

Poetry Series

**Lawrence Beck**  
**- poems -**

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## Lawrence Beck()

My advice to anyone reading one of my poems: read it so quickly as you can the first time through. Since I write in a rush, my melody will become most evident if you read in a rush.

I have a web site, , which contains more of my recent poems than the 50 I leave up here. I refresh this site every other month.

Alas, I must add this: if you write to me asking me to read your poems, I may, but I will not comment on them. I am very sick of numbers hogs who troll through a day's list of contributing poets, and ask each one to read his or her poem. If you write well, someone may notice and comment. If you browbeat people into reading your poetry, the comments you receive are worth nothing.

# A Few Words On Behalf Of Rashness

At what point does prudence turn and bite,  
Become a rabid dog, and "good sense";  
Become resignation first, and, later,  
Hopelessness? I worry that yours turned  
And bit you, and the once-great dreams  
You had were neatly folded long ago,  
And thrust into a sack, which you have labeled  
"Not to be, " and even lesser dreams are  
Shunned as doubtful, not what you expect,  
And hopes of any kind only belong to your  
Most silly friends. You have all that you'll  
Ever have, and I, who gave myself to you,  
Am doubtful, shunned, or even placed inside  
The sack of not-to-be because it would have  
Been imprudent to accept my love.

Lawrence Beck

# A Murky Wednesday Morning

The clouds are low. They suffocate,  
And muffle sound, and soak up light.  
The baby's sleeping in her swing,  
Its quiet groans the only indications  
Time and life remain. The world,  
This one, seems so small, and set  
Off so far from all others. Conflict  
Doesn't happen here, nor do elation,  
Laughter, sorrow, any sense that  
How things are will change for better  
Or for worse. All seems set to stay  
The same as an unseen assailant  
Holds a pillow to my face. I don't  
Know why I do not struggle  
As I suffocate.

Lawrence Beck

# Adrift

My eyes move along the words as two dead fish  
Would bump along the river bottom:utterly  
quakes help the Turks  
To kill off dollar's gaining ground.  
The president is contradicting his most recent  
ns of the oligarchs  
Are fanning out before the sun has risen,  
Stuffing envelopes of cash into our legislators'  
fine men in robes (they're black  
These days; the riffraff still wear white)oppress  
The needy ever further, sternly pounding  
With their s; that's how the world  
y's heating up the feathers  
Are in fish eyes bump past such rocks  
much can I care?The one I want  
Is far away, so far I cannot hope to see her.  
I can do no more than this:pretend to read  
While wishing she was near.

Lawrence Beck

# Aesthetic Contemplation

This guy's going on and on to a woman (his girlfriend? Maybe)  
About the painting which hangs on the wall in front of us.  
It's a such, it's incredibly dull, decorative, really,  
Not about theless, he explains its significance.  
She is impassive, not clearly impressed, but also not irritated  
Or bored. I like her dark hair and her elegant clothes,  
Her bright red lipstick, and lifeless brown eyes.  
She's decorative, doesn't mean anything.  
Still, if I was given the choice, I'd let the Rothko  
Keep hanging here, and carry that woman back home.

Lawrence Beck

# Ariel

An aftershock: I feel again the way I did  
When we were close. I look into her lovely  
Face and listen to her saying almost anything  
To keep me there. I know, and know that she  
Does, too, that we are right to be together,  
Never mind the noisome facts, but soon  
The aftershock has passed, and she and I  
Are far apart because, though we were  
Right together, there were noisome facts.

Lawrence Beck

# Bad Poetry On A Blustery Day

I'll find you, Miss Mouse, one day, in your airless  
Room with all the other rodents writing stupid  
Verse, convinced that willful incoherence  
Proves its utterer profound. The lot of you  
Deserve to feel the snap of steel across  
Your necks, but I'm benign. I'll play the piper,  
Reach your room with fitting fury, throwing  
Open shade and window, so you'll see  
The autumn sun inflame the tree's remaining  
Leaves. You'll hear the wind's rush, and you'll  
Feel it. You'll wish for your winter coats,  
And, as your explorations scatter, I will shout,  
'This is the world! Learn it! Live in it,  
You fools, before you try to write.'

Lawrence Beck

# Baggage

I will not miss her any more over the weeks  
When I am gone. I doubt that I will miss  
Her less. I see her here three times a week,  
But only briefly. We don't speak. Sometimes,  
It seems, she peeks at me, but there's no sign,  
There's not to be one, that we used to be  
Quite close. I'd go to her (but only briefly)  
To remember happiness. She always brought  
It back to me, and I'd be further pleased  
To watch her face relax, to see her smile,  
Something she doesn't do that often.  
She, or someone, one day, started thinking  
What we did was wrong, and, since that time,  
We've stayed apart. I cannot miss her more  
Or less if she is near or I am gone. I miss  
What we became together even more  
Than her.

Lawrence Beck

## Bavarian Blahs

Munich has its pleasantries. I don't intend  
To list them all. It's clean. It seems to be  
Well run. The whole town's been rebuilt,  
Of course, so all the architecture's new,  
But streets still wind. They have the  
Intimacy city streets should have,  
And at sufficient intervals, a square  
Appears, one full of tables, places  
Where a local or a guest can be a  
Resident, and meet with old friends  
Or with new, and eat, and drink  
Enormous mugs of beer, a party  
Every day. I haven't reason  
To complain, but I don't like it  
That much here. The place seems  
Too American. I've gotten  
Waterlogged from beer. I'd rather  
I was back in Paris, with its shabby  
Beaux Arts charms, its wine.  
Pickpockets notwithstanding, I'd  
Prefer that I was there, still sharing  
It with you.

Lawrence Beck

## Before Dawn

Like Christ, who's always said to be coming,  
The day has not sky is dark,  
And that is fine by me, as days, like Christ,  
Have unknown , when  
The light appears, paradise will be at hand.  
The sun will air will warm.  
The wife will putter in her garden as I fool  
With this or that, with purpose, but not urgency,  
But, then again, the light may bring a grumpy  
Christ, who calls me sinner, sending me down  
Into hell, where his handmaiden, my dear wife,  
Has turned her back to helpless flowers so as  
To torment me with an endless list of  
Noisome light lay me  
Remain in ignorance of what will come.  
Salvation's far too much to ask, but,  
Uneventful pleasantness is not, and I'd  
Prefer it to damnation and a day which  
Doesn't end.

Lawrence Beck

# Daydream

I played that Eisenhower jazz, that languid, mournful  
Combo stuff which always sounds like closing time.  
The sky outside was leaden, damp, perfumed by soggy  
Fallen leaves. I dreamed that I was not at home,  
Not painting walls, but sitting toward the back  
Of somewhere, back in Eisenhower days.  
A cigarette was burning in an hing  
Cold, a gin and tonic? , sat inside a ring of condensation  
By my hand, and you were were not  
head lay upon my shoulder.  
We were a dream! In fact I wasn't  
Even eight, and your own parents weren't yet born  
In Eisenhower days.

Lawrence Beck

# Done

Perhaps I will be done with you  
When I get home. You've been  
More sow's ear than silk purse  
For me for two long years.  
Why should I care if you still  
Love me if you fear someone  
Will know? Why should I pity you  
For burrowing into a dismal life?  
There's someone else who's  
More forthcoming, someone who  
Is not the cold and distant moon.  
She is radiant, a sun, and, though  
I rarely get to see her, how often do  
I see you, oh purse who turned back  
Into ear? I'll call her purse, as she  
Bears gifts, and leave you for the dogs.

Lawrence Beck

# Existentialism

It's lunchtime where she is. It's nice.  
I looked. If I was over there, I'd say,  
"Let's go out to the beach. We'll  
Take some wine, take off our shoes,  
And dip our toes into the ocean."  
"Only once. It's very cold, " she'd  
Laugh, or maybe she would say,  
"I can't. I've got some work to do, "  
And one more in a string of several  
Thousand pleasant afternoons  
Would go to waste, but I'm not there.  
If I had any sense at all, I'd get up,  
Stop this dreaming, and enjoy  
The one I've got.

Lawrence Beck

## Geezer On The Beach

A crowd of obstreperous preteen boys  
Invades the lake on bicycles, their  
Towels rolled. They've come to swim,  
Aware that time is growing short.  
The water's cold and school's begun.  
The sun's gone sooner than before.  
Another blissful summer's ending.  
They don't mourn it. More will  
Come. I do. I'm not so sure.

Lawrence Beck

# Goodbye

I got a helium balloon, a souvenir of some store's  
Anniversary, as I recall. I brought it home,  
And tied it to the back of my big wicker chair.  
I loved its color: brilliant red. I loved the way  
It floated in the air, how it loomed over me,  
But, as time passed, it ceased to float. It sagged  
Down to the floor behind me, growing dull  
And dusty. I suppose I should have thrown it  
Out, but I did not. I kept it tethered to my  
Chair, but one day, recently, the air was cool.  
I opened up the doors which lead onto the  
Patio. A breeze blew in, and broke the string  
Which held that wretched thing in place.  
I saw it drift between the doors, and down  
The street. I watched until I could not see it  
Anymore. It's gone at last. Goodbye, balloon.  
Good luck wherever you are cornered.  
I am pleased you're out of sight, no longer  
Mine, no longer wanted, less a cherished  
Souvenir than something kept too long,  
Now blessedly away.

Lawrence Beck

# Growing Old Gracelessly

The signs of physical decay don't come  
As great surprises. Mirrors show the  
Wrinkled, drying face, the rheumy eyes,  
The flaccid skin. The spirit feels itself  
Defeated after work. It's hard to walk.  
One shoulder or the other aches. One  
Cannot summon energy to plod out  
To the curb to get the paper and the mail,  
But what hurts worst is what's unseen:  
The steady diminution of emotion.  
Things just cease to matter. Joy dries  
Up. It disappears, and even sorrow  
Seems to be diluted. Nothing's all  
That sad. Everything, anticipated,  
Fully known before it happens,  
Hasn't any resonance. The ancient  
Mariner returns to port, and all is as  
He'd seen it, dull, expected, unaffectioning.  
He dies as he lives, becoming neither  
Caterpillar, nor the butterfly. He's  
The useless chrysalis, a cloven hulk  
Stuck to a tree, it's cargo going on  
With life as it, subjected to the  
Elements, decays.

Lawrence Beck

# Happy At Last In The City Of Light

She is not like you, my sweet.  
She's willing to be seen with me.  
She smiles when I'm next to her.  
She even likes to hear me speak,  
And this is not like home, my sweet.  
The sidewalks teem with couples,  
Like my new/old love and me,  
Who stumble on the cobblestones  
Between the bistros and the bars  
On these Parisian streets.  
We stay out late. We laugh,  
And I believe that I am happy,  
Something that I haven't been  
Too often on your continent,  
When I'm near you, my sweet.

Lawrence Beck

# Her Majesty

The old queen morosely eats his dinner,  
Takeout from the grocery store, at home,  
In front of his TV. He watches as the  
Dancers dip and swirl, and he tries to  
Tell himself that he'd be perfect there,  
And that a pretty college boy could  
Dip and do si do with him, regardless  
Of reality. He's gotten old. Nobody  
Calls. Those boys are summoned  
To the places he no longer gets to go.  
He gets to languish here, and wish  
That they would come to visit him.  
They don't. The night comes,  
Empty-handed. He absorbs  
The dancing, dead and lonely,  
Queen of nothing, old, forgotten.  
Have a drink. Let darkness come.  
Let all be lost, and let the world,  
The pretty boys, the women who  
Prefer to be with men who lust  
For other men, surround him  
Somewhere in the discotech's  
Dead lights. Perhaps he ought  
To abdicate. Let someone else  
Become the queen, and let him  
Fade to nothingness, a guy  
Who's having takeout food  
For dinner, and whose looks  
Have faded, reason enough  
To be trapped inside the house,  
Morose.

Lawrence Beck

# Hope

It's twilight, and it's autumn on this planet,  
On my aging mind. The fit is good.  
The nation also seems to be senescent,  
Stooped and falling backward, balled  
Up, moaning horribly. My fellows,  
Bitter old white men and women,  
Want the good times back. They want  
To be the ones in charge. They want  
The deviants and Spanish speakers,  
And the blacks to scurry back into  
Their shadowed realms, to stare in awe  
At whiteness regnant, overweening,  
Overwhelming, at the wheels of big  
Gas guzzling cars, and breathing plumes  
Of coal, the world as it used to be  
When it was at its best, the world after  
We had won the war. We don't win  
Wars these days, of course. We fight  
For years, and then we lose, and "we"  
Don't do the fighting now. We send  
The deviants, the Spanish speakers  
And the blacks, the ones who aren't yet  
Stuck in prison. We stay home,  
And watch TV, and cheer on that  
Psychotic monster we have made  
Our president. The planet dies.  
The poet dies. The nation which  
Always was less than its uneducated  
Citizens were wont to hoarsely claim  
It was, collapses into to debt and  
Conflict, doomed to perish, justly so,  
The poet's aging mind decrees,  
But poems end. What is does not,  
And, underneath the dying thatch,  
The millions of shoots sit, unseen,  
The children, who are not quite white,  
Accustomed to a nation that is  
Ever more ambiguous, accustomed  
To a future without coal, which

Won't use gasoline. It's twilight  
Now. My days are numbered,  
And the world I see is growing  
Darker even as I speak, but night  
Is cyclical. It does not last. There  
Always is a dawn.

Lawrence Beck

# I Wait

The river sparkles in the afternoon.  
I so wish you would see it sometime,  
Sitting next to me. I'd tell you what  
I think that sparkling means. It is  
A metaphor for all of life, and  
Both of us. The river's dull  
And uninviting during most of every  
Day. The sparkles briefly make it  
Precious, briefly make me certain  
That I'm better off to have it near,  
And you, my love, so long so dull,  
So silently avoiding me, can sparkle.  
I have seen you do it, in the process  
Dazzling me, and causing me  
To keep believing I am better off  
To have you near.

Lawrence Beck

# In Search Of Appropriate Apparel

Given the way I feel these days, my crappy heart,  
My gimpy hip, my nearly always aching shoulders,  
I feel a little presumptuous dressing, as I always have,  
In T-shirts and , after all, are working  
Men's clothes, and I don't work.I barely function.  
What should I wear instead to better suit the wreck  
That I've become?A polo shirt and a pair of chinos?  
They wouldn't go with the beard I've grown.  
A rabbi's rumpled suit and hat?Perhaps.  
An imam's flowing robe?Seemingly a decent  
Choice, but Muslims aren't received too well  
In this part of America.A jumpsuit, like old  
Geezers wear?I can''re gross.I'd hate  
Myself.A flannel shirt and overalls?I don't  
Think so.I don't what would my  
Young sweetheart say if I appeared before her  
In the garments of somebody else?She knows  
How feeble I've become.I do not try fool her,  
Puffing out my chest and chopping logs.  
She knows my working days are done,  
But seems to find me worth embracing  
In a T-shirt and some jeans.

Lawrence Beck

# In The Footsteps Of So Many Others

I'd be the well-heeled refugee, another alien  
Face on the streets that aren't really yours anymore.  
Paris is maintained by Parisians, but in the  
Possession of everyone else. I can say, "merci."  
That's all I know, but your language isn't  
That useful now. I hear English and German  
And Chinese, not are hordes  
Speaking Arabic just down the way.  
You won't need to attend to me. I'll be okay  
At a spare cafe table, a cheap glass of wine  
And my tablet in front of me, one more  
American helping himself to the pretentious  
Preciousness you've earned yourselves.  
Let me stay. I'll keep quiet. I'll pay  
My respects, high-minded refugee, not  
On the run from slaughter or famine,  
But flying first-class from the corn-fed  
Capitalist, fascist crassness which  
Lies like a shroud on my land.

Lawrence Beck

# It's Always Something

The tour is over. Now, it's time to address  
Mundane needs. I'm lodged in northern  
Munich, which is working class, not picturesque.  
The family's on a plane back home. I have  
No need for souvenirs. What I want most is food  
To eat, and there is plenty here, leftovers  
From the meals we ate last night. The duck's  
Delicious, but, alas, I'm not in Salzburg anymore  
Exactly at the time when I could use a little salt.

Lawrence Beck

# Keeping Up Appearances

I fake complacency. My circumstances  
Warrant it. The yard is lush. Late summer's  
Come, and noisome plants like nettles blossom.  
All the world is beautiful, and warm, which  
Means that I can do my dozing outside.  
I can swim. Because I'm old, and only for  
That reason, I receive a check each month.  
It forces me to work less hours, giving me  
More time to do, in truth, not anything.  
I gaze. I doze. I swim. I drink. Sometimes,  
I ride the gorgeous, blood red motorcycle  
I bought for a song last winter. Life, in other  
Words, is good by others' standards. I'm not  
Sure. My heart is weak. I don't feel well.  
I miss the one who used to love me.  
Still, like someone savoring a steak  
In a Calcutta slum, someone who's  
Found a piece of gristle, I'd look bad  
If I complained. I'll seem a better person  
If I fake complacency.

Lawrence Beck

## Kim Jong-Un

I will throw in my lot with the little fat man,  
Having suffered through fixes like his before.  
Who has he harmed? What did he do  
To antagonize Donny, the bully, the moron,  
Who drools a little as he makes idle threats?  
Donny's compadres, stupid as he, also threaten  
The fat man. How dare he presume he's  
Entitled to live as he chooses? Donny says  
That cannot be. He and his pals will decide  
How we live, everyone, everywhere, fat men  
And thin, but the little guy, smiling, off on  
His own, says, "You cannot scare me.  
I know how to kill you." "Do it. Save us,  
Little fat man, " I mumble, as Donny's  
Cheap-suited operatives hear me, and lead  
Me away.

Lawrence Beck

# Kiss

One worries when the train has gone  
That what had seemed to be was not,  
That "mutual attraction" really was  
One-sided after all, and that the parting  
Kiss was less the product of affection  
Than a gesture lacking any meaning.  
You know how it is up there..., but  
Word arrives (too late to stop the train,  
To take another back) that mutual  
Attraction was the kiss came  
From the heart, and parting, said to be  
Such sorrow, truly can be  
Done? Not anything. It's too late now.  
The kiss will burn, like lye, upon  
The lips, but she who kissed is far away,  
And he, whose knees were weakened  
By the kiss, must forge ahead toward  
A future without her, the kisser, without  
Arms to hold him, without laughter  
On the crowded train  
heart is broken,  
Maybe magnets, mutual  
Attraction doesn't work too well  
When its two poles are set so far  
Apart. I see her picture, lick my lips.  
I'm several borders from her now,  
And won't be coming back.

Lawrence Beck

## Leaving J

God-awful drizzly morning. Six. Still dark. She woke for me.  
Still mostly asleep, she smiles. We kiss once. Then again.  
Goodbye. I drag my suitcase down four flights of winding stairs,  
And out onto no longer charming cobblestones to catch a bus  
To catch a train to Munich. She stays with the room. I imagine  
She'll return to sleep before she also leaves for her home in Bordeaux.  
The train station begins to fill with businessmen and glossy dolls,  
The sort that Paris has in spades. They're potted plants, and lovely,  
But I want my unkempt Yankee daisy. Soon, the sun is rising. I am  
Moving at 200 miles per hour into Germany. My heart, I think,  
Is sinking at a faster pace than that.

Lawrence Beck

## Like Rain

She comes to me like rain to a desert:  
Rarely. In her wake, the flowers all  
ation ceases to be,  
But she leaves so suddenly as she  
Arrives, and she's absent for years.  
The blossoms soon die, and the desert  
Itself, once again without life,  
Starts to wonder if she really came.

Lawrence Beck

# Lipstick On A Barracuda

There are other evils which have ravaged  
This poor nation's face, have given it  
Such ugliness that no amount of make-up,  
No sweet words or self-help booklets  
Can redeem it in the world's eyes.  
Patriarchy's one, of course, but it's  
Made ugly every country. Capital,  
And those who own it, also sears like acid,  
But, again, it does so everywhere. The only  
Evil that's (almost) unique to this benighted  
Nation is its embrace of enslavement.  
Monsters, themselves barely human,  
Bought and brought their equals here  
From Africa in ropes and chains, and  
&quot;Owned&quot; them as if they were only  
Animals, and said that they weren't  
Truly human. This went on for centuries,  
Until too many others found enslavement  
Unacceptable. The slaves were freed,  
But, even so, the monsters, with their  
Ropes and chains, still said that they  
Were animals...to be thrust into separate  
Ghettos, captured, judged, and thrown  
In jail, and shot on sight, unarmed, by  
White policemen. And the monsters,  
Filled with fear by what they've always  
Done, turned their homes into armories,  
And turned their nation, here and elsewhere,  
Into one which knows nothing of charity,  
Diplomacy. The only thing it knows  
Is force. &quot;Subdue the niggers. Subdue  
Anyone who questions who we are.  
We're God's great white gift to the planet.  
We will kill the dusky ones, the ones  
Who've come to question whether  
We're so good as we proclaim, or whether  
We are ugly, evil, ruined centuries ago  
Because we loved our slaves.



# Making Everywhere Great Again

They're here. Oh, God, Americans, a bus  
Filled up with aging fatties. Each is armed,  
And many waddle doggedly from face  
To face to ask, "Why cain't you speak  
No English?" They're not here for local  
Foods. They'll be buying hamburgers.  
They'd rather not learn anything about  
The place to which they've come. They've  
Never had much use for school. They plop  
Themselves down on the sand and loudly  
Talk. They point and laugh. To summon  
Waiters, they shout, "Boy!" They're  
Pleased to have been able to bless  
This benighted place with all the  
Traits which have endeared Americans  
To no one I have known.

Lawrence Beck

# Motel Morning

Lobby coffee, not so good.  
She glanced at me.  
I'd hoped she would.  
Two smiles, two tentative hellos,  
A table shared.  
What next? Who knows?  
A stroll, a kiss,  
A sweet romance?  
Her husband's coming;  
Not a chance.

Lawrence Beck

# Neither Here Nor There

I did work as I walls were painted.  
Now, at least, the living room of this old manor  
Glow again. I sat and stared out through  
The windows at the fallow fields below,  
And pondered worlds which are and aren't:  
This one in which my body lives, a place  
Of ceaseless solitude, and that to which  
My mind had flown, a bar in an imagined  
Past, a table shared with someone who  
Is real, but rarely near.

Lawrence Beck

# No Pearl

I'd be this way if I was sent to heaven:  
Vaguely out of sorts. The oyster needs  
Its grain of sand, its irritant, to make a pearl.  
Artists must be nagged by pain, but, in  
Vienna, nothing's wrong. The food's delicious.  
Buses come on time. The streets pass  
Endless splendid buildings. No one's nasty.  
Even here, inside this hotel, I'm ecstatic  
Showering in water pressure far exceeding  
What I bear when I'm at home. The woman  
At the desk at night, so Austrian, so pale  
And blonde, is lovelier than almost any woman  
I ever have seen. I could lose my passport  
And conclude my life here in Vienna, dogged  
By only one regret: I'd never write again

Lawrence Beck

# Once Is Enough

The old professor's time machine sits idle  
In its basement room. He used it once,  
And now he's gone. I hope he's happy  
Where he is, since he is there, and it is here.  
He has no way of getting home. Sometimes,  
I come to look at it, to blow off all the cobwebs  
And the dust, and, sometimes, I consider  
Climbing into it myself to go back to two  
Years ago to feel her love for me again,  
But since I know what had to happen,  
I stay here. I see no point in having  
My heart break a second time.

Lawrence Beck

# Port Angeles

The sand is wet. It rained last night. Now, morning's come  
In suffocating gray, the sky, the sea, the shore. I throw more  
Wood onto my fire, stare out at the tossing water. Such days  
Banish satisfaction, but they also quash desire. Three years,  
She meant something to me, but she does no more.

Lawrence Beck

# Reason

Reason is a pretty coat of paint which covers  
Prejudice, and wise men know that this is so.  
The ones who place most faith in reason  
(Is that not a contradiction?) , always falter  
When confronted. In the end, the wall  
Shows through the pretty coat of paint.

Lawrence Beck

# Restless

The geese are headed south again, and I,  
Almost as if I was nineteen, not nearly 64,  
Am restless. Should I go with them?  
The doctors all have made it clear that I  
Don't have that long to live. Would it be  
Wise to hang on here, the father/ husband/  
Grandpa now who chucks the chins, who  
Offers pleasant bromides and encouragements?  
I don't believe they count on me. If they'll  
Be fine, why can't I bolt? Why can't I take  
The girl/woman I have loved these last two  
Years somewhere neither of us has been?  
Why can't we find ourselves beneath some  
Sheets, forever after kissing, mornings,  
Coffee on our breath? Why can't we join  
The throng which turns toward the south  
This time of year, geese and guys who  
Age like me, with neither grace nor hope?  
I'll die, they say. I want her with me  
Somewhere down in Argentina or Brazil.  
I've gotten restless, almost as if I am  
Nineteen, far from 64.

Lawrence Beck

# Sisyphus

I no longer love the one I did for three long years.  
Besides, she's disappeared again. I love the one  
I loved before her, having spent some time with her  
In Paris just a month ago, but we don't get together  
Often, and we're rarely by was  
The first time I had seen her in some sixteen months,  
And it's unlikely we will get to be together very soon...  
So why wish for someone who can't be near?  
Why spend two years lamenting that last love?  
It's as if longing's simply something that  
I always have to do, its object almost arbitrary.  
When I force myself into lucidity, I understand  
That my life's virtually complete. I have no needs  
Which are not met. I haven't even many wants.  
I have just one, in fact, and even I'm aware  
That it's absurd: a dream which cannot be fulfilled  
And shouldn't be, and, anyway, would be replaced,  
Should I attain it, by another dream which was,  
In all respects, the same.

Lawrence Beck

# State Fair

I do remember the image in this picture.  
Forgive me, but I've gotten old, so the  
Mundane facts the newspaper fed me  
Decades ago come back with more clarity  
Than whatever I did last week, last year.  
It would seem that we'd gone to some  
Shitty resort or event somewhere easily  
Driven from here, from the heart of  
Yokeldom, Middle America. Fried food!  
Dunk tanks! Thrill rides, and Ferris  
Wheels; pretty thin gruel for someone  
Who's older than eight, and possesses  
Much of a brain. The wife and the kids  
Had fun, I believe, but I moped. I don't  
Do well with such entertainments.  
An art museum might have been nice,  
A coral reef, a bottle of bourbon, a chat  
With someone whose knowledge runs  
Past right-wing talking points  
And professional sports, but none  
Of these things was there to be found.  
I was unhappy; I'd fallen in love,  
And the girl to whom I had fallen was far off,  
Stocking the shelves in the place where  
I worked. Red haired, pale, mostly pleased  
To be with me, she told me she loved to  
Ride roller coasters. Maybe she would have  
Liked where I had gone, but I loved her  
Anyway, even as I moped. I just can't  
Say for sure when that was.

Lawrence Beck

# Stupid Men

We've seen it happen twice before:stupid men  
Deranged by hubris push ahead against each  
Other, certain that someone will turn away,  
But not one thinks he can, or should, and,  
Suddenly, the little wars which keep the stupid  
Men employed become world's  
Aflame, from Latvia to Lebanon to both Koreas  
To Iran and all of the Arabian Peninsula, and  
On the oceans to the missiles  
And munitions fly, and men and women  
By the millions, those in uniform and not,  
Are slaughtered until one group of the stupid  
Men other group, in triumph,  
Executes the first, and, reassured that they  
Are brilliant, also righteous, they begin  
Again to set the world on the path to war.

Lawrence Beck

# Taking A Sledgehammer To What's Already Broken

I stepped upon a stool at the crossroads  
Of two aisles in the store and loudly spoke.  
'Be it known to one and all that I'm  
Unfit to be the lover of that woman there.'  
I pointed down at Ariel, whose face soon  
Grew a shade of red far brighter than  
Her hair. 'I'm married, and I'm old.  
My heart is weak. I'm impecunious,  
Depressed, and given to be overcome  
By fits of futile rage. In short, I'm not  
The one for such as her, as she is,  
If not altogether warm, someone who's  
Virtuous and steely-strong. She's told  
Me not to come to her. She acts as if  
I am not here, and, so, my fellows,  
Be assured that I am not just not  
Her lover. I'm unfit. She'd tell you so, '  
Though, by then, she had slunk away,  
And, later, when no one could hear,  
She hissed, 'I truly hate you now.'  
'You do? , ' I asked. 'What does it  
Matter? It's been almost two years  
Since you even spoke to me.'

Lawrence Beck

# Tattletail

The sun, that shameless gossip,  
Spots us as it moves across the rooftops  
Not far from the Isle de Cite. Through  
Our window, it illuminates a little pile  
Of clothes built on the floor beside  
The bed. I'm on my elbows, looking out,  
While J sleeps peacefully beside me.  
There's a man across the street, who's  
Learned our story from the sun.  
So Parisian, he's descreet. A little  
Smile warms his face before he  
Turns away.

Lawrence Beck

# The Bird That Won't Shut Up

The trees below the house hold many birds,  
Whose strange and varied calls, from pretty  
Songs to rasped reports, always have  
Pleased my ears, but lately one bird  
Perches on a branch beside my bedroom  
Window, drowning out the others as he  
Endlessly repeats a dreary tune too lame  
To call a song. I doesn't seem  
To hear. I beg, "Oh, let the others sing, "  
But he and his dull tune remain.  
I wish he'd go away.

Lawrence Beck

# The Dawn Of Capitalism

The Germans chose to stack the deck.  
In other countries' churches, God is marble,  
As are all the saints, and those who came  
Inside to worship, tradesmen, nobles,  
Humble clods, would have to do the  
Heavy lifting, breathing into cold, white  
Stone the spirits who they sought for  
Their salvation in unsettled times,  
As armies came and sacked their cities,  
Famines passed across the lands,  
And plague moved silently among  
Them, taking every fifth or sixth.  
In Germany, each God is gold,  
His glory signified by radiating  
Rays, also of gold. The saints are gold.  
The point is clear. God's worth is  
All-too evident. No heavy lifting  
Must be done. God's so good  
As precious metal, and the opposite  
Is true. The nobles and the burghers,  
And the clods who came in from  
The fields could rest assured that  
Gold itself was of a piece with God.

Lawrence Beck

# The Swain Gets All Mushy

Of what use is the swan which glides so regally  
Across the pond when I've obtained an  
Afternoon upon the bank with you?  
How pleasant are the songbirds' sounds?  
They aren't. They're mediocre, barely  
Better than those of the jays when you  
Are whispering to me. What flower's  
Odor can compete with your delightful  
Fragrance? What confection could  
Seem more appealing than your  
Soft red lips? The world fades,  
Becoming nothing but boring backdrop  
Now that I've obtained an afternoon  
Within it next to you.

Lawrence Beck

## This Site, More Often Than Not

Oh, God. I've entered fairyland, and all around me  
Mundane poets poison what had been good air  
With censers swung so heedlessly, with fumes  
Of poorly chosen words, with sounds attributed  
To sights, with purple phrasing, simple gush.  
I cough. I cannot stay in here. My father  
Was an engineer. My mind is his. I want  
My words to be hard-edged and structured  
So they'll bear some weight. I've never liked  
The smell of incense. I hate fairyland.

Lawrence Beck

## Thrust Back Into Levittown

Grocery stores, of course, are all alike with their  
Disgusting lights, cold and blue, like those which  
Let the coroner complete his work. The produce,  
Shown so, isn't pretty. Meat is, well, it's carrion,  
And packaged goods are stark and sterile. I am  
Home, and almost nauseous, gliding glumly past  
A cornucopia of shitty food: "cheese," which  
Cannot be distinguished from the plastic sheets  
Onto which it was squirted days ago, bologna,  
Wan and without merit, something made by  
Someone with a clipboard, who had read  
The surveys, "bland is best; it never fails,"  
And beer that tastes like German urine,  
"Feed them all with garbage" brought  
By trucks from places far away. Feed them  
Fruit which feels like granite. Feed them  
Bags of flavored flour. Watch them turn  
Into balloons, which rise, and lightly float  
Away to come to rest against the needles  
Saving them with insulin, and I, as I said,  
Almost nauseous, also rise and drift beyond  
These soulless sidewalks and the endless plots  
Of land reserved for cars. I think back to  
The cold blue light of one street-corner grocer  
Steps away from where we laid our heads.  
J, who's trying out her French, is looking for  
Some cider, since she doesn't like the local  
Wine. I am snatching bottles which seem  
Cheaper than they ought to be, to have with  
Baguettes, almost costless, and real meat,  
And cheese which tastes of mold and caves,  
As cheese should taste, and, all around,  
The motor scooters flit, and, at the tables  
And the bars, a dozen along any street,  
Parisians meet. They drink and smoke,  
And talk. The sun sets somewhere to the  
West, out by the Eiffel Tower. J and I,  
With little bags, climb up the stairs into  
Our room. We eat. We drink, and I say,

&quot;Here's to our two lovely lives, &quot; and she  
Says, &quot;Never let them be besmirched  
By grocery lights.&quot;

Lawrence Beck

# Trade Show Blues

Symptoms of inchoate dissatisfaction appear.  
I'm no longer glad to have come. A barn is a barn,  
Whether filled up with livestock or humans,  
And this display hall is a patter  
Of capitalists leaves me gadgets  
Seem time, which no one but I  
Believes has any value, is precious in contrast  
To this. It's raining wouldn't it be?  
I push through the entryway doors, nonetheless,  
And trudge toward a cocktail lounge, head  
Getting wet, the most immediate cause of my  
Dissatisfaction becoming quite clear.

Lawrence Beck

# Trifles

These coeds from Kearney seem not to want to disdain me  
The way that you do, my love. Maybe disdain has to grow,  
Like a child, but here, out of reach of your sense of  
Propriety, here in hot rooms in which the strictures  
Made plain by parents in faraway towns have been shed,  
I am someone intriguing, exotic, older and courtly,  
And worth bringing home for the night. These sweet things  
Suffer less of your darkness. There isn't much to them,  
To tell you the truth, but they're lovely to look at, and they  
Treat me well. I don't feel as if I am disdained.

Lawrence Beck

# Untitled

I checked. I am 800 miles from you, almost 5,000  
From Nebraska. I am here alone, wishing you  
Had come with me. I miss your laugh, your lovely  
Face, your smell, the way you suddenly withdraw  
Into your telephone. We're not at all the same,  
I know. You're young and vital. I am, at best,  
Somewhat stoic, marching hours next to you  
As we tick off the tourist sites. Where did I  
Love you most? , I wonder. Was it when you  
Sat, still Catholic, in the pew in Notre Dame,  
Or was it when we moved together, arms  
Around each other, Fred and Ginger, on  
The Eiffel Tower? Was it when you came to bed,  
Or was it when you said goodbye, and suddenly  
I realized how slight you are, all skin and bones,  
And how slight was my satisfaction? You're 800  
Miles away, and soon you'll be much more than that.  
With luck, I'll see you in the summer. Until then,  
Please don't forget the one you've left alone.

Lawrence Beck

# Wraith

She passes by in silence. I look up,  
But only briefly. There's no point  
To doing more than that. I start  
To wonder once again what happened,  
Why her eagerness to be with me  
Abruptly ended, why she had her  
Mother tell me "Stay away, and  
Left, but then came back again.  
Did she do so to pass in silence,  
Hoping I'll look up?

Lawrence Beck