

"[Bill Knott's] poems are so naive that the question of their poetic quality hardly arises. . . . Mr. Knott practices a dead language."
—Denis Donoghue, *New York Review of Books*, May 7, 1970

[Bill Knott's poems are] typically mindless. . . . He produces only the prototaxis of idiocy. . . . Rumor has it that Knott's habit of giving his birth and terminal dates together originated when he realized he could no longer face the horror of a poetry reading he was scheduled to give."
—Charles Molesworth, *Poetry Magazine*, May 1972

"[Bill] Knott's work tends today to inspire strong dismissal. . . . [He's] been forced to self-publish some of his recent books. . . . [B]ad—not to mention offensively grotesque—poetry. . . . appalling maddening wildly uneven . . . adolescent, or obsessively repetitive . . . grotesqueries [His] language is like thick, old paint . . . his poems have a kind of prickly accrual that's less decorative than guarded or layered . . . emotionally distancing uncomfortable. Knott . . . is a willful . . . irritating . . . contrarian."
—Meghan O'Rourke, *Poetry Magazine*, Feb 2005

"[Bill Knott's books are] filled with venom. . . . Knott seems to hate himself . . . and he seems to hate his readers."
—Kirk Robinson, *ACM (Another Chicago Magazine)*, date?

"[Bill Knott's work] consists almost entirely of pointless poems, that say disgusting things. . . . [His poetry is] tasteless . . . and brainless."
—Michael Heffernan, *Midwest Quarterly*, Summer 1973

"Knott is making capitol on poetic fashion, attempting belatedly to enter the canon of the Language poets by reviving the idiom of Ezra Pound. [His poetry] so successfully defies communicating anything that one wonders what [his publisher] had in mind. . . . Knott, it may be recalled, "killed" himself in the early 1960s."
—R. S. Gwynn, *The Year in Poetry*, *DLB Yearbook* 1989

"Bill Knott's poems are . . . rhetorical fluff . . . and fake."

—Ron Loewinsohn, *TriQuarterly*, Spring 1970

"Eccentric, uneven . . . poet Bill Knott is not [fit] to win prizes . . . [His work is] thorny . . . rebellious, avant-garde . . ."

—Robert Pinsky, *Washington Post.com*, April 17, 2005

"[Bill Knott's poetry is] queerly adolescent . . . extremely weird. . . personal to the point of obscurity. . . his idiosyncrasy has grown formulaic, his obscure poems more obscure, his terse observations so terse they scoot by without leaving much of a dent in the reader. . . There is a petulance at work [in his poetry]. . . [H]is style has grown long in the tooth. . . In fact, [at least one of his poems is] unethical."

—Marc Pietrzykowski, *Contemporary Poetry Review*
(<http://www.cprw.com/Pietrzykowski/beats.htm>)

"Bill Knott's [poetry is the equivalent of] scrimshaw. . . . [It's] either self-consciously awkward or perhaps a little too slangily up-to-date."

—Stephen Burt, *New York Times Book Review*, November 21, 2004

"[Bill Knott is] incompetent . . ."

—Alicia Ostriker, *Partisan Review* (date? 1972?)

"Bill Knott . . . is so bad one can only groan in response."

—Peter Stitt, *Georgia Review*, Winter 1983

"Bill Knott [is] the crown prince of bad judgment."

—Ron Silliman, *Silliman's Blog*, June 26, 2007

"[Bill Knott is] a malignant clown."

—Christopher Ricks, *The Massachusetts Review*, Spring 1970

"Bill Knott should be beaten with a flail."

—Tomaz Salamun, *Snow*, 1973

SEX ON QUICKSAND

:

COLLECTED SHORT
POEMS 1960-2009

Bill Knott

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The poems in this book are fictional. Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used ficticiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

*

When I began writing back in the 1960s, the short poem was popular. That vogue soon ended, but stubbornly or stupidly I continued trying to write them.

All my poems and my short ones in particular are indebted to Robert Bly, who encouraged my early work . . .

Regretfully over the years I failed to live up to the promise that Bly and a few others thought they saw in me back then when I was young,

a failure evidenced by the fact that this book must be printed as a vanity publication.

*

The order of the poems is random, with a few obvious exceptions.

*

EXAMPLE

All my thoughts are the same
length—they're lines,
not sentences: you may protest
that on the page they seem dissimilar
in their duration,
but I swear to all you
unregulated readers-of-prose,
that in their passage
through my mind
each of these took an equal amount of time.

PROPHECY

When I stepped up onto the TV
to see what channel I weigh
the card I got from the slot
said You're going to travel far away
don't forget to leave the remote

LOVELADE

The sea is the cargo of empty ships
Moon bears the sun when it's gone
My face with the trace of your lips
Will fare from now on and on

[UNTITLED]

after the carnival suddenly
mysteriously burnt down they
stirred the fortuneteller's ashes
to try and find the reason why
but sadly it seems prophecy
does not work in reversus

SONG

When my shadow falls off of me
I yell "So long!"
But when I fall off my shadow
It cries "Long so!"

It seems obvious
That one of us
Is either falling wrong
Or calling wrong.

IDEAL ESTHETIC

I only keep this voice to give to anything afraid of me

MY EPITAPH

WANT
TO EARN
BIG MONEY
CARVING
TOMBSTONES?
CALL NOW
FOR DETAILS:
217 1840

Note:
unfortunately snow or grass obscures
most of the phonenumber.

PRISONER

What raw name scrapes and saws at my breath-hatch . . .
This voice wanted always only to soothe, not grate.
And its last noise, that rasp, that deathrale scratch?
—A file, smuggled in to an empty jail cell, too late.

GOODBYE

If you are still alive when you read this,
close your eyes. I am
under their lids, growing black.

HOMEWORK

Dear boys and girls,
please don't forget to
underline my words
after you erase them.

MISANMYOPE

They say that blinking lubricates
the sight and keeps it safe—
but did this World-Eye really
need the lid of my brief life?

HAIBUN: THE JUGGLER TO HIS AUDIENCE

One must be able to juggle at least 3 things to be a juggler (2 is not enough). But whatever the 3 things are that one juggles—whether it's (for example) father, son and holy ghost; or mother, father, child; or id, ego, superego: whatever this minimal trinity consists of—the juggler must acknowledge that his audience is not external to the act; and the juggler must confess to that audience:

One in my hand,—

one in the air—

and one in you.

TO A DEAD FRIEND

mourning clothes worn
inside out
would be white
if things were right
if opposites ruled

if truth prevailed
then me and you
would be two
instead of the one
we've become

DEATH

Going to sleep, I cross my hands on my chest.
They will place my hands like this.
It will look as though I am flying into myself.

MESSAGE

I am a messenger sent to find
the genius in everyone here,
because it alone is the true
recipient of what I carry—
it alone can read the code
this note was writ in: it alone
is the genius in everyone
but me, which is why I alone
can bear to bring it to you.

AT THE CROSSROADS

The wind blows a sheet of paper to my feet.

I pick it up.

It is not a petition for my death.

FRAMEPOEM

First, make a 100 minute movie. Then take the 1 million 440 thousand frames, or stills: take each frame, blow it up, print it, put a frame around it, then take all 1 million 440 thousand pictures, hang them in a gallery, consecutively in a line so that the first frame of the movie is the first picture inside the door and the last, last: you get the idea. Then have the people who come in RUN past the 1 million 440 thousand pictures, so that in this way they become both spectator and projector.

SHOWER

I tie my handkerchief
to a kite
to try and dry
the cries of
the clouds up there.

Pour, pour:
oh, if only
I hadn't loaned
my umbrella
to that submarine!

MY FAVORITE WORD

"Attentionspan" is my favorite word
because I can never finish
reading it all the way through.

ADVICE FROM THE EXPERTS

I lay down in the empty street and parked
My feet against the gutter's curb while from
The building above a bunch of gawkers perched
Along its ledges urged me don't, don't jump.

VOWS

The commonplaces of
the wedding ceremony
would like to go back and marry
the proposal's florid words—
But isn't that love?

THE FATE

(for Anne-Marie Stretter)

Standing on the youthhold I saw a shooting star
And knew it predestined encounter with the sole love
But that comet crashed into the earth so hard
Tilted its axis a little bit not much just enough
To make me miss meeting her by about a yard.

WISE SAYINGS

Sitting under a tree in the forest
or under a chair in the house
wise sayings may pass by unheard
or worse may be misheard
through all these leaves and legs.

EN PASSANT

While orbiting
the earth
at a height of one millimeter
I notice
it tickles.

PENNY WISE

well alright
I grant you
he was a fascist
ahem antisemitism the
er war and all
I'm not defending them
but at least
you've got to admit
at least he
made the quatrains run on time

Note:

2 puns explain the title and last line: "Penny wise, pound foolish"—
And: Mussolini's admirers used to say, "Well, he may be a fascist, but
at least he makes the trains run on time."

[UNTITLED]

The trafficlight on Lovers Leap never changes to red.

[UNTITLED]

scarecrows placed on
the airport runways
to frighten the fish
away ah if only I
were as admirably tasked

SKIRT

My hem has a snake threaded
through it to hold it down
when the wind blows and
then when the wind is still
to give it a twist of tremor.

POEM

the door is open
but the wall
which the door opens
continually waits for it
to enter

FAITH

People who get down
on their knees to me
are the answer to my prayers

TO X

Somewhere in history
Somewhere in untold ages
Somewhere in the sands of time
Somewhere in the vast seas of eternity
There is one person
Only one
Who could understand me and love me
And you're it
So get with it

[UNTITLED]

Before going to the palmreader I glued
mirrors to my palms, so the irrevocable
lines and configurations that told my fate
were merely reflections of the reader's eyes,
eyelashes, retinal imperfections which time
will perhaps deepen to blindness . . . I was
about to p.s. this poem also. What do you see,
O Sibyl?

SYMMETRIES

How mirrored this merging: it's like lover/loved—
The poem aligns us and aims to make our skins
Correspond, each of your pores barrel-grooved
With one of mine, clone-gunned: then void opens
Onto void, grid-ideal, union, see, it joins!
First of course the skins have to be removed.

NO-ACT PLAY

I'm sitting alone in my rented room.

A door knocks at the door.

I don't answer.

It goes away.

Later I leave the room, and go to my crummy job.

The door returns, and knocks again.

It is admitted.

NAOMI POEM

The beach holds and sifts us through her dreaming fingers
Summer fragrances green between your legs
At night, naked auras cool the waves
Vanished
O Naomi
I kiss every body of you, every face

UP TO THE MINUTE

A jet falls on a cow.
Part of the animal sticks out and twitches like the
usual closeups of the hero's jaw.
Children I admire play in the crushed cow's shadow.
And even the plane itself has been left atop the skel-
etonized milk-giver,
clouding one's dreams of a bloodless coup.

[UNTITLED]

on the one hand
but on the other hand
I rest

NOTE (NAOMI POEM)

I left a
right where the nipple cheeps
kiss in each nest
of the black bra
hung inside your bathroom door.

THANKYOU, TANKA

Was it out of kindness
I dropped a compass
into the volcano
so the lava will know
which way to flow.

SANS

To cross-section a pinpoint,
reveal what quadrant
still exists. Oh
keyhole-cleaved,
data mint. Tin ion,
meet iron quark.

Grasped at or loved—

It's a cease orifice.

NAOMI POEM

When our hands are alone,
they open, like faces.
There is no shore
to their opening.

POEM

The pose heightened in desires, the pose.

The several lovers in their young arms.

MUTABILITY (Polvo serán, mas polvo enamorado)

Quevedo wrote he would be dust, but dust in love—
And while I can't believe that millions from now
A rose and a quartzstone will embrace, I can believe
Still less that my arms are around you here: or how
 Your sharp crystals
 Are tearing my petals.

SLUM SCENE

poor children sharing
back and forth their one
set of Dracula's teeth—
here even the dead
live hand to mouth

NAOMI POEM

What language will be safe
When we lie awake all night
Saying palm words, no fingertip words—
This wound searching us for a voice
Will become a fountain with rooms to let.

ANOTHER COLD WAR POEM

So what if you lived only
One second longer
Than we
Did: to us
You will always be known as the Survivor.

RETORT TO PASTERNAK'S ZHIVAGO'S JESUS

The centuries like barges have floated
out of the darkness, to communism: not to be judged,
but to be unloaded.

Note:

See the last lines of "Garden of Gethsame," which is the last poem of
'The Poems of Yurii Zhivago,' the verse supplement to Pasternak's
Doctor Zhivago.

(POEM) (CHICAGO) (1967)

If you remember this poem after reading it
Please go to Lincoln Park the corner of Dickens Street and sit
On the bench there where M. and I kissed one night for
a few minutes
It was wonderful even if you forget

BANG BANG GLUB GLUB

My ark/my life's-boat
had two of everything
necessary for salvation
with the exception
of two bullet-holes
in its bottom hull.

RECAP

It was that kind of day
the kind that goes through you
like a skewer but is okay as long
as there's someone beside you
waiting ready to lick the skewer
when it emerges from you

UNTITLED

Unscarred unscratched
Unnicked as the bottom
Of the lost wishingwell.

POEM

See the unicorn's empty sword,
how its lack takes place
in a lack of place.

Nothingness is its own niche.

FRAGMENT

Because at least one couple is making love
Somewhere in the world at all times,
Because those two are always pressed tightly together,
Hatred can never slip between them
To come destroy us.

PHOLK POEM

The soup is lumpy.

Well then, pour it out.

The soup is lumpy.

Well, pour it out then!

The soup is lumpy, the potato soup.

ALAS

yes I allow each fool
to toss around my skull
but remember I tell
them remember it will
finally always land
in Hamlet's hand

AT THE MUSEUM THIS WEEK

Poland Through The Centuries a touring
Exhibition of maps drawn
By German and Russian cartographers reveals
There never was a Poland.

QUICKIE

Poetry
is
like
sex
on
quicksand
ergo
foreplay
should
be
kept
at
a
minimum

HISTORY

Hope . . . goosestep.

[UNTITLED]

Photographs—
lightningbolts which,
their shadows having caught up with them,
perish.

POEM

The dead paperweight rests
on my lips, occurring to me
like a cry from the words it
has crushed: think of what it
saves from scattering minds
and windows' wind-drafts,
think of all the blink-wafts
of Argus trying to read this.

POEM

Doesn't each tree throw
its shade to show
boundary to the others'
thirsting thrust?
Only the roots are brothers;
the roots are the forest.

TO COMPLETE

last one in the sentence is a rotten old period

SEANCE

Around the readiest table
a manicurist with a hammer
nails in place all hands together
to hold the ring of our focus clung

and keep this communion open:
like jousling airliners the dead
must circle before they land
along the medium's tongue.

[UNTITLED]

Rice thrown from
an open grave marks
the height of a ceremony
somewhere in our lives.

HOLISTIC

Before eating the cherries
I pinched my cheeks
to get in tune, in tint—

OLD JOKE FROM THE TED & SYL SHOW

Hectoring her as usual with a bark in
His bite wit, Ted tutors his young gal Syl:
God, he scold-quotes, is in the details.
She grins and wanks his chin with pinkette nails
And winks that mock-erotic spark in
Her eye: You're wrong, you bodkin, you big moose,
You handsome sod: God is in the profile—
Got one, and you're God; you're Ted Hughes;—
Don't got one, you're Philip Larkin!

ANOTHER RESURRECTION

God sucks off tombstones
until they cum, the soul
up from its finest gloryhole
gushers across His tongue—

Only the premature flesh
(for the last time/eternally)
is left to detumesce, just
another BJ, another JC.

POEM

My cheeks threw themselves as fuel
into the fire of the kiss and then in
succession the rest flesh bone all
features flowed thusward until my
entire body was gone burned away
in the flue space that held between
two mouths turned ash the heart
or hearth that cannot last the night.

[UNTITLED]

each a prey to self's salt
though impervious to sea's
mermaids must never weep
their tears would rust erode
their scales their souls

[UNTITLED]

Fucking; nightcrawlers smashing my anonymous.

JUNK

Nothing evicts our everydayself
(our (as Heidegger calls it) *they-self*)
like a glimpse of that tenant within,
Occupant Corpse.

And to think that all the mail addressed to it
is elegant throwaways.

HAIKU

The sweat on my forehead
shines brighter
when it's in my eyes.

STUMPED

I wish I could count
up to one without
first cutting off
nine of my fingers

CONTRIVANCE

The perfect artist is
the one who manages to die
at the hands of the critics.

PRISONER EXCHANGE

After I replace the bars of the cage with my bones and
replace the bones of my body with the bars,
will I have escaped?

[UNTITLED]

A nose surrounded
by a flaw—
hark, that's my face

DIRECTIONS

A kite in the shape
of a map floats
over the land it depicts,

but at night no-one sees
its roads at the end
of which a child feels

his hand tugged upward,
disappearing
in salutations.

WRONG

I wish to be misunderstood;
that is,
to be understood from your perspective.

[UNTITLED]

Nothing could be born if there didn't
already exist a metaphor for it, or if
the whole world wasn't a metaphor for
the non-existence of this nothing, this
none-too-future something.

POEM

The most private part of the clock is the hour,
no, I mean the minute,
or wait, the forever.

The most private part of me is the heart,
no, I mean the nipple,
or wait, the never.

OR NOT TO BE

Not Hamlet but his shadow
shows the clarity of performance—
see how brilliantly it holds its stance,
soliloquy bold and brando.

But then of course it is like all
such primadonnas, liable
to be much too much dependent upon
its prompter, the sun.

[UNTITLED]

Some have a bodied voice
Their tongue its skeleton
Mine's a wraith
Waiting for a wind

KNOT (Hendecasyllabics)

After you've sewn it, bite the thread off my grave—
Please leave no loose seam of me to wave above
The bones unknitting, the flesh unweaving love.

THE DAILY ROUNDS

I keep a TV monitor on my chest
so that all who approach me
can see themselves
and respond appropriately.

PUTATIVE POEM FROM SAMURAI ERA

he made a haiku
before his blade took my head
why not a tanka
tanka would have let me live
fourteen syllables longer

HUMIDITY'S TONES

Four AM, nothing moving, no hurry,
dawn still has time to be choosy
selecting its pinks. But now a breeze
brushes across me—the way my skin
is cooled off by the evaporation
of sweat, this artistry, this system
someters me: when I am blown from
the body of life will it be refreshed?
I dread the color of the answer Yes.

NIGHT THOUGHT

Compared to one's normal clothes, pajamas
are just as caricature as the dreams
they bare: farce-skins, facades, unserious
soft versions of the *mode diem*, they seem
to have come from a posthumousness;
floppy statues of ourselves, slack seams
of death. Their form mimics the decay
that will fit us so comfortably someday.

MY RIVER

The closer it gets to the sea the more
it aches for its source, the wound
that sprung it from the ground.

NOTE

After Cocteau wrote
in his journal that
"Beauty limps"
he did not go out
and break his leg.

PARANOID THOUGHT

My roots are twisted entwining lovers,
Couples passing me on the path, ignoring me,
Always pretending that I am not their flower.

PAST FUTURE

Idly wondering
if the underlined items
in one's itinerary
are more likely
to occur.

Ditto diary.

TYPE-CAST

Of course I refused all roles until
they offered me the lead
in "The Co-Star Killer"

STRANGLEHOLD

9 planets and
1 sun make 10
holes into which
the fingers go
so smoothly but
who is wearing
these gloves that
orbit my throat

OCTNOV

Stickum leaves fluttering down
Pin unpin each path's compass

The season on our sleeve has shown
Another course for us

FEARS (CONT.)

niche niche niche niche
the birds go seeking a covert

eclipse eclipse eclipse eclipse
my shadow hides behind the sun

this this this this
every corner finds a crevice to keep

wish wish wish wish
the oldest word pacifies the youngest infant

THE GETAWAY

It's 1969—and I'm

All iam: down
These libertysplit streets
U.S.A. I

Throw a measuringtape out, run its length,
Throw again, run,
Throw, run.

TRIP

. . .Jesus walking on the water
. . .keeps tripping over
. . .the flying fish

STORMFORM

All the lines of this poem
would like to contain
the sound of the rain
against my windowpane,
but I'm going to have it remain
here.

FOOTNOTE

All of us who lived on earth
and all our loves and wars
may not appear at all
in the moon's memoirs.

from A BACHELOR'S TANKA

copulation entries in the diary there are none
I'll never have a daughter or a son
no woman wants my wrong to go on

[UNTITLED]

so here I am
if truth be told
feeble and lame
either febrile or cold
senile-years-old

CHANGE

Why don't the ranks in a marathon
carry little piggybanks, and listen

to the coins clank around as they run:
wouldn't that be an encouraging sound?

(Oh surely I can't be the only one
the sanguine clashing of cash spurs on!)

WHAT I SAID

Humor is banned in hyena heaven.

[UNTITLED]

are there some
invulnerabilities too
hard to bear perhaps
the bulletproof vest
stabs itself in secret

'QUOTE UNQUOTE'

Who wrote that we use our children to forget
the size of our parents, or is that really
a quote? And if it isn't, and if I forget
to write it, does that mean that someone will—

But what if someone forgets to write the words
that bring me here, that let me be born?
Oh micro-mini-soul, you, my shirking ego,
your quotemarks would just hang there in the air
like wings without a bird.

MAY EAGLES GUARD YOUR GRAVE!

The weird thing is,
I can't remember if the above
is a phrase I read or heard somewhere,
or if I wrote it myself.
(And, is it a blessing, or a curse?)

DAYS

Ceilings ring with morning's occasions;
but evening's toll us to the floor.

[UNTITLED]

I beg myself bare
I cry my knees
For a penny please
A share

[UNTITLED]

in case it forgot
was the apple not
reminded to rot
before being put
into Eve's hand

POST

the one skull I'll never find
between my teeth is mine

anyone else's skull I may
(all the dystopians say)

have to suck the brains
out of if no food remains

postnuke postplague
(I'll crack it like an egg)

AUDIENCE

Murderous the fist
of their paws condemns
us all to die of applause:
in this circus minimus
even Coriolanus must
nurse and gnaw and showcase
his scars when the next
closeup comes.

DEAR ADVICE COLUMNIST

I recently killed my father
And will soon marry my mother;
My question is:
Should his side of the family be invited to the wedding?

[UNTITLED]

only when
the welcome-mat is
exactly centered
at its core
can a labyrinth
begin

ANCIENT MEASURES

As much as someone could plow in one day
They called an acre;
As much as a person could die in one instant
A lifetime—

TO X

You're like a scissors
popsicle I don't know to
whether jump back
or lick

MY LIFE BY ME

Every autobiography
longs to reach out
of its pages
and rip the pseudonym
off its cover.

HAIR POEM

Hair is heaven's water flowing eerily over us
Often a woman drifts off down her long hair and is lost

ALTERNATE FATES

What if right in
the middle of a battle
across the battlefield the wind
blew thousands of
lottery tickets, what then?

PERFECTION

Cueballs have invented insomnia in an attempt to forget eyelids

3 A.M.

Time to pare down, pull in, simplify;
—I'll buy a dark coat, move my lips when I read
the bestseller lists . . .

POEM TO POETRY

Poetry,
you are an electric,
a magic, field—like the space
between a sleepwalker's outheld arms!

MADE FOR EACH OTHER

Today a fashion-model stopped me on the street
And asked me to marry her because
She said
She wanted to eat all the rat-poison in the world for
her wedding-supper

THE THIRST

Light through the green leaves
drinks an absinthe of itself,
entering the earth
as forthwith, as fleshed.

Sweat dripping from a sundial
regulates the time
for those who wait
their turn at the spigot.

TWO EPIGRAMS FROM A NOTEBOOK DATED 1984

1. [The ageing epigrammatarian]

Youth's engine
of thumbs revs
and purrs—

Oh:
I am all
fingers now.

2. [Plus ça change . . .]

When young
I was attracted to what they call
Older women.

Older now
I am attracted to what they call
Old women.

BEDDYBYE

Just hope that when you lie down your toes are a firing-squad

I SHOULD HOPE SO

Next year when this book is
pulped and the pulp recycled to
print your Collected Poems, will I
still be here still writing this?

SECURITY

If I had a magic carpet
I'd keep it
Floating always
Right in front of me
Perpendicular, like a door.

POEM

Flinging your door keys
into the wishingwell will
not unlock the secrets
of what you wish for
down in your own depths,
and is not even funny.

SLEEP

We brush the other, invisible moon.
Its caves come out and carry us inside.

POEM

All my soapbubbles dance on daggerpoint.
I throw dice while jacking off and cum snake-eyes.
Where there are twins one is wearing a mask.
My enemies list consists of nothing but autographs.

[UNTITLED]

that poem I was working on in 1959
and the half-done one-act play from 1969
the novel I spent 1979 starting
the painting I made sketches for throughout 1989
and the website I planned to debut 1999
are around here somewhere
maybe I should
 finish them up today

WHERE

are the arrows that
bear bandages instead
of feathers at
their ends

OCCUPATION

Error is everywhere,
but one might hope
that the graves of surveyors
would at least be dug
the correct distance apart.

POEM!

Shh, you'll wake up the stains on my bedsheets.

POEM

Night, in whose death did your ennui take refuge?
The women all lay their kerchiefs on the water, and
stepped back.

POEM

The brow is the face's map,
on which can be read
the twists and turns it took
to get here. Yet the seams
and cracks on one's footsoles
show that only through detour
can the road reach itself.

WHAT ABOUT PENS?

Always remember that day follows day,
but night precedes night—
and that your hands are merely microscopes for pencils to
look through.

LOVE, HATE, LIFE, DEATH, MAMA, WATER, ETC.

If everyone on this planet was forced to write
one word on a piece of paper, their favorite

word, the resulting anthology might add up to less
than Shakespeare, who had, or so I've read,

a 40K vocabulary: wouldn't most of us
just put down the same few words; how many could

resist the usual abstract homilars, our limited
minds consisting of each other, non sequitir. I would

be ashamed to show that book to my UFO guests,
no matter how repeated or urgent their requests.

MINOR POEM

The only response
to a child's grave is
to lie down before it and play dead

HOLY SHIT

Gosh golly Galway Kinnell's pig is holy and I
Am holy too and so are you and gee if I could only
Find the name of the right saint to throw in here they
Would print this next to his in all their anthology.

Note:

After Kinnell's "Saint Francis and the Sow."

THE FINAL WORD

Our farewells lack the plausibility of our departures.

STORM: FARMBOY DREAMING TO REACH THE SEA

I skiffed up rivers
and creeks of lightning
till thunder
split my covers

and down I drowned
lung by lung
to a stone
of salt the cows licked.

TANKATOWN

This island has
Been discovered by a great explorer,
But fortunately,
News of the discovery
Has not reached here yet.

BREAKFAST

You know how I like my dawns god— 'll
Just tap off this nubei-pink 'n' 'n'
Call yuh call
 That a 3 minute dawn?!!

You need a new timer old timer

POEM

The amputation of
my stilts has left
me leveled, eye
to eye with what
should have been
cut off, myself.

ADULTERER WITH NO MOUTH AMUSES WORLD*

Not having a mouth is no joke! Imagine an ax
left by somebody, sinksank into some tree-trunk:
and each day you go by, the embedded ax seems
higher, higher, until finally, one day, jumping,
you're just barely able to brush the fine of the
grain of the bottom of the ax-handle with your
fingertips—and yet the tree has not grown. Nor
have you shrunk. Imagine: imagine trying to
explain this to someone if you didn't have a mouth.

* Newspaper misprint

THE RUINS-READER

I-beams uphold that wall—
You-beams bolster me: guess
Which one is going to fall.

[UNTITLED]

I tried but
they wouldn't let me put
tombstones on
the merrygoround
for a ride

EVICTIVE

If the body is a house,
eventually that house
pushes us
from its rooms
out
onto its ledges.

Age must live on a ledge.

COURSE

Our ship needs wheels
to sail across these
waves of stone if
Medusa is our
figurehead.

[UNTITLED]

Nakedness exists only an instant—
Quickly becomes flesh, becomes thought:
The night is a torch of comas . . .

[UNTITLED]

As a detail in a painting
frames that painting in
the often memory,
so, for me, your face is
surrounded by your eyes. Aura!

INTERRUPTUS

Wait. What are you.
I'm a poet. I write filler for suicide-notes. Like:
I love you.
Alright. Continue.

[UNTITLED]

Once I had to leave you so
I arranged for earth-tremors at night
so in your sleep you'd think I was caressing you—

THE AMNESIAC'S NAME

Whatever it is it is
The only alias
Anonymous never uses.

POEM

If the poet could say to everybody,
“I release you from your duty to me
so that you might tend more purely
the grass and the trees
and all the earth,” then the poet
could say to eternity,
“OK, let’s go—we’re free.”

WEIGHED

Always jumping from one pan
of the scale to the other, always
trying to measure
your absence.

THE TENTATIVES

If the arrow is merely
An elongated bullseye

Do I know this head
(Target that grins and winks)

Like mine surrounded
By eye speedbreaks

[UNTITLED]

Searching it goes,
alone at night,
—my beacon of ashes.

A STROLL IN THE COUNTRY

Here for ear-rings my lobes
Are pierced by scythes
Whose handletips bump along
The very ground I despise!

[UNTITLED]

trying to find the name
five letters first letter J
of an ancient prophet
or god which I need
to complete my cross
word puzzle and
my cross

SIC TRANSIT

Tangentially
 the sun
unites itself in us,
 forged
by our transparency
 into
another shadow
 to avert
one's eyes from.

[UNTITLED]

They wandered through the hand in hand.

ODD

Hard rhymes of childhood ride
me back to lack's kitchen

in which it's leftovers again:
from the cyclops cupboard

I plop another half-ate
Ulysses onto my plate.

ENLIGHTENMENT OR SENILITY?

The night is paced with stars
Day spaced by birds' wings
At last the spread of things
Has replaced my particulars

[UNTITLED]

Octopus floating
in earth's ink-ore core
whose arms extend
up here as trees
may your branches squirt
their black across
my pages please

FLAWLESS

Mopbucket toed across a jeweled floor.

To scrub down between these gemstuds is hard,
and yet I have to cleanse every dust-shard
that might perturb the great ones who walk here.

Only rubies diamonds pearls and other
beautifuls can their bare soles encounter.

[UNTITLED]

Check out the Obituaries—each
day there's another page and
guess what, those fucks,
there's nobody on it but us.

METAPHOR VS. METONYMY

As the hand carries on the function of the
sleeve to a somewhat absurd degree, so you
could take over for me if we ever finish
this sentence, whose period is its cufflink.

VISION

moon of all means
sun of all ends

the TV screens
whatever day

or night sends
me away

SUMMER DAYS

a butterfly with a sandwich
bite out of one wing flies away
from the inhabitoads of our shadow
or tries to

[UNTITLED]

Do they let you still keep your crutches when
they crucify you, as if you could even manage
the goshdarn things with your hands out like that.
Heck, they'd have to nail them up to your armpits.

LUST

The parachutist wearing stilts so long they reach the ground
Wants
To jump anyway.

SNAGGYPOO SNUGGUMS POEM

Morning always lets down strings, knots
of light to be untied by our hair—
but by the soar of night's coiffure,
all them puppets lie back in their cots.

FINALS

My classmates
wrote the answers
on my skin in
invisible ink then
during the Test
set fire to me

They passed
I passed away

PROGRESS

I advance a few whines,
then am driven back
twice as many whimpers.

WINTER SUN

Full-stop, period, dot,
erased at times by birds.

Or asterisk, whose footnote
clouds our breath with words.

THEIRTOWN

a lack of streetsigns shows
those who live here
more fortunate than us
they never need to know
where they are

TRY ME ON FOR SIZE

My head is put on and taken off
by one thought after another,
though strangely it seems to fit
none of them. And yet somehow it
never goes out of style, that hat.

[UNTITLED]

the past and the future
are my parents
meeting for the first time
when I die

[UNTITLED]

now that I die
my past becomes as endless
as my future used to be

[UNTITLED]

Eternity gnaws its thirst.
Its tusked planets rut suns raw.
Its grapes mist the sea.
But sleep flows to the fallen.

MAYBE (TO X)

a stopsign stranded
in a sea of cacti
won't grow needles
maybe but then

even I take on some
characteristics
of human when
I'm with you

[UNTITLED]

Silence disguises itself
as vowels, but the loudness
of consonants is also a ruse,
a mask worn to betray
the words we chose to say
only for their echoes.

[UNTITLED]

a jet zooming by
may see climbers on a cliff
and never know if
those souls ascend or descend—
to the fast slow has no end

[UNTITLED]

The shorter the poem the
longer the words.
The shorter the poem the
more endless it must be.

[UNTITLED]

Age retracts me, filling my hands
with shirtcuffs as I shrink, reduced
to secondchild. My skin is
smoke from a paper house, my hair.

Prepare a needle sea for me to walk on.

(Prepare me. Make sure
my cries are wrapped up in a leaf.)

31 SYLLABLES

even the wisest
(even the esteemed poets
who when I was young
acclaimed me as promising)
have at times been proven wrong

PAINING VS. POETRY

Painting is a person placed
between the light and a
canvas so that their shadow
is cast on the canvas and
then the person signs their
name on it whereas poetry
is the shadow writing its
name upon the person.

FOOTNOTE TO CAVAFY

Sure hope them barbarians
Will allow us to pay them
To take photographs of them
Before they slaughter us.

BAD HABIT

At least once a day,
everyday,
to ensure that my facial
compatibility with God's is nil,
I smile.

[UNTITLED]

mute/hard
forboden
words
line the mountain
down which we melt—
stones that wore our
trickle tongues away

LESSON

Even if the mountain I climbed
Proved to be a duncecap really,
It was only on gaining its peak
That that knowledge reached me.

ESCAPE PLAN

I examine
my skin

searching for
the pore

with EXIT
over it

BASH (ten versions of *furuike ya*)

If I were a pond
and some frog jumped into me
I wouldn't respond.

I am a pond but
when a frog gets intimate
I keep my mouth shut.

I may look like scum
but some frogs can poke this pond
to orgasm come.

This pond is so old
even its frogs want it sold
to build the new road.

This pond is old as
me. That's how bad-off it is.
Frog-visits, I doze.

You're old, pond—the same
as me. But when your frogs come
you recall each name.

This pond is year-scored
as me. But frogs that shake it
up just make me bored.

I'll float in this pond,
fearing each frog that jumps down
will wash me aground.

This pond is old too—
But when a frog jumps into
It, it still sounds new.

This pond is dead earth
But listen to its rebirth
When frogs take a bath.

FURU YOU, EEKY YA

*

Ya, the old wash-hole—
wait-a-fuck—a frog?—oh, no!—
goes splasho Basho.

*

Ya, the old North Pole
where Santa Frog (ho-hop-ho)
chops a splashin'-hole!

*

Ya, old-boys brothel—
watch Oscar Wilde get Basho
to wet his tadpole.

*

Ya, here's to Basho!—
there's one frog-boozin' dude you
should raise your glass to.

*

Whoa, Ranger Basho!
frog-herd's at the water-hole—
leggo your lasso.

POEMPATH: PERIOD

Each syllable
a steppingstone
till you stumble
on this one.

EVERY RIFT WITH ORE

How fiercely foilsome the facial knife shivs
its two blades up to where the forehead ends
as wound-deep-wedged widow's-peaks: how weakly
the old hero hair-line fights back and fends,
each pass of day fewer gray strands save me—
how deadly dull's the duel our sword lives.

[UNTITLED]

Hamlet in the nunnery kneels
to take his veilful vow
while Ophelia scales
with sword and bow
the enemy's walls

MY THEORY

The universe's mission is to expand,
all scientists now agree; yes, but why
should that be its quest, they question—

Based on my experience, my theory:
if one remains in the same place, one
must pay rent, life's made me understand.

Landlords and clerics may disagree
with me, but look, see every galaxy
sneak out the back, staircase in hand?

BATHROOM MIRROR

Every morning the glass
empties my face
of its night and then
as its day is poured in
I feel forsaken and
my eyes strain longingly
down the drain.

MOVIE-Q's

*

Ben Lyons was typically blunt
in *I Cover the Waterfront*—
his cute co-star Claudette Colbert
could have frenched it: 'Ze waterfront, I co-vair.'

*

Attack of the 50 Foot Woman
is not a film appeals to everyone—
but I, I like the way it feels, I guess,
to have a whole town look up my dress.

*

Although by gorgeous Gene Tierney
he was loved, and loved sincerely,
Richard Widmark proved pretty shitty.
The flick? *Night and the City*.

*

*Those Incredibly Strange Creatures Who
Stopped Living and Became Mixed-up Zombies* blew
my mind, man. Like wow! (—Was I crazy? Was I sick?
Maybe I shouldn't have watched it through that Thai-stick.)

*

Basic Instinct 2 avoids the great esthetic error of *I*
by not having any Moviestars appear but the sheer Sharon:
its other no-name actors fade to shadows in this Dantean
vision of the heavenly ("Eat me!") Stone alone up there on the
screen.

*

I know Jack Nicholson played a cameo—
and Elton John played a song or so—
and Ann-Margaret played his mommy—
but *who* the hell else was in *Tommy*?

*

How many of you gazeekoids went yumyum
Watching that transmuted geek Jeff Goldblum
Rip off his own ear and eat it? *The Fly* was great!
(And if he'd unzipped his fly, ripped *that* off, and ate?)

*

Oh sight that might have made an atheist of God,
seeing the screenwriter-producer-star of *Panther Squad*
—auteur divine, Sybil Danning—opt to not go topless!
(Even John the Baptist 'd put it on his flop-list.)

*

Where Garbo got the great John Barrymore
To play the part of her perfect paramour,
Poor Joan Crawford was stuck with brother Lionel:
Life is c'est la vie at der *Grand Hotel*.

*

It's a crime shame that that scene where
Sean Penn tied his wife Madonna to a chair
and then put on her dress and licked her thighs
got like totally cut out of *Shanghai Surprise*.

*

*

Note: I don't know if the Movie-Q constitutes a form per se,
but I made up some rules for it: the complete name of the film
must appear within a quatrain rhymed AABB. The Movie-Q must
try to be funny, or piquant, or pointed. Etc., etc., though
actually I can't think of any more rules.

POEM FOR NOW

I live bent over now
like pages folded down
in books, the ones
I meant to get back to
but won't.
These are my dog-ear years.
What I write now
will never
be read again.

[UNTITLED]

perhaps I still wake up

I still live perhaps

but I hope

I hope I do it for sloppiness sake

POEM

The thumb is
the scoop of the hand
and often
it empties it.

Tongue
head
ditto.

GYPTIAN

architect of the Sphinx
must have sketched his first plan
knelt down with a finger
to draw lines in the sand—
isn't that how he began?

AND SO ON

suicide sex it's so much fun
you take 3/4ths of a fatal dose
and then fuck till you pass out
you cunnil her or fellate him
while they slit their wrists and
then you call 911 and so on

VANT

First, cover yourself with chameleons.

Then walk down the street.

The one who recognizes you as you is your enemy.

The one who recognizes you as Greta Garbo is your lover.

LOW-ROOT THOUGHT

beyond reign
of human
songs remain
Celan says
meaning his
but not mine

SUMMIT

on this hill at sunset
I will feel the contrast
of it going down
and me up here for
a moment as total

[UNTITLED]

The snowman's luggage
is always enroute.

INTHREADABLE

each snowflake's
a maze
whose center
no other flake can find
the ways
to enter

[UNTITLED]

mirror smashed in a snowfall—
the flakes will find each face
like themselves to be unique
as long as it remains lost
in the blizzard of shards

WAS

Age 20 to 40
everyday I said
"I wish I was dead."

40 to 65
each day I cried
"I wish I was alive!"

65 to whenever
daily I'll whisper
"Wish I was either."

POEM

Even when the roads are empty,
even at night, the stopsign
tells the truth.

WORSE

All my life I had nothing,
but worse than that,
I wouldn't share it.

[UNTITLED]

having found a penny
atop a weed's aureole
however it got there
is it wrong of me to look
for bucks on roses

[UNTITLED]

someone's lost handkerchief pinned
on our community bulletinboard
and I thought to just touch it
just touch it that's all honest
I wouldn't have done anything else

[UNTITLED]

clearly
my eyeglasses
need cleaning but
but I wasn't looking
at anything

IMPOLITE

in the conference den
impolite to strain one's neck
past all the faces talking
to read what someone left
scribbled on the wall

IN VAIN

I like to look at myself in the dull gold
of the frames that contain erotic paintings
and, as I gaze, ask, as if I cared,
"Will moonlit lashes continue
to surround sunlit eyes?"

WISH I COULD (*AND DO IT IN 31 SYLLABLES*)

like someone whose quick
halt in the midst of traffic
to check his wrist makes
him late for that appointment—
that's how to think about death

[UNTITLED]

the sixth sense is
what the first five use
to delude us into thinking
that all we do here is
see hear touch taste smell

THE TRINITY

I don't recall the faith I was born with
I don't know the faith I will die with
all I can do is hope and pray
that the faith I live with
differs from them in every way

THE COMMUTER'S DREAM

Every morning an afterdinner mint
dissolves around us. In it, cars touch,

like tiny hands at a football huddle—
headlights. Rush-hour pushes through mist

or dark its stubborn, pre-peekaboo path;
a worm fed into a pencil-sharpener.

TOWERS

1.

Pisa's power to bend the head sideways
must be envied by history,
which can only force it forwards—
and Babel of course is praised
in every book (on every page)
for the way it slanticulates our words.

2.

Galileo drops a pound of lead
and a pound of feathers from the top,
one of which hits you on the head,
but which one—
(which head?)—
It makes you think, as well as stop.

3.

Every tower around here
is always in need of repair,
due to the superstitious habit
of leaning over
to peek into its 13th floor
to make sure it's still not there.

4 TRANSVERSIONS OF GOETHE'S *WANDERERS NACHTLIED II*

Every hill is overcome
with peace, the trees are a dome
down which the wind echoes
to mass one last breath;
the forest song has rung its close,
bird by bird, descending—
await your death
no longer. Listen: this too is ending.

Over all the hilltops is peace;
in all the treetops no breeze
endures, merely the breath of one;
the birds are gone, or at least
their song has ceased. You have your wish:
desist, desist! Thy will on earth be done.

You can feel your breath stilling all the hills,
and oh, what an undulant illusion!
The birds have wrapped their wings around their bills
and sleep: soon you too will be no one.

Now peace envelops
the hilltops
and every tree's summit
seems to submit
its final breath to the pall
and harshly over-all
hushing of even
the baby birds' calls when
you, you and your haste, come near—
Beware: your place is here.

THE CYCLE

what's the use
waking all night
to write down truths
which dawn quite
easily refutes

[UNTITLED]

in the hand's cup
the palm is
an irreducible drop
a shrunken gnosis
no one can drink up

MINUS

For time to consist of me,
it would have to halt.
And space, if it wanted to exist of me,
empty.

I forget the other dimensions—

but whatever they are, they
must cease as I
to be me.

THE WOULD BE NONCHALANT

I try to shrug it off, but when my shoulders poke themselves up to form the shrug they get stuck, and I slump down trapped in between these shoulder-peaks; so I live in the valley of a shrug, in its perpetual shadow.

TROTH

if you drew a string through
the entwined fingers of lovers
might it come out all knots
which would then in theory right
be too tight to be untied

BOTHERSOME

what's that clatter-clack a jack
in the box having a heart attack

open him up crack the seal
but if we let the poor guy out we'll

just have to close him in again
and this time with a coffin

so let's save an hour or a minute
and bury his self with him in it

FLAKE TAKES

Snow,
echo
of lightyears,
your time it appears
to reach the ground
is never now.

Like truth
the snowflakes peek
from behind a veil.

Sunset: the snowfall lacks
(altitude vs. attitude)
the hauteur
(condensation vs. condescension)
of the skyfall.

All this missive whitefold
is franked by a pattern
its own; stamped unique:
'Return to Sender'—?
No: *Deceased*.

UNSPEAKABLE

A comma is a period which leaks.

TWO CRIMES

1

poem/accomplice
distracting your
attention for
a second or
is it hours
while I pick
and pick
your pocket's
flowers

2

the holdup went down
as the clockhands show
at 1:55 so
I refused to stick em up
because I never no
I never mime
time

[UNTITLED]

Your nakedness: the sound when I break an apple in half.

SHUT FLIGHT

the knob's the head
the hinges open-spread
would make wings

but see the keyhole
like an eye that seeks
its beak

why does
the doorbird leave its nest
only when it's closed

VALUE

the weapons I purchased
didn't finish off the fascists

the love I sold my own for
did not put paid to them either

why'd I never think to try
whatever it was I got free

NOT THIS WAY

if that bird soars across
this wall which halts us
why does it then
fly back here again

LEAD

If I could fill these lines
up with pencils instead
of letters I would. Less

metaphor meaning or
superstition might adhere
to those writing-sticks

than this. Let the tool be
a substitute for the work;
the eraser for the point.

POEM

Here in town the sound
of bells must compete with
me for room, but out
over the waves can zoom
alone. Across the sea
bells travel unimpededly.

SAY TO SAY

Say ten snowflakes light on your fingertips,
one on each, the ten snowflakes that match
your ten fingerprints in pattern the most,
the closest it's possible to get and yet remain
a similie, since similies like M-and-M's melt
not in your hand but in your mouth say.

IN ORDER

the dead you
wrote about
in order to
forget about
so you could
write about
the living are
still living there
where you aren't

NOBLESSE OBLIGE

I always put on a whole-slick tuxedo
when I jump off tall buildings so

when I'm sprawl in the streetdust
that passersby can say, "Oh no: and just

when he was at the height of his success;
look at that tux—now that's the way to dress."

[UNTITLED]

Long candle, ponder, short candle, think.

A MEDIUM TO DOUBTERS

How can I make you sit
Beneath the clairvoyant's
High-table at seance,
And, while her tongue transmits
Some tremulant spirit's
Long-withheld voice in trance,
Make you tongue her clit,
You true communicants?

[UNTITLED]

Fingerprints look like ripples
because time keeps dropping
another stone into our palm.

POEM

I heard the abide.

How low it was.
How loud it was.

How soon it ended.
And what it said.

I heard its words
poured, pouring
from the sky.

The clouds were frauds.

The froth lost its mind in an ear.

[UNTITLED]

The moon's a wishingwell you threw
all your sources at, but you wasted them.
Everything is coming true,
but for the last time.
The moon will soon be tossed into you.

SENIOR DISCOUNT

Poor King Lear must use both hands to raise a Big Mac to his mouth.

STRUNG

Song proceeds from a sort
of inner rectitude, gut
aligned with throat,
foot to palate straight
as sync: the link
tightens each thought on
a taut cord word caught
between this tension, strung
toe and tongue. Song
proceeds all wrong
unless it's wrung.

THE SAME WITH POEMS

When you set the table you want to
place the knives and forks and napkins
so perfectly, so alignedly, that everyone
will hesitate to pick them up, to break
the symmetry. The food should rot
while the diners gaze down dazed.

DISCRIMINATION

Although not lab-test verified,
I would guess that the pages of porno
magazines turn yellow and crumble
from the sperm shot onto them
faster than the poems in my books
turn yellow and crumble from
the saliva spat at them by readers—
or is it a fallacy on my part to assume
that the products of love are always
more acidic, more corrosive
than the products of loathing?

SIMILE FROM THE PAST

When a felon was condemned to die
they would place a black cloth upon
the white wig of the judge before
he pronounced that sentence high—

And that heritage is what this page
shows, words, words in their fatality,
solemnly lowered in curt characters,
whose bald ink declares me guilty.

SKETCH FOR AN ARTIST

A paper lighthouse with crayon beacons
that make visible
a glass clinked against a waterfall
to test the acoustics for
a concert where we sit and watch
a thumbprint
howl out its whorls—

I can draw things like these anytime
but I can't write them.

IN PASSING

in an opaque ocean
the transparent fish
reflect each other

WEBSTERS OFFICIAL ANTHOLOGY OF AMERICAN POETRY

doesn't exist. But
if it did, they wouldn't
put me in it.

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"[T]he remarkable poet Bill Knott is not the type to win prizes, become the pet of academic critics or cultivate acolytes. But this thorny genius has added to the art of poetry." —Robert Pinsky, *Washington Post*, 2005

"For the past thirty-five years Bill Knott has shown himself to be one of our very best poets and perhaps the most original. . . . I think he is one of the few poets of my generation who will remain with us." —Stephen Dobyns, *Harvard Review* (Spring 2002)

"Bill Knott is a meld between Gerard Manley Hopkins and MTV, producing poems with the former's violent beauty and the latter's largely ironic postmodern presence." —Mary Jo Bang, *Lingua Franca* (May 2000)

"Knott was an incredibly important poet to me and still is; I think Bill Knott is a genius and probably the least known great poet in America. It's really kind of pathetic that he's not as well known as he was even thirty years ago because he's even better now." —Thomas Lux, *The Cortland Review* (August 1999)

"Bill Knott is one of the best poets writing in America. Without question, he is the most original." —Kurt Brown, *Harvard Review* (Spring 1999)

"Bill Knott is a genius." —Tom Andrews, *Ohio Review* (1997)

"It is no accident that the major British and American poets of the 19th and 20th century were outsiders. . . . The most original poet of my generation, Bill Knott, is also the greatest outsider." —Stephen Dobyns, *AWP Chronicle* (1995)

"Bill Knott is the secret hero of a lot of poets. . . . [P]oets who differ radically from Knott look to his work for the shock of recognizing themselves." —David Kirby, *American Book Review* (1991)

"Bill Knott's poems . . . are the poems Beckett's Gogo would write if he were among us." —Sharon Dunn, *Massachusetts Review* (1990)

"[Knott's 'Poems 1963-1988' is] a powerful and original book, a record of one of the most disturbing imaginations of our times. Few people can create a world so completely and concisely as Knott does time and time again." —Kevin Hart, *Overland* (1990)

"Knott is no parlor poet. His work is the most sharply original of any poet in his generation." —Jim Elledge, *Booklist* (1989)

"Among people who know his work, Bill Knott is regarded as one of the most original voices in American poetry." —Charles Simic, blurb for *Poems 1963-1988* (1989)

"Knott sets up principles far outside most of those we know, and he always writes up to and beyond those standards." —Sandra McPherson, blurb for *Outremer* (1989)

“Bill Knott is an American original. No one else could have imagined what James Wright once referred to as Bill Knott’s ‘indispensable poems.’” —Stuart Dischell, *Harvard Book Review* (1989)

“I think Bill Knott is the best poet in America right now.” —Thomas Lux, *Emerson Review* (1983)

“Bill Knott’s first book, ‘The Naomi Poems,’ published in 1968, established him instantaneously as one of the finest poets in America. Subsequent publications deepened and reinforced that reputation.” —Andrei Codrescu, *The Baltimore Sun* (1983)

“[Knott’s poems are] shrouded almost always in the glaring and polluted light William Burroughs foresaw with such brilliance in ‘Naked Lunch.’ In fact, Knott, Poet of Interzone, is the poet Burroughs seemed to call for in his seminal novel. . . . Knott is one of a handful of original poets working today. His genius suits the times better than any poet I’ve read . . .” —Robert Peters, *Los Angeles Times* (1983)

“With the death of Berryman, Knott seems to me to be the chief embodiment in language today of Mallarmé’s spirit. . . .” —John Vernon, *Western Humanities Review* (1976)

“. . . Knott’s originality as a poet: he is absurd and classical and surrealist all at once. A marvelously impossible animal.” —Paul Zweig, *Contemporary Poetry in America* (1974)

“At his best, Knott is a kind of surreal classicist. . . . He is already a formidable poet.” —Karl Malkoff, *Crowell’s Handbook of Contemporary American Poetry* (1974)

“[Knott’s] images are astonishing. Whatever you may think of Knott’s poems, they have not been written before by anyone else. . . . Poetry such as this strikes me as extending our awareness.” —Louis Simpson, *New York Times Book Review* (1969)

“Bill Knott is one of the most remarkable poets to appear since James Wright and James Dickey.” —Ralph J. Mills, Jr., *Poetry* (1969)

“I think [Bill Knott] is one of the best poets I know.” —James Wright, blurb for *The Naomi Poems* (1968)

“I think the most significant group of young poets are those published in *Choice* and *The Sixties*, and the most impressive of these is certainly William Knott.” —Kenneth Rexroth, *Harper’s Magazine* (June 1965)