Poetry Series

Lawrence Beck

- poems -

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Lawrence Beck

No books published; none to be published soon.
Web site: www.lawrencebeck.net
Unpublished poetry books available online:
Miniatures (1984-96) ,
Plainspoken (1997-2004) ,
Five August Days,
Suite for a School Girl (2004-05) ,
Common Household Items (2004-05)

10/2/05

What would you have for your breakfast,
My friend? I can give you
Bombast and brass bands,
The blare and glare of righteous fury,
Deftly directed at this awful place,
The land of wounded pride,
And stupid men, and boys and girls
With guns, bent on subduing,
Well, who knows? , whoever,
The ones with skins of other hues,
The ones with other gods,
And too-broad interpretations
Of all of that junk, like laws,
And wealth, and ballots,
Being left on one's own,
That they ought to know
Are meant to be only for us:
Pale-skinned deities, who descend
From the sky, to confer or punish,
And are not, ever, to be questioned.

Ah, but such fare may be
Too heavy for you this morning.
Perhaps you'd prefer something light,
And, by that, I do not mean joyous.
Rather, I offer a menu of whispers
Of intimate moments, when things
Are revealed to have fallen apart,
Women, who might have been,
Should have been, lovers,
Who briefly stopped and stared,
Seeming to gauge my fitness,
And, finding it wanting,
Silently wandered away,
Hours when almost nothing occurred,
A cloud obscured the sun,
A clock, none of them tick anymore,
Slowly counted the increments
Of my gathering desperation.

Make your choice. Place your order.
The kitchen is going to close.

Lawrence Beck

6/14/05

There is a fingerprint smudge
On the corner of one window,
A half-eaten, melted, bowl of ice cream,
Thoughtfully placed in the kitchen sink,
And they are the only signs
That she ever was here.
There is a silence
That isn’t so awkward now,
But the heartbreaking lines of her silhouette
Against the evening sun, and the smile
That countered the chill of this wind
Blowing out of the north, are gone.
I’m coming to terms with her absence.
I am, as I reassure myself
That she didn’t love me, anyway.
From my chair on the deck,
I can stare out across a prairie
That stretches a thousand miles.
The wind has successfully scoured the sky.
There are no clouds.
There is nothing at all.

Lawrence Beck

6/17/05

I am not irresolute.
Let me assure you of that
(As I work to convince myself) .
It's just that things are unsettled of late.
The one with whom I was truly in love
Never did make her feelings clear,
And, now, she nearly is gone
(Good riddence, I say, I guess;
She's a remarkable girl.) ,
And your friend, well,
She's shockingly pretty,
But I can't tell what she thinks of me.
I have reason to believe
That she doesn't like me at all.
My mind has run in exhausting circles,
Desperately trying to come up with ways
By which I might prove to either of these
That I should be the one
Who they want, but it's hopeless.
They're both such conventional girls,
Probably bent on marrying well,
Probably simply assuming
That, at some point, young guys
With excellent prospects,
Clean-shaven faces and stylish haircuts,
Will lead them, first, to churches,
And then to country clubs
And hazy, but certain happily-ever-afters.
They'll grow smug(ger) and fat,
And even more wary of me,
And I will be sorry
Whenever I have to see them.
Meanwhile, here you are,
With your beautiful hair
And your delicate, freckled face,
Sharp as hell and seemingly pleased
To have found a rough-edged apostate,
Who promises trouble at best, possibly grief.
You smile when you see me
And laugh at my wisecracks,
So, yes, after due deliberation,
I have resolved to come here to ask you,
Would you enter my poolside chapel?
Would you turn your back,
At least for a while,
To thoughts of bland, eternal contentment,
And choose, instead, to see
If we can be happy now?

Lawrence Beck

6/18/05

Which of us is the more deluded, Ray?
Is it I, who use up too much of every day
Pretending that I saw something
In the eyes of a woman,
In those of several women,
Who, at best, never have thought of me
And, at worst, are sorry that I was born,
Or is it you and your jingo's jingle,
Hyping our precious democracy,
How we have it, and how we impart it,
And our special moral place in the world?
Rich guys own our souls, you know.
They pay our wages and write our papers.
They buy the pairs of interchangable shits
Who clog our ballots, and every second of
Time on TV, beginning with gauzy portraits
Of dogged defenders of families, little guys' rights,
The nation, the usual stuff,
And ending with vile slanders.
They send the kids, the boys
And girls, some of whom
Might be in love with me,
To murder thousands, for what?
Nobody really knows, but I believe
That all of those people gathered
At gravesides all around the world,
And those nearby, who can't find work,
Can't breathe, can't go to a doctor,
Don't even feel safe anymore,
Speaking their minds,
Simply would laugh
At my silly pretensions,
Desperate dreams of a lonely man,
But they would howl with rage
At your claim that we're their saviors.

Lawrence Beck

6/24/05

Witless scientist,
Shackled by faulty theories,
I stand at the edge of a crowd,
Unable to understand how it is
That people can be
Satisfied with their lives.
I am not happy with mine,
But, clearly, here among
My fellows, the ones
With pinched expressions,
The fidgeters, those who always
Will say that the weather
Has gotten too hot or too cold,
The physically wounded,
The mentally wrecked,
The ones whose jobs
Don't pay them enough,
There are men and women
Whose faces are serene,
Who laugh, loudly and often,
And tell little stories that show
How proud they are
Of the things that they've done
And their children,
And do not do so
To try to prove that they're
Better than someone else.
My compatriots and I
Will skulk away early
And tell each other,
As we climb into our cars
For our deadly journeys home,
That every happy face is a fraud,
That laughter only disguises pain,
But we'll know
When we're at home in the dark,
Staring, waiting to go to sleep,
That, though no theory exists
To explain it,
There are those who are able
To be happy,
Even if we are not.

Lawrence Beck

6/28,7/3/05

Let us say, for argument's sake,
That I am new to this planet,
And also that I am unsteady on it,
And, furthermore, grotesque thing that I am,
That I have fallen for a girl, like you,
A beauty, thought by all of her peers,
Her well-dressed friends,
And prosperous parents,
Classmates, coaches, teachers,
And the rest, to be
Perfectly suited to life
On this surface, an effortless
Swimmer through nitrogen gas,
At one with the bubbling flow
Of bipeds among their mysterious dwellings,
Someone, who, even if she could see me,
Would have no use for the tender touch
Of my tentacles, who would, in fact,
Recoil in horror if I should advance.
And, yet, through my alien eyes
I believe that I see what
Those of your species cannot:
A trace of discomfort,
An unshakable feeling of sadness,
And, so, perhaps,
I should have some hope
That we might have an historic meeting,
And, as I struggled to make my desires known
In a language that you could understand,
As I applied otherworldly skills
To try to heal your heart,
You would try, in turn,
To teach me to mimic your magnetic grace,
And we could forge an improbable union,
And build a shelter for ourselves
In this strange and difficult place.

Lawrence Beck

7/13/05

I spent the weekend on Angeline’s sofa.
(Actually, I don’t know anyone
Who has that name,
And I always say “couch”,
But let us go on.)
On Monday, we drove to the beach
(Hard to do in Nebraska;
In truth, I had lunch
With my sister.) ,
And, as she fooled with her radio,
I could smell her hair.
I touched it,
And, one thing leading to another
(My sister and I took her dog
To a park and sat) ,
Though we could see the waves
Crashing splendidly, and the sun
Was hot despite the breeze
(It rained at the park) ,
We stayed in her car,
Kissing and groping each other
Until, at last, I said
That I loved her.
At that, she lifted her head
From my shoulder,
Narrowed her eyes,
And told me
(As did my sister,
From whom I had asked
For a loan)
That she couldn’t trust me.

Lawrence Beck

7/16/05

At this point in the narrative,
Our hero is hopelessly lost,
And shouldn’t he be,
Now old, now stricken
With treacherous blood cells,
Browbeaten, bullied
By one of the first
Of a succession of females
Who, upon reflection,
Seemed not to have much use
For him, no more
Than did any men,
Who found it odd
That he stayed at home all day,
Tending to children,
Writing poetry;
What kind of man would do that?
Two ex-loves live nearby,
One up, one just down, the street,
Who never made it clear
That they were aware
That he loved them,
Though he tried to show them
That he was; what they
Did clearly indicate
Was that they couldn’t
Love him back, and, now,
Again, he contemplates
A fine, impossible union
With a dour country beauty,
Who he sees a couple of times
A week in a dusty railhead town,
And who, he knows,
Soon will drive away
Without a backward glance.
Surely, this man is lost.
The blame for his situation
Lies with his author,
Who ought to save him,
But that guy, a two-bit god,
Pasty and broke, a dreamer,
Simply isn’t up to the task.

Lawrence Beck

7/19-21/05

In this little village
Not a lot has changed.
The sun beats down.
Kids ride bikes along
The grid of streets,
And go to get ice cream
From the freezer
In the gas station/store
Out by the highway.
Farmers lurch in mornings
For coffee and eggs
In Gary's Kozy Kafe,
At the corner of Second
And Main, lurch out
To sweat in their tractors,
And then return,
Late in the afternoon,
For beers in the foul coolness
Of the Sunset Lounge,
Off Main, on Third,
Across the street
From the long-empty shell
Of what began as
A movie theater,
Then became a fabric store,
And now is a place
That is hard to remember to see,
Just as it's hard to remember,
Most of the time,
That we are a nation at war.
Every so often, somebody
In the bar changes the TV channel
From sports to headline news,
And one of our nation's leaders
Has to remind us, or one
Of the stories shows
An expensive piece of equipment
Burning, and anguished
Men and women running around it.
A deputy sheriff
From over in Timmons
Was called up for the reserves,
Shipped out and spent
A year and half
Processing prisoners
And watching his ass,
Then came home
A couple of months ago
To his old job
And a nice parade.
The weekly county paper
Had two pictures of him

On its front page.
In the first, he wore his uniform;
The second had him back
At his desk.
Life goes on in Timmons,
And almost everyone there
Still says that the war,
Which no one
Quite can explain,
Is worth the cost,
But things are different here.
There is a house,
A couple of blocks
To the north of the Kozy Kafe.
It’s small and white, like all of the others
On that block,
With a weedy, sun-baked lawn
And a battered maple in the front,
And there is a car,
Covered with canvas,
Hood off, sitting halfway in,
Halfway out of the crowded garage
With its motor laying on the floor.
It had belonged to Neil,
A tall and gangly kid,
Who had grown up
One street over,
Finished high school, and then,
With nothing to do,
No chance of finding
A better job
Than the first one that he found,
Pumping propane into trucks
At night, at a tank farm
Fifteen miles from town,
And without money for college,
Decided to join the National Guard.
He’d married his old girlfriend,
Kelly, a cheerful, plump young woman
With long, red hair,
And, with a lot of help
From both his parents and hers,
Had scraped up just enough cash
To get a mortgage on that house
Three years ago,
About the time that Kelly
Had learned that she was pregnant.
They had a little blonde girl,
Who they called Bug,
And the three of them
Went plodding through
Each identical day,

Trying to keep up
With the bills,
Visiting with the grandparents,
Always just before
It was time to eat,
Washing clothes,
And folding them
Late into the night,
As wiseguys on the TV joked
About things that they didn’t understand,
And beautiful women
And handsome men
Complained that even being rich
Didn’t make life easy.
Toward the end of the summer
Last year, Neil’s unit got the call.
To go to Texas to train for a while,
And then it would join the war.
Almost all of the town showed up
On Main Street when the bus
Arrived, Neil and four other guys
With their duffle bags,
Dressed in mottled tan,
Wives and kids,
And parents, and friends,
Most of them smiling
And looking bright,
Though, on the edges of the crowd,
There were grim-faced dads
And uncles, who had been
Where these boys were going,
And knew that there was
No reason to smile;
It wouldn’t do any good
To wish them well.
Even the ones who made it back
Would be changed
For the worse forever.
Neil sent home letters,
Almost every day, from camp,
Saying how hot it was,
And how hard
They were working,
And he said similar things,
Less often,
When he reached the front.
What news there was
Seemed to indicate
(As his letters never did)
That Neil’s unit
Moved from town to town,
House to house in those towns,

Trying to kill
Savage, invisible men,
Who'd suddenly show up
One place, and bomb
And shoot, and disappear,
And then show up
Someplace else.
People were dying.
Nobody knew their names,
But, one day, late in the fall,
A somber man
In a uniform
Drove into the driveway
And parked behind
Neil's car.
He came to the door
To tell Kelly
That Neil, too, had died,
Killed when a bomb went off
Beside a road.
He said that he was sorry,
Then drove away,
As Kelly stared at nothing,
And Bug ate a jelly sandwich
And counted, over and over,
To six. Neil's body
Was back in town in a week,
And all of the people
Who had seen him off,
So happily, cried
At the funeral.
Now, though everything
Seems almost the same,
The kids still ride their bikes,
The farmers come and go,
There is an emptiness
That radiates
Throughout the town,
And will not be ignored:
A car that sits, forever apart,
A little girl, who knows
The word, but can't remember
Much about her daddy,
Pictures on walls
And chests of drawers
Of a husband, who's gone,
A son, who doesn't call
Or come to eat,
A guy, who used
To fill the trucks,
And stopped by the store,
Sometimes, for beer.

The war goes on,
Appearing, once in a while,
In the lounge.
Nobody even guesses
When it will end,
But here, unlike in Timmons,
People know its price,
And, though they never ask
Out loud, they wish
That someone would
Tell them, truthfully,
What they're going to get
In exchange
For what they lost.

Lawrence Beck

7/31/05

We meet again, my enemy, MFA,
And, as always, you’re hogging pages,
Burdening them with
Your precious pretensions,
Cabalistic bleating, meant
To baffle those beyond
The grad school’s walls,
And to, thereby, let you
Keep your job.
Scratch the backs
Of the literature hacks,
Who are churning out theses
Down the hall,
Explaining (perhaps, even to you)
What you seemed to be trying to say,
And they will return the favor,
Telling their hapless students
That you didn’t intend to waste their time,
And that they must buy
(Now, there’s the main point)
Your dreadful books,
And read them,
Though only for classroom credit,
And, surely, not more than once.

Lawrence Beck

8/14/05

I am not a believing man,
But, if I was,
I might see the hand of a god
In the change of the weather
The day before my beloved's departure.
Weeks of blinding sun and heat
Suddenly gave way
To brooding clouds,
And lightning, and buckets of rain,
And, over the time
Since she's been gone,
The sun's remained obscured,
And the air has been
Unusually cool,
And I've been thankful
For this cosmic manifestation
Of the sadness that I feel.
I wonder what sort of god
Would change the world
To match the mood of a man
Who isn't even his friend.
Perhaps he'd be old, like me,
Grown out of that adolescent
Petulance that he showed so often,
Back when he lived in the desert,
Drowning things and turning
People into pillars of salt,
And, now, though not really
Merciful, he'd have come to see
The value of a sympathetic gesture,
Or maybe he'd still be
The shit that he was,
And he'd want to mock me.

Lawrence Beck

8/18/05

While the notion that every
Exchange is a market,
And each two potential lovers
Examine each other
With clear eyes
And standards of worth in mind,
Is not just offensive,
But also untrue,
It seems, alas, that, somewhere,
Beneath the level of consciousness,
One senses one's station in life,
And that, for this reason,
One will not heed,
Will not even notice,
Bids for affection that issue
From those who are not
Attractive or wealthy
Or cultured enough,
And, so, dear girl,
I bid you goodbye.
You, it seems, were too pretty for me,
I too plain or strange for you.
I have learned, and I shall
Lower my sights.
Why, I've just seen
A woman, whose features,
While coarser, seem
Adequately lovely to satisfy me.
Her body, not lithe
And perfect as yours,
In truth, a little bit squatty,
Nevertheless, has given me a thrill,
And the greater part of that
Has been the way
That she's stared at me.
Having been appraised
As up to her standards,
And decided that she meets mine,
I must leave you quickly
To make this crucial transaction.
Stay, if you'd like,
In this dreadful bazaar.
She and I will be going home,
To enjoy such treasures
As we had the means to obtain.

Lawrence Beck

8/5/05

I have two fingers left
With which to grab
This sheet of silk
Before it slips forever
From my hand
And the wind sends it
Silently tumbling away.
Delicate, beautiful thing
That it is, it also
Is hard to hold,
And, as I stand,
Dreading what has to happen,
I wish that I knew how to ask,
Does it want me
To keep it from falling?
Will it be sorry when
It finds that I can't?

Lawrence Beck

8/6/05

It is only you, reader,
Who knows
That I've come to the edge
Of this field
To stare across the tops
Of the soybean plants
Out to the limits
Of this soothing, sweltering
Floodplain, and to face
The sodden sky
In order to calm myself
Ahead of the loss
Of the woman, whose face
Almost seems embossed
On everything that I view,
And it's only you, reader,
Who can sense that,
Given the choice,
I would bring her here
To share this place
And, at the very least,
Put off describing
It to you.

Would you be hurt?
I doubt it.
How could you be,
Not knowing what I haven't told you
About a place to which
I may not even have gone?

Lawrence Beck

9/10/05

On this, most auspicious
Of wasted mornings,
I hear the sound of
Thousands of birds,
Jabbering in some nearby
Trees, and, suddenly,
Leaving as one, with a whoosh.
I see the sun crawl up
From the east, to cast
Gargantuan shadows
Of those same trees
Across the cornfields
To the west, and I
Promise myself
That nothing will keep me
From hearing or seeing
Such things, and nothing
That anyone says
Will make me productive.

Lawrence Beck

About My Odor

Spotted, not striped, a skunk nonetheless,
I came to the coop and admired the hens,
Precious, fresh-faced, fertile young things,
Who peeked from their doorways
And tittered, as I searched for Jessica's
Sister. I found her where she had said
That she'd be, on the seventh floor,
Alone, in her tiny room, grinning,
Wet, wearing only a towel, which clung
To her slender, magical form
No more closely than did my eyes.
I was there, invited, to betray
Poor Jessica, who had become
Annoyingly bossy toward me, and had
Always mistreated her sister,
A quiet, deep-eyed, beautiful girl,
Who, over the course of the final month
Of her summer vacation, had gotten
Quite skilled at reaching the door
Of her family's house ahead of Jessica,
Looking at me as if, for some reason,
I meant more to her than anything else
In her rapidly ending adolescent world.
She would run her hand across
My shoulders when she passed by
The dining room table, where,
Night after night, Jessica and her
Parents and I would play cards
And pantomime what seemed to be
Coming: a marriage and, with it,
Years of acceptable evenings, sitting
Around with the folks. I took to
Making sly little jokes, which
Confounded those at the table
With me, but would lead the sister
To cover her mouth and race
Around the corner to laugh.
I would let her come up to hug me
When I was leaving, pleased by
The way that she held me tightly,
Probably a little too long, and
Subtly, but unmistakably, ground
Herself against me, more as a
Lover, not a lover's sister, would.
She asked me to wait outside
As she dressed, and, when she
Emerged, wearing a college girl's
Baggy sweatshirt and jeans,
Her face was flushed, perhaps,
In part, because of the shower,
But mostly, I think, it reflected
Her joy in knowing that I had

Cared enough to come, and the
Giddy thrill of secretly doing
Something that she had hoped
To do, even though it was wrong.
I took her down the street for a dinner
Of fish and chips, and she politely
Asked me how I'd been. She
Wondered aloud where Jessica was,
Clearly not wanting to know,
Before she began to happily babble
About her life at school. She reached
For my hand and held it through
Most of the meal. She worried
That she was talking too much,
But I told her, honestly, that I loved
The rush of her words, the dance
Of her eyes, her excitement,
A substance that people seem to
Possess in finite amounts that drain
Away, and leave them, like Jessica,
Burning with anger, or hollow
And worn, like her parents and me.
I told her that I was happier being with her
Than I had been in years. We went
To a nearby park, and kissed and groped
As we watched the moon come up,
Yellow, huge, and seemingly warm,
Despite the November chill,
And then we slowly returned
To the henhouse and rode
The elevator up to her room.
She said that, though she wished
That I could spend the night,
It wasn't a good idea. Nevertheless,
She locked her door, and smiling
Shyly, began to take off her clothes.
I did the same and we spent
An hour or so, beneath
The blankets on her narrow bed,
Before she told me that I
Had to go. In the morning, as I
Lay by myself in my own dreary bed,
The telephone rang. It was
Jessica's sister, crying, saying
That we had been seen, and that
Jessica knew what we'd done,
And she'd called, screaming
And cursing. I shouldn't visit her
Ever again. Soon, as I had
Expected, my phone rang
A second time, and Jessica
Filled my ear with venom.

It was then that I learned
That I was a skunk. She told
Me that I stank, and I suppose
That she was right. I mailed
Jessica's sister a letter a few
Days later, which said that, though
I felt very badly for having caused
So much trouble for her,
I truly had cherished our night
Together. I never heard
From her or anyone else
In Jessica's family again,
And it's probably only right
To tell you that I have been
Calling that girl "Jessica's sister"
Because I've forgotten her name.

Lawrence Beck

An Old Poop Waits for January

The holidays approach from the east,
Far enough off, as yet, to be hard
To see. Are they three or four?
Are they kings or murderous horsemen?
Whichever they are, they cast a pall
Upon this recently sunny tundra.
You have to go, I know; family
Obligations. I will miss feeling
The covert touch of your fingers
As we pass in the hall, the kisses
Behind the copy room door, and in
The parking lot, and those rare,
So cleverly stolen, Saturday mornings,
Huddled in blankets, lying to each other
About our pasts, and also a future
That probably won't arrive.

I am the autumn, dry and dying,
Bent on saving what exists, convinced
That any effort to obtain what I
Don't have is bound to fail
Or disappoint. You are the spring.
I cherish your girl's face and your
Naive belief that you can seize
Whatever you want (even me) ,
If you're determined. I suppose
That we are mismatched,
Seasons separated during, and by,
The winter, not intended to be
Together, but to succeed each other:
You will rise and grow
After I have decayed, and,
In my absence, you will find yourself
Becoming what I am.

Why, I wonder, would I
Make such dire prophesies
When you are here to say
That you'll be back? Perhaps
Because I worry that you won't.
Still, you have known me long enough
To understand that, if you come,
I will be waiting, and I'll celebrate
The passing of the pall, and we can
Rifle through the wreckage
That the horsemen left or open
Any gifts brought by the kings,
And we can start again, and lie
And lie, and watch the tundra sparkle.

Lawrence Beck

Another Night with Sharon

It's a sad fact
That a night with Sharon,
Despite the surrounding
Aggravation, is better
Than any of the other times
When my heart beats
Pointlessly, and my eyes
Examine a world without
Very much appeal,
So I will call her again,
Put up with her caustic
Commentary on every
Element of her life: her
Boyfriend (who's, surely,
A pitiful guy) , her parents,
Her allegedly unfair boss.
I will do my best
To not look at my watch
As she swabs her roll
Across her plate,
Pours out the last of the wine,
And then checks her lipstick
In a mirror, and, after I've
Paid for dinner and we walk
To my car, I'll begin
The process of turning
The evening away from
Burdensome chatter
Toward the fulfillment
Of my lecherous needs.
My luck on this score,
So far, has been good.
Half-drunk, talked-out,
Sharon has willingly
Tickled my teeth
With her tongue, and
Almost leapt from her clothes
When we've come in
The door. The nights
Have passed briskly.
I get a great deal
Of exercise, after which,
I must admit, I enjoy
The feel of her body
Against me, underneath
The blankets. Still, when
She awakens in the morning,
And quickly resumes
Her complaining, I will
Be thrilled to help her
To gather her things,
And to drive her back

To her house. I'd rather
Remember the glories
Of the night that passed
Than to let her share
A day that still has some
Promise, having only begun.

Lawrence Beck

Bologna

The sandwich?
No; I don’t like it much.
I rarely eat sandwiches,
Tuna sometimes,
Maybe pastrami on rye,
But never bologna
And margerine and cheese,
And, no, this is not
My favorite type of music.
It’s a little too lush for me,
Too polished, too
I don’t know,
Middle of the road,
And your plaid couch,
And your posters of cats
Are not what I would have
Placed in this room,
But please don’t be
Angry or hurt.
I did not come
For any of these things.
I am here for you alone,
And I am
Because each of the previous
Seventeen evenings
Left me convinced
That you suit me.

Lawrence Beck

Buffalo Bill

With naught, but my wits
(And a jacket and gloves,
A hat, a stack of credit cards,
Two hundred dollars, a car,
And a job as a technical writer,
Which I will start on Monday)
To keep me alive, I am a
Modern-day pioneer,
Bent on making a home
For himself out here, in the
Spooky suburban wilderness.
Thank you for wishing me luck;
I've needed it. Tell the folks back
Home that I have been very brave
As I've dealt with microwave
Dinners, and the absence of both
A couch on which to sit
And a television to watch.
I'm beginning to see why sages
Recommend privation. Going
Through it truly has made me
Stronger. Like the cowboys, on
Their horses, wading through rivers
And snow in the Rockies,
Or Vikings, at the oars of their boats,
Slipping through the mist, at the
Edge of the Newfoundland
Shore, my trials have made
Me bolder than I was.
I no longer wear the knee brace
When I run. Sometimes,
I read without my glasses, so, when
You come, you should be
Prepared to see a different
Man from the one who left you
A week ago. Hurry! I want
You to meet your new hero
(And also to bring me
More blankets) .

Lawrence Beck

Choose

Even you, even now,
Weeks away from the end
Of your twenty-eighth year,
Still swaddled, it's fair to say,
By your high-minded tax-cheat
Father, who grumbles to his
Friends at the club that (lesser)
Law-breakers ought to be jailed,
And your mother, who, over
The course of a lifetime, has been
Reduced to wandering aimlessly
Among the aisles of the stores
In the mall, and babbling to her
Neighbors about which wines
Go well with chicken, and
The best ways to handle
Stains on the carpet, must know
That the choice that you face
Is stark: go with the man
Who is shaven, respectable,
Full of promise, dull as dirt,
Who urges you to remain
(Or return to being) someone
Like your mother, an agreeable,
Helpless thing, drawing your
Salary, and all of your social
Standing from standing at his
Side, or come with me to find out
Whether this half-assed Bohemian
Nonsense really is what you
Want from life. Are you unwilling
To turn from your easel? Can you
Face the thought of waking up
Each morning, hungry and cold,
Counting the bills in your pocket
To see if you'll get to have
Peanut butter or tuna to put
On your toast? Will you
Wait for hours for me to finish
Writing, hoping that, when I do,
I'll still be the gallant rascal
Who I have been, so far,
Who tells you, as he stares
Into your eyes, that you are
More beautiful than unstained
Carpets, and leads you to
The top of a hill for
Lukewarm beer and pizza,
And the chance to sit
At the edge of a world
That is larger and wilder,
And, therefore, probably better,

Despite its dangers and pains,
Than the one into which
He wants you to wedge yourself.

Lawrence Beck

Drunk, I Sang to a Skinny Girl Beneath a Sliver of Moon

I shall cater to you tonight, my dear,
Less for your dewy eyes than for
Those orbs which rest about chest high.
Remember, I led you out of college,
Basiled in Bunting, dissertating,
Eager to do that interpretive thing, and, thereby,
Show your bearded betters, how well
You know the canon, and can can-can
With the prep school's Puritans,
Deconstructing (is that really a word?)
Things that people, in the past, have said.
Tennyson anyone? What's a Wordsworth?
Salve my Burns with Coleridge; surely,
The Pope will understand that Milton's
Stilton starts to stink when Eliot
Leaves it to Chaucer on a saucer,
As he runs to the Pound for his pooch.
Hop's kin isn't beer anymore; it's
Some kind of malty beverage.
Little Dickensons cry at night, but
Use your wit, man (or woman) ,
And you will cross the Crane's
Decrepit bridge. You will get
Your MFA. And what, in return,
Will I get? Aflame, a taste of the Triangle
Shirt-Waist factory, talented talons
That test my mettle and stroke
The little guy, who stares,
One-eyed, already weeping,
At a rather too-educated goddess,
Who hears not one bar
Of the glorious music, but, instead,
Mechanically counts her iambs, graphs
Her biblio, breaks my heart
At the very instant that my tongue
Gives out from trying to make her tingle.

Lawrence Beck

For Gonzales and the Other Monsters

You’re a smooth little fellow.
We’re glad to have found you.
We admire your soft, clean hands,
And, yes, ragged and crude,
As we may be, we endorse
Your elegant findings.
An enemy of ours,
Such as yourself,
Suited and far from the fighting,
Surely is not a soldier.
Thus, you must be
Another kind of combatant,
One who is not protected
By all of that war crimes nonsense,
And you can be tortured
Because you could be
The ticking bomb,
And because some
Greater good (in this case,
Our entertainment)
Would be served.
Scream, if you’d like.
Ponder the injustice,
But always bear in mind
That, as we smash your teeth
And shatter your bones,
Gouge your eyes,
Puncture your eardrums,
We are doing things
That your legal opinions
Have said we could do.

Lawrence Beck

From a Bus Window

I craned my neck
To look at Lydia's house
As my bus went by.
One of an endless line
Of little brick palaces,
Built, I suppose, in the 1950s,
And sold to the children
Of Irish, maybe Italian, immigrants,
But now the pride
Of modestly prosperous
Families, whose ancestors
Came to this country as slaves.
In its yard, like all of the others,
Bounded by a chain link fence
And too tiny to hold a tree,
I saw her father's perfectly manicured lawn
And the brightly-colored plastic slide,
A gift for Lydia's daughter,
That I had helped her to carry home
And put together.
That was a year ago, or so,
And I saw the barbecue grill
On the porch,
Behind a white-painted
Wrought-iron rail,
On which her father,
A plumber, who works
For the city, had cooked
Us hot dogs and steaks,
And I saw the sky-blue door,
And wondered if those
Who lived behind it,
Lydia and her daughter,
And her mother, brother and father,
Still were okay,
And I also wondered
What it was, beside
The color of my skin
(And the four hundred years of evil
That is on it, like an odor
That I cannot wash away) ,
That led her father to drive her
To my apartment,
Where she told me, softly crying,
That he didn't want her
To see me anymore.

Lawrence Beck

From a Steakhouse in Ogallala

The year no longer is new;
It's gotten tarnished.
I sit, again, in a dimly-lit
Booth, pushing my knife
Through a steak, but,
With the blessed moment
Of birth having passed
A couple of days ago,
The happy crowd is gone,
And I am by myself, being
Borne away by the second carriage
In this newly assembled cortege
Of dreary work nights.
The waitress leans on the checkout
Counter. She's fidgety,
Wiping the menu covers,
And often looking at her
Watch. The guys from the
Kitchen have gone outside
To smoke, an act which grows
More appealing to me
By the minute. I've had
Enough to eat. Besides,
I cannot get comfortable
On this bench. I am
Uncomfortable everywhere:
In my room, in my clothes,
In my life, on this desolate
Stretch of prairie, which stands
Between a number of places,
Each of which I once called my
Home, but to which I have
No urge to go.
I am another year older
And deeper in debt, as they say,
And colder, and more deeply
Decrepit. Perhaps the year
Retains its sheen, but these eyes,
Having grown so hollow,
Aren't able to see it.

Lawrence Beck

Happy New Year From Fallujah!

Yes, I speak English. I learned it
Studying engineering, up in Michigan.
"How 'bout them Spartans? "
"Fuck off, towel-head; "
The phrases that aren't in books,
And here we are, in my country now,
With damned little left to engineer,
Since you and the other fine young men
Dashed across the land, like locusts,
In great machines that pulverized
Virtually every building.
Somebody said that we'd
Done the same to yours,
But that turned out to be wrong.
They said that they'd catch us
With horrible weapons, but look;
Is there anywhere they could be
That hasn't been dug up, and blasted,
And combed? And then, after every
Other excuse had failed, your leaders
Told us that you'd come to bring us
Democracy. We'll have a government
We have chosen. We'll be almost
Up to your standards, and our two
Nations (or the pieces thereof) ,
Having gotten to be wonderful friends,
Won't want to open old wounds
By mentioning war crimes
Or reparations. I lived long enough
In the U.S. to know that nobody
There, and none of you here, can be
Convinced that you have done
Wrong. You are, in your fevered,
Empty minds, a chosen people,
The world's saviors, pure as your
Effeminate, Nordic Jesus, unable
To do any harm (except to those
Who deserve tt) , and nothing that anyone
Says will cause you to realize that you
Have made a mistake and should leave,
But I also know this: you are
A race of absurdly impatient people,
Who cannot tolerate pain, and, thus,
When one of you loses his life,
The length of your occupation
Shrinks by a day or so. That means
That, as they would say in Michigan,
Though "this isn't personal, " you
Are going to have to die.

Lawrence Beck

Heard in the Hallway at the Metaphysicists' Convention

Let us not waste time debating
The ease with which the task is done.
Instead, let’s examine the larger issue:
Who would want to take candy
From a baby?

Lawrence Beck

I Know Their Fete, But Not My Own

His oleaginous patter
And his gift for holding
Names to faces don’t mean
Much to me, but I know
That they’ve made him
Very successful,
And his wife’s miraculous
Image of openness,
False as her cheekbones
And nose, has made me
Feel welcome here,
In their sumptuous home.
She’s taken my jacket
And gotten me Scotch,
And ushered me into
The living room, where
Her husband charms,
And various, vaguely
Familiar-looking titans
Quietly chat with each other.
I suppose that, again,
I’m the token artist.
Someone will ask me
What I write and admit
That they don’t have the time
To read, and I, trying
To be funny, will ask him
Or her what I should do
With money, though I
Haven’t found the means
To gather any,
And, after a wonderful dinner,
Eaten in relative silence,
And a few more hours
Of trying not to look
Too out of place, I will see
That the crowd is beginning
To thin, and that will allow
Me to thank my delightful
Hostess, firmly shake her
Husband’s hand, and those
Of several others, and,
At last, be on my way,
Though, once outside,
I’ll have to face the fact
That I have nowhere else
To go.

Lawrence Beck

I Would Rather Not Remember

If I had known how vividly,
Even after a decade
Of steadily darkening years,
I would remember your long,
Thin hand, holding your hair
Away from your face, your eyes,
Flecked yellow and gray,
And sad, filled with pity,
Empty of love, the smell
Of your smoky clothes,
And the tight-lipped, futile
Smile that you made, I
Wouldn’t have taken you
To that meadow, my church
In the forest, and told you
That, more than anything
Up to that point, and, it seems,
More than anything since,
What I wanted was to hear
You say that you didn’t
Plan to leave me.

Lawrence Beck

I, Too, Am Aglow, In a Way

Elevated to be among
(But not so needy as) the fireflies,
Gaudy desperadoes, frantically searching
For mates in the failing light, I was
More than grateful to you,
I was yours entirely then,
And I have been that way
As the nights have grown too cold
For us to share outside, and
The money that you got from your aunt's
Estate dwindled almost to nothing,
And, though I am not, by nature,
An optimist, nor am I
In any sense, someone of such
Great worth that you have no choice
But to treasure me forever, I promise,
To you, and to my hitherto not-so-faithful
Self, that I will remain in love
With you for many more months
To come, perhaps even longer
Than the time it will take for
My fellows to join me in the sky
Again, and, flashing their lights,
Attempt to obtain what I believe
That I already have found.

Lawrence Beck

I'll Write You a Still Life

My muse is exhausted.
She’s gone away, up to Wisconsin,
I think, to visit her mother.
She left a note on my keyboard,
Which said, “Stop your pounding,
And go outside, and DO NOT
Think about calling me. I will
Return when I feel better.
Then again, maybe I won’t.”
Consequently, I’m at a loss.
I cannot gin up much interest in
Another discussion of the women,
Real and imagined, close-by
Or far way, who have led me
Through my Prometheus act,
Sometimes tearing away my heart,
Sometimes making it grow, nor
Can I get myself to say anything
More about the stupid and evil
Men who rule the land, or the
Simply stupid ones, bland commodities,
Packaged in millions, instantly ready
To fire guns or rise and applaud on cue.
I will have to do as my friend, Raymond,
Who is a painter, does, when he runs out
Of ideas. He gathers junk that he
Keeps around his house, arranges
It nicely, and paints. “It’s nothing, ”
He says, “It’s a still life; it’s art, ”
And, in that spirit, I give you this:
A poem about a table. That is all.

Said table is brown (surprise!) ,
And about the length of my arms,
Spread wide. It is made of actual
Pieces of wood; I can’t say
What kind, being woefully ignorant
Of those sorts of things, but I can tell
That it hasn’t veneers, or plywood, or
Pressboard, or contact paper. It was
A fine piece of furniture once,
Some pioneer family’s dinner table,
But, now, it is dusty, and chipped,
And gouged, demoted and sent
Downstairs. I have covered it
With my computer and avalanched
Stacks of bills, and I no longer
Bother to find a coaster for it
When I put down my coffee.
Its left side is bleached from
The sun through my window,
Balanced by crescent-shaped

Marks, like moons, on the right
That my son made with a hammer.
In short, it is somewhat useful,
But not very pretty, like its
Owner, a passive component
Of a purposeless world,

But I won’t go on about that.
My muse just called to warn me
That I shouldn’t write about myself
Until she has gotten back her strength,
And can be at my side to restrain me.

Lawrence Beck

Mr. Orwell, Meet Mr. Bush

At the start of a day
Of lamentable tedium,
I scoured the headlines
For signs of something
That might blow up
As the hours went by
Into some sort of
Dreadful scandal that
Would cause the glossy
Mannequins who report
The news, and those who
Make it, to stammer,
To shudder, to fail in some
Way in their efforts
To make the world
Appear to be ordered
And bound, always theirs,
Not for such boobs
As yours truly,
But I found nothing.
I brushed my teeth
And left for work,
And the masters and
Minions, in front of
Immaculate backdrops
Peddled their polished
Blather. None of it
Would prove to be true,
Of course, but, having been
Said, calmly and often,
It would suffice.
In the cars around me,
On the highway to town,
All of the faces were docile.
Terror was down, stocks
Were up; everything
Was going to be fine.

Lawrence Beck

Not Your Savior

I can solve all of your problems, Elise.
That’s not even halfway true,
But, maybe, you can solve some of mine,
And, in these days of numbing cold
And darkness, my long hours
Of staring at nothing, and yours
Of relentless efforts to make enough
Money to pay the bills and find
The time to tend to your children,
We could forge an imperfect alliance,
Meeting for lunch on the sly,
And holding each other, once in a while,
Late in the dreadful night.
Both of us are lonely, it seems,
And the prospect of sharing our
Various burdens (a paltry one,
Compared to having them lifted)
Has led me to think that we
Would be better off together.
I am not a savior at your door.
I am, instead, empty-handed.
Are you going to let me in?

Lawrence Beck

One Afternoon

Irretrievably out of place,
I, in my phony farmer's garb,
And he in his cliched academic
Oxford cloth and corduroy,
Killed a few hours of our exile
To the steppe in a nearly empty
Bar, one across town from the college,
Chosen only because we believed
That it wouldn't be filled with students.
Instead, a couple of stools,
And two or three of the stacking
Chairs and pedestal tables
Were occupied by guys
In construction workers' clothes
And one quite tall, simultaneously
Scary and pitiful woman,
Who was wearing a lot of
Makeup and clearly, sometime
In the past, had bleached her hair.
He and I, middle-aged
Underachievers, moaned a while
About the way that so many
Precious dollars bypassed us,
And even our more deserving,
Ambitious colleagues, on their
Way to studies, and committees,
And spokesmen, and nicer
Carpets and bigger desks for the
Drones, who are said to administer
Our institution of higher learning, and,
Of course, we spent some time
Discussing recent, and welcome, turns
In feminine fashion, the tight-fitting clothes,
Bare skin, and real and synthetic cleavage,
That had led us to lengthen our office hours
And filled us with all-but-impossible dreams
As we blathered, unheard, in front of classes
Of slobbering, snoring rubes.
We took turns slurring our stupid
President, a grown-up version
Of the people who we had come
To the bar to avoid, feckless and
Fascist, ignorant as hell. I said
That I couldn't understand why
So many people stood by,
Silently staring, even applauding, as he
Tore up the constitution and whispered,
"Never call it torture; what you are doing
Is trying to find the truth."
My friend just laughed. "You have
Been on the campus too long,
I'm afraid. Take a good look

At your neighbors. Surely, not one
In a hundred has read the constitution.
It’s only an idol to them, a thing,
Like the flag, that symbolizes what
They are. It doesn’t have to be
Understood, and, remember,
These are the decent sons and daughters
Of the people who killed off the Indians,
Cousins of those who slaughtered the Jews,
Sisters and brothers of the Jews
Who murder the Arabs. There is
Nothing new in any of this.
Forget it. Finish your drink.
I have to get us back to school by six.
A gorgeous young thing needs some
Help with her paper, and I,
Who have lost all faith in mankind
As a whole, still do have some hope
That pleasant afternoon chatter
And careful placement of fingers
And other digits at night can keep
One’s life from becoming
Unbearably sad.”

Lawrence Beck

Period Photo of an Unknown Couple

From where do you gaze
At this picture of me, waving,
Wanly or wearily, certainly
Without conviction,
Arm around my wife
On the shore of some sort
Of body of water?
What do you know
That I couldn't?
When did I die; of what,
And where, and was I
With anyone?
What language do you speak,
And how long has it been
Since the sun, which shines
So brightly on the dappled water
Behind me, has shown
On the unseen parts
Of my sclerotic world,
Known to you only as silent highways,
Abandoned factories
And empty houses,
Storefronts built, but never
Used, and unpaid bills,
Tumbling across uncultivated fields,
Having been blown
From the mailbox
Of someone, who was sent
To the war, and didn't return?
Do you believe in the permanence
Of your culture? Don't.
I'm waving in hope
That you'll see me,
And hear my warning,
The moan of the wind
As it passes
Through broken windows:
What you know will die,
And someone, sometime
Later on, will look at your picture
And wonder
What you were thinking.

Lawrence Beck

Read This Immediately, or Kitty Gets it!

I know that my son
Will love this day,
Among the last before school begins,
With its gentle, cooling breeze,
Its sun, flowers in bloom,
And absence of chores,
Time and space
To construct an adventure,
And I know that I will hate it.
The lawnmower's broken.
The barbecue grill is falling apart.
I have no money, no time,
No inclination, heartsick
And worn-out, as I am,
To resurrect in myself
The way that he feels.
I wonder if I should warn him
That happiness doesn't last.
He should savor it while he can,
As, all too soon,
Such paltry tragedies as I face
Will shatter his spirit,
And make him like me,
But I won't.
I suffered enough
At the hands of my elders
To learn that there is a difference
Between helpful advice
(Such as "tie your shoes")
And the churlishness
That naturally flows from those
Who cannot enjoy
The world the way that he does.
I will say nothing
And tend to my dreadful tasks,
And hope, without conviction,
That he will be among the few
Who find more good than bad
In each day,
Even after they're grown.

Lawrence Beck

Son, set

Why should I dwell
On my failings as a father?
They’re known: my preference
For words that are written,
Not spoken, my serial
Losses of nerve, my contempt
For what passes for education,
And yet, as I stare at my son,
Uneasily sleeping next to me,
Wracked by inexplicable fears,
Unable to do as he’s told,
Hurtling downward as a result
Of his lack of interest in any
Of the things that his teachers
Insist that he should do,
I am filled with guilt
For letting him lose the way.
Whose way? Not mine.
I am too much like him
To lead him anywhere,
Luckier than he is
For having been born
In an absurdly prosperous age,
When willful idlers were said
To be taking time
To find themselves,
And there was nothing wrong
With that, I took forever
And never did finish the job,
But, now, the time and the money
Are gone, and authorities,
Keen or desperate,
Try to mold every piece
Of clay who arrives
Into a purposeful pot,
The better to make good wages
And master the world.
No one will bring my boy
His dinner unless he learns
Which knife to wield,
Which formulas to repeat,
And which prejudices
He has to take to heart,
And, so, as I sit with him,
By-passed, useless,
Slightly proud of the way
That he wanders in circles,
Just beyond any potter’s reach,
I worry that my greatest
Failing has been
That I let him know me.

Lawrence Beck

Thoughtless Acts of Destruction

Boys are out each night
In the suburbs of Paris,
Burning cars. Why not?
No one they know can buy one.
No one they know
Has a job or can leave
His family's shitty apartment.
Someone on TV
Said they were scum,
And, all along the precious
Boulevards, pale-faced paragons
Of the real France, socialists,
Cluck their tongues at each other.
It's terrible!
Then they sit down to croissants,
And open their bags
To show the things they have bought.

In London, the same sorts of boys,
For the same sorts of reasons,
Walk onto subway trains
And set off the bombs on their backs.
In Holland, they slash the throats
Of people who call them names.

And who do you say has done wrong?
"That's easy: the bombers, the torchers,
The slashers; not anyone, like me,
Who simply goes about his business,
Taking his groceries
From little brown bastards,
Who can't seem to pick up
The language, and have to be
Shooed away from my street by the cops
When they've finished their work
For the day.
If they don't like it here,
They should go somewhere else,
And, if they can't figure out
That, whatever they do,
I always will be their better,
Then that's just too bad for them,
Though I hope that they'll
Come to their senses soon,
And see that everyone is hurt
By these thoughtless acts of destruction."

Lawrence Beck

To One of the Many Fish

Could I win you with one more
Volley of metaphors, tell you
That you are the moon, so cold,
And pretty, and hard to reach?
Should I say that you fill up
My heart, as a roast fills a belly,
Richly and fully, or should I say
That you're liquor, and I am
Intoxicated, flat-out drunk on the floor
In your presence (and, when
You're gone, I become so sick
That I vomit) ? And what
Would you say in return?
Would you, artlessly, as you
Have done in the past, mess
With your hair in the mirror
And finally tell me that there
Is someplace you must go?
Would you stare at me
Almost as if I'm a monster,
And cautiously back away?
I've seen you do that, too,
And, as a result, I am nearing
The end of my ardor.
Perhaps, today, I will save
My metaphors, polish them up
A bit, and begin to see if
I can identify another, who might
Succumb to them.

Lawrence Beck

To Zahra

Whatever is born
Is destined to die.
Uranium worries itself
To lead. The eddy
The waterfall makes unwinds,
And the muezzin's honeyed
Sing-song tenor surely
Will take on a rasp.
Nevertheless, I make this pledge
To you, and I do so
For reasons which go beyond
The peculiar way that your body,
An engineer's nightmare
Of smooth and gently
Merging curves,
Silhouetted against the sun
This morning, sates my eyes,
Yet leaves them desperately
Hungry: I will do whatever I can
To sustain this sensation
That your arrival here
And the way that you
Seem to crave not just
My touch, but also
My companionship
Are gifts of far greater value
Than those that I've gotten
From everyone else.

Lawrence Beck

Two Dogs' Lives

A twenty-foot length of yellow rope,
The kind that boaters use,
Is laid out straight in my back yard,
One end still tied to a fence post;
The other thoroughly chewed.
My dog has gotten away again,
And, surely, is running amuck
Somewhere nearby, sniffing the air
And serially bedding the bitches,
Whose owners, local squires,
Will call and curse me
For letting my randy mutt
Pollute their darlings' purebred loins.
I will apologize (insincerely) ,
And spend this afternoon
Crisscrossing the lanes
And the bridle paths, on which,
According to the neighborhood laws,
A lowlife from across the highway
Isn't supposed to walk, and,
Sooner or later, I'll find my dog.
I'll drag him home by the collar,
And give him the usual lecture.
"Buddy, " I'll say, "it's not that you're not
Handsome. It's more a matter of class.
Those gals, whatever their inclinations,
Are not meant to be loved by you,
And he will stare up at me with guilty eyes,
Not knowing what he's done wrong.
I'll pat his head and tie the rope again,
And stalk into my house, thinking
That his desires are exactly the same
As mine, our difference being
That he is a slave to his, while I
Am a slave to my fears. He schemes,
And always will, to escape
Restraint, while the rope to which
I'm tethered isn't chewed or cut
Or challenged in any way.

Lawrence Beck

Welcome, Economists!

Gentlemen (sadly, the term is inclusive;
There’s not a woman among us,
Not a person who isn’t
Remarkably pale, no one
Whose hair is flamboyant
Or who has chosen to wear brown shoes) ,
What I have to say
Is less the product of malice
(Though, surely, I bear some of that)
Than it is an expression of my concern
That you and I are gravely at risk
Of losing our jobs.
How long, after all,
Can the world pretend to respect
A science, such as ours,
That became becalmed, ceased to advance,
In those precarious, languid years
Before Dr. Guillotine’s machine arrived?
Said machine, and others that followed,
Steamships, telegraphs, locomotives,
Airplanes and satellites,
And the ceaseless tumult,
People losing their heads,
Their nations, their native tongues,
Dying by the millions in trenches
And camps and on lands
That had gone to desert,
Forced our fellow scientists
To alter their views of the world.
Nothing was permanent.
Everything changed.
What was thought to have been at rest
Actually always moves,
Though how it does never is certain,
As the observer also always moves,
And, in fact, exists, adrift,
In a universe that is his,
Or hers, alone,
Yet we have done our best
To try to stay where we believed
That we were, piling up
Mathematical walls, functions
And statistics, with which
We’ve hoped to preserve
Our faith in equilibria
And rational navigation
Of the surrounding chaos.
Tyrants pay us handsomely
And use our words as weapons,
Though they chuckle in private
At our naiveté,
While the rest of the world hates us.

We are in peril, I tell you.
Soon, we will have to leave our fortresses,
Close the salons, dirty our hands,
Prove to someone that we
Know something, or else
We will suffer the fate
Of our ancestors, the alchemists,
Who found themselves abandoned
And eventually disappeared.

Lawrence Beck