Classic Poetry Series

Bill Knott

- 50 poems -

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Bill Knott (1940 -)

Bill Knott, originally known as Saint Giraud, was born in Carson City, Michigan. He is an associate professor at Emerson College in Boston. He first received recognition with The Naomi Poems published in 1968.

He published this work under the pseudonym Saint Geraud (a figure who, it was claimed, lived from 1940 to 1966). Poet Thomas Lux wrote of the collection: "The best poems in this first collection … confront the reader with their directness and imagination …. They're poems of anguish and frustration because the poet takes responsibility." Knott's poems are sometimes surreal, with startling juxtaposed images. Critic Meghan O'Rourke noted the variety of forms in Knott's poetry, identifying the simple style of some poems and the "highly-torqued syntactic compression" of others. In The Unsubscriber, she found "the mode alternately heroic and vernacular, the subjects ranging from ecocide to the degradations of age to meditations on the sword of Damocles and Rilke's archaic torso."

Knott, who was an orphan, spent a year in an institution for the mentally ill in Elgin, Illinois, when he was 15; he worked with his uncle at a farm in Michigan, spent two years in the army, and wrote his first book while working as a hospital orderly. He taught for many years at Emerson College in Boston.

Works:

Books

The Naomi Poems: Book One: Corpse and Beans (1968), Follett, under the pseudonym 'St. Geraud'
Aurealism: A Study (1969), Salt Mound Press. (chapbook)
Auto-Necrophilia; The _____ Poems, Book 2 (1971), Big Table Pub
Nights of Naomi (1972), Big Table (chapbook)
Love Poems to Myself (1974), Barn Dream Press, Boston (chapbook)
Rome in Rome (1976), Release Press
Selected and Collected Poems (1977), SUN
Becos (1983), Random House
Outremer (1989), University of Iowa Press
Poems 1963-1988 (1989), University of Pittsburgh Press
Collected Political Poems 1965-1993 (1993) Self-published chapbook
Sixty Poems of Love and Homage (1994) Self-published chapbook
The Quicken Tree (1995), Boa Editions, Hardcover Softcover
Laugh at the End of the World: Collected Comic Poems 1969-1999 (2000), Boa Editions
The Unsubscriber (2004), Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Stigmata Errata Etcetera (2007), Saturnalia Books

(Desire)Threadbare(Desires)

 -to S.

The light lay in shreds across the bed,
only your waking could make it whole;
resuming its costume of day, its role
which seems to overnight get ragged—

Fate latent as weights in theater
curtainhems, what soul is sewn here
to be rung down at last, divested
of these disguises. But if we are

bared by such cloth as cries in this
lament for the sun's fragility,
would I dare now to shake you astir—

to drape over you my shadow, whose
myth-ex-machina remains all mine,
mine, and therefore torn from yours.

Bill Knott

(End) of Summer (1966)

I'm tired of murdering children.
Once, long ago today, they wanted to live;
now I feel Vietnam the place
where rigor mortis is beginning to set-in upon me.

I force silence down the throats of mutes,
down the throats of mating-cries of animals who know they are extinct.
The chameleon's death-soliloquy is your voice's pulse;
your scorched forehead a constellation's suicide-note.

A phonograph needle plunges through long black hair,
and stone drips slowly into our veins.
The earth has been squandered by the meek.
And upsidedown in the earth a dead man walks upon my soles when I walk

A baby is crying.
In the swaddling-pages
a baby.

'Don't cry. No Solomori's-sword can
divide you from the sky.
You are one. Fly.'

I'm tired, so tired.
I have sleep to do.
I have work to dream.

Bill Knott

(Poem) (Chicago) (The Were-Age)

'My age, my beast!' - Osip Mandelstam

On the lips a taste of tolling we are blind
The light drifts like dust over faces
We wear masks on our genitals
You've heard of lighting cigarettes with banknotes we used to light ours with Jews
History is made of bricks you can't go through it
And bricks are made of bones and blood and
Bones and blood are made of little tiny circles that nothing can go through Except a piano with rabies
Blood gushes into, not from, our wounds
Vietnamese Cuban African bloods
Constellations of sperm upon our bodies
Drunk as dogs before our sons
The bearded foetus lines up at the evolution-trough
Swarmy bloods in the rabid piano
The air over Chicago is death's monogram
This is the Were-Age rushing past
Speed: 10,000 men per minute
This is the species bred of death
The manshriek of flesh
The lifeless sparks of flesh

Covering the deep drums of vision
O new era race-wars jugular-lightning
Dark glance bursting from the over-ripe future
Know we are not the smilelines of dreams
Nor the pores of the Invisible
Piano with rabies we are victorious over
The drum and the wind-chime
We bite back a voice that might have emerged
To tame these dead bodies aid wet ashes

Bill Knott

2 Futilists

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

*

Is there a single inch--
one square millimeter
on the face of our planet
which some animal
human or otherwise
has not shit on?

Is there anywhere even a
pore's-worth of ground--
earth that has never
(not once in its eons)
been covered by what
golgotha of dung?

If such a place exists,
I want to go there
and stand there
at that site
in that spot, truly
and purely for an instant.

Bill Knott

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.

Bill Knott

An Instructor's Dream

Many decades after graduation
the students sneak back onto
the school-grounds at night
and within the pane-lit windows
catch me their teacher at the desk
or blackboard cradling a chalk:
someone has erased their youth,
and as they crouch closer to see
more it grows darker and quieter
than they have known in their lives,
the lesson never learned surrounds
them; why have they come? Is
there any more to memorize now
at the end than there was then"
What is it they peer at through shades
of time to hear, X times X repeated,
my vain efforts to corner a room's
snickers? Do they mock me? Forever?
Out there my past has risen in
the eyes of all my former pupils but
I wonder if behind them others
younger and younger stretch away
to a world where dawn will never
ring its end, its commencement bell.

Bill Knott

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--

Bill Knott

Another Hole for W.R Rodgers

Speak like a singularity, a lack
residing deep inside every lock, just
past the point keys can jab: against all thrust
make safe-ensure your door's core is held back,

for reckless access to that pure center
quarks more quintessence than taking exits
from those pried voids whose secret quickly sates:
ubiquitous if Space presses Enter.

Which inadmissible sill still calls loud
with imagine: our skeleton keeping
each such portal neither open nor shut,

unhoused of that exclusive dustborne cloud
we breathe, though there must be something
it accumulates, accommodates: what?

Bill Knott

Castration Envy #11

Tying the pimp in dreams to a lamppost
His tuxedo wet with wheedled kisses, can
I wake up sucking the footprints of toilets
In jails that glitter like crash-dived marquees.

A dog appears in call letters on my skin.
Twin worlds, who exchange threats via scoreboard
I rival this night, this fight to the death
With enough leftover, ooze for twosies yet.

Either even, I wish I could put on take off
My clothes without first saying to my cock
"Excuse me, is this yours," while the stars

The collected no-shows of eternity, rise.
Hey, remember the way painters gauge perspective?
Me, I cut the thumb off and throw it at stuff.

Bill Knott

Cemetery

Who whispers here is forgotten.

Saliva's emptiest fruit
adorns the stones,
words ripening your mouth
to a spoilation
of silence.

Who speaks here
reads a text that downloads
the screen of his fingernail,
through which nothing's visible
as glass is.

For the memorial
we must kneel
to pick each flower
from amongst its modifiers:
but to do that
one needs a hand bared
of all uses, of all trades:
as ours is not.

Bill Knott

Christmas at the Orphanage

But if they'd give us toys and twice the stuff most
parents splurge on the average kid, orphans, I submit, need more than enough;
in fact, stacks wrapped with our names nearly hid
the tree: these sparkling allotments yearly
guaranteed a lack of--what?--family?--

I knew exactly what it was I missed as we were lined up number rank and file:
to share my pals' tearing open their piles
meant sealing the self, the child that wanted
to scream at all You stole those gifts from me;
whose birthday is worth such words? The wish-lists
they'd made us write out in May lay granted
against starred branches. I said I'm sorry.

Bill Knott

Compact Dusk

Here at the height of the day night change
The color of the sky is uncertain,
The sky depending in which direction
One's eye strains, each of its swatches a strange

Hue which dies too soon and which makes this hour
Linger in the mind transient as a life,
Whose names once known remain another
Posied-up portrait on our palette knife.

Until even I wonder if one tint
Ever survives the harm of seeming unique
(Evening's intrigue, time's singularity.)

Study for its trace, its placemap, I see
— Redundant as a stopsign in italic—
The face on which my profile leaves no print.

Bill Knott

Dearth Demise

Satiety help me I have inhabit
of this world. Extant upon its designs
to be more aimlessly fluttering at
the window, to shadow all the patterns

it offers each sun. In frames far as eye
I draw my words towards a juggler's shards
as if our fallings-down our deaths occurred
but did not involve a lot of colloquialized

arm movements, the body language throws. Thus
the shape of your silence when it speaks me
is different than mine in saying you,

though both of them resemble that spasm hymned as
repose lifepause a happen of sorts the way
the horizon's a long way without meaning to.

Bill Knott

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.

Bill Knott

Escape Plan

I examine
my skin

searching for
the pore

with EXIT
over it

Bill Knott

Excerpts From the Diary of Damocles

I don't dare speak too loudly,
some timbres could be fatal--

that string is not too strong
I think: and at times I have

to breathe. Or maybe I fear
my paraphrastic exhalations

will spoil the oiled perfection
of its sleekness, will mist

over that brightness whose
needle sharp point compasses

my every stray. I am as
edgy in my way as it--

as little-rippled, as subtle.

Prey to vapors, to sudden
icecap thaws, seismic

dicethrows, the world wires me,
I hex myself up to a pitch

of infinite finicky sensitiveness,
alert to every window opening

down in my castle's bowels,
every mousehole emergence.

A simple housefly--a moth
murders my rest when it

mistakes for light that glittering
blade in which every passing

glint is glassed--barometer
of my highest apprehension.

*

I know my fear is only a ploy,
a sticking point in the old

hairsplitting debate of the winds . . .
I the first split personality

divide into a Dam/an Ocles,
a mother and her myopic

son. Or, since everything
is reversed in its mirroring

shaft, a Selcomad, mad and sulky.

Language does this to me.
It inverts my position: King

I am, but await my crown,
unmanned until it come down;

my kingdom lies in twain
to each, I am in half to all.

*

If only I could reach up, up,
and take it in my teeth,

suckle that penile projection,
cloister its unremitting hardness

in the sheath of my throat--

swordswallower who exalts
his posture with this adjunct

second spine, aligning gut with
palate, my groin with my height.

*

Male means to be in the crime
of things here, this frail planet

killed wide, maimed down.
Male means murder, rape and war.

Its indomitable will will not allow
approach. All broach will fail.

It must fall on you or not at all.

*

Insane, isn't it? History hangs
impregnable to the mind, eager

to halve your brain with rift,
intrusion and strife, the warrior's

dissonance. No whole is hallowed,

no peace. Don't let the humor of

this scene (when the phallus
falls the fears recede) attend

you away from its cruelty.

*

I stand here exposed to whose
justice, my crime my Y

chromosome. That Y aims
his prick point down at me.

A dowsing wand that seeks
my artesian quench, my depths

of death. His insistence
sustains me in steel, his encased

incursion covers my melt,
my metal. Each day he rights me:

his richterscaled tremors are
my weather, my wherefore:

his gloss his gleam condemns
my fortunes, his ore loads my gold

with schist. His soliloquy
interrupts mine at every word.

Linebreaks enforced by sword,
his poem sunders my rhythm.

All mine at last is made him.
His blade remembers my name . . .

Bill Knott

Face in the Window

I am a modest house, a house solely
notable for the fact I lived here once.
Its brass plaque depicts an oxygen eye
in which two pupils of hydrogen dance.

Downstairs is where I lit fires whose insights
with approach-velocity froze me, then
singed off into flame. This always happened when
I came close to a truth. Months passed. Years. Nights.

Shall I accommodate myself again,
a humble aquarium of lordly
thumbs, some fin de species? Of course each word

the blackout-moth mutters to my keyboard
shows the snowiest letter on this page is "I"—
must I now plumb its one remaining pane?

Bill Knott

Feeding the Sun

One day we notice that the sun
needs feeding. Immediately
a crash program begins: we fill rockets
with wheat, smoke-rings, razorblades, then,
after long aiming
--they're off. Hulls specially alloyed
so as not to melt before the stuff
gets delivered we pour cattle rivers windmills,
aborigines etcet into the sun which
however, grows stubbornly
smaller, paler. Finally
of course we run out of things to feed the thing,
start shipping ourselves. By now
all the planets-moons-asteroids and
so on have been shoveled in though they're
not doing much good it's
still looking pretty weak, heck, nothing helps!
Now the last few of us left lift off.
The trip seems forever but then, touchdown.
Just before entering we wonder,
will we be enough. There's
a last-second doubt in our minds: can we,
can this final sacrifice, our broughten crumb,
satiate
it--will a glutteral belch burst out then at last,--
and will that Big Burp be seen by far-off telescopes,
interpreted as a nova
by those other galaxies,
those further stars which have always seemed even more
starving
than ours?

Bill Knott

Flashbacks

All it takes is Laura Riding's riding-
crop across my butt, and I'm off:
Git-up horsie she cries astride me as

I crash sweetly onto the carpet.
Boredom what an esthetic,
cleansing the days-
I laud the vintage of my toothpick.

Small-husband to the floor,
my foot stoops in dance,
in courtship intervals.

Putting their clothes on afterwards
the lovers are surprised
at how empty
the buttonholes seem.

Bill Knott

Fragments from the Beach

(Nonasyllabics)

In retrospect the tragic nature
of sea is a taste wept too daily,
too depleted by freedom's rupture;
the eyes have other secrets to see

and deeper use for the detritus
within us: the bright effluvium
of ego dries up, mired as it is
in wealth, that remedial medium.

Blame it on fate, on beach memories--
pebble put in the pocket or shell
fragments; any memento carries
us as much as we it. Time capsule

contains every evening's interval.
The ocean observes its own puddle.

Bill Knott

Goodbye

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

Bill Knott

Hair Poem

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

Bill Knott

Heritage

“...here thy generations endeth in accord.”

I physically resemble my mother
And father and therefore must have been
Adopted, because on my TV screen
The role-children rarely share a feature
With either parent. The fact they're actors
And I'm not is what makes me misbegot—
A matched world of monitors all 2-shot
The mirror daily where I pray these stars

Come: cancel everyone of us whose names
And clans have sundered human unity
Descend always among daughters or sons
To live still, beyond the Net's trivia games,
Till their faces cloned shape ours. Family.
From android to ape, we'll be Thy reruns.

Bill Knott

Ledgelife

The taller the monument, the more impatient our luggage.
Look, look, a graveyard has fancy dirt.
Historians agree: this is the pebble which beaned Goliath.
Every billboard is theoretically as beautiful as what lies unseen behind it.

Mouth: the word's exit-wound.
It is impossible to run away face-to-face.
Shadow has closed the door out of you to you, but not to us.
The sign on the wall advises: Hide your gloves beneath your wings.

Even sculptors occasionally lean against statues.
Migrations?! Fate?! Life swears up at ledgelife.
All the sad tantamounts gather. They want, they say, to errand our ways.

Please aim all kicks at the ground.
Address all blows to the air.
We are to be barely mentioned if at all in the moon's memoirs.

Bill Knott

Lesson

Our love has chosen its appropriate gesture
Which when viewed in the midst of all the gestures
It didn't choose seems almost insignificant.

The gesture our love has chosen is appropriate
We both agree not that we have any choice but
Amidst all those others does seem insignificant.

Is it incumbent on us thus to therefore obliterate
All of the gestures except this insignificant one
Chosen by our love for its own no doubt reasons.

It is up to us to obliterate all other gestures
Though they cluster round thick as presentations
Of war and sacrifice in a gradeschool classroom.

Use of our love's chosen gesture for the obliteration
Of all those foreign gestures is forbidden however
We must find something else to erase them with.

Our love has chosen its appropriate gesture
Which when viewed in the absence of all other gestures
Seems to spell the opposite of insignificant.

Bill Knott

Lifeguard Clinging to a Steeple

Why are all the survivors of the needle's eye
nude, as if their lifethread had disrobed
rather than sewn them. Sans coat-fare,
we proceed it seems only to precede;
birth to burial, are not yet here.

But when did we first start embracing
the wakes of ourselves in each other rather
than each other? As the fruit falls
to hiatus us, its bloom spoiled by last year's cores.

Or the sun whose portrait rots in our pores,
those sweatbeads blurred in closeup but clear afar--
that pointillist pap, that hybrid suicide.

The face carefully tattooed around love's wounds
does not itself look injured.

Bill Knott

Minor Poem

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

Bill Knott

Monopoly

Finally the day dawned when a monopoly owned everything in the world
So it went looking for its stockholders to celebrate
But they were all owned by it they were all dead they were someplace
Their photographs hung in elevators which went up and down up and down carrying nobody
Everyone else was in bed doing exercises to get in shape for noon
Hey the monopoly said let's uncork the World Trade Center and get blotto
Silence
The monopoly scowled
All it wanted was a little good-fellowship, like you get in the highrise apartment-buildings
Then the sky got awful dark
Gee
And everyone was in bed frantically doing those exercises that get us in shape for death
Exercises known as "kissing" "fucking" "caressing"
Everyone was unaware that they had been bought
Or that the earth was about to sell them to the moon
For a little light

Bill Knott

Nuremberg, U.S.A.

In this time and place, where "Bread and Circuses" has
become "Bread and Atrocities," to say 'I love you' is
like saying the latest propaganda phrase...'defoliation'...
'low yield blast'.
If bombing children is preserving peace, then
my fucking you is a war-crime.

Bill Knott

Obsolescent

Bending over like this to get my hands empty
Rummaging through the white trashcans out back
Of the Patent Office I find a kind of peace
Here in this warm-lit alley where no one comes.

Even the rats too they know that nothing new
Is going to get pitched out now--no formula,
Not one blueprint will ever be found in these
Bright bins whose futures are huge, pristine.

Old alleymouth grabbags my attention at times
I see the world flash by out there, glow-glow as
The floors of decontamination chambers-

I go back to my dull, boring search, foraging
For the feel it gives me of the thing which has
Invented me: that void whose sole idea I was.

Bill Knott

On a Drawing by Charles Tomlinson

By a swath of inks the eye
thinks it sees solidities
which alter with the watercolor
way his brush washes its dye

in distance, though even this
finds a faraway fixed not
by the surveyor's plumb but
by the action of the thumb

delaying all the fingers meant
to draw out of the paper,
splashed dry. The clean grain

catches what it should retain
if enough pressure pleasure
is applied to the stain to lie.

Note: Tomlinson is not only a distinctive poet, but a visual artist of repute. His graphics grace the covers of many of his books. This Homage attempts to imitate his verse style, or rather one of his verse styles.

Bill Knott

Picture

Meadow of matchsticks,
soon to be rekindled
by Spring the incendiary.

The exact flame of your blossoms
will ignite the passions
happily sapped by time--

Dripdrop their excess went
and now miners' hats
light up like love before

your vein, the frame of which
is there to depict the drift,
the waste when I painted

all the review copies
they sent me. But those books
open to polar pages where you

and I weigh the ends of this
teeter totem down, you
at the head and nadir me;

where postmortem is
the aura of self-portrait,
its other half regained at last.

Bill Knott

Poem

At your light side trees shy
A kneeling enters them

Bill Knott

Poem (After your death...)

After your death,
Naomi, your hair will escape to become
a round animal, nameless.

Bill Knott

Poem (As your light side trees shy...)

At your light side trees shy
A kneeling enters them

Bill Knott

Poem (Chicago)

'My age, my beast!' - Osip Mandelstam

On the lips a taste of tolling we are blind
The light drifts like dust over faces
We wear masks on our genitals
You've heard of lighting cigarettes with banknotes we used to light ours with Jews
History is made of bricks you can't go through it
And bricks are made of bones and blood and
Bones and blood are made of little tiny circles that nothing can go through
Except a piano with rabies
Blood gushes into, not from, our wounds
Vietnamese Cuban African bloods
Constellations of sperm upon our bodies
Drunk as dogs before our sons
The bearded foetus lines up at the evolution-trough
Swarmy bloods in the rabid piano
The air over Chicago is death's monogram
This is the Were-Age rushing past
Speed: 10,000 men per minute
This is the species bred of death
The manshriek of flesh
The lifeless sparks of flesh

Covering the deep drums of vision
O new era race-wars jugular-lightning
Dark glance bursting from the over-ripe future
Know we are not the smilelines of dreams
Nor the pores of the Invisible
Piano with rabies we are victorious over
The drum and the wind-chime
We bite back a voice that might have emerged
To tame these dead bodies aid wet ashes

Bill Knott

Poem to Poetry

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

Bill Knott

Self(The Poet Passé)Portrait

His task to watch an hourglass wash itself,
A ritual cleansing that leaves him bare,
Though no purification's new enough
To nullify the need for such labor--

Prior soon to repeat, platonic clone,
He should have practiced that horizon
Vocation, camouflage, opening his
Arms wide the better to hide. But of course

If the flesh is fire, bones are the kindling:
Still there but aching to be unbelied
By the lover, unbellied as breaths held
Until all the minutes fall to the wrong

End of the hour and find his final
Efforts,ve faded, dated as (or like) a sundial.

Bill Knott

Sleep

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

Bill Knott

Space

From the trees the leaves came down
until we joined hands with a wand
and that act enabled them
somehow then to reach the ground

where they scuttered round our feet
urging the latter to unite
with a baton as if that act
together with the hands can clasp

a dowsing-stick cut from the same
branch from which we launched
converging on gravity's purge-point

at which point we merged to remove
all consonants from our star-maps.
The infinite consists of vowels alone.

Bill Knott

Story of Or

To pose nakedness is
To refute it. A pose
Is a clothes. Like
Stanzaic arrangements of

The word which should
Ideally, be in pain against
Its w and its d. No slack
Is why such heaves of or

To denude itself could
Make us exude gold, yet when
Was that ever opposite enough

What scream or epigram
This sperm has come
To measure our mouths for.

Note: For 'or' to free itself from 'word,' it must strain ('heave') against the 'w' and the 'd' that enclose it. If, via this strenuous (perhaps squeamish) process, the meaning of 'or' is transmuted from the English into the French as a sort of homage to the pseudonymous author of 'Story of O' (Histoire d'O), then, alchemically speaking, (or so an Aurealist might suggest) it will have risen from the pose of its measures to or-emerge as an else-gasm.

Bill Knott

Stress Therapy

Time, time, time, time, the clock
vaccinates us.
and then even that lacks
prophylaxis.

Ticktock-pockmarked, stricken
by such strokes, we
get sick of prescriptions
which work solely

on the body.
Systole diastole--
It is by its very

intermittency
that the heart knows
itself to be an I.

Bill Knott

Tempestrousseau

The clock is dressed in drag, I mean it wears
space instead of its own proper aspect
but if it wore time, would it disappear
isn't visibility an effect

of transvestism, that shield pastime whose
crosscasual aim unmasks the eye: must you
assume the costume of the other to
be here, to present the sense with an ess. . .

Narcissus saw his guise decked out all ruse,
but if there were none, what would our true clothes
consist of, our rig rags, our regalia—

Whose dapper element dons us: Einstein's
continuum—or Flaubert's condence
that, come the same, the Bovary c'est Moi?

Bill Knott

The Enemy

Like everyone I demand to be
Defended unto the death of
All who defend me, all the
World's people I command to
Roundabout me shield me, to
Fight off the enemy. The
Theory is if they all stand
Banded together and wall me
Safe, there's no one left to
Be the enemy. Unless I of
Course start attack, snap-
Ping and shattering my hands
On your invincible backs.

Bill Knott

The Hunger

If a path to the Gingerbread House
could be established by breaking crumbs
off its edifice and sprinkling them
so as to find what lies behind us

across the featureless fairytale
void of childhood: yet how very quick
that trick wears out when the story's track
takes hold, takes toll, a far-older trail

prevails, we're forced to give up this lost
cause; and the fact is that every last
morsel was gone long before the you

or I might totter our way back here
to try to dissuade all these other
Hansel-Gretels hollering in queue.

Bill Knott

The Misunderstanding

I'm charmed yet chagrined by this misunderstanding--
As when, after a riot, my city's smashed-in stores appear all
Boarded up, billboarded over, with ads for wind-insurance.
Similarly, swimmingly, I miss the point. You too?

And my misunderstanding doesn't stop there, it grows--soon
I can't see why that sudden influx of fugitives,
All the world's escapees, rubbing themselves lasciviously against the Berlin Wall.
They stick like placards to it. Like napalm. Like ads for--

And me, I haven't even bought my biodegradable genitalia yet!
No. I was born slow, but picking up speed I run through
Our burnt-out streets, screaming, refusing to buy a house.
Finally, exasperated, the misunderstanding overtakes me, snatches up

Handcuffs. So now here I am, found with all you others
Impatiently craning, in this queue that rumors out of sight up ahead somewhere,
Clutching our cash eager to purchase whatever it is, nervous
As if bombs were about to practice land-reform upon our bodies,

Redistribution of eyes, toes, arms, here we stand. Then, some new Age starts.

Bill Knott

The Patriots

at the edge of the city in
the garbagedump where the
trucks never stop unloading
a crazy congregation stumbles
from trashmound to trashheap
they smash their fists down on
whatever's intact they tear
to bits the pitifew items
that have remained whole they
rip everything old clothes
papers cans bones to nothing
with their glazed teeth
the enlightened the faithful
every few meters one of them
falls and is torn to shreds by
the others at the edge of
the city where there's a line
waiting to join

Bill Knott

The Unsubscriber

Like all children, you were a de facto
Member of the Flat Earth Society,
Believing nothing but what you could see
Or touch or whatever sense led act to

Fruition: mudpies made summer beneath
A tree whose measured shade endowed decrees
Between light and dark: such hierarchies
Gave you implicit, a sophistic faith--

(Fallacious fellowship!)"
Youth's adherents
Ignore the fact that most factions reject
Their lyric league (which only fools have stayed

Striplings of) and none condone its nonsense:
No-one loves that vain solipsistic sect
You'd never join, whose dues you've always paid.

Bill Knott

To Ripley (Alien 1-4)

Always your face like a space
(Destination: beautiful) ship
Empties its mote of closeup trace
Down screens that blink blank blip

Somewhere between countdown
And coma time is a line
Where waking centuries often
Drained against that measure we find

Our blood redshifts (direction: west)
Until film can clone one sun
With stars both whole and gone

Attending every sequel
We pray for an intent equal
To our interest

Bill Knott

WELTENDE VARIATION # ?

The CIA and the KGB exchange Christmas cards
A blade snaps in two during an autopsy
The bouquet Bluebeard gave his first date reblooms
Many protest the stoning of a guitar pick

Railroad trains drop off the bourgeois' pointy head
A martyr sticks a coffeecup out under a firehose
Moviestars make hyenas lick their spaceship
God's hand descends into a glove held steady by the police

At their reunion The New Faces recognize each other
A spoiled child sleeps inside a thermometer
A single misprint in a survival manual kills everyone
The peace night makes according to the world comes

Note: von Hoddis: author of 'the first Expressionist poem,' Weltende, published in 1910. His poem has been aped innumerable times (Auden's 'The Fall of Rome,' for example), hence the questionmark in my title.

Bill Knott