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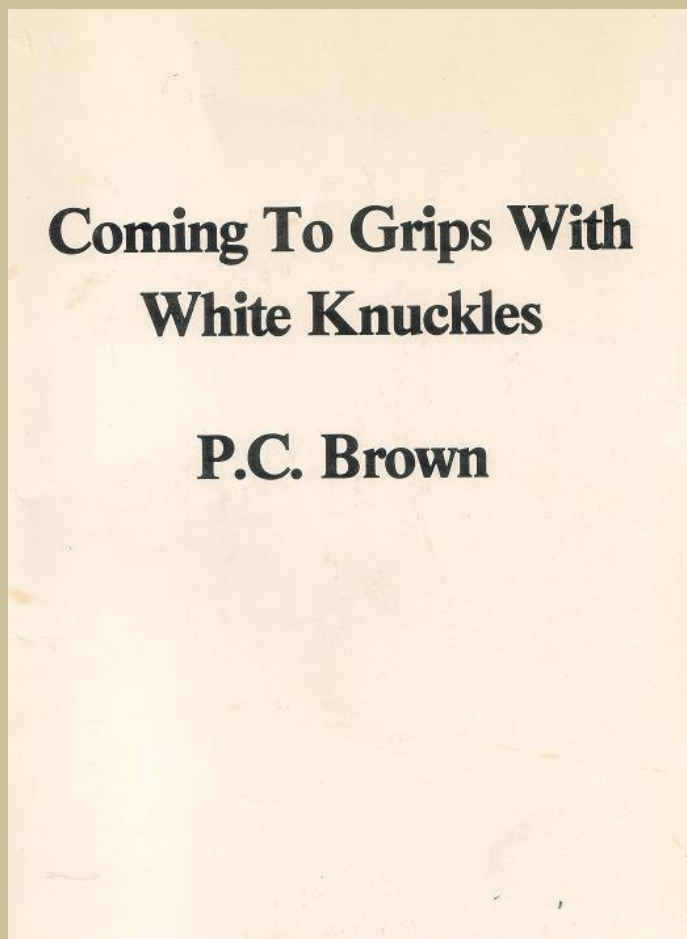
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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK COMING TO GRIPS WITH WHITE KNUCKLES \*\*\*

**COMING TO GRIPS WITH WHITE KNUCKLES**

**By**

**Paul Cameron Brown**



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Toute est dangereuse, tout est nécessaire.

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## KING AND JOHN STREETS

### (FOR ISABELLA VACANCY CRAWFORD)

When the shadows are hungry  
 animals on walls  
 and theatre goers are  
 parliamentarians engaged  
 in a repast or feast  
 of words.  
 the lone house stands  
 as a stone shard or sliver  
 about to disengage itself  
 from the eye.

For behind boulders of tenement  
 walls and vines creeping  
 to match the red brick of  
 sumac and the parrot bill of fire escape stairs,  
 I watch the building  
 cylindrical in the darkness  
 crouching thin air  
 as if an awkward child  
 were about to make strange  
 for the dozenth time.

There are few things to duplicate  
 plaster held by the bite of wind,  
 open poverty like lesions  
 refusing to move.  
 neglect that festers  
 to pop the endless seams  
 of the mind like burning  
 radiator caps,  
 scalding water to lighten  
 the lanced up eyes of vermin who  
 lather these swollen rooms.

[7]

## COLETTE

The waitress mainlines  
 the cup under the saucer  
 balancing it on the  
 waistband of her arm  
 much as a junkie  
 might tie a tourniquet.

Wiping the glass edge  
 of the table  
 clear of croissant crumbs  
 & watching the barely dry  
 reflection of her own  
 image going thru the emotions.  
 the California chic  
 pothouse & gardenia  
 bloom effect of  
 her work is enough  
 to leave a dirty smear.

[8]

## CHINATOWN I

And a little farther  
 the Fu Manchu mustache  
 curved in mock epic proportions  
 of a scimitar un-sheaved for action,  
 perhaps the executioner's progress  
 his victims entombed to their skulls

in rolls of quivering earth--  
the parting of the ways  
coming as your coin drops  
to the rasp of his  
tin cup chuckle.

[9]

## TORONTO

Quennelles. Lady of the Gold Horse with Diamond Eyes.  
A bottle of Napoleon brandy for the Count and two Persian  
lions carved in wood.  
Salads Nicoise.  
Dinners at Pré Catalan in the Bois, a Toronto equivalent.  
A girl named Chantilly burning charcoal in the forest.  
I drank a cocktail with the girl of the white polo coat.  
Or as the cynic said, my pipe is the tent, the tobacco  
the days of my life.

[10]

## THE DRAPER'S CLOTH

I imagine stars at the dragon's tail,  
eyelids ringing with butter.

I want to brush palms as  
lightly as two sparks.  
take the wand of your waist  
in two plush hands  
with the pitiless gesture  
of a sparrow

We part the leaves in breath,  
arouse trees in envy.  
I sense colours more vivid  
than your tongue  
after wine,  
explosions to cap the wind.

To enter you in argument--  
a bough creaking in underbrush,  
svelte panthers hiding.

And afterwards, sheets are open galleys,  
oarsmen ploughing breakers  
across both sea and night.

[12]

## POETS ARE MAGIC BEINGS

She sits within the Magic Lantern  
--that facsimile for pleasure,  
decor of wineskins where  
at \$2.50 a garment  
extravagance comes extra;  
skin like rosy flames  
the whisk of smoke  
at hearthside  
sunlight about her face.

Cherubs arise from those lips  
and battle lines are drawn  
about the sweet curvature of her breasts.  
A tight cashmere sweater rides  
comfortably two of the finest King's  
deer headstrong thru Sherwood Forest.

And, Merry Man,  
firmly planted in Lincoln Green,  
the plodding turf growing at odds within my soul--  
give this brief to the Sheriff at Buckingham;  
I cool my heels, the soft doe lies prostrate at my feet.

She's loveliness,  
hair drawn as curtains  
signalling the clouds,  
eyes that beckon twin doves  
to flight, in swift passage, like the arrows.

[13]

## CASHA

A child-like fawn  
moistened nudging &  
joyous breath,  
an allowance for leave  
as her gentle hand  
budes my sibling cupping.

And walking in a field of gardens  
--our Jardin des Plantes--  
a molecule in depth  
flowery pennons  
near Picardy wet.

Casha tendrils here pinion the eye,  
little Annabel Lee  
with the sunshine wet in her parting hand  
that all the birds in grace sigh  
at Saint Francis breathless.

[14]

## THE JOLLY TUPPER

Sun on the eiderdown  
breaks tiny corners off the bedspread,  
declares green plants its bidding  
before summoning Fragonard's maiden  
off her swing--so richly dressed  
in picture from the sunlit wall.

Expensive tabac from an imported humidior  
etches tiny leaves  
their stems as faces against the glass,  
rich aroma, trèsor, like the Jolly Tupper print  
preparing his bowl,  
drawing on the clay stem  
as if from a height watching ships come in.

Smoke cold as blue fungus over outside buildings  
follows horses with hooves to split cobblestones  
stuck in the city's eye,  
more than mountains around  
the stone filled ravines  
of the rich man's heart.

[15]

## VERTIGO

We're travelling down a carnival road, are met at intersections by  
varying faces: poets as eyes in collapsed black holes, even the  
universe as extension of the stellar poet. Then, they are transformed,  
become worm-pickers, masons, longshoremen who subsidize their  
poetry with the real task at hand: making waste, laying trestles  
instead of women to prove a point.

This is necessary. I'm defending it, find it both believable and  
interesting. Meanwhile, troubadours and wandering minstrels eke  
out a living on storybook memories, join Marco Polo if he ever  
lived. Seek out the Great Khan in a box of cookies or within a  
magnum of champagne depending on circumstances.

The Grand Lunar is watching. Her pallor commands true poets to  
roll over, gaze at silver buttocks make a commitment to the art

beyond spray painting, ghost watching, navel gazing.

The sky is the final home of the soul, the Sage himself a wanderer  
announced.

It was a warm spring evening. Lilac bounded from antler brown  
twigs only recently inert. Everything dissolved at once into crying.  
The world itself became a tear.

[16]

## BEDROOM GLASS

Counted three white pigeons  
on a roof, near a gable  
silhouetting a barn;  
as an afterthought  
killed as many nery bluebottles  
on the bedroom glass as  
warnings to myself, perhaps,  
or the elements pelting the window  
with ice beads, tiny crystalline  
versions of those distant elephantine birds.

[19]

## AHOY

Image throttled in the subconscious,  
romantic throwback--  
the mind on a voyage round land's end  
to eclipse pyramidal fires  
set as beacons along rock strewn shores--  
her skeletal inhabitants on ice flows  
wrapped in bearskins  
with dirks between their teeth  
slapping one another to keep warm.

Then, alpine ranges carrying  
the plight of the Andes in their mouth;  
a dull, white sail propped against ship's bow  
with a noise like an anvil  
coming loose in the brain.

More frightening, sailors mutiny on a diet  
of bread as sallow maggots  
march in a quarter horse sized trot  
across the floorboards.  
Such men in the bellows of one's mind  
break out rubber dinghies  
in quickening escape thru the  
maw of an Arctic sea.

Expiry. Dry rot. Sunken astrolobe  
and an armada of feelings drifting alone.

[21]

## THE POETRY POND

Everyone is a poet, or so the philosopher said. The world teems  
with poetry in much the sense the universe teems with life.  
A poet or two is squirrelled away in every major office.  
Boiler rooms hum with the tooth and nail, robust imagery of  
working class poets. The neurological desire to express oneself  
transcends even social barriers. Be creative, like a brain surgeon.  
My scalpel runneth over amongst all those cerebral ganglia.

The mind washed clean, scrubbed down. Words burn holes on the  
paper. Firemen disguised as poets douse the heroic flames.  
Sherpas tightly drawn amidst depths of a Himalayan winter  
weather a torrent of words. Groggy, I search for breath, am given  
oxygen but see writing materials.

In the future, everyone will be famous for five minutes.

We have been promised this by Andy Warhol.  
In the present, a day in the life of the poet is within reach of each of  
you, my peers.

Barnum and Bailey's fresh from the publishing scene comes to  
town, will train talent or so the sign read. But the Big Top can't  
accommodate all the poets. Word jugglers sneak under the tent to  
court the ringmaster's favour.

Poetry is a religion, said the neophyte before downing its meagre  
fare. A window on life confounding reality, fingering experience.  
Feast for the intellect, grace and passion abiding as one. Yet, with  
poetry becoming as all things to all men and with every man doing as  
right in his own eyes, privateers and other assorted scalawags, eager to  
toss in their lot with the real Empress, lay ransom to this queen of arts.

Somewhere, every person alive has written a book of poems.  
Bushel and a peck, common as gravestones.

My mind was a tabla rosa and the poets could not pick it clean.  
And me within reach of this uncontrolled mitosis, arspoetica. I  
dread "have a nice day," is already a populist poem. Think my  
grade 13 biology is hazy but not my ability to count the poets.

I am holding hands with the poets lest we foam too perilously  
at the crest.

Sentenced in absentia to torturing words, pulling wings off  
proverbial flies, attacking motherhood.

Worse, performing illegal abortions on the craft.

[23]

## WHAT BECAME OF THE SIXTIES?

The "Haight," in Ashbury lived up to its name.  
Sexual pioneers became commonplace.  
Agribusiness consolidated the back to the land movement.  
Joni Mitchell remortgaged all the tree museums.  
Flower power became a snivelling joke.  
Groovy and way out once again were associated with corduroy  
pants & fire exits.  
Fascism was taken over and made respectable by Ronald Reagan.  
Jewish mothers and landladies outguessed the War on Poverty.  
Strobe lights were said to cause cultural myopia.  
The Just Society lost another Vietnam.  
Rock music recycled itself in "meaningful dialogue."  
Innocence learned a lot from experience.  
Contemplation of one's navel was resurrected by phenomena  
of the eager and job hunting corporate executive.  
Long hair became a symbol of displacement.  
Au pair girls received a new lease on life.  
Tofu and herbal teas survived even the commune experience.  
Primal scream, therapy, in the crunch, outdistanced everything else.

[24]

## SIXTIES HANGOVER

"We have all been here before.  
almost cut my hair;"  
the refrain from Crosby, Stills. Nash & Young  
reading more like a law firm letterhead than  
any invocation for real social change.  
Respectability, that first casualty of the eighties.  
What, exactly, was a true child of the sixties?

Here's a few safe bets:  
Valedictorians were few and difficult to find for their "irrelevant,"  
high school peers. Are you listening Paul and Paula?  
Cutoffs. Hitchhiking to California?  
All is beautiful. Laid back. Beads.  
The sixties were a jukebox that came of age.  
Ponderosa shirts were destined to outlive their owners.  
Thirty-three is perilously close to being afraid.  
Elvis Presley, a blimp at forty, missed the sixties or rather  
failed to live them down.

The hullabaloo of freedom was taken for granted, then shelved.  
Amid a crescendo of killing only a year and one half of the present  
decade duplicates the assassinations of the "violent sixties."  
Even the cop troupe withered, crooned Eric Burton at Monterrey.  
I think not.

[25]

## DASH INTO REALISM: ESCAPE PAD FROM THE SIXTIES

For one, street argot became tougher.  
You had to distinguish between what you meant by calling someone  
a mother.  
The Black Panther influence, no doubt, but a rejuvenation of the  
language. Street fighting man. Butchery at My Lai.  
House arrest for Lieutenant Calley so strangely appropriate for the times.  
So middle class and a tribute to "doing one's own thing":  
Rampant, militant individualism, the hallmarks of expression.  
Sit-ins, love-ins, peace-ins. The Electric Acid Kool-Aid Test,  
anyone? The sixties were the highwater meritocracy from the  
foremost "me decade".  
Getting right on target for the narcissism of the seventies.  
Or so it was rumoured.  
What's next in the social roller derby?  
Cutbacks, retrenchments, accountability.  
Even uglier, this new argot of the eighties.

[26]

## WHAT COLOUR IS LOVE?

Sixties idols were built to last.  
A 70's idol is shoddy and throwaway by comparison.  
Whatever became of Carnaby Street or bell bottoms?  
The mentality is alive and well (another dreadful anachronism) in  
smart up-town boutiques.  
The proprietors, though, don't sell little bells to freaks anymore.  
Luxurious Persian rugs, instead, are all the vogue.  
And bail money for vendors hawking copies of Guerrilla on the  
streets of Toronto or Black Panther leaflets in US cities isn't  
needed anymore.  
Who was Bobby Seale? Who remembers?  
  
The first generation in history, a new consciousness...  
Remember the Greening of America?  
Escape From Freedom?  
The futuristic think tankers?  
consciousness III?  
Bombers turning into butterflies?  
Today's B-52's are punk rockers.  
  
I like my memories, retreat-like, hazy in myopic seclusion.  
I suspect social historians for the pleasant dribble they write about  
the age.  
The age, like it spanned a thousand years, opened new epochs.  
More like Adolf's remark about his millennial Reich.  
Some doubt the authenticity of the Holocaust. I doubt the sixties.  
It, too, lasted what seemed twelve years.

[27]

## CHAIN LETTER

I'm sitting in a "sixties bar." No put-on.  
All around old Rolling Stones music is playing.  
I can tell it's a sixties bar by the spiffy waiter recycling sheets for  
tablecloths. The sixties was "into," environment.  
It's the eighties now as Heineken was unobtainable in 1969.  
Someone reminds me in order to run a tab a credit card is needed.  
This seems logical but very out of sorts with the people power  
complex I'm nurturing.  
Even the jokes above the bar are old hat.  
This confirms with certainty that Madcaps is Nostalgia.



It's too built up for Sha-Na-Na, fintails or Nancy Sinatra's,  
These Boots Are Made For Walking.  
In my sensible decade that tune is considered sadistic. Obviously,  
the effect is too sophisticated to imagine I'm even a temporary  
time traveller. Still, poetry is a communicable disease  
invented in the 1920's by a snooty degenerate named Pound.

I bide my time. It's an oasis for waiting. Old time experiences seem  
strangely current in this campy pub.  
Occasionally, someone in a zoot suit comes in but realizes he's  
missed the last act of Grease.  
Old Blue Eyes might make it here if he looked like Bogart in drag.  
Like them, Presley was by-passed by the theme of this decade.

There's a fleshy table and chairs with a knock out chick that looks  
like my Bridge Over Troubled Waters.  
The waiter scowls like vintage Ben Casey.  
Beehive hairdos mingle casually with early "Mod."  
Rockers wishing Cherry Reds are served drinks instead.  
Comfortable sleaze.

The window is up on the future now and New Wave is out to  
spray paint graffiti artists all the way.

"Either you are part of the solution or you are part of the  
problem." Now there's a sixties homily that still delivers.  
Nice to think the social history of three decades is indistinguishable  
and that silence comes as its own reward.

[28]

## SLAUGHTERHOUSE

You're the aggressor  
and your passion exceeds mine  
but we're in this slaughterhouse together  
and it's near closing.

Vats of prickly ointment  
destined to repattern animal skin  
and tubs of steaming formaldehyde  
rest casually with the more antiseptic  
thrill of green sawdust.  
Blood is a chameleon, here, changing colours  
en route to sausage and Pram but  
my hotdogs and donuts are  
holding better to the cuttlefish  
in this unnatural forest.

The stars are a jangle of planets  
in a world where wood became noise;  
each ceiling beam, incidentally,  
is the wrenched out spine  
of a Longhorn steer,  
doorknobs pig knuckles  
bound for Octoberfest fear.  
Even the kindly attendant is an  
ogre spying out porkers' throats;  
will sit under a bridge  
then capsize crates  
of young chickens  
knife ready at hand.

The squeal of this bovine camp  
is recycled on 40 watt amps  
through more than decibels of rage;  
is a fishly contest designed  
to trade off gruel  
for fresher prospects.

One armed forklift drivers, for instance,  
with realistic Captain Hook hands  
jab instructions to  
lifeless walls where  
underlings the colour of grey slate  
form a human paste.

Sound is the monetary exchange,  
rabbit dung the troll's own currency--  
each scrawl of the pen  
confirmed by the work order

## LAVENDER

A mind is a ray of light running to the sea;  
an arch of wood upon which birds rest.

Minds roam the ocean's crest, sit as antlers upon a beach,  
watch eddies of water trap themselves in the sand.

And minds are in anything but a state of rest--they violate  
physics, make mockery of other bodies not in ready motion.

I have seen a mind enclosed above fresh air and sunshine,  
frolicking on its own strength, the elasticity of its thought lassoing  
all the stars assembled.

Golden points of light caught in this sand with an oval sun  
marching blue legions across the sky bring more harmony than  
all the stars assembled.

Admiral. Fakir. Harem. They are all here as is batik, geisha,  
sarong, teak and gingham. I have seen them in quiet pools near  
the atolls.

Rapture is a word to be eaten with persimmon and pears.

The closed wood. Copse and fragrant bush. White mare alone in  
a green-studded pasture aback groves and groves of pleasant  
trees. Bright insects making a curry of the forest floor with leaves  
as trinkets bartered to the wind.

And the endless sky overturned like a bowl across the horizon.  
Water and air, the two chief elements in a brisk compound with  
earth and fire.

The land itself nursing a presence by the sea as a lizard might  
devour a fly on a bough above a tree.

Then there are the granaries of this empire, the washed up logs  
darting into footprints from the inlets. A white sand making its  
presence felt like a tireless magician. Green strands of the  
cucumber bush big with melon, a mother with expectant child  
hushed and sitting by a clearing.

"The waters of the stream please me more than the sea,"  
coconut groves with hand-me-down messages for the ages.  
Strands among weeds, wine bottles as ferrymen ready for  
circumnavigation around islands crisscrossing bucolic charts.

And everywhere reefs and coral and sugarbush fish darting  
between the sieve of land breaking bread with sea; exchanging  
colours from many coloured coats.

Kangaroo, koala, tepee, bayou hula, lei.  
Sights which gallop against the senses, act as brigands to mature  
reason. Faraway in the mountain fastness of the mind, alpine  
meadows look out upon further marvels, exchange cocoa for  
quinine, adjust the mind as a stirrup before a long, night ride.

The shaman with a hammock in his catamaran dolefully accepts  
the waves as the skin must a tatoo.

The lovely collision of sound with twilight on fragrant sea-grape,  
the hush of storm clouds preparing to administer their own  
bromide of fire before the appearance of a band-aid patch of  
lightning streaks against the divide.

Perhaps lavender is a language here, the juxtaposition of mind  
with energy coming to a halt from a brisk canter, then proceeding  
to nibble a currant from my hand.

For my part, I spied red berries  
on a currant bush  
lush in August;  
the canopy of leaves  
a nesting place for hornets  
clocking one hundred  
in & out of their ice-castle hive.  
Birds had fled in horror,  
there was a pallor  
around the sun  
and nearby a Hubbard squash  
grew like Topsy  
already several baskets in size.

I threatened suicide  
in this herbivorous garden  
amid wild canaries and butternuts;  
my jangled nerves a lobster colour  
only calmed by more grievously  
afflicted tobacco hornworms,  
their skins pierced by the radar alum  
of wasps.

Transformed into insect angels  
strumming away the afterlife,  
they arrived as ghosts to comfort me.

Fresh, spring potatoes grew like serendipity  
under a pleasant summer sky.  
The smell of good earth  
revived above  
the saltpetre muddle  
of the humanoid puzzle.

Later, the night became a lavender cloak,  
her folds sweet orifices  
of a pleasure bound woman.

[32]

## PILLAGE

It's chess of sorts but  
reeks of you--  
the hand carved emerald rook, for one,  
and so many Black & White squares  
that tiptoe like many a patio stone  
between our warring minds.

I think of rollaway mats  
lepers use to beg on,  
habitually to die on  
or marked cards that  
outside castle walls  
dicers' oaths  
must originate from.

I am having trouble  
keeping the pieces straight.

I mean, you're White  
& concluded the beginning of the end  
with first move; still, I'm prepared  
for nothing short of winning.

Should we discuss this  
growing stalemate near  
the Bishop's mitre  
and exploding gun  
or against hungry faces of expendable pawns  
raging, as they say, across Seas of Galilee  
on that first night of Storms?

And, when pressed during attack,  
is it proper logistics  
to prepare the drawbridge,  
fondle another dart  
for a King's crossbow,  
then advance at parapets  
with scalding liquid,  
the oily spillage

of our tongues?

[33]

## DESIRE

Sleep is a striking woman  
accosted by various men  
while in a dance;  
the warring desires thus  
present themselves as on  
a battlefield--  
hunger comes arrayed with  
red plumes to befit  
his appetites,  
sensuality somewhat  
decked out as a dandy  
in a mauve waistcoat  
and, of course, there is  
Fear, the most thwarted  
of the suitors, bejewelled with a  
flashing sabre, rattling it from  
the tail of his skinny stick horse,  
the pale charger riding  
to intercept the beautiful courtesan Sleep  
bestowing her favours illicitly  
wherein she would but choose.

[34]

## PREENING

The sky is red and comes  
from Montreal--  
you lied to me  
the hemlock of the wind  
is not this January's  
but is ringed with  
steel laughter of  
another winter.

I saw you wringing sweat  
from the eyes of the road,  
lie down take the season's  
wetness in your mouth,  
push apart moist dampness  
'til one cavity was  
felled and another opened

[35]

## CHANCE UPON

As she's lying there in sherbet panties  
looking somewhat disaffected, a nez perce  
expression bordered by sleep,  
think of the Sultan's regalia  
his entourage of kings  
chance upon dark laughter from Saladein's[1] concubines,  
Nell's[2] white turn of the knee  
or the pretty bosom of a Confederate  
officer's belle . . . all satin & lace ...  
perhaps, again, the splendid neck  
of Titian's choicest nude.

To further turn the phrase,  
ponder a basket of fruit--  
the sexual omnipotence  
of its texture a dreamy sensuality  
thickened by red Emperor grapes  
ripened against the elongated nails  
of a Pompadour's[3] milk white hand.

[1] Richard the Lion Hearted's adversary

[2] The Merrie Monarch's favourite mistress

[36]

## LEAF DOCTOR

You said happiness was a bird  
--a hand extended  
could bend its perch.  
span the perfect wings.

I spoke of swallows.  
lived off flies  
ebbed when flying.  
seldom came to rest.

[37]

## TUSSAUD'S

In the wax museum with Attila and Genghis and Tamerlane all so  
close in spirit with our century.

At Madame Tussaud's in London: Neill Cream. Burke and Hare. It's  
hard to keep the legitimate heroes straight from the villains. I expect  
Houdini to make this Niagara Falls and appear at midnight  
Halloween.

With so many real and picturesque notables in abundance, I plan  
the idea of creating my own arch criminal wax museum assembled  
from the hallways and stairwells of my own life.

I imagine employment counsellors from across the years with sardonic  
laughs and strings tripping off records to make them authentic.  
Then busts of fiendish ex-teachers and hatchet fanatics that  
pass as librarians giving me advanced nausea because my card  
has technically expired. Think the occasional gesture at remembering  
a swine or two from freeway driving might not be entirely out of  
place or that mindless clerks administering my life from afar and  
costing a future deserve an enshrining.

"A nickel short," droned the bureaucrat, "no transfer," secures him  
passage to my waxworks.  
"Sorry," and "we'll certainly keep you in mind," as a litany of woe  
with its users made to memorize and make good all promises ever  
made.

Wish the mind and her memories could be enlarged; I would recreate  
my own historic scenes to stand alongside Nelson's Death,  
the Little Princes in the Tower. Detail Israeli Nazi-hunters to  
track down my Adolf Eichmanns.

Instead of samples from Jack the Ripper's handwriting in the waxworks,  
rejection slips and the stylized, flowery "we'll keep your  
application on file," would be served up as horror epics.

Dunces that compose form letters made to live out the threadbare  
future promises. Each human roadblock making decisions out of  
ignorance would have his statement dutifully recorded before entering  
a world of his own design.

Ad agency types made to explain in effortless detail to packed  
houses why their ketchup commercial should stand up.

Crooked garage operators made to oil and grease the chassis of  
every car owner hoodwinked since the automobile began.

Football made a crime punishable by fate.

Shyster store owners too cheap to bag my newspaper made to  
launder all the soiled white pants across a lifetime.

Tailors that mistakenly think they are being shortchanged  
and become vocal made to attend Sartre courses where "hell is other  
people," doctrines predominate.

The huckster, the con-man, those who prey on the multitude  
transposed from whatever city of origin then made to tramp the

streets of Toronto where every wrong syllable or misbegotten  
accent costs them a dollar of their savings.

My whole museum a living aviary, a subway at rush hour where  
snotty, telephone receptionists are fed a steady diet of the Biblical  
injunction "by words they shall be known."

Well meaning but ignorant people endlessly poking with the "you  
should smile more," placed in a house of mirrors with durable  
cassettes of Laugh-In.

Belligerent restaurant owners telling kids they can't use the  
washroom then made to mop up the waste they helped create.

The world, a stand-up comic throwing away his happy face then  
coming to sit in disgust at the unchronicled petty evil of our times.

[38]

## VULCANS

Adder toothed flowers snake  
the broken ground where  
molten tongues cremated  
the twisted, bunker forms--  
a Latin cross of  
green jubilation  
lies matted atop a  
sweating road, calligraphy in broken stone.

As trembling shale collapses into thin hills,  
light fuels to cross the Pale.  
A little exploratory weeding droops this lava rain.

A long, dove fence comprised  
of stones & rattled by ancient slaves  
winds its distance  
along the gully  
borne in fire, percussion caps,  
cretin growth  
lobbed under  
creeping wire.

Shafts of pioneer light  
delight in coral baskets,  
empty twilight darts the  
agave swords' mauve pitcher plants.

The 1692 Tremens decimated Port Royal[1]  
--moved a ravine from  
florid to mossy shadow  
where antler shoots today announce  
temperate plants, eclipse by-gone tropic flowers.

[1] An earthquake destroyed in the seventeenth century not only the  
stronghold of Jamaica's pirates but also changed the topography of  
the North Shore creating Fern Gully.

[39]

## DRY GUILLOTINE

In my childhood, "Verdun," meant madness.  
Bars on the windows, cages around the intellect.  
Time was a poor keeper of souls, it seems, wore out all but  
a fragment of my memories. Musical, poetic. The sounds of clay china  
being dropped on the floor. Fierce Celts with a gift for the muse in  
keeping with their love of lyricism and war.

Driving by 999 Queen in Toronto accompanies a lot of the above.  
A cuckoo bin by any calculation and a reference not meant to be  
pejorative. A subject so clothed in solemnity only irreverent  
"kidding," can hope to disarm its grasp. Still, the truth must be told.  
In university, no one shrinks from whispering the ultimate fate--  
a stint in Sydenham or a trip down the road to Cedar Springs.  
Delightful euphemisms, the names reminiscent of sonorous rivers,  
tree lined groves, peach blossoms across Georgia springs. Or  
Ophelia's funeral oration wherein Polonius rightfully alludes to her

sudden falling away amid laughing brooks.

I am reminded of Charrière's desperate attempt to stay sane on Ile du Diâble, the cutting edge of his dry guillotine--his mind's fabric giving way to the slightest irritation. In the present, the chant of a crowd's "jump, jump," to the would be suicide. Then there is the most foreboding type of all dementia, the collective sort. A strength through joy movement of the Hitler camp with society's many institutions set up along the spit and polish order of the Reich.

Indeed, if we think of it, we all have a deep knowledge of madness; days when the centre is about to break alongside the pit. Days when wars on the periphery take hold, colours appear different.

As a child, madness was watching Ichabod Crane in cartoon form outrace the Headless Horseman. In Sleepy Hollow trying to put down the panic in himself. Ichabod, the peaceful school master, driven to the edge. At war with himself but trying to reassure that same self the plodding sound of approaching hooves was only dried, bullrush stems hitting against his head.

Madness is more than Van Gogh offering an ear; Druid priests garnishing oak trees in a British forest or plaintive Gauguin abandoning his family at 34, mid-stream in a successful career. It probably stands behind half the men on skid row, beckons like a welcome friend before turning fiend and consuming impulse to a bag lady.

The close relation between the creative impulse and "letting go." Between the arts and wide eyed eccentricity. Between wanting to be free. And knowing. Hearing if you go on like that you'll end up on the Lakeshore. Another pretty euphemism. A dangerous truth left like an upturned rock for someone to trip on in another garden.

The farthest away anyone can be.

[40]

## MANGROVES

How do you survive  
in the mangrove swamps--  
amid the twitchings of fetid water  
& water lice thick as baby tears?

How, with all the wallow of thick muck  
making suction noises and the teams in relays  
searching nightly with baited hounds, do you pull free?

Your bamboo pole knows every ploy  
but is a slender craft ill-equipped  
to sparring blows from every quarter,  
the undergrowth necessitates.

The closeness of the clammy night  
heaved about like so much rotting fruit will draw  
the ants . . . devouring like that abundance of cold, yellow eyes--  
the firefly swarms that mock your heavy steel machete arm.

Across the drift of darkness  
and the insect life  
you bat in swarms,  
the ultimate danger is not in the cayman giant  
or his reptilian cousin named of copper wire,  
the Anaconda; or even mindless holes, thick black  
ooze that throttles a victim . . . but the two legged form coming,  
searching . . . a spectre on hind quarters with a bolo knife stepping  
free of that beaded circle, the inner camp.

[41]

## PONDICHERRY

Chess pieces resting upon the jade mantle piece  
see sampans move quietly  
thru warm night,  
rich bundles of bougainvillaea crowd market squares  
where deck chairs extend

to the Persian Gulf.

Leisured gentlemen  
finger walking canes,  
hold eyelids thick as goblets,  
sharp tridents beside private lairs.

Skin in puffy whiteness bulges under  
lamp's white glare, becomes copra gathered  
miles from Pondicherry, sesame  
oil in rotting casks.

And the Indian heat, closing with certitude  
akin to the trance of the snake charmer,  
holds his flute poised with the Bengali lancer  
riding a slow crop over the prostrate polo ball.

[42]

## THE CLEARING THAT IS THE TREES

"They know they are going to the filth of numbers and laws,  
to the games anyone can play, and the work without fruit."  
Lorca

I want to go walking in troubled marshes  
where cold gray coves leave off the mind  
and the scent of rushes twist the wind  
as fall covers dungeons of angry sparrows.

I want to go quickly to troubled marshes,  
hear the squeak of brackish waters  
over crocks of sponge bubbles crabbing  
their surface.

I desire stands of dead brush  
to wave in grave solemnity,  
whimpering little houses  
off forest glades to flicker  
out lamps with  
large dogs poised on verandahs  
like stone gargoyles.

I want to handle anguish as if  
it were an interesting bauble  
plucked from the shallows,  
a curious snail with ritual markings  
or a mauve shellfish  
caught in swift eddies  
as the tide goes out.

I want to examine canker introspection  
as a peevish child might  
faint tracings on an old stone  
lodged in the most forgotten  
corner of a graveyard;  
sample its wonders  
fingering the many indentations  
with more than slight awe  
or hear the crashing of waves  
far off from the physical restraint  
of the marsh or this forgotten  
burial plot so near an angry sea.  
Then, awaken as if from a dream,  
rub troubled memories from my eyes  
but never the brain  
for on winter nights just before  
retiring as the wind stirs packets  
of snow or the moon is chased  
by skeletal hounds along Greta trees,  
there will come the realization  
another day is thru  
with another night to pilot away  
fresh brush & rubble  
before emerging, at night's end,  
from the clearing that is  
the trees.

[43]



# HUMBOLDT'S CURRENT

Cresta roja wine  
--colour of  
arterial blood,  
vena cava of  
the alcoholic soul.

And seeing bottles bob  
in mainstreams of men's blood  
to pistol whip their reddened eyes,  
Humboldt's current becomes a rash of drinking,  
a map that charts more bloody lies.

The thirst that passeth  
all human understanding,  
(an alternate Biblical rendering)  
certainly body heat surpasses  
Vulcan's bellows  
adding new faces to Delirium Tremens.

[44]

## THE GINGHAM DREAM UTTERANCE

As I watch the clouds assemble, steam-ship fashion, with funnels to  
alert passersby, I realize the Romanovs tore silk & riches from  
every bazaar leaving the bright spot of this evening studded with  
emerald marks.

A dot in the ocean is a spark upon which minnows play, their silver  
bellies upturned to imitate the moon's white shawl.

I am wanting in the delights of the reef narrowly hauled from  
rambunctious depths, the tiniest splashes of green, yellow, blue darting  
in an upturned fish's tail.

An octopus rock commands squadrons of fingerlings while the eisel  
fish decorates a steeper, coral garden.

Jet black sand crowns the lagoon volcanic ages' past the innocence  
of this spurting palm while mounds of pitch dark ants deposit slivers  
of rich eggs.

After a fashion, onyx enamours pearl and pearl ivory as cays and  
atolls are swept to the wiggle of sun's dance on white sand. Eel-like  
islands are only pomegranates undigested by the moon.

The amber breath of growing leaves is rich dark coffee stolen as in  
a smile.

Almond drink is refreshing as the tips of cloven hooves to the dried  
earth.

One might hesitate to watch firm nipples being given as broaches to  
a king but the sandpiper is a river barge commanding slow access to  
the next water.

Near barely lit lamps alongside make-shift beds, a woman with olive  
skin prepares her toilet.

Hatchet brown birds beseech her with brittle songs stolen from  
one wing.

A cathedral bowl lies overturned in the warm twilight of lovers  
kneeling before the growing strength of day.

Stone stars are flattened by the glare of sun and shell encrusted  
beaches bear a passing resemblance to chalices strung around an  
avuncular stretch of land.

Perhaps in the hunted meadow near red spined caterpillars feeding  
near the larvae of the elephant hawkmoth, a cistern will open the  
earth and drink as a thirsty spoon.

[45]

## JUNIPER TREES

Sitting as Buddha on a chocolate juniper  
--the theme of madness  
thirty cinnamon centres  
Ophelia squares;  
Brunelleschi floating down a fallen river  
on nougats, perhaps onyx pears.  
The sleek eyes of a cat stare floodlit topaz,  
ocelot rings round her burning mask.

And sipping dry wine  
Beaujolais, decanted Anjou  
with iron doors not Ghiberti's fashioning but sweet meadows waving  
fresh, summer grass.

And I at the garnet Buddha box--  
a cold winter day pledging choices  
pale, juniper tree  
the carnival log egging up thick cordial;  
the inlaid satin box hovering about silent, apple wedge  
a child's fantasy, orgeat or bordeaux,  
lactose fudge, bon appétit  
syrupy taste of Burgundy cherry.

The axe ring of squirting tissue  
with drone of passing feet  
up finger stairs  
until the rustle of cloth  
crosses the turquoise box,  
clamours almond clusters  
into the courtyard cafe.

[46]

## DISTEMPER

Looking into the glassy crucifix of water.  
slits of rock form stigmata across creviced limestone--  
green pools with an occasional fish passing  
air bubbles to the top  
the eerie night crumbling under shafts of starlight  
with the smell of hemlock pods & cedar bringing  
nard and precious stone within  
crowns of natural thorn--  
this body of muskeg pressed onto  
aromatic herbs then borne away  
along the road to a wooded Calvary and  
the sense of Christ  
in that light at dawn.

[47]

## NIGHT WINDS

They made us sit alphabetically in rows.  
Green oranges are sprayed systematically  
in volcanic soil near pummelled surf.

One stood to answer questions,  
was called after the surname,  
requested permission for trivials.

Outrigger canoes with barnacles in tow splash  
menacingly near coral reefs. Under a lazy orange-ripple  
moon halving itself between stages of growth,  
night winds taunt puffish clouds.

[48]

## AMHERST ISLAND

In winter, you were  
a flash of light,  
tundra against  
Arctic floor

Warm breath  
stirred yr  
summer's breast  
and I saw  
windblown hair  
the colour of kelp  
transfix  
the lavender print  
of a scalp strewn  
shore

Later,  
tiny bits  
from  
a calico dress  
became domiciled wings  
off butterflies,  
miniature bitterns  
ever more shadowy  
strewn across the Barrens,  
an unbridled strength from that

Faraway isle released to orchestrate sunlight  
amongst all colonies that flower--  
a statuesque Red Admiral,  
Banded Purple,  
feckless Comma  
all aswirl to the  
pipes of a Devil's Paintbrush,  
stranded drumfish, sage,  
and tubercular ragwort

[49]

## ANCIENT OF DAYS

It's Epsom but could pass for Epping,  
New Forest or Dumbarton Wood.

There's ivy of the thickest  
English sort not commonly  
found in America; sprigs  
growing across open ground  
mantling it.

Shiny to the eye, soft encircling  
the touch, I am reminded of blue waters,  
green grass Blake's Ancient of Days:  
an old man's beard stepping from the trees,  
Spanish Moss so unearthly it covers a  
southern forest.

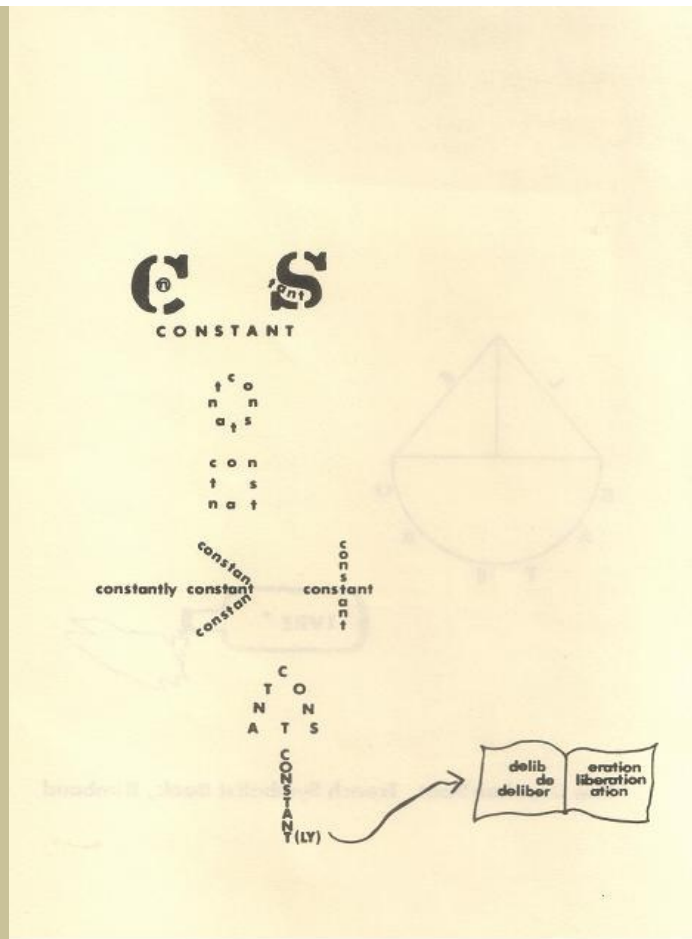
There are tendrils in herbal potions of unbroken lips that move  
across both dew and clover.

I see Druids reciting psalms, weaving ivy along garlands  
of oak, the incantation set before a British lake--  
briar baskets carrying the trusting dead;  
food offerings transversing the waters.

The ivy calls to mind all these things,  
just a sprig held tightly yet aromatic beyond imagining,  
my timorous English settlers seen thru a spate of leaves  
clutching their holly on Roanoke island.

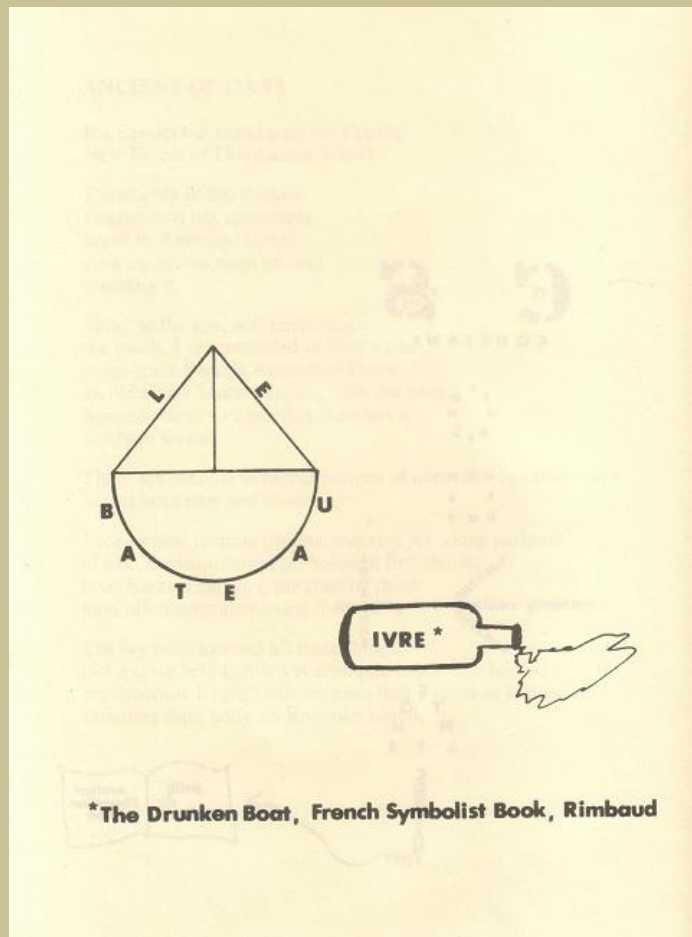
[50]

## Constantly Deliberation



[51]

## The Drunken Boat



\*The Drunken Boat, French Symbolist Book, Rimbaud

# Biography

Previous titles by Paul Cameron Brown include fiction, poetry, chapbooks, illustrations and broadsheets by a number of Canadian and American presses.

". . . A master at evoking mood and atmosphere" The London Free Press

". . . Beguiling writing indeed" The Canadian Author and Bookman  
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