a glimpse of one whirring up into the air.
She showed him where she lived,
backstairs entrance and a long climb
smelling of old women,
a “schizophrenic” room she called it,
laughing relaxed in her hoyden’s dishabille.
Though austere, nearly ascetic, the room
seemed overfilled with its jumble of shapes.
The door opened on a trapezoid hall
then came the largest space, a canted trickery
under the eaves with a deep dormer window,
one corner became an octagonal garret –
a sunny niche at the top of a gizmo.
A bed, a table, a chair, a bookcase,
and a bamboo rocker for the octagon.
With great deliberateness he
reached out and took her sex in his hand.
There was a small ruffled lamp
on the night table. Perfumed oil.
I don’t know where you can buy oil like that.
It’s something you win at the fair.

JENNIFER

snapped up in Nevada OK Rubber Welder
RPMs might've speedometer-cabled a serpent
into the high-impact Greyhound lavatory.
We had a blowout and the driver,
kicking tires,
found and killed a rattlesnake.
The passengers strolled like loonies
in the sagebrush while Jennifer,
red as a capillary,
kicked up dust devils with her baton.

THE PATHFINDERS

Dusty rose hips,
easily as dusty as the new apples,
earwigs in the mailboxes,
did they open the letters?
Now the plums have fallen on the path.

Our treehouse in the old apple tree,
a seat for you and a seat for me,
the breeze soughing in that huge apple tree.
It doesn't matter what you do there,
it doesn't matter, come again
and find what you left there,
hide-and-seek words
written on a tongue-and-groove board.

THE CABLE

Why do we walk to the water
do we return to the water
go through fields and woods
for a look at, smell of the wet.
Regrets we so regret the turning back
to patent-folded evening and finger
our maps for another route into the plains.
Parcelled flowers, settlers in the bay now
since the river plugged itself,
leap-frogged itself.
I lay another way to flowers and
the service of worms, now
game that graze where lakes were
reek to the hunters.
The undress procession of reeds chants past,
tramps over the old water where I fell.

WINDWARD ISLE

Leaves on the platform,
the mist on the fjord,
directions and routes as inland as an island.
Were there that many roses?
I knew the apple but then I found the hawthorn,
berries red as map tacks.
Deer vault up from the hollows
and over the knolls,
know only the island,
browse at night in the indelible contours.

FELLMONGERY

The rooms are full of light we saved
in touching each other all night,
banners of rain wetting the stucco to set it,
watering the lawn after dark to spare it,
bead curtains of rain in the dank courtyards
beautiful when it doesn't matter.

I know where the sun is,
in your armpit
where it goes at night
and whole winter when the world
crawls in between our fields
and all but flowers sleep.
Here's dark of the flower
whose parts meet and change,
twice-dust sinks its flint and tinder
moist joints bump in sleep
rue and laurel grind and summer my fingers.
Oh, love, the make and keep of me.

THE REMEMBER SONG

Remember in the morning,
wake and think of me,
remember the place
remember my face
it's you I want to see.

Remember in the morning
a night not long ago,
the look of the night
in smoky light
in places we would go.

I saw you in the morning
and hoped we'd meet again,
and find the place
and kiss your face
again and tell you when

I thought of you in the morning.
I wanted everywhere
to be the place
in your embrace
I first drew breath of air.

HAWTHORNE EFFECT

Play, play, the motions of playing
It looks like playing the kid must be
Playing let's play this or that
A choreography a repertory
Pickaback combinations variants
With alternative equipment.

A mockup of playing
The disinterestedness of being interested
A disguise of playing disguises
An innocence in engrossment
A subterfuge of child's play
Innocent in an engrossment of subterfuges

The outcome of play as attitude
A satisfaction in obliviousness
An attitude of cognizance
A clatter of ritual paraphernalia
As a child cognizant of achievement
Displays playform activity.

THE BRIDEGROOM

Wearing a crown of flies
the bridegroom cometh shuffling on his yams.
Brain cancelled with an overdose
he was the intended of Hypatia waiting in a Thorazine[®] cloister,
a Graceland meted from the Nautilus's chambers,
Manhattan State Hospital.

Pigeons warming underbodies on the gravel,
a wink of rain in the sequestered sunshine,
green fishpond covered with scattered rings...
The subject has difficulty translating a visual associate,
he has already definitely labelled a person or object
by means of his own...but he has forgotten.

Thus a name whose own private processes
of recognition are complete
the Triborough Bridge and his soul tries to ascend,
tries to get out, hammers
on the inside of his wide-open corneas
like a bird at a window.

But this is a conspiracy of foolish virgins,
the hole after a demolished building,
an exhalation of New World molds
from a badly mildewed trousseau
and the indescribable layette.

Kevin fat and straw-hatted that time
on the escalator at Journal Square.
My Dad seems perfectly clear to me now,
I want to cry and comfort him,
put my hand on the shoulder of the apparition,
no flesh no blood no skin no bones.

Rockaway doggie standing in the suds
watching the great silver ducks taking off
one every sixty seconds, say,
the gracefulness of their jet exhausts
on a wind-mild day with a high surf
as they fan out one every sixty seconds,
grooving the mathematics of tails.
I see by your clothesline
that you are a homeless doggie.
Handsome dog,
Irish setter and golden retriever,
let this mutt pat your beautiful coat,
sometime waggle pooch
clean and sea-smelling.
Sea doggie – you could be
groomsman and together we could
maybe find some steaks.

Morning flash of train windows on the Williamsburg Bridge,
panhandling on Kenmare Street another subway token.
Oh Dad it's the orange blossom special.

He has lingered with the catcall sirens on Mermaid Avenue,
cut a figure on the slanting deck in the Gowanus Canal,
in the cloudburst seen the writing on the Con Edison gas tank
and in his furnace thirst sat in a wrecked convertible
under the Shore Parkway overpass and drunk
the tetraethyl runoff from the roadway above

By the siding of dead D trains
found shelter in an old wooden truck body,
heard the cops' wisecracks from smoke-break prowler cars.
In the perpendicular rain shivered all night
on a pile of greasy rags with tires and lube drums,
the inhabitant of the shrine.

Style which we analyzed in the introductory section
in the sunny morn another Cropsey Avenue high-stepper.
He sits down on a bench a view of the sea a sea breeze
and to cheer himself watches the families,
children, men playing boccie,

until he is shooed away by the Good Humor man
and clutching his pants about his bony pelvis
hustles away leaving a trail of petals,
cars on the parkway and joggers on the promenade.
In the September afternoon he stretches out in the grass.

In the nave of the river O, cool bells reverberating!
Weedy buttresses of drowned palisades cool tolling
deep plainsong down from the steep sheds of America,
Chasuble-turbulent alb-deep Hudson,
Ship-icons shouldered to the sacristy of the tide.
River, oh reverberate.

At a vesper dirged by the electronic chimes
on the U.S. Army Chaplains School in Ft. Hamilton
he goes down to his goal,
a section of the railing ajar as if torpedoed by a car,
The Open Gate communicated in a foetid whisper.
Ye have led him away to consummate on the stones.

Leaving his shoes on the slimy stones he wades out,
Gravesend Bay cool to his destroyed feet,
and treads water until with his last strength
he tries to shout.
He coughs underwater.
The lights go on the Verrazano Narrows Bridge.

Backtrack again and pick up the stars we have unravelled,

shepherd whales on the heels of the mother fire,
git-along dogie at the railhead of tidal currents,
temperature, salinity,
the world trade of molecular osmosis,
the sweet and soft lips and hair,
nuptial estuary.



THE FOURTH SEA

All airplanes' eyes are bigger than their stomachs,
the engine biting off more than it can chew
faster and faster (Sizzle Swig takes a long pull).
Remember when you were a sack of potatoes
and the dog's summer nose unfolded like a parachute?
Thursday the Fifth was but a lable-tummied kitten
when he heard One Pup sing to his mother
ding-a-not ding-a-not and all your charms.
Now I am wind sore and balloon weary,
nagged of cuticle and bursting at the gums,
and the soggy telephone books are busy with silverfish.
One chip off the old bifocal is enough to prime the bottom
and bottle divers kneel and read home towns across the ocean.
That stretch of highway in France that day,
cars were stopped every few kilometers
windshields gone.
Kids threw ball bearings, they said,
dandelions tall as carbon-age onions.

DEALING AND JEALOUSY

I always thought there was
another room to the apartment
and the feeling persisted
even after we checked it out.
Then I found out that in putting
a new cement floor in the bathroom
the previous tenant had laid
2 x 2s over the old floor
so there remained a hollow space
with a Polaroid paper
and a matchbook.

OCTOBER TULIPS

We know the trees,
October tulips in the deer clearings,
the cob-covered trees the Easter spider strung,
the pilot's daughter blows dew on,
dew on October tulips.

We know the road,
October tulips show us past the houses
to the sand spit cradle knolls,
past the window where the orphan sleeps in glass,
dew on October tulips.

There is the boat
uncovered by the storm,
past the spume funnel full of sand and a rope end shows.
Pull it and we climb into the flowery earth,
undersea October tulips.

There's the sea pine salter than the deer,
the sea-apple hedgehog
with a snake in its quills paddles past
the ambergris cliff we climb with our toes,
grassy sky October tulips.

October tulips is my love
you, the pilot's daughter and me,
three as a baby in its mother's tuck
over cob-cleared wood and wind-dimpled water
and dew on October tulips.

NB:

Poems can be useful for everyday purposes. October Tulips is twenty-five lines drawn mostly from a couple of dreams from

different periods, and for a number of years I used it as a navigational aid, you might say, through the rocks and shoals of living. The poem, full of landmarks and soundings like a sea chart, was in my mind every day.

-K.T.



CRAZY LEGS

The skinniest troll lives inside an
abandoned daddy long legs leg.
He's skinnier than a dog's hind leg
and twice as crooked. Sometimes
he'll be the shadow of something
that isn't there, or as voluminous
as a partial vacuum.

He's the slimmest thing in troll gauge.
He can split a rock just by
holding his breath, and fly
backwards by spitting through his
teeth. He's as useful as this
poem or the underside of a roof.
To cause a dog to woof

what he does is roll his eyes back-
wards in his head and looks.
And don't be fooled by the doorhook.
If you want to loose weight fast
go walk where thick broken mast
saplings litter the woods
and ask yourself who

Peterborough, N.H.

SLIPTOWN PUMP

Sliptown Pump holds nighttime parade
with the usual oom-pagh instruments
together with duck and varmint calls.
They slip and slide in the graveyard,
pause by the village pump,
special-step to the town line and
then go to bed with their clothes on.
Some village dog's last word:
You'll find yourself decorating
a stone wall or the front lawn,
the furniture in the driveway.
An American will build a house,
make sure the fireplace draws,
then go off and leave it.
All those perfectly good dinosaurs
lined up and waiting for the
march down to the water's edge.

HORUS

In the eye of August
riding in on a crest of boughs
and seize the oblivious prey
in a whoop of summer the splendor of you.
Ah, and ever and now the summer's lanterns lilt
the while of a smile the breeze on a tongue,
the road no more a right-of-way
then when fare was in kind and passage laid no claim.
How would I tell you my love,
how would I tell you I saw the sea?
I saw the ferry materialize in full figure
in front of the horizon the horizon was applauding
ah, the ship dragging its fish roots.
Who would dismantle the sweet peas?
There is no disorder in their archive,
sea-wall fixtures on an old postcard,
a saving thing remembered tangled after a storm,
and the scent of grain nearly ripe in salt fields.
What I wished for in the night by dawn was with me:
Pitman mysteries in a circumflexion of the wind
or imparted in a swoggle of Apis.

STREET OF THE HARP

It was something that comes from
looking at people too closely.
I spotted him, his unsure gait
like a dream residue jaywalking
across the dusty street I no longer frequented
except to check the mailbox.
He wasn't the first man to apologetically halt
on the sidewalk and explain himself;
he called it self-transcendence.

“You always said to walk poor
or somebody will think you are happy.
It began with something as harmless as
playing with her tits in her parents' kitchen,
and the thing she sang artlessly in pitch –
'I'll make my love a willow wreath,
I'll call my love my wren,
and ev'ry time he sings for me
I'll make him sing again.”

You studied solfege with Nadia Boulanger,
but this ambition, your lonely evolution,
how did you manage, unchanged yet
unrecognizable with a face like matzo brei?

“It's the insufferable habit of perpetually
weeding things out to the final admission.
'They'll make you pray to God to fall
from his grace, and he will hold you,
he has seen it before,' she said, and that thing...
'I'll make my love a willow wreath,
I'll call my love my wren,
and ev'ry time he sings for me
I'll make him sing again.”

He turned and looked down the street,
“I expect there was a letter for you,” he said.
I nodded and laughter flickered in the set features.
“Remember to walk poor.”



PLENA

The arboretum in the Botanical Gardens,
the trees in individual tubs
standing there quite different from one another
like a cast of characters.

There was a flowering tree from the Mediterranean
and it has white blooms with a gardenia-like fragrance
and it is called Plena.

The tree she touches she would touch all of them
every one a different timbre,
the post office of the new leaves.
After the spring gale the old man stoops to
pick them up "because they are so obvious."
The windows and which things in them,
the side street she will prefer for a torsel
or the children who play in one of the courtyards,
and she will go in the courtyard and watch them
for a minute until she remembers
the slant of the evening and something in the next block
and the brambled islets chorded with birds.

What lightning gleans in the way of ground
the early quarrying and synchronizing of fishes
tosses block on block until gobbling clappers
pound in bronze maws and steeples flash.
The roaring bells reiterate
the metal of her loins
as rooks rope from their cotes
and unroofed houses trumpet.

THE BATH

I like you best in the mornings,
I save the day and the night to love you then
when you are like a young girl again
and fragrant from your dreams.
All your politics and your ambition,
acting things out and playing things
off against each other,
your idea of yourself,
listening to your own voice all day,
everything you have to prove
is gone, washed away in sleep.

THE TECTONICS OF MOONLIGHT

Striking the leaves of the trees
a sound like raindrops,
the blotting-paper wings of individuals
upward seeking, moths
swarming in the harvest moon.

Looking for a place to pound your ear?
Don't you know you're somebody's sunshine?
The clouds' unself-conscious shape-up
said the selfness in loving-kindness
is singlemindedness of purpose.

Getting a child with child
is something like make-believe.
Didn't I get under that skin of yours,
guileless as the rain,
knocked up with a boarding-house reach?

A handful of milkweed crushed my heap of bricks,
the flaked paint on the molding and the odor
from the dumbwaiter,
when you came to my sweltering berth
with your cool arms
and what I have known of roads
in a confluence of soft lips.

The field of six bullocks,
the meadow of the heifer with a star between her horns,
the striped badger shifting for himself,
the nightingale thrilled in the rose thicket,
the turn-turtle turbot we ate ourselves sick on
and the squid-scarred moon.

THE GALACTOGOGUE

Dance with the Mommy and hear the Mommy say
what she likes of things and all manner of things
and God you like the same things, so dance with the baby
and hear the baby say.

Remember when all of it was her milk?
The whole thing turned on her breasts' milk and this
slip of a girl in the middle of the night lifting the baby
to hear him burp

and you have touched this girl's breasts, your
fingers in the purling millrace of stars and galaxies
dripping in rings melodious as the little boy
laughing in his sleep.

Likewise the night when you woke at a sound,
the tired girl was asleep her breasts uncovered
and the infant had risen up, had risen up and
was talking to her,

was leaning up, his fingers playing with her breast...
until he saw you looking and fell back to her side
and you understood his melodious language.

THE POKE BONNET

The architecture of awaking and she rises,
dewey with her turgor of own light,
and goes out in the garden. Birds riot.
Will you never leave off regarding
my persistent request a vocation
to define the common man
and what was in it for them?

The frosty March evening, a prolonged
scream, a cat its back broken by a dog.
Again, outside the kitchen window.
In the flashlight four pairs of feral eyes,
two foxes circling and one at it,
the screams the vixen's
who didn't appear to be in distress.

Stumblebum came I
ambushed by the hot morning
in your stub-toe surf of iris,
tagetes and poppies a resinous froth,
zinnias, tints of graceful temple idols,
my voicy sap abruptly poke-bonnet
filling you and capable of more.



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