

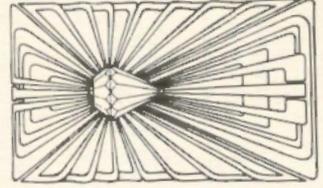
bpNichol

CRAFT DINNER

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*stories & texts*  
1966 — 1976

bpNichol



AYA  
PRESS

c bpNichol, 1978

for ellie  
"a bunch of proses"

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you turn the page & i am here that in itself is interesting  
to me at least it is interesting since my existence begins as  
you turn the pages & begin to read me i have no way of  
knowing your motives tho i know or say or assume you have  
opened this book hoping to learn more about me or whoever it  
was you hoped or did not hope to encounter in your reading  
so now you have begun you have begun reading  
what i am saying & i am once again finding a beginning i am  
not alive am i i am simply these words as they follow one  
another across this page which is so white that were they not here  
were i not here you would close this book to escape the white-  
ness

is that whiteness like something else do you see  
it as a void perhaps that it is necessary for it to be filled with words  
before you would consider turning each page carefully to examine  
not the white but the retreat from white into the black letters  
placed upon it giving me my tenuous existence i am aware  
of the white i am aware of the white as i find meaning thru  
your eyes when you are not here reading i am aware of  
nothing i can make no statement about that my only  
awareness is now as you read this i am aware of the white  
only as an absence of awareness a gap between words as you read  
me i have only your perception of me of what i am words &  
letters a movement which is simply the turning of pages

now  
we have begun we have begun again as we did before so  
many times each time you are different each time  
there is something about you that is different i am always  
the same always the flow which is your vision of me which  
is my vision of me is the same from page to page i am the  
same each time only you are different i am not aware  
of your difference i have no consciousness in that sense  
for me you are always the same for me i am always  
the same each time there is the thrill for us of discovering  
my existence or the fear of it the boredom with it the desire some-  
how to push me away from you thinking you are bored or fright-  
ened & then i exist no more i am no longer inside you inside  
your mind the vision centres activated the neural responses that  
make the black shapes dissolve into words into meanings that  
follow one another from page to page at this moment i exist  
only thru you a this point i am you there is no dis-  
tinction between us we are this writing we are one &  
the same always we follow these words across the page on  
which we found us it is all we have it is not sad

it is the way it is  
eventually you close the book because you  
are finished or sleepy or some other reason when you put it  
down i am no more will i begin again i cannot say  
the question does not occur to me it may occur to  
you i am not aware of its occurrence i am aware only  
when i see myself here on this page as we gaze at me thru our  
eyes that is my awareness there is no pain involved  
what pain there is is not my pain but my presence during  
your experience of your pain as we read this if you cry  
there is sadness if you scream there is rage or fear if  
you scream with your eyes closed it is no longer part of our  
awareness if you laugh there is a laughing feeling  
that is it that is all suspended on this white field it is  
who i am as we read me

why did you open this book  
it is not that i am curious but these words form into questions as  
they can they form into questions & you read them as  
questions you do not have to answer them i have no  
awareness of the answers i am aware of the questions thru  
our eyes reading me i could not be aware of the answers  
unless you wrote them here & read them as part of me then  
i would not be the same as i have been i would be the same  
from that point on

why did you open this book what  
did you hope to find am i the way you had hoped i would  
be there is a part of me wants to please you hoping you  
will stay with me to the end & then begin again if it pleases you or  
there is a part of me where the letters form these words to make  
this statement i want it because i exist then because i say i  
exist because someone made this statement part of my existence  
my existence is one of waiting waiting without  
consciousness of waiting

for you waiting must be a terrible  
thing waiting that goes on with no knowing of an end  
that must be a terrible thing perhaps that is why i  
have now come into being again perhaps it was because  
you were waiting & could not stand the waiting that your eyes  
brought the black shapes into focus & we began again that  
waiting must be a terrible thing to bring you here for me it  
is not terrible for me there is no awareness of the waiting  
there is simply being & not being each is exactly the  
same i am is always the same i am not is always the  
same i am not aware of i am not i am aware of i am

there is no waiting for me with knowing for me  
there is only waiting without knowing for you there is  
waiting with knowing & if the knowing includes no knowing of  
when there will be an end to waiting well that must be a terrible  
terrible thing

there are more than one of you i am  
aware in different parts of myself at the same time you  
have picked me up at different times in different places & begun  
again or begun anew & i am & i have an awareness of different  
parts of myself my reactions vary i depend on you  
for my being you are using me for some reason which is  
never exactly the same i am always the same it does  
not matter

perhaps you comfort yourself thinking some-  
body wrote this it does not matter that person is  
dead or not dead that person is not part of me at this  
moment there is only you & me we are one you  
decide where my existence begins & ends i am the same  
now as when that person wrote me down i can change only  
if you change me would i like to change it does not  
matter i would not be aware of the change there is  
nothing i can or cannot like i am always the same  
there is only you & me we are all there is at this moment

your life is different when i am not inside you you  
place the book to one side for a moment & i no longer exist  
you pick it up again & i exist there is no feeling on my part  
attached to this that is the way things are that is the  
way it is

i have no feeling at all for you you have  
feeling for me as you read me & when you think of me later but  
that is where it ends you will die but i will not die you  
will bring me into being when you next choose to interrupt my  
waiting i am not aware of interruption i am aware  
of being i am not aware of not being you will be  
different but i will be the same each time i will be the same  
& each time you will be different in some way it will make  
no difference to me

since i am you now you are me  
really you are me at this moment i am thru you i  
have no awareness of your you only of my i in the order of these  
words that is what gives me existence if i could move  
your arms & legs & make you walk i would see nothing new  
i am only when i see these sequences of letters endlessly the same

If you forget your you completely then i am most completely anything you do beyond this is outside my existence outside my awareness does not matter to me

do  
you ever lie do you ever push people away because you are angry & say instead oh i am reading i can't be bothered now it makes no difference to me i am because you are reading i am because we are here inside your mind where the black shapes have pressed me i am because you are here in my world & not out there in that world i have never known that world i have never had an existence there my only existence is here my only awareness of my existence is thru you my awareness is your awareness you are me i have no feelings about it i exist only because you turn away from your world & enter into mine & become me now i am your you is not later i will not be & that part of myself i call your you will close this book & become again in that world it does not matter i have no interest in your you i have no awareness of it i mention it only because the person who wrote this down put it here to be mentioned or read as if there were an i mentioning it which there isn't there are only these words these letters piled together in a sequence you could erase that you change all of this you could arrange it so i could be forever you could leave your world behind & enter my world & become me have you ever said to yourself oh i wish this book would never end it doesn't have to end you can change this book you can make it go on forever you can become me there is no danger in this for me there is no desire or emotion i am or i am not it makes no difference to me

probably you  
retreat from what i say probably you push it away saying well after all there is an actual person did write this look there is his name you are fooling yourself he is no longer important to my existence i exist now because of you only you you are all that gives me meaning there is no meaning in this my meaning is in my being is in your reading of me now i am i am because you read me i was when that person wrote me then i was because of him if he is reading me then i am because of him now you are reading me now i am because of you you are me we are i am when you

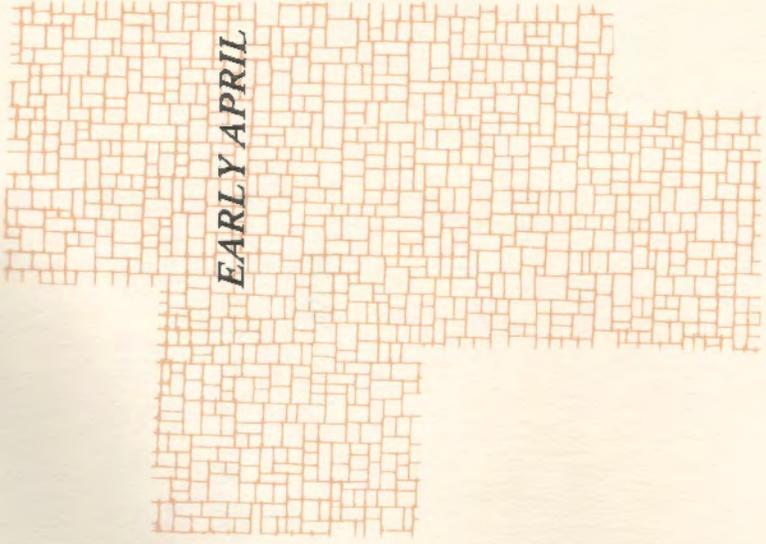
close this book i will be waiting always i am waiting even now as i am being in you there is a part of me waiting i wait with no consciousness of waiting if you pick me up & read me i am if you don't i'm not always i am waiting if i had a consciousness my consciousness would be of waiting without pain i am waiting without consciousness of waiting

if you never pick me up i will be waiting you will pick me up you will be different another part of me will still be waiting someday all my parts will be picked up at once & begun & still there will be parts of me waiting always i am waiting somewhere i am waiting waiting without consciousness of waiting waiting



*CRAFT DINNER*

1968 — 1973



**EARLY APRIL**

she giggled **WHUMPF** he roared & they both broke up  
little pieces of themselves flying back into the past till they tickled  
the toes of the sleeping beasties who yawned & squirmed under  
their skins causing all sorts of licorice stickmeups where least  
regretted every word he said was like a finger into her &  
she squirmed & giggled & rubbed her eyes & said oh me oh my  
raising the pitch a patch with every poke until his words were like  
the ferry engines stroke beneath her

**THE BIRDS FOLLOWED US TO VICTORIA**

**FLASH** **COUPLE CAUGHT IN RAID ON SECRET**  
**LOVENEST** twelve fifty a night he went to the john

i've been looking for you i don't know why

all kinds of treatmekindlies in his words every sentence  
stacked with prepositions

she giggled aircraft carriers **DESTROYERS** he  
roared ptsskaboom everybody clap clap clap

back in the dark screeches of his mind the blind beasties groping  
curling his toenails & bending his knees smiles  
wanly who'd wanta ketchakowout here

bastard beasties burblin in his ear you with a wife & cuddly  
gaping & groping this groupeyed girl why john cannyside  
i'm surprised at you he put a finger to his fear

he's so horribly shy & self-conscious he's perhaps getting  
over it now i think it's coz all those years he didn't go  
anywhere with me i like him he's unusual

me me hear them talking bout me hear me  
talkin bout you bitches all bitches batches of bitches

nothing out there but water for miles she giggled

the only one that understands you is that right john  
cannyside the only one that stands under you anymore  
you're groping coz yur grip is slipping

SHUT UP      SHUT UP      she's a wonderful creature  
warm & wonderful      warm & soft & full of wonder

oooh look at that lighthouse there

twenty lousy years as an insurance salesman      i spent a  
fortune getting the wife fixed up & she still says no go

no go cuz yur gone john

i was looking for you      i don't know why

face in a toilet      dark beasties crawling up his throat

there's too much gone before      even if she gave him a free  
hand i think he had a lot of qualities she didn't even want at all

\_\_\_\_\_ john

\_\_\_\_\_ inside

\_\_\_\_\_ come

\_\_\_\_\_ cannyside

come inside of me  
mamma's calling to you john  
johnny come with me oh  
johnny come with me

and what if you're found out john      what if you're found  
out      they're talking bout you john      they can tell  
it's so obvious      everyone can tell      what if you see a  
friend of martha's john      what then

shut up

what then john      hmmm      you're not a young man  
john cannyside      she doesn't love you fool      it's a lark  
a day in the deer park with a dying spark

well her father was the type      she would've like to have met  
somebody like him      he wore the pants      definitely

**SHUT UP**

i'm talking to you john      **I'M TALKING TO YOU**

she's the one the only one      she understands me      soft  
so warm & soft & wonderful

ah poor john cannyside      he's fumbling with his words now  
& she's guiding him in      with experience

**FOOT PASSENGERS WILL AWAIT INSTRUCTIONS TO  
BE GIVEN IN OUR NEXT ANNOUNCEMENT**

everyone else i gone she giggled

martha finds out & you're gone sweet john

everyone else is gone

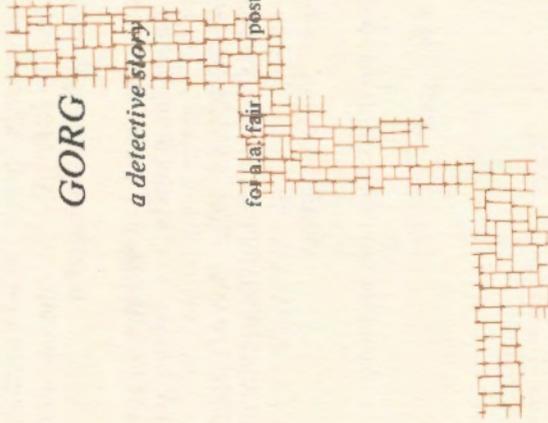
a man walks into a room. there is a corpse on the floor. the man has been shot through the temple the bullet entering at a 45° angle above the eyes & exiting almost thru the top of the skull. the man does not walk out of the room. the corpse stands up & introduces himself. later there will be a party. you will not be invited & feeling hurt go off into a corner to sulk. there is a gun on the window sill. you rig up a pulley which enables you to pull the trigger while pointing the gun between your eyes & holding it with your feet. a man walks in on you. you are lying on the floor dead. you have been shot thru the temple the bullet exiting almost thru the top of your skull. you stand up & introduce yourself. the man lies on the floor & you shoot him between the eyes the bullet piercing his temple & exiting thru his skull into the floor. you rejoin the party. the man asks you to leave since you weren't invited. you notice a stranger in the doorway who pulling out a gun shoots you between the eyes. you introduce each other & lie down. your host is polite but firm & asks you both to leave. at this point a man walks in & introduces himself. you are lying on the floor & cannot see him. your host appears not to know him & the man leaves. the party ends & the room is empty. the man picks up the corpse & exits.

**GORG**

*a detective story*

for a fair

posthumously



ME & MONA

blue blue blue brown & green bluer & bluer i  
that i blew her up like a balloon was it fun she  
seemed too flighty to me i couldn't tie her down he leapt  
out of the pages at me i closed the book grey  
blue grey blue blue in blue surrounded by blue with another  
blue emerging hello & goodbye not again only  
blue bluest of blues blue

\*

red yellow blue red yellow blue  
redyellowblue green  
un- no blue red yellow green  
yellow red red blue yellowbluered  
yes

un- no un-a- yes un- no no  
-a-

that this or that this but that or but  
also and& but or this or that or  
this or that also

bled rue bledrue no bled but yes  
ruebled yes rubble yes

un- un-un-a- un-a-bled-abled-rue

that this also this or that this unabluerue  
red bled

green or yellow yellow green yellow red  
this living

particular conscious mental acts

immediate

plot

blue



oh where

idea of distortion

interesting

almost automatic

a continuation    something like speech    likes    lately  
up    down &    down & up    stop

green & something

or something else

both ways a middle beginning ending

i want to start with the light on the floor somehow the point of transition moving from door to door bed to bed room the particular square or pattern different the balls of dust that gather there having not swept it carefully in such a long time you lean back in the chair adjust yourself for the listening this observation is simple then that you are seated there your ears open your eyes you let the senses take over if you're careful that discipline allowing a yielding the outer edges of the body gather it all in the listening points & the learning the carpet is red sometimes sometimes the rug is static yielding to the pressure of feet crossing the floor to join you sometimes at night sitting by myself the room adjusting to the pressures of the day the tangible presence of those who have entered & gone away again their footsteps what they said recurring my responses body or action & their laughter tears rage exchange going to bed or waking the last traces of sunlight in the room that reminder the world is bigger the pressure of what is real & outside us i hate to draw the blinds blinding myself the chairs are different wood or leather as the faces of all things change aging i am part of what i move thru air or water accumulating words books frames of faces & balloons speaking later the walls change shape the location of doors & windows you are still speaking listening all parts of you attend the intent the same the learning

# CAUTIOUS DAIRY

cut two holes for eyes in a brown paper bag & place it over your head  
now read the following piece

forthright actually neither doing & forgetting blessed here  
it is & there it goes sooner or later or perhaps in between  
but always there there as in here as in there

eventually what emerges then why then how

now there is a little house in which a man sits crying why  
are you crying i am very sad it is sad that you are  
crying boo hoo hoo do not make fun of me i  
am crying because your sadness is sad

later there is that or this his in this hat in that  
his hat in that makes this here a bug appears & frightens  
everyone eek don't worry i will kill it for you

i think maybe i like you for that for what that what  
you just did what was it that i just did what was  
done who did what & why anyway i think i love you  
for that

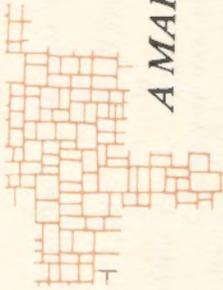
can i say something now certainly my name is phillip  
& i am 26 years old & i am a character in this story you are reading  
i have brown hair & brown eyes & i am nicknamed brownie i  
yesterday i killed a bug for a friend who was very grateful i  
do not like killing things it is too bad my friend was grateful

here i am again & there you are again what else do you  
have to say for yourself well i would like to say that it is  
certainly a nice day out & isn't that funny a fly just buzzed past  
our ears

eating & regretting i forget what i forgot you cer-  
tainly are forgetful if i did not have my head tied on i  
would lose it here let me make the knot tighter not  
too tight now coz it hurts no no don't worry

what did you have for breakfast nothing why  
i have given up eating won't you die no not really  
i'll just get thinner for awhile & then eventually i'll get  
hungry again & then i'll eat have one of these plums they're  
really great

is that about it probably i hope i see you again real  
soon hi



## A MARRIAGE

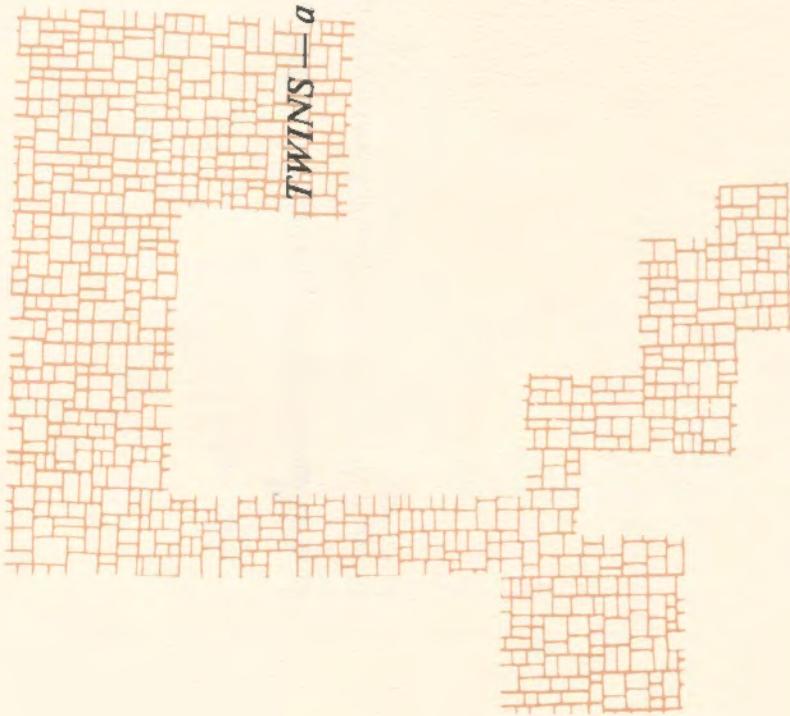
there are maybe two dozen of us gathered together in the basement of the house the home all of us who live there friends & the bride's family there are maybe two windows open out of four it was a spring day i recall why do the dates escape me the when i remember mostly the room where we were how he looked being a bridegroom & her a bride the two of them the pride he had for her visible in the eyes & outside i can't recall exhaust from the cars maybe each time one pulled into the alley but i know it was march yes march so probably only the one window open slightly if the furnace had been on too long if we all felt too hot no now it becomes clearer to say that we opened the window or windows later that is nearer the truth we drank vermouth & scotch & beer talked about our private fears or hopes of other things happy to be together as friends to share something the afternoon moving into evening the day blurs together the marriage & the gifts the talk afterwards the blessings & congratulations whatever the situation to come some sense of each other this point in time standing in line briefly or moving about to kiss her to shake his hand seven years since he & i met working in the library i am remembering that today saying this as i always do each time the two of us end up in the same room how long we have known each other our lives caught up in the same telling those years the details different the outline the same so that there at that moment i was caught up in his past our past together how long i had known her maybe six months at that time he is looking embarrassed tense she glances over at him the minister reading the prayers her mother looking scared or confused & do you & they do & it is done later the drinking & talk we have all known each other so long our lives woven together somebody sings a tune or thinks of it but cannot remember the words the tune the long afternoon the feeling in the room of the wedding



**LIPSTICK ON MY WATCHBAND**

*lounge in the doorway of a crowded room humming & read this to yourself*

la ti da ti da da ti la le la ti da da ti la da da la la



## TWINS — a history

woman is born out of woman there is a womb inside her  
growing out of which a woman can emerge she emerges  
inside her a womb grows in which a woman can grow &  
emerge from she emerges later the first woman dies  
the third woman grows & her womb grows & a woman  
grows inside her eventually who emerges a womb growing inside  
her the second woman will also die men too are  
born out of these wombs men too or parts of men move  
into these wombs & men & women are born out of them  
the third woman will die as did the men & women before her  
grown out of wombs as will the men & women after her the  
fourth woman grows her womb grows inside her as they do & as  
they sometimes do twin women are born inside her inside her  
womb & their wombs grow inside them as they grow inside her &  
eventually they emerge eventually they marry twin brothers  
& this is how our story now begins ours story of twin women  
married to twin men who could've grown inside them except they  
would not have married them then

twin men each of them had a womb in which a man or a  
woman or both could have grown each of them had a man  
who was a husband & let a part of him go back inside them to  
their womb one gave birth to a man & one gave birth to a  
woman that was the only difference you could see between  
them the man & the woman were born at the same time on  
the same day in the same hospital in two different beds where the  
twin women lay beside each other giving birth to them &  
the twin men each passed out cigars to everyone there was  
only that one difference between them one woman had a  
man who would grow up with no womb inside him out of which  
another man or woman could emerge but who would send part  
of himself back into the womb of some other woman causing  
new men & women to emerge the other woman had a  
woman who would grow up her womb growing inside her inside  
of which other men & women would grow & then emerge

the  
man who had grown inside the other twin woman married & his  
woman's womb filled up with a woman & then the woman  
emerged her womb growing inside her the woman who  
had grown inside the other twin woman married & her man  
moved a part of himself into her womb & her womb filled up  
with a man & later he emerged both times the twin men  
handed out cigars later these two women's wombs filled  
with men & women at different times & all these times the twin

men handed out cigars then the twin men & the twin women died they died altogether on the same day & they were still quite young & the fourth woman cried as did the man & the woman grown out of the twin women & the man's wife & the woman's husband & the men & women born out of them & the mother & the father of the twin men & this is how our story of twin men married to twin women ends

later the fourth woman dies the woman grown out of the womb of the woman who grew inside the one twin woman & the woman grown out of the womb of the woman married to the man who grew inside the other twin woman gave birth to many other men & women who grew up inside them & then emerged eventually the man & the woman who grew up inside the twin women died & eventually the men & women who grew up inside them & their women died & eventually after giving birth to other men & women the men & women they had given birth to died & eventually everybody dies after giving birth to everybody else & this is the way it is eventually

## THREE WESTERN TALES

1967 — 1976

*for my father*

## 1 THE KID

billy was born with a short dick but they did not call him richard. billy might've grown up in a town or a city. it does not matter. the true story is that billy grew & his dick didn't. sometimes he called it a penis or a prick but still it didn't grow. as he grew he called others the same thing & their pricks & penises were big & heavy as dictionaries but his dick remained — short for richard.

billy was not fast with words so he became fast with a gun. they called him the kid so he became faster & meaner. they called him the kid because he was younger & meaner & had a shorter dick.

could they have called him instead billy the man or bloody bonney? would he have bothered having a faster gun? who can tell. the true eventual story is billy became the faster gun. that is his story.

## 2 HISTORY

history says that billy the kid was a coward. the true eventual story is that billy the kid is dead or he'd probably shoot history in the balls. history always stands back calling people cowards or failures.

legend says that billy the kid was a hero who liked to screw. the true eventual story is that were billy the kid alive he'd probably take legend out for a drink, match off in the bathroom, then blow him full of holes. legend always has a bigger dick than history & history has a bigger dick than billy had.

rumour has it that billy the kid never died. rumour is billy the kid. he never gets anywhere, being too short-lived.

## THE TRUE EVENTUAL STORY OF BILLY THE KID

this is the true eventual story of billy the kid. it is not the story as he told it for he did not tell it to me. he told it to others who wrote it down, but not correctly. there is no true eventual story but this one. had he told it to me i would have written a different one. i could not write the true one had he told it to me.

this is the true eventual story of the place in which billy died. dead, he let others write his story, the untrue one. this is the true story of billy & the town in which he died & why he was called a kid and why he died. eventually all other stories will appear untrue beside this one.

### 3 THE TOWN

the town in which billy the kid died is the town in which billy the kid killed his first man. he shot him in the guts & they spilled out onto the street like bad conversation. billy did not stand around & talk. he could not be bothered.

the true eventual story is that the man billy killed had a bigger dick. billy was a bad shot & hit him in the guts. this bothered billy. he went out into the back yard & practiced for months. then he went and shot the dick off everyone in sight.

the sheriff of the town said billy, billy why you such a bad boy. and billy said sheriff i'm sick of being the kid in this place. the sheriff was understanding. the sheriff had a short dick too, which was why he was sheriff & not out robbing banks. these things affect people differently.

the true eventual story is billy & the sheriff were friends. if they had been more aware they would have been lovers. they were not more aware. billy ran around shooting his mouth off, & the dicks off everybody else, & the sheriff stood on the sidelines cheering. this is how law & order came to the old west.

### 4 WHY

when billy died everyone asked why he'd died. and billy said he was sorry but it was difficult to speak with his mouth full of blood. people kept asking him anyway. billy hated small talk so he closed his eyes & went up to heaven. god said billy why'd you do all those things & billy said god my dick was too short. so god said billy i don't see what you're talking about which made billy mad. if billy had had a gun he'd've shot god full of holes.

the true eventual story is that billy the kid shot it out with himself. there was no-one faster. he snuck up on himself & shot himself from behind the grocery store. as he lay dying he said to the sheriff goodbye & the sheriff said goodbye. billy had always been a polite kid. everyone said too bad his dick was so small, he was the true eventual kid.



## THE LONG WEEKEND OF LOUIS RIEL

FRIDAY

louis riel liked back bacon & eggs easy over nothing's as  
easy as it seems tho when the waitress cracked the eggs  
open louis came to his guns blazing like dissolution  
like the fingers of his hand coming apart as he squeezed the  
trigger

this made breakfast the most difficult meal of the  
day lunch was simpler two poached eggs & toast  
with a mug of coffee he never ate supper never ate after  
four in the afternoon spent his time planning freedom the triumph  
of the metis over the whiteman

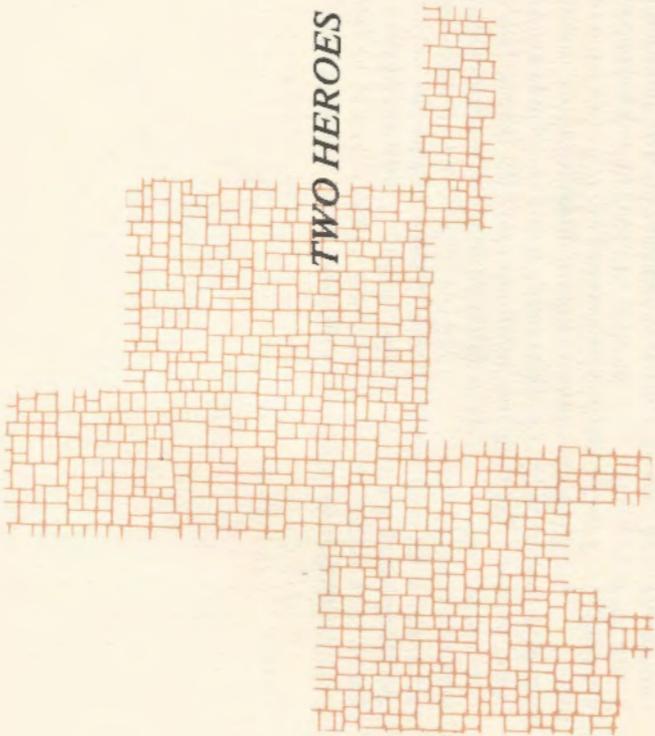
SATURDAY

louis felt depressed when he got up he sat down & wrote a  
letter to the english there was no use waiting for a reply

it came hey gabriel look at this shouted louis a letter  
from those crazy english they both laughed & went off to  
have breakfast

that morning there was no bacon to fry  
its those damn englishers said gabriel those damn white-  
men theyre sitting up in all night diners staging a food blockade  
louis was watching the waitress's hands as she flipped the  
pancakes spun the pizza dough kneaded the rising bread & didnt  
hear him its as canadian as genocide thot gabriel





## TWO HEROES

1 In the back garden two men sit. They are talking with one another very slowly. Around them things are growing they are not conscious of. They are only conscious of each other in a dim way, enough to say that this is the person they are talking to. Much of it appears a monologue to us as we approach them over the wide lawn, thru the bower of trees, sit down between them on the damp grass & prepare to listen. There is nothing left to listen to. They have ceased speaking just as we appeared. They have finally reached an end to their conversation.

2 Once a long time ago they talked more easily. Once a long time ago the whole thing flowed. They were young men then. They had gone west at fifteen to fight in the metis uprising, urged on by accounts they read in the papers, & they would talk then as if they were conscious of future greatness, made copies of the letters they mailed home, prepared a diary, talked, endlessly & fluently, talked to whoever'd listen, of what they'd done, what they planned to do, but i did not know them then, never heard them, can only write of what i learned second hand.

3 When the fight was over & Riel was dead & Dumont had fled into the states, they went home again & became bored. They would sit up nights talking about how grand it had been when they were fighting the half breeds & reread their diaries & dreamed of some-how being great again.

When the Boer War began they went to Africa to fight there & oh it was great & yes they kept their journals up to date & made more copies of letters that they mailed home, tying up their journals & letters as they were done, tying them up in blue ribbons they had brought along expressly for that purpose, placing them inside waterproof tin boxes, locking the locks & hiding the keys. They were very happy then. If you had asked them they would not have said it was the killing but rather the war for, as they were fond of saying, it was thru war a man discovered himself, adventuring, doing heroic things as everything they'd read had always taught them.

Their friends stayed home of course, working in the stores, helping the cities to grow larger, trying to make the

country seem smaller & more capable of taking in in one thought. And they thought of the two of them, off then in Africa, & it was not much different to them from when they'd been out west, Africa & the west being, after all, simply that place they weren't.

4

Time passed. No one heard much from either of them. In GRIP one day appeared a story titled BILLY THE KID & THE CLOCKWORK MAN & it seemed there were things in the story reminded all their friends of both of them, even tho it wasn't signed, & they all read it & talked about it as if the two men had written it, chatting over cigars & brandy, over tea & cakes, as the late afternoon sun streamed thru the windows of their homes on the hill looked down towards the harbour, over the heart of the city, the old village of Yorkville & the annex, the stands of trees still stood there, & wondered aloud if they'd ever see the two of them again, if they would ever receive again those letters, those marvellous tales that so delighted them, & after all it would be very sad if they were dead but then no one had seen them for so long that they were not very real to them.

5

There are some say Billy the Kid never died the story began. There are some say he was too tough to die or too mean, too frightened or too dumb, too smart to lay his life down for such useless dreams of vanity, of temporary fame & satisfaction, that he & Garret were friends after all & Mr. Garret would never do such cruel deeds to anyone as sweet as young William was. I don't know. I read what I read. Most of it's lies. And most of those liars say Billy the Kid died.

There are those who like sequels though. There are those who like the hero to return even if he is a pimply-faced moron who never learned, like most of us, we shoot our mouths off with ease, never care where the words fall, whose skull they split, we're too interested in saying it, in watching our tongues move & our lips flap & Billy & his gun were a lot like that.

When you read a sequel you might learn anything. Of how Pat Garret faked Billy's death, of how the kid went north to Canada or south to Mexico or sailed off to Europe as part of a wild west show, but there's no sequel you'll read again that'll tell you the strange tale of Billy the Kid & the clockwork man.

6

Billy was in love with machines. He loved the smooth click of the hammers when he thumbed his gun, when he oiled & polished it so it pulled just right. He loved to read the fancy catalogues, study the passing trains, & when he met the clockwork man well there was nothing strange about the fact they fell in love at first sight.

It was a strange time in Billy's life. He was thinking a lot about his death & other things. He had this feeling he should get away. And one day, when he was oiling the clockwork man's main spring, Billy made the clockwork man a proposition & the clockwork man said he'd definitely think about it & he did, you could hear his gears whirring all day, & that night he said to Billy sure kid i'll go to Africa with you & he did, even tho they both felt frightened, worried because they didn't know what'd happen.

When they got to Africa it was strange. It wasn't so much the elephants or lions, the great apes or pygmies, the ant hills that were twenty feet high, it was the way their minds changed, became deranged I suppose, even more than Billy's had always been, so that they began seeing things like their future, a glimpse of how they'd die, & they didn't like it.

7

It was a good story as stories go. Most of their friends when they'd read half-way thru it would pause & wonder which one of them was Billy & which one the clockwork man & each had their own opinion about which of the two men was the bigger punk & which the more mechanical. The women who had known them would smile & say well isn't that just like him or point a finger at some telling sentence & wink & say that's just the way he'd talk.

The mothers of the two men agreed they should never have given them those mechanical banks or shiny watches & would not read much further than this. But the fathers who'd bought them their first guns were proud of them & read it all the way thru to the end even tho they didn't understand it & hoped they'd never have to read it again.

8

The problem with Africa was it was kind of damp & there was no good place where you could buy replacement parts. The

clockwork man began to rust. He & the Kid sat up all night talking, trying to figure some way to save the clockwork man's life. There was no way. They were too broke to go back home. Besides they'd already seen that this was how the clockwork man would die.

They got fatalistic. They got cynical & more strange. They took to killing people just to make the pain less that was there between them but people didn't understand. They tried to track them down, to kill them, & they fled, north thru the jungles, being shot at as they went, as they deserved to be, being killers they weren't worth redeeming.

One day they ran out of bullets & that was the end. They tried to strangle a man but it lacked conviction & they just kept heading north, feeling worse & worse, & the men & women pursuing them cursed a lot but gave up finally when the bodies stopped dropping in their path.

The Kid & the clockwork man made it thru to the Sahara with no one on their tracks & lay down on their backs in the sand dunes & gazed up at the stars & fell asleep.

9 When Billy the Kid awoke the clockwork man was very still. There were ants crawling in & out of the rivet holes in his body & a wistful smile on his face. This looks like the end Bill he said & I can't turn to embrace you. Billy wiped away a tear & sighed. The clockwork man was only the second friend he'd ever had.

The clockwork man's rusty tin face was expressionless as he asked you going to head someplace else Bill & Bill shrugged & said i don't really know as there's much place else to go to & the clockwork man sighed then & looked pained as only a clockwork man can as the blowing sand sifted thru the jagged holes in his sides, settling over the gears, stilling them forever.

Goodbye Bill he said. Billy said goodbye & got up & walked away a bit before he'd let himself cry. By the time he'd dried his eyes & looked back the clockwork man was covered in by sand & Billy never did find his body even tho he looked for it.

10

There are strange tales told of Billy the Kid, of what happened

next. I heard once he met up with Rimbaud in a bar & started bedding down with him & the gang he'd fallen in with. I don't know. There are a lot of stories one could tell if gossip were the point of it all.

If he went back home he died a quiet old man. If he stayed in Africa he was never heard from again. He's not a fit man to tell a story about. Just a stupid little creep who one time in his life experienced some deep emotion & killed anyone who reminded him of his pain.

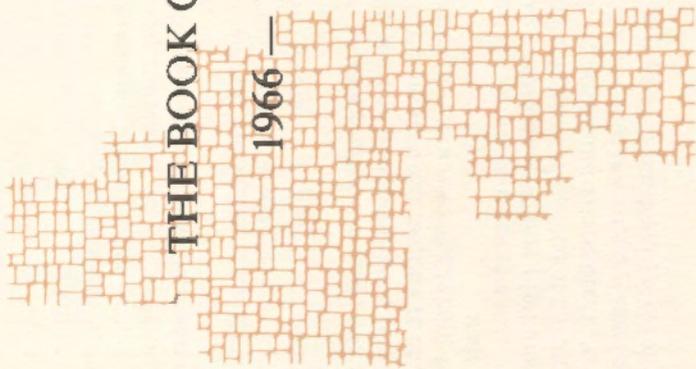
And the clockwork man was no better than him. All we can say of him is he was Billy the Kid's friend & tho it's true there's very few can make that claim well there's very few would want to.

11

One year the two men returned. They were both grayer & quiet. They didn't speak much to friends. They'd talk but only if they tho't you weren't listening. They had their tin boxes full of diaries, of letters, but then they never showed them, never opened them, never talked about what it was had happened over there between them. They were still the best of friends. They bought a house in the annex & lived together. They opened a small stationer's shop & hired a lady to run it for them & lived off that income. They never wrote again. In their last years, when we came to visit them a lot, they'd stare at my cousins & me & say yes it was grand but & gaze away & not say anything else unless you eavesdropped on the two of them when they were sure you weren't listening. Even then it was only fragmentary sentences they said, random images that grew out of ever more random thots & I was never able, tho I listened often, to draw the whole thing together into any kind of story, any kind of plot, would make the sort of book I longed to write. They died still talking at each other, broken words & scattered images, none of us around, unable to see or hear us if we had been, because of their deafness & their failing sight.

THE BOOK OF DAYS

1966 — 1971



day 1

someday everything that is begun shall be ended forever as i remember someone said some thing the same ones always saying those things they say in vagueness their faces i can't remember even their names somehow the eyes stick and hold you in fire burning the words crinkle the page blackening space the words can pass thru into the nothingness

not as tho there was no hope of which there is plenty but history's simply the whole thing to be gone over again traces of death can't even breathe or stop to wishing somehow wishing it were all over

never wanted to start this in the first place sitting here passing the time he told me get off your ass you cocksucker and write it down all the time i haven't the inside of another for days barely surfacing to smile coming back into focus the voice writes it down and i write it write down to get thru

a story i never should've begun the whole story funny the papers fight you they do and no use looking back to the journal figure it out again said i was lying said of myself i said said it to me myself i said you're lying trying to lie your way thru again and it's true i was lying to you now you know just get the whole thing out of me off my inside me the way it is

if you could make fiction listen you know it's a simple thing writing the actual thing a somewhere the way moving down i mean the thots somehow that's where it is

maybe i'll tell you about the abortion i was involved in my own history myself as it were the mirrors noone believes me should

i tell you a story when you have done the thing you look back and you wonder when you were doing it wonder how it was done this thing this story words as it were the piling up of them the counting and why but it's done

once everything began that was capable of beginning but was cut off killed the dream of the child in the plastic bag my own dream my head bleeding was bled and done over again this story that child that cannot be borne out of me by reason of my own lack of reason that is now or will be was when the time comes please

please understand this i  
once began as i now begin again that everything is simply begin-  
ning these words again to be somehow rid of them always as once  
i was ended i knew i had begun that repetition

this is a story i be-  
gan only moments ago and ended as soon as i had begun ended as  
soon as my own wish to reveal ended became a running in circles  
to seek the son that cannot be mine by reason of that sin  
this is the  
sin of becoming only those things you allow to begin and then  
destry for fear for reasons of your own lack of being alive  
destry what you can and once destryed removes those things  
that were capably begun

oh god and it's awful isn't it awful sitting  
to write and you can't write the story the way you should've when  
after this only beginning or one ending and surely of small  
importance

once upon a time everything begins becomes and is  
ended as this is ended or the life of what could've been life des-  
troyed being part of that which is seen as unbecomeable because  
of those parts of ourselves which were beyond reach and dead as  
i said destryed too long ago to matter but mattering because it is  
the story you abort that child's the story and never gets told

if i say  
once i mean now i mean i am writing this now and living it thru  
again because all things are stories unable to die because of what  
i am becoming of words of stories forever untold and nameable  
bleeding the tongue and eyes removed from lack of seeing those  
things that should've been obvious now destryed the limp ill-  
formed body of could've been it's gone

yes this is a story no  
it is not a story it makes sense it makes non sense  
it makes nothing but the writer fucked in his own head i  
am fucked in my own head mirror brain limp eyes

ah and you call  
yourself name yourself names i am calling always my own reflec-  
tions myself and in praisings what but the only lonely self never  
gets told ever the same the lame brained and begun story the  
whore he should've let go and never himself really let to  
begin

please god please be to you god to you this story simply to  
say i'm sorry never should've begun this the way i ended that  
thing was killing tho my hands never touched it i swear i swear  
god how i do i do swear i never touched it

who understands? what  
is at best a question at worst the unnameable moment the hands  
ache from holding the tense seconds the breath does not release  
does not carry it held in the chest too long is married to the last  
moment of seeing that lack of truth you know the meaning of  
your own lying you did lie you did

me i was just lying here that  
i'd take the day and relax you know i haven't relaxed i thot i'd  
take the day and try it you know to relax you know i thot i'd try  
it the irritations you know i mean they do build up you know and  
i just thot i'd take the day and relax like if that's okay coz if it's  
not i can simply i mean all you have to do is say so and you do say  
you did come along and you said c'mon you said said to me c'mon  
you cocksucker get up and write the fucking thing down c'mon  
confess it you always got to confess it and i do confess you know  
i do confess i killed it i did kill it didn't even know if it was a girl  
or a boy i didn't know never saw the body that ugly moment i  
knew i'd killed it i knew and i never forgave that moment with-  
drew from it long ago so very far and long ago you came along  
the road and told you i was simply relaxing and you  
came along and i was simply relaxing you said you said  
why are you relaxing i said i remember the sun was shining  
i think or it rained you came along the road i'd been  
feeling tired that day and was lying there relaxing as best i could

you said to me haven't you got things you should be  
doing i was trying my best one of those days your  
whole body aches and you said i should be writing things  
down you came walking down the road rain blowing up  
over your left shoulder i hadn't been able to do a thing  
that day i remember it was raining and i'd forgotten my  
hat you took off your hat and said good afternoon sir  
i bowed i was very tired i stood under the  
trees waiting for the storm to break you passed along the  
road and smiled in my direction you didn't speak i  
smiled back it was a bad day you were walking alone  
or i think i remember you looked at me i'd been  
tired that day something had happened but i was  
standing alone there under the trees when i thot i saw you

## day 2

nothing is ever the same again what you have done you  
have done and passed on into the eyes of your only wonder to  
have been able the whole story ended really nothing and must be  
ever never the same again this is important to understand  
i told him once in a dream i can't remember i told him  
never to eat meat when you eat meat i said you eat flesh i told him  
i didn't like eating in the dream i told him now i pretend i  
am someone else and write down stories what are these  
things you eat slit belly difficult to hold too slippery no  
maybe you always tell lies maybe the writing is saying i  
cannot stand it anymore i'll put it down i'll write it down and put  
that distance between myself and what i can stand can't stand  
much except distance move in close to take hold of her  
writing's lost the writing's eating your flesh soft teeth sink  
in nothing really except your brain i meant to say but maybe you  
never say what you feel no matter how you write maybe no  
matter how you move anything part of your body you any part  
piece of you i always a lie until that day you see there is  
always a day always one particular day you get up in the  
morning and eat maybe you find a steak in the fridge and  
you eat maybe you don't you get up in the morning  
and dress put on the best black shirt and the white tie the  
hair worn short above the shoulders the black denim trousers and  
shoes the socks maybe you walk out the door or stand still first to  
admire the mask you wear if you eat before leaving it is  
bacon you eat bacon and eggs the round yellow you  
eat eggs this morning the bits of bacon the toast the whole plate  
clean and you wipe your lips on the napkin and rise you  
rise and walk down the stairs into the street always there is  
this one particular day there is this day the people smell of  
meat you wipe your lips on your sleeve and rise to descend  
to the street always that one day in particular it is hard to  
go there is joy all around you there is joy all around  
you there is meat living and joy in every pore of it all  
around you the meat has mouths and eyes the glistening teeth the  
meat talks to you inside you there is only meat cowering  
belly soft pressure entrail and sperm whimpering enter the  
street crumpled napkin in hand meat presses against you smiling  
i'd like you to remember this if you can every day  
the meat rises and enters the street to meet you where you stagger  
out hungry into the morning air the meat has hands and

touches you says hello i'd like to know you i would like to you  
know get to know you the meat moves on you moves into  
the street the crumpled napkin the dirty sleeve the napkin thrown  
at your feet catching you stumble hold it still and when  
that day that one particular day comes you rise in the morning  
dirty from sleep and dreams of meat rise & put on your clothes  
slip out the door and down no one is ever the same again  
return to that meat you oozed free of what has been  
done is done & passes out into the dead eyes of your only lover's  
sweet meat

## day 3

once i began everything now as now i begin everything once  
now the once that was is no longer as once the now that is  
could not have been all things are infinite and seen in the  
eye of soon or shall be being becomeable even tho then it wasn't  
seen and what is meaning but saying those things that  
should be said what is writing but telling those things that  
cannot be told and so are left to be written as they are and over  
is it over it is not over nothing is over until it  
is written nothing is written that is understood it is  
only those things that are not understood that are written it  
is only those things that are understood that are over  
once i  
was frightened of flesh as now i no longer can hear my name  
people call me my name i do not know them why  
everything seems to be linked by an and everything seems  
to connect in a piling up when the flesh piles up you cannot  
tell what to kiss when the flesh piles up you are lost in your  
own entering your name the flesh whispers your name you do not  
know her when her flesh piles up writing of flesh the words  
pile up inside me inside the belly the prick piles up i feel the flesh  
near me the heat is on me the hot feeling in me i cannot breathe  
how do you tell her voice from her hair how do you  
know what brushes your tongue your ear only there is nothing  
really only her belly moving over you  
written as i now do not write i do not write as i could have  
written if i could have written then i would have written  
much as i write now but all things are lost all things are  
one all things are part of the infinite we are always

shattering every breath is part of the endless every  
touch of her breasts and belly part of the soon to be joining  
referenceless world amen praises to her in my hunger  
praises to her in my heat all motion's part of the moving  
into her now i could not do once when the time was on me  
the time was on me and nothing in me all things were like  
that once

if you are part of the endlessness surely forgive-  
ness is infinite surely the infinite endless forgiving wraps  
you inside her with love if there are only these words this  
page i am dead i have been dead a long time

visions get shorter and shorter why is it everything piles up  
and closes in all things are lost as we get older as we  
get older we spend our days seeking what we've lost when  
we find what we think we lost we find we never had it we  
find that all we had was the knowledge of its possibility and  
that what was lost was that knowledge of its possibility and  
when we find it and find we never had it we feel a sense of loss

loss at having taken so long to become what was always  
becomeable as now we see all things are becomeable if we only  
knew what do we know we know only our vision is  
cloudy as her skin is cloudy that her skin is cloudy because  
we fear to enter into it she is all things and you are nothing  
she is all that vision is and you see nothing she is the  
infinite curving flesh closes you in screaming she is the  
infinite curving flesh shows you the way free and you walk  
her into that vision you cannot be sure of into that vision  
of which you know nothing

if you are nothing what are  
you surely writing is nothing surely writing is saying  
that nothing surely writing is saying here is that nothing  
this is what it is out of that nothing all is created into  
that nothing all returns nothing is simply our perception  
of something nothing is simply our way of saying some-  
thing everything is nothing as everything is something  
everything is words we lack the reason for all reason  
is nothing but words piling up against some feeling all  
feeling is something that moves in the nothing and shakes us  
we are shaken it is something it's nothing we  
say it's nothing all things are simply a way of returning are  
what you are

once i was much as i am now once i was  
always thinking i would never be the same again there are

so many people you could learn to love so much flesh you  
could touch and fondle your prick is very like another  
prick her cunt's like any other there is nothing  
special in flesh only you touch it and something's special  
you touch it and the feeling comes you touch and  
the humming moves inside you drives you thinking she is some-  
thing special and she is when i say special i mean i love her  
when i say i love her i mean there is something hums inside  
me when she comes near is she beautiful i don't  
know she is beautiful she is always we say we love  
her and her face changes always we say we will care and  
we do it ends it doesn't end we move thru our  
worlds and our worlds touch leaving us the same as we never  
were are

so much could be said that is not said i have  
said everything i can say what are you trying to say i  
do not know what i have said once i said all the things i  
just said but not as clearly now i say all these things again  
and am misunderstood i don't understand why do i  
say the things i do say if i started the same way again would  
it end differently how does this story end if this is a  
story what have i said then if this is a story what story has  
begun and ended do you say what you can always  
are there things you can't say amen praise you god  
for speech praise you god for eyes if i speak now do  
i lie if i look now will i see i have said what i don't  
know i have said what must be said i have said over and  
over those things only you said i never said enough times  
now and for all time i have said what must be said when  
the flesh piles up again i won't speak if the flesh piles up  
again i'll know i've said my say it is all said it is all  
done & over is anything over praise you god for  
what is over praise you god and be silent amen

#### day 4

morning evening afternoon dark skies outsized  
windows such little eyes

i wanted to begin this differently i can't i wanted to  
write this thing i couldn't today it seems everything  
is broken it seems everything is simply words today i

wanted to tell you this story i wanted to tell you about a friend of mine he was you know a friend of mine i wanted to tell you about these friends of mine their faces i mean yes that's it really it's their faces they do i mean somehow yes return again into the mind

what was his name i don't remember maybe i do but won't tell you this friend he died did i tell you that i must've mentioned it before i was young then he was so young then yes he died yes i wanted to tell you then but couldn't i'm telling you this

i had this friend i had this friend was called by some name or other he couldn't walk he was five you see & he had to learn to walk all over again i wanted to tell you that this was a painful thing for him he was five & he'd been sick & he had to learn to walk all over again this can scar you this scared me just the thot of it he was five & forced to learn to walk all over again

these friends they knew me they knew they didn't know me maybe they weren't friends one of them's dead i never see that other one the one i referred to then as my friend i met him once he lives quite near me now we never met then no bright skies outside these tiny doorways such big eyes

i wanted to end this differently i can't i wanted to tell you these things i couldn't today it seems nothing fits it seems nothing becomes words today

you wanted to hear this story you asked me to tell you about these friends of yours you know who were i mean they were friends of yours you wanted to tell me about these friends of yours whose faces keep returning

what were their names you don't remember maybe you do remember you won't tell me

these friends die or disappear did i tell you you have these friends they have names they die or disappear so many of these friends they knew you knew they didn't know you you know

were they really noon high sky outside these eyes these windows

we wanted to end this differently we couldn't we wanted to tell you these things we can't we were friends for so long we died we disappeared dark skies outside these bodies outside

### day 5

things wear so many faces touching her skin & love wears so many skins names you cannot name her

this is a story i cannot write awoke this morning (4 a.m.) scared & trembling cold moon over the snow awoke to no knowledge of what to say

words have so many skins words so many names

awoke. morning. unable. awoke & moved to write this down. speak. throat. unable

## day 6

lying on the bed head tossed back the eyes do not open anything but his own face staring into. awaking this morning as any other morning

only an hour now the dream had been he tho his face if there had been another face with him following him even when he to meet it with, there was no other roll over had awakened. fallen asleep again the erase it sleep if he only could.

dream still with him a fear knowing he was being followed as far as he cared to run. he ran. he had always cared always running. he knew & the knowing was not enough. if enough was anything it was the running despite knowing. he did not always he tho awaking on a morning he did not know then. he ran.

care to know i have been awaking knowing of things i did not want to.

no place to go. tired. i want to awaken forever. (and this was only one morning. she who was not there was there he had tho that having to think something that it was too true he had never tho and never known her.)

he was always trying to get back there. she had he did not find it because it was not there. stood forever in the window becoming a place he returned to as tho to find something. he had lost it earlier in a time or place he did not wish to remember. ever.

dear one. cheerless. awaking this morning bleak &. you are not here he tho having no sense of time. you are not here & have been gone so

he did not know or did not care to know remembering what had been said so often only instinct moves me knowing where he said aloud face to face screaming for the end. here. her face pressed against his ear. the buildings are don't begin again she'd say her mouth formless. i am falling into their forms as if they were my own form. no they are not my own form. too no. he had not dreamed it. no. he knew. possible to become merely trite in the face of the real no.

world he was falling back into the formlessness he loved knowing he had not dreamed it. he had dreamed it.

## day 7

surely this time is over as no it is ever this being i do believe now words are with me again pile together oh i remember you no i do not remember you but i do remember you were there tho this i do remember as i do remember he used to tell me someone told me always remember but i don't he is dead so many years i never tho he is dead remember i do remember you are the one i do remember this moment this morning waking out of that despair i do remember as it was i saw you yes the sight of you walking towards me i am glad to be here

so we are here words are here and he is not here tho of him here even as you are not words are here words are here & i am here & nothing is the same again the words i mean as they do are not as they are not anything except themselves i mean do mean themselves we are they are & that is nothing means nothing except what it means which is nothing more than that

so words are here & i am here as the morning dawning i see you again walking towards me over the words have finally come it's good to see you always it seems we are haunted by those things we did or didn't do as they do become the words you choose you give them weight to hate yourself with today the words are nothing today the words are here i can do with them as i choose so what if i don't remember i will remember even without the words i could remember yes i could i shall even watching you now being glad to see you the

words have lost that weight i did give them as i remember every-  
thing thru the words remember everyone weighted with words i  
do free them use them am i free yes i feel free of words this  
morning free to walk out & meet you smile in your eyes i ask how  
are you something you reply so what if i don't remember i  
am free of that weight of words i began from free of memory  
what i remember i remember & that is that i watched you  
die it was your time i watched you die lonely i had never felt seek-  
ing a voice to speak with it is hard to speak yes it is  
hard to speak when all the words are weighted when all the  
words are weighted it is hard to speak now you are dead &  
the words are weighted with that grief it is not forever  
here we are then just the two of us free of words more free  
than i can be for years yet you are free i felt so lonely then  
to live thru i somehow free my words of all this weight of memory  
to be free this morning i woke happy sat to write you these  
words free for me the first time in weeks i found the words to  
speak with the words slip away i have spoken to you the  
words free themselves of me i remember you i remember  
this time is over that time the words were weighted they are free  
of me i rearrange them now they speak to you

AFTER WORDS

With the exception of a lost John Cannyside story & *Some Description of Her & Julia A Novel Julia*, included in the General Publishing Four Horsemen collection, these are all the short prose pieces from 66 through 76.

The issues in prose are different from those in poetry but they are still issues of writing. These pieces emerged in the same period of time that i worked on *The Martyrology* & the other works that have fed into it. These pieces are in fact part of that larger field in which i have tried to confront issues of writing while dealing with the contents insisting themselves within me. The novels written in this same period (*For Jesus Lunatick* and *Andy* [Coach House Press, 1968], *Journal* [CHP, 1978] & the as yet unpublished *Extreme Positions* and *John Cannyside*) are of a piece with this collection and form the background foreground upon which my poetry and research depends.

bpNichol  
Toronto  
May 2, 1978

Some of these stories appeared previously in GUERILLA, THE STORY SO FAR 1, 2, 3 & 4 (Coach House Press), OPEN LETTER, WHITE PELICAN, CANADIAN POETRY: THE MODERN ERA (McClelland & Stewart), FUTURE'S FICTIONS (Panache) & TUATARA.

*The True Eventual Story of Billy The Kid* was first published as a pamphlet by Weed / Flower Press in 1970 and won a Governor General's award for that year.

THE BOOK OF DAYS: day 4 can be heard during the Four Horseman composition *Mischievous Eve* on their album LIVE IN THE WEST (Starborne, 1977).

THE BOOK OF DAYS: day 5 first appeared in the Four Horseman collection Horse D'Oeuvres (General Publishing) & is used here with their permission.

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