

Poems of the Four Times
dpres 2000 sebastopol

Artwork by Claude Smith



MY ESCAPE FORWARD

What's up?

What's down?

What's there to do?

What's done?

It doesn't matter if I go up the Congo

down the Mekong
or follow Strawberry Creek
if I go far enough I'll loose my mind

Strawberry Creek runs down the hill
past the Cyclotron through Faculty Glade
I sit by the stream
and my dreams are full of heavy metal

My freshman year at Cal
Professor Parkinson says my essay
My Home
is the worst thing he's ever read

These squiggles are my class notes
for Atomic Radiation and Life—
must be the paths of neutrinos
no mass, just spin

Frank Chin takes off his Rotcy uniform
and sticks the barrel of his rifle in the ground
Walking off the drill field in his shorts
he's no chickencoop Chinaman

The Un-American Activities Committee
is in town—Black Friday—the police
fearing they are loosing control wash
the protestors down the courthouse steps

At breakfast my dad chokes on his toast
I'm on the front page giving a sieg heil
What he can't see is the mic
I'm holding for KPFA

A child might wonder why
the earth seems flat
note the lines
connect the lines

Eventually, they form a circle—

Bosnia—East Timor—Kuwait—
now that your world map is complete
the name of the game can be changed to

Genocide for Control of Oil
The New Super Bowl
It's an end run...
the SCUDS vs the Patriots

It's a blitz
on a fortress, on a mosque
creating a gulf of blood
and a nightmare of smashed faces

And in the aftermath
open sewers and squalor
with a half million children
dead because of sanctions

A war machine slouches towards Saigon
I hear the litany of the dead
A protest movement is born—
the formation of a hive

Released from the Darkness
a pair of calipers measures my skull
Is my brain pan enlarged?
by Tibet, by Nicaragua, by Burma

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HOOKEENA VILLAGE

Camped on the beach at Hookeena
an embittered youth goddess
slightly overweight, says she's been
here a month and not been hassled

A couple of scuba divers surface
and wade ashore—a sunbather rolls
off the table she's been sleeping on
and waddles to the *Chew Chew Caboose*

I look around for my shoes
and find them on a bench
where I left them yesterday
when I was cleaning fish

I'm continually pelted by mangos
Wind scatters and gathers
Buddha sips a beer and says
"All this is transitory"

PAGE OF WANDS

for Noella

don't you want to know what is going on?

black on black on

black, black dress, black nails

black eyeliner, blonde hair dyed black

dog chains

and combat boots with 4 inch soles

you want to learn tarot

but don't care about Ancient Egypt

or what is hidden in the cards

just how to read them

so gothic

my mood, your costume

no need for all this blather

ok, I'll forget the traditional path

take you to a coffee house

look at the art

here, let you play with the cards

go off in whatever direction

from whatever vantage point

correspondence

with whatever comes next

that girl's tattoo

it says "broken" across her back

in bold letters—

the coal miners' strike in Harlem County

Kentucky in the 70s

no kidding, things get me down

better now we're sitting in this café

note my inflection and the emphasis

put on precision, value, fun

coming at you sideways

first a double mocha, then history

then a balloon
inside, I write, "Poot was here!"
and vanish into air



I KNOW NOTHING

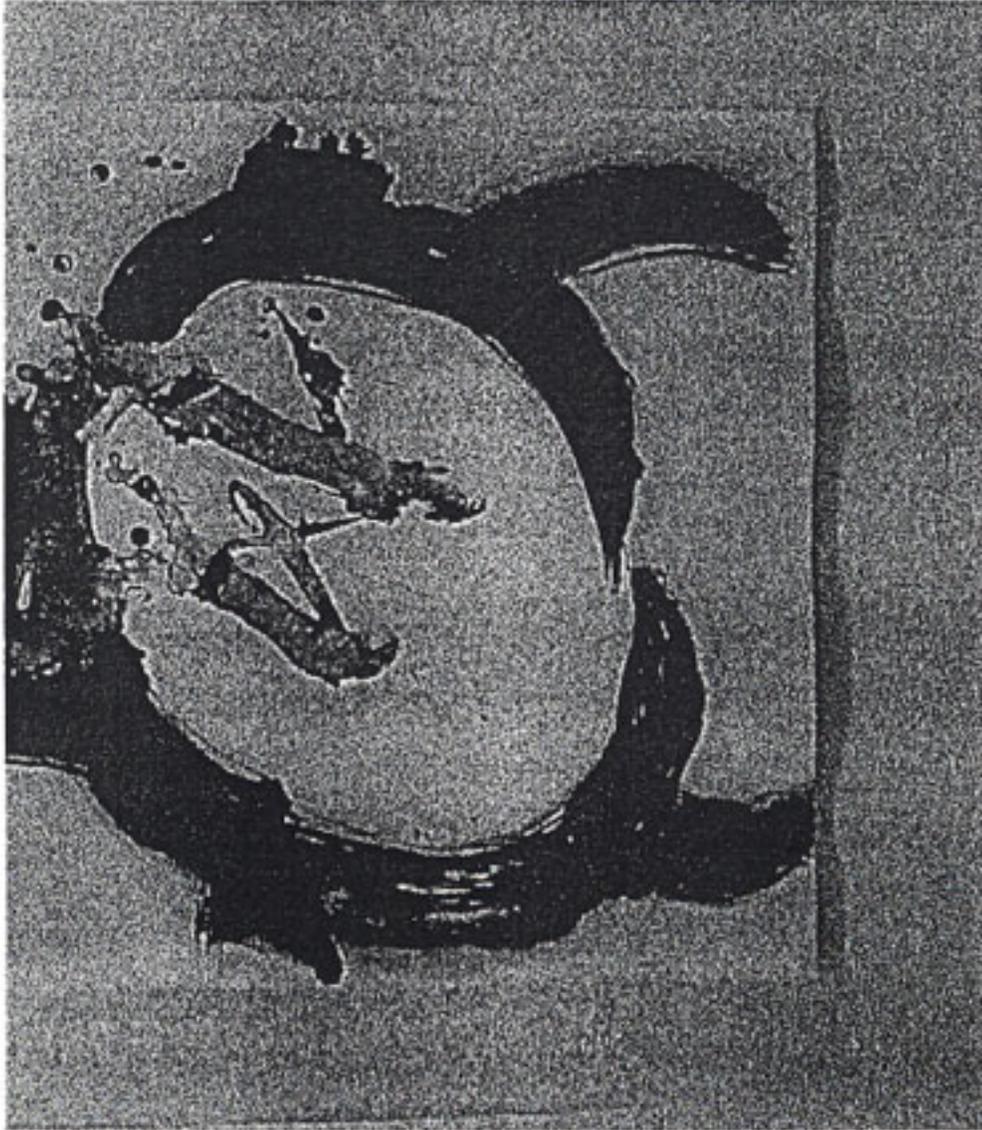
Silence before me and behind
preceding speech

What I am now saying is false

The sky passes
passes through my senses

Everything smells of mock orange

I skipped today, went
around midnight into tomorrow



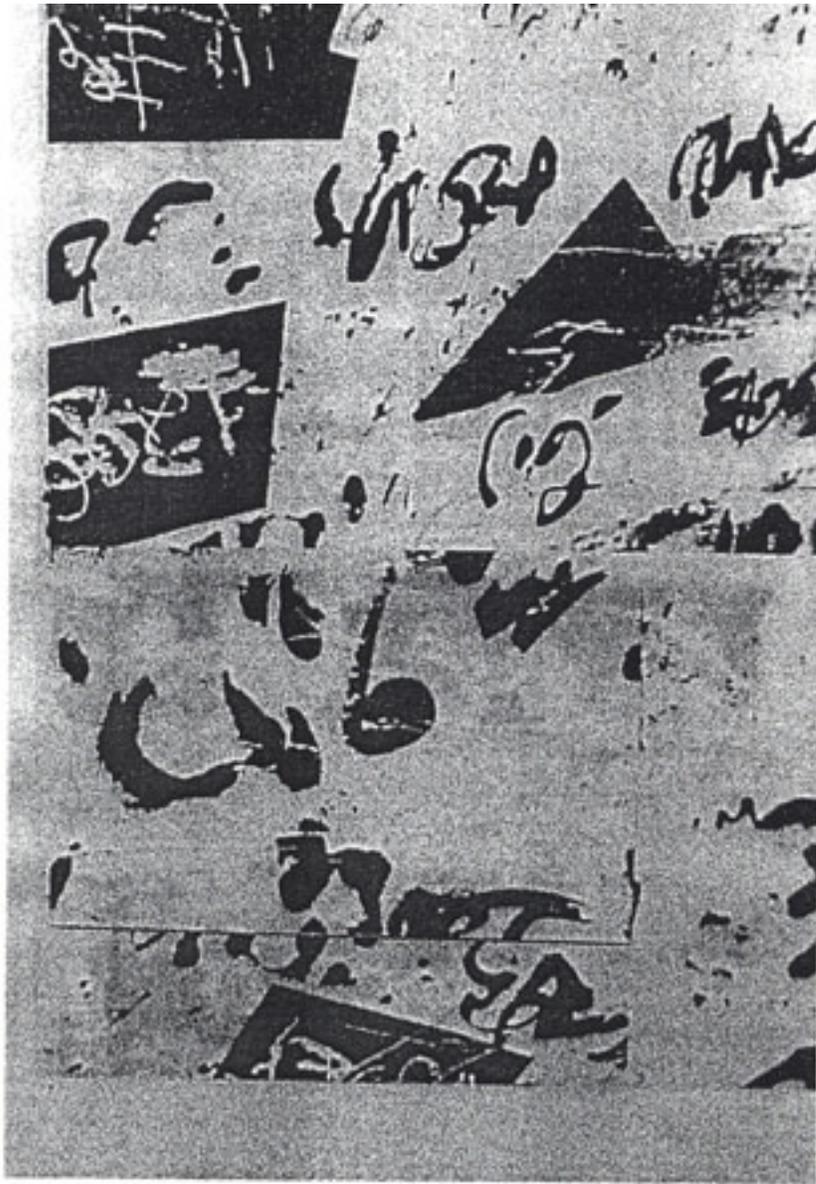
FLOWING

It's morning—everything's ok
if I can get up,
if not, I'll crawl
all the way to Australia

The clerk at the health food store
gives me a dead look
and blandly wishes me a nice day
I order some whey to go

Outside, I see a little dog
I wonder why he doesn't have any hair
I wonder why he doesn't have a tail
I wonder why he doesn't have a head
I wonder why he doesn't have feet
I wonder how he trots down the street

I'm a distortion in the fog
a man without form
a man with one arm
a man with one lip
an old man I finally understand



WHAT IS MIND?

Dad awakes, he's shaking—
says he's embarrassed, he's wet his bed
and doesn't know what to do
Here I am
bringing diapers to my main authority figure

He also wonders if there is a drive on
to change the color of the grass
I can buy into this
I wouldn't be surprised if there is

Friggin' scary
even a bit moribund—
feel this way because I am still
indulging myself
in life
and fear the weirdness of dying

MAGICIAN'S APPRENTICE

I cough, sweating, with knots in my shoulders
He knows I know where the *drib* lies
where the energy emanates

My nausea is the key
Follow my stomach, follow the heaving
find the spot in the earth

He points to a rock
moves his hand in a circle
I remove the rock
He hands me a sharp stick, and I dig

I hear chanting in the yurt on the hill
It is daylight, but it is like a long night

He points to a new place a few inches away
and I dig there, another address of agony
He points to a spot a foot away
and after more digging
a piece of paper appears
I can see script bleeding in the damp
I want to unfold this dark treasure
but he makes a gesture for fire
both hands upturned, fingers wiggling
I build a small fire with leaves and twigs

A wind begins, then vanishes

although it's still here

I cough and blow on the flames
as the paper catches
and curls like a question

My nausea is gone

At the sight of him
in his robes and tennis shoes
doing a playfull shuffle
I can't help but laugh

CORD CUTTING

Yeshe asks me to be her surrogate father
Lloyd, born 1917 in Arkansas
Shirsten will play the part of Emma
the mother, born in Peru

We meet at the sweat lodge
Yeshe is wearing peasant clothing
a long skirt, a white blouse
Sparky Shooting Star and Tsultrim
stand to one side to guide us

The three of us form a triangle
with a ribbon around our waists
and Emma and I speak to our daughter
how she has lived up to our expectations
time, now, for her to be on her own

As she wrestles with this separation
we cut the cord of one too long in our service
and her tears fling aside the pretence of the rite
and hammer home the meaning of being grown



NIGHT OF MYSTIC RAIN

I have been watching a cat
and now it's dark
and the cat appears blue and yearning
with claws ready to scratch the night

I am going out
to look for you on the bench in the park
expecting to find you wrapped in newsprint
alone and sleeping red in the dark

Rain in the yellow trees
there is a song under the table
I have enough love to make the stars ache
and I can afford to buy the silence I become

SAMSARA IS AN AIRPORT SURROUNDING A DELAYED FLIGHT

I'm stretched out with my eyes closed
listening to the travelers and the intercom

"...want my money back..."
"...want to be in San Francisco, now..."
"...really no reason for this..."
"...is it really raining there?..."
"...will my luggage arrive?..."

"Will the pilots for flight 2807
please report to gate A6?"

This presence
that is all
that is

Given
each moment
each breath

"This is your final boarding opportunity!"

VISION QUEST: SO MANY RAINBOWS

The mothers sat by the fire chanting
I could see them in the lightning flashes
Rain came down in sheets

I couldn't tell if it was all rain
or the mothers' tears

ALL THIS INSIDE ME

I enter the quiet
where flies buzz and leaves rustle
in their immortality

The silence ends at a yellow bird
a Western Tanager—I looked him up—
atop a stalk of last year's mullein

POINTLESS POEM ABOUT THE EXISTENCE OF NON-EXISTENCE

Sitting in Mercy Hospital in Durango
I wait for Lama Tsering

An obese lady to my left in shorts and t-shirt
paints her toes copper

A tall Indian in a set of tails, his hair in a braid
turquoise and bone necklace
dark glasses and cowboy boots
paces the floor

A tough-looking dude with a tattoo on his calf
blood on his shirt
his right eye mangled
bounces a baby on his knee

Aliens 3 is on the TV



STORY MY MOM TELLS

1939: Globe, Arizona
and in the spring, about May
we visited some friends
lived up in the mountains

That was Geronimo's territory
and I asked Mrs. Craig
"How did you ever exist up here
with no roads and having to ride
mules to get out and to bring in
your furniture and Geronimo

running through the country?"

"You kept an eye peeled," she said
"and your kids close at hand"

REFUGE

Don't look at this poem
You are staring
I stare back
Your eyes are clamped here
It is damp here
but my throat is dry

This poem is a shamble
down an alley of broken glass
relief from rowdy talk in The Tav

You are asking questions
this poem
cannot answer—
at best you can rest
here

I cannot answer
but I can sing