



**The Collected Shorter Poems  
of Kenneth Rexroth**

Kenneth Rexroth

The Collected Shorter Poems

NEW DIRECTIONS

# GÖDEL'S PROOF

NEW POEMS **1965**

*“A self-contained system is a contradiction of terms. QED”*

For my daughters  
Mary and Katharine  
and for Carol, these new poems.

*When the nightingale cries  
All night and all day,  
I have my sweetheart  
Under the flower  
Till the watch from the tower  
Cries, "Lovers, rise!  
The dawn comes and the bright day."*

ANONYMOUS PROVENÇAL

# **ANDROMEDA CHAINED TO HER ROCK THE GREAT NEBULA IN HER HEART**

## **I**

The ache  
The heart is never well  
The incurable pain  
The iron warp of time  
The shrinking web of life  
The grey unquiet ocean  
Under uninhabited fog  
The roar which always begins  
And is never still  
Which nothing will ever stop  
In the grey  
In the white  
In the bitter throat  
Against the concave wall  
The little pile of soiled bones  
Nails will never glitter  
Brain will never ooze  
Gulf will no longer open  
O heart  
O charred heart  
O broken eye

## **II**

Anguish and form and prayer  
No excuse no betrayal  
No dimension in space or time  
Without caution without consequence without motion  
The many blades of the revolving razors  
The many tears of the breaking sorrow  
The fear of the bear the ghost of the bear  
The gear of care that is always here  
When the cross of words spells zero  
There are trees in the sea  
There are red columns on the horizon  
And fear everywhere  
And every year no word at all for all her pain

And she said I want just what you want she said  
Just a big box full of old veils  
And the shears were always cutting at night  
Always far away or always near cutting  
Move the cube at right angles to everywhere  
At right angles to itself  
Lips to lips and eyes to eyes move  
At right angles  
Hands on hands edges  
Spin in light beams  
In the rattleflake of brightness  
Gone  
Call  
Kindred  
Keep  
Coinage

### III

O fire around fire in fire of fire with fire  
By fire alone  
Fire pointed fire the star in star  
And the self falls in god shimmer  
The visionary shipwreck  
The kidnapped ecstasy  
The copulation of the lightning and the lighthouse  
A skirt lifts its tent of perfume  
A woman's frail veiled sight moved stirred  
Stirred the virgin in the womb of the man  
Ishtar the tree of fiery stars  
The eye wraps itself up in its retina  
The old dark transmigrating eye  
A boat of oak sails  
Under a tree of silver  
Under a crown of thorns  
Gold spring blue autumn purple winter  
Song alone  
Or the harp in a crystal room  
Snow falling ever more heavily  
The room growing steadily darker  
Bones like white wires cry out in their dream

### IV

Eyes in moss

Salt in mouth  
Stone in heart  
An owl rings the changes of silence  
Torn head  
Crow's wings  
Black eyeballs  
Poison seeps through the parabolic sand  
The rock on fire  
Ice falls towards the sun  
The hurled axe  
Lost in the future  
Of an automatic and anonymous dream  
The brazen serpent  
In the desert of hallucination  
Manna is the excrement of vermin  
What is the shadow  
Crawling on the eggshell  
What chorale  
Flees in the sea shell  
The bite of the gods  
In the wilderness  
Metamorphosing the demigods  
Thunder lost in shadow  
The arc with its unknown spectrum  
Of colors never seen before  
Infants falling  
In the web of sudden geometries  
And caution awry  
In the power of these hearts  
O tower in the dark  
Chord in perfume  
Day of wrath  
Morning of delusion  
The iron crow wings  
Bear away the torn head  
Into the fragile sky  
Into the rapture of the depths  
Where the blood runs cold

## **TRAVELERS IN EREWHON**

You open your  
Dress on the dusty

Bed where no one  
Has slept for years  
An owl moans on the roof  
You say  
My dear my  
Dear  
In the smoky light of the old  
Oil lamp your shoulders  
Belly breasts buttocks  
Are all like peach blossoms  
Huge stars far away far apart  
Outside the cracked window pane  
Immense immortal animals  
Each one only an eye  
Watch  
You open your body  
No end to the night  
No end to the forest  
House abandoned for a lifetime  
In the forest in the night  
No one will ever come  
To the house  
Alone  
In the black world  
In the country of eyes

## **OAXACA 1925**

You were a beautiful child  
With troubled face, green eyelids  
And black lace stockings  
We met in a filthy bar  
You said  
“My name is Nada  
I don’t want anything from you  
I will not take from you  
I will give you nothing”  
I took you home down alleys  
Splattered with moonlight and garbage and cats  
To your desolate disheveled room  
Your feet were dirty  
The lacquer was chipped on your fingernails  
We spent a week hand in hand

Wandering entranced together  
Through a sweltering summer  
Of guitars and gunfire and tropical leaves  
And black shadows in the moonlight  
A lifetime ago

## **GRADUALISM**

We slept naked  
On top of the covers and woke  
In the chilly dawn and crept  
Between the warm sheets and made love  
In the morning you said  
“It snowed last night on the mountain”  
High up on the blue black diorite  
Faint orange streaks of snow  
In the ruddy dawn  
I said  
“It has been snowing for months  
All over Canada and Alaska  
And Minnesota and Michigan  
Right now wet snow is falling  
In the morning streets of Chicago  
Bit by bit they are making over the world  
Even in Mexico even for us”

## **OPEN THE BLIND**

Nests in the eaves stir in the dawn  
Ephemeral as our peace  
Morning prayer  
Grace before food  
I understand  
The endless sky the small earth  
The shadow cone  
Your shining  
Lips and eyes  
Your thighs drenched with the sea  
A telescope full of fireflies  
Innumerable nebulae all departing

Ten billion years before we ever met

## **HIGH PROVENCE**

Every evening at seven o'clock  
We met under the soaring swallows  
In the dense shade of the ancient plane trees  
At the same café table  
On a little square of golden limestone houses  
Dry grass and gravel  
Where a fountain spoke softly  
The language of the dwellers  
In the center of the earth  
Rose and green gold and blue  
Smoke of olive and wine twigs  
From the supper stoves  
High up swallows  
Laced the immense sky  
We kissed in the perfumed evening  
And walked off hand in hand  
Along a winding road  
Over a Roman bridge  
Each bucket of the mossy mill wheel  
That revolved so slowly  
Through the vanishing water  
From the dark underground  
To the twilit sky  
Held an aquarium  
Full of brilliant fish  
No one had ever seen before  
We sat on the hillside and looked back  
Over the town and counted the bells  
And the new stars  
Hazy hair flesh like a plume  
Did you watch this half moon  
Ten hours ago when it went by  
The end of your steep street  
Swimming over the Mediterranean

## **CAMARGUE**

Green moon blaze  
Over violet dancers  
Shadow heads catch fire  
Forget forget  
Forget awake aware dropping in the well  
Where the nightingale sings  
In the blooming pomegranate  
You beside me  
Like a colt swimming slowly in kelp  
In the nude sea  
Where ten thousand birds  
Move like a waved scarf  
On the long surge of sleep

## **AMONG THE CYPRESSES AT THE END OF THE WAY OF THE CROSS**

Will you eat water melon  
Or drink lemonade  
Beside San Miniato  
This hot twilight  
Arno blurring in its white dry cobbled bed  
Wine honey olive oil  
Fill the air with their secret vapors  
And a black potter  
Treads treads treads  
Her wheel shaping a pot  
With a template cut from your flesh  
Lovers whimper in the dusk  
We are lost do you hear  
We are all lost  
As the hundred bells break  
And the stars speak

## **SOTTOPORTICO SAN ZACCARIA**

It rains on the roofs  
As it rains in my poems  
Under the thunder  
We fit together like parts

Of a magic puzzle  
Twelve winds beat the gulls from the sky  
And tear the curtains  
And lightning glisters  
On your sweating breasts  
Your face topples into dark  
And the wind sounds like an army  
Breaking through dry reeds  
We spread our aching bodies in the window  
And I can smell the odor of hay  
In the female smell of Venice

## **LEAVING L'ATELIER — AIX-EN-PROVENCE**

Bare trees  
Smoky lavender twigs  
All the world  
Receding horizontal grey blue panels  
Ochre walls  
Piebald pink tile roofs  
Black jagged olive trees killed in the winter of great cold  
Everywhere feathers of silver green new olive sprouts  
Everywhere red brown plowed fields  
Stubs of waiting vines  
Hoarfrost on the dark purple plum buds  
A black white and green magpie  
In wavy flight  
Under the morning moon

## **TIME IS AN INCLUSION SERIES SAID McTAGGART**

**5 POEMS ON THIS SUBJECT**

**I**

In just a minute we will say goodbye  
I will drive away and see you  
Cross the boulevard in the rear view mirror  
Maybe you will make out the back of my head

Disappearing in the traffic  
And then we will never see one another ever again  
It will happen in just another minute now

## II

Willow Street  
Street of bitter leaves  
Three generations of whores in the windows  
Mother daughter granddaughter  
Whose fox are you  
Nobody's fox I'm a lone fox  
A lone black fox a lone blue fox  
Blue fox that's me  
The best head on Willow Street  
She's dead Helen is dead Dolores is dead  
Willow Street is only an embayment  
In a ten-story housing project  
Willow Street is gone along with  
The street of bad boys the street of bad girls  
The street where the heart rests  
Will they leave even a tiny alley  
To name after me

## III

Talk in a dark room  
Birds fly into the clouded mirror  
And never come back  
The mirror wears out

## IV

For a very long time now  
I have been following a black vine  
I cannot find the root  
I cannot find the tip  
There is a high wall of thorns  
There is a thick wall of thorns  
Around an unknown castle  
The thorns are covered with flowers  
Each flower is different  
But their odor is the perfume  
Of a body I have lost

## V

Thousands of white scattered  
Petals on the waters of hours

Moonlight music surging sea  
Commonplace sentiments  
Heartbreaks and kisses  
Singing voices and voices  
Far down the misty beach  
By the driftwood fires  
Singing forever forever

## **PHAEDO**

After Midnight Mass  
In the first black subzero hour of Christmas  
I take a twig and white piece of paper  
And show you the fragile shadow of Sirius  
The Dog Star guarding the Manger  
Sleeping at the foot of the Cross

## **PARK IN THE PUBLIC'S OR IN THE PUBLIC, PARKS**

*For Parks Hitchcock's magazine "Kyack"*

Cessible  
Inack  
Cessibleinack  
In Nyack  
Inaccessible the evidence is  
They are all intransitive  
You can't get Through  
You can't get Anyplace  
Not with them Zeno knew it  
You know Zeno  
Zenon Cruel Zenon D'Elée  
M. Zenon  
Cessible  
Inack  
On the Isle of Dogs  
In the Horse Latitudes  
Gentlemen by the Bowels of Christ I regret that I have  
only one fox to feed for my country that is what

Bishop Latimore said as he was being bit and et  
in the Horse Latitudes

On the Isle of Dogs

Cessible cessible  
In Nyack  
N.Y.

Attached to their harpoons by long rawhide cords were inflated  
whole seal skins a couple of seals of air to each harpoon they came as close as  
possible and rammed home the harpoons by main force the whale dove but the  
floats of sealskin pulled him back to the surface again and then they would ram in  
another harpoon and finally when he was worn out the leader would come  
directly up to his snout and stab him through the eye into the brain  
You wouldn't think Eskimos could do that would you  
The whale is comparatively inaccessible to Stone Age Man  
And the Eskimos unless they tempt Fate are inaccessible  
to the whale  
In Nyack Cessible Not in a  
N.Y. Inack Kyack

## **SONG FOR A DANCER**

I dream my love goes riding out  
Upon a coal black mare.  
A cloud of dark all about  
Her—her floating hair.

She wears a short green velvet coat.  
Her blouse is of red silk,  
Open to her swan like throat,  
Her breasts white as milk.

Her skirt is of green velvet, too,  
And shows her silken thigh,  
Purple leather for her shoe,  
Dark as her blue eye.

From her saddle grows a rose.  
She rides in scented shade.  
Silver birds sing as she goes  
This song that she made:

“My father was a nightingale,  
My mother a mermaid. Honeyed notes that never fail  
Upon my lips they laid.”

## OTTFSSENTE

twelve  
a dozen  
a docent  
a hundred does in the zendo does  
1905  
down on Victoria Nyazi  
The African Princess by Erasmus B. Black  
The Lady or the Tiger by Claude Balls  
does  
dozing sing do  
oh do  
from dark to full fill filled and fully factual  
does  
there is at least an entity a  
there is at least an entity not a called b  
fundamental to the assumption of duality  
is the assumption that the class of classes  
is itself a class  
that’s what b is  
don’t you see  
A B C D  
goldfish  
out of order springs the multifarious world  
out of order  
oh do  
everything going joyfully everywhere  
in all the gleaming myriad dimensions of space  
do do  
oh do  
to the mathematically mature it is well known that there  
is no such thing as the correct missing number in any  
specified sequence. It is possible to insert any number  
whatever  
and find a formula which will justify the sequence term for  
term  
but the does were missing  
from the zendo garden

a dozen does  
and the singular literate goldfish  
from the crystal deep  
said the knowing  
docent to the dozen  
unknowing  
dozing  
Africans  
who said  
oh do  
sing  
so the Princess  
the Lady  
Claude  
and the Tiger  
all sang  
do.

## **CINQUE TERRE**

A voice sobs on colored sand  
Where colored horses run  
Athwart the surf  
Us alone in the universe  
Where griefs move like the sea  
Of the love lost  
Under the morning star  
Creeping down the sky  
Into pale blind water  
And we make love  
At the very edge of the cliff  
Where the vineyards end  
In a fringe of ancient  
Silver olive trees

## **TOOK**

take it bright day first hour  
single chime clear water one thought  
nobody has it

take age  
take again  
take anger  
take anguish  
point take point  
or yellow collars question  
take and take  
nobody  
nobody rode the sheep and has it  
take nobody and got away nobody  
so bright and salty  
so bright and blue  
young nobody has it  
take girlish  
and fans and blades  
and glittering scales  
take time  
and mark it  
dogged dogged  
but what dogged  
makes merry  
takes and calves answers  
each each  
when the bears are polar  
it all goes round and round  
and rockets and rackets  
take time take time  
the time nobody ever had  
take it all away take it far away

and

hide

it somewhere under the fine sand filled with shards of pots  
shaped like the torsos of splendor where everything is  
hidden and never will be deciphered and all the camels  
will die before anybody gets there and not one of the  
angels will ever come back  
as  
took

## **A FLUTE OVERHEARD**

Grey summer

Low tide the sea in the air  
A flute song  
In a neighboring house  
Forty years ago  
Socrates on death  
The pages turn  
The clear voice  
Sea fog in the cypress  
My daughter calls  
From the next room  
After forty years  
A girl's candid face  
Above my desk  
Twenty-five years dead  
Grey summer fog  
And the smell of the living sea  
A voice on the moving air  
Reading Socrates on death

## **THE WHEEL REVOLVES**

You were a girl of satin and gauze  
Now you are my mountain and waterfall companion.  
Long ago I read those lines of Po Chu I  
Written in his middle age.  
Young as I was they touched me.  
I never thought in my own middle age  
I would have a beautiful young dancer  
To wander with me by falling crystal waters,  
Among mountains of snow and granite,  
Least of all that unlike Po's girl  
She would be my very daughter.

The earth turns towards the sun.  
Summer comes to the mountains.  
Blue grouse drum in the red fir woods  
All the bright long days.  
You put blue jay and flicker feathers  
In your hair.  
Two and two violet green swallows  
Play over the lake.  
The blue birds have come back  
To nest on the little island.

The swallows sip water on the wing  
And play at love and dodge and swoop  
Just like the swallows that swirl  
Under and over the Ponte Vecchio.  
Light rain crosses the lake  
Hissing faintly. After the rain  
There are giant puffballs with tortoise shell backs  
At the edge of the meadow.  
Snows of a thousand winters  
Melt in the sun of one summer.  
Wild cyclamen bloom by the stream.  
Trout veer in the transparent current.  
In the evening marmots bark in the rocks.  
The Scorpion curls over the glimmering ice field.  
A white crowned night sparrow sings as the moon sets.  
Thunder growls far off.  
Our campfire is a single light  
Amongst a hundred peaks and waterfalls.  
The manifold voices of falling water  
Talk all night.  
Wrapped in your down bag  
Starlight on your cheeks and eyelids  
Your breath comes and goes  
In a tiny cloud in the frosty night.  
Ten thousand birds sing in the sunrise.  
Ten thousand years revolve without change.  
All this will never be again.

## **ORGANIZATION MEN IN AFFLUENT SOCIETY**

It is deep twilight, my wife  
And girls are fixing supper  
In the kitchen. I turn out  
The reading lamp and rest my eyes.  
Outside the window the snow  
Has turned deep blue. *Anthony*  
*and Cleopatra* after a trying day. I think of  
Those vigorous rachitic  
Men and women taking off  
Their clothes of lace and velvet  
And gold brocade and climbing  
Naked into bed together  
Lice in their stinking perfumed