

## COPYRIGHT NOTICE:

The following material has been published and copyrighted by The University of Akron Press. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher, except for reading and browsing via the World Wide Web. Users are not permitted to mount this file on any network servers.

For course pack and other permissions or for more information, send e-mail to [apeters@uakron.edu](mailto:apeters@uakron.edu).

 Blues For Bill

*Akron Series in Poetry*

AKRON SERIES IN POETRY

Elton Glaser, *Editor*

Barry Seiler, *The Waters of Forgetting*

Raeburn Miller, *The Comma After Love: Selected Poems  
of Raeburn Miller*

William Greenway, *How the Dead Bury the Dead*

Jon Davis, *Scrimmage of Appetite*

Anita Feng, *Internal Strategies*

Susan Yuzna, *Her Slender Dress*

Raeburn Miller, *The Collected Poems of Raeburn Miller*

Clare Rossini, *Winter Morning with Crow*

Barry Seiler, *Black Leaf*

William Greenway, *Simmer Dim*

Jeanne E. Clark, *Ohio Blue Tips*

Beckian Fritz Goldberg, *Never Be the Horse*

Marlys West, *Notes for a Late-Blooming Martyr*

Dennis Hinrichsen, *Detail from The Garden of Earthly Delights*

Susan Yuzna, *Pale Bird, Spouting Fire*

John Minczeski, *Circle Routes*

Barry Seiler, *Frozen Falls*

Elton Glaser and William Greenway, eds., *I Have My Own Song  
for It: Modern Poems of Ohio*

Melody Lacina, *Private Hunger*

George Bilgere, *The Good Kiss*

William Greenway, *Ascending Order*

Roger Mitchell, *Delicate Bait*

Lynn Powell, *The Zones of Paradise*

Dennis Hinrichsen, *Cage of Water*

Sharmila Voorakkara, *Fire Wheel*

Kurt Brown, Meg Kearney, Donna Reis, Estha Weiner, eds., *Blues for Bill:  
A Tribute to William Matthews*

**B**lues for Bill  
A TRIBUTE TO  
WILLIAM MATTHEWS

EDITED BY KURT BROWN,  
MEG KEARNEY, DONNA REIS,  
& ESTHA WEINER

FOREWORD BY RUSSELL BANKS



THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON PRESS  
AKRON, OHIO

Copyright © 2005 by Kurt Brown, Meg Kearney, Donna Reis, and Estha Weiner  
All rights reserved.

All inquiries and permission requests should be addressed to the Publisher,  
The University of Akron Press, 374B Bierce Library, Akron, Ohio 44325—1703.

First edition 2005

08 07 06 05 5 4 3 2 1

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Blues for Bill : a tribute to William Matthews / foreword by Russell  
Banks ; edited by Kurt Brown . . . [et al.].—1st ed.

p. cm.—(Akron series in poetry)

Includes index.

ISBN 1-931968-23-3 (cloth : alk. paper)—ISBN 1-931968-24-1 (pbk. : alk.  
paper)

1. Matthews, William, 1942—Poetry. 2. American poetry—21st  
century. 3. Poets—Poetry. I. Brown, Kurt. II. Series.

PS3563.A855Z54 2005

811'.54—dc22

2004026941

Manufactured in the United States of America.

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American  
National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed

Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48—1984.∞

Cover image: “Waiting,” acrylic on pressed tin, 20” x 28”,

Scott Kattenbraker, c. 2003

The illustration on pages 1 and 83, “Jazzman,” appears courtesy of William  
Matthews IV.

# Contents

Foreword / <i>Russell Banks</i>	ix
Preface	xiii
William Matthews	xv
Things My Father Passed Down to Me and My Brother / <i>Sebastian Matthews</i>	xvii

## Poems

Birthday Poem / <i>Cynthia Atkins</i>	3
Bill Matthews Coming Along / <i>Coleman Barks</i>	4
Notes for the Elegy / <i>Judith Baumel</i>	5
After / <i>Jeanne Marie Beaumont</i>	6
Bill Matthews / <i>Marvin Bell</i>	7
Remembering Bill Matthews / <i>Earl S. Braggs</i>	8
Blues, for Bill / <i>Andrea Carter Brown</i>	10
Unfair / <i>Harriet Brown</i>	12
No Profit / <i>Robert Burr</i>	13
Pissing Off Robert Frost's Porch / <i>Mark Cox</i>	14
Before You / <i>Stephen Cramer</i>	15
Matthews in Smoke / <i>Sascha Feinstein</i>	16
Inspiration / <i>Allen C. Fischer</i>	18
Untitled: For Bill Matthews / <i>Debra Fried</i>	19
The Last Time / <i>Rachel Hadas</i>	21
The Eternal Light of Talk / <i>Daniel Halpern</i>	22
Sleek for the Long Flight / <i>James Harms</i>	24

Magic Lantern / <i>Pamela Harrison</i>	25
The Poet Speaks of Italy / <i>Walter R. Holland</i>	26
Bill at Bellagio: A Rockefeller Grant / <i>Ann Hurwitz</i>	28
Reincarnation of a Lovebird / <i>Richard Jackson</i>	30
Last Class / <i>Jacqueline Johnson</i>	32
The Secret of William Matthews / <i>Rodney Jones</i>	34
Nature Poetry / <i>Meg Kearney</i>	35
My Blue Heaven / <i>David Keller</i>	36
Elegy for William Matthews / <i>Gerry LaFemina</i>	38
Last Call / <i>Peter Makuck</i>	39
Writers' Conference / <i>Gary Margolis</i>	40
Over a Long Distance / <i>Cleopatra Mathis</i>	42
Buying Wine / <i>Sebastian Matthews</i>	43
Request / <i>Karen McCosker</i>	45
Bill / <i>Christopher Merrill</i>	46
Some Words for Bill Matthews / <i>Judson Mitcham</i>	47
In Memory of William Matthews / <i>Robert Morgan</i>	48
Matthews Ah Um / <i>Sharon Olds</i>	50
Fixity / <i>Rick Pernod</i>	52
When He Fell Backwards Into His Coffin / <i>Stanley Plumly</i>	54
Following William Matthews' Recipe for Scallion Risotto / <i>Donna Reis</i>	55
Matthews in Maine, 1980 / <i>Kenneth Rosen</i>	57
We Never Shot Baskets Together / <i>Vern Rutsala</i>	58
Open to Everything / <i>John Schenck</i>	60
Coming Down in Ohio / <i>Dave Smith</i>	62
For William Matthews / <i>Henry Taylor</i>	64
Ode to Bill's Vocabulary, 1997 / <i>Melinda Thomsen</i>	66
Glimpse of a Traveller / <i>Richard Tillinghast</i>	68

Bill Matthews, 1983 / <i>Sidney Wade</i>	69
Elegy for Matthews / <i>Bruce Weigl</i>	71
On the "Island of the Old Women," / <i>Estha Weiner</i>	73
Scrabble with Matthews / <i>David Wojahn</i>	75
In Cortona, Thinking of Bill / <i>Susan Wood</i>	77
Melancholy Baby / <i>Baron Wormser</i>	80
An Interview with William Matthews / <i>David Wojahn and James Harms</i>	85
Editors	119
Contributors	121
Acknowledgments	129
Index of Titles	133



## Foreword

*Russell Banks*

When a beloved friend dies suddenly and unexpectedly (“without warning,” as they say, though Bill had given us more than ample warning), one’s mind returns almost obsessively to the last time one saw the friend alive. We had met for dinner in New York at San Domenico—Bill’s choice, a sleek, dimly lit, *nuevo italiano* restaurant on Central Park South, where the waiters look and dress like gigolos and treat the diners like wealthy, middle-aged, American widows. I hadn’t seen him since his life-threatening arterial surgery that summer and expected a much weakened version of the nearly invalid man he’d been the previous spring, but there was, for the first time in a decade, a spring in his step. His cane seemed an elegant affectation, more decorative than orthopedic. His cheeks were pink, and his gray-blue eyes glittered with feisty good health. He’d been off cigarettes for forty days or thereabouts and claimed, typically, that it’d been easy to quit, no problem whatsoever, as if quitting smoking merely hadn’t occurred to him before the surgery, or he’d have done it long ago. He wore a new, pale gray, silk jacket and a gorgeous necktie, Italian, no doubt, given the restaurant, and a shirt in a shade of yellow that rhymed with the Bosc pear color of his Bally shoes. His moustache and hair, usually louche and untended, were trim as a suburban hedge, and even his teeth seemed whiter and brighter than I remembered. I think he had new glasses, too.

We drank a harmonic duet of Barolos, ate like minor Florentine aristocrats, and talked that night mostly of the future, because we both believed we still had one. But we talked also, as always, of the past, because we were men in our late fifties and had shared so much of it. Later, we walked up Broadway to Iridium, where we dawdled over a nightcap and took in the last set by Archie Shepp and didn’t talk much there, just let our minds and bodies get jostled and groomed by the music and single malt.

We drank our whiskey neat, as I recall, but I would have remembered so much more if I’d known that in two weeks Bill would be dead of “an apparent heart attack.” (Bill would have noted that heart attacks are

never apparent, except to the heart under attack.) Nonetheless, it was a memorable evening and remains one, and not just because it was our last. We'd had during the previous year a few unacknowledged stress points in our relationship, the type of minor sprains that never cause a break and in lifelong friendships between men are usually fastest healed in silence and in the dark alone. Clearly, on this occasion the healing had been successful, so there was no need to mention the pain, and we were once again closer and more comfortable together than brothers.

We left the club and at the curb on the west side of Broadway grinned and said goodbye. Bill started across the avenue to catch an uptown cab, turned back halfway across, stopped and gave a little wave, then broke into a jog, not to dodge traffic, as there was none just then, but to show me, without having to announce it, that he could jog again, that, for the first time in many years, blood was flowing amply into his legs and lungs, and he could actually run, even when he didn't have to. Watching him, I had that ridiculous, clichéd thought, a fool's thought: Damn! He's gonna make it! And thus when Bill's younger son, Sebastian, telephoned to tell me that his dad, my oldest and most beloved friend, had died, my first reaction was, of course, disbelief. It simply couldn't be true.

I know the biography of the late poet, William Matthews, mainly by memory of how much of it we shared, what he told me of it himself, his sons' and sister's and parents' stories, and the accounts of his ex-wives, all of whom were and still are my friends, which is as much a compliment to Bill as to them. He came from a distinguished, affluent Cincinnati family, its distinction and affluence, by the time he was born in 1942, having been somewhat downsized over the years. He was William Procter Matthews III, but it had been several generations since anyone swimming in his gene pool had been meaningfully associated with Procter & Gamble. He was the elder of two children, went to Berkshire Academy in Massachusetts, did his undergraduate work at Yale in the early 1960s and his graduate work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the middle 1960s, leaving in 1967 to teach at Wells College in Aurora, New York, and later at Cornell, University of Colorado, University of Washington, and City College of New York, with brief, sidereal stops along the way at Iowa, Houston, Emerson, and

probably a few that I've forgotten. In 1969, while he was still at Wells College, Random House published his first collection of poems, *Ruining the New Road*, poems mostly written while he'd been a student in Chapel Hill. From that point on, there is a public record of his life as a poet, teacher, editor, and as a tiller in the field of literary nurturance with the Associated Writing Programs (president), the National Endowment for the Arts (chair of the Literature Panel), Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines (board member), the Poetry Society of America (president), and a half-dozen other institutions dedicated to the care and feeding of American letters. He became a figure early on, and remained one.

But in this volume of poems and remembrances, he is best remembered as a teacher and friend. He had a gift for both, and he trained, developed, and disciplined those gifts as if they were his precocious children whose talents he could not bear to see wasted. He made teaching and friendship seem easy, as if he'd given them no more thought than he had to quitting smoking. But Bill worked hard at them. Making difficult tasks appear to have been done brilliantly almost by accident was not a point of vanity for him, but a moral principle. Making painful things seem painless, turning evident loss into apparent gain, and converting loneliness into solitude were for Bill ethically necessary. It was as *sprezzatura*, a graceful, unspoken way of acknowledging that he was, in effect, one of nature's noblemen, and though he had been born blessed with extraordinary intelligence, talent, good looks, and health and had been given a first-class education and most of the financial and social advantages of a white, middle-class American male of that generation, it was through no fault of his own, and he therefore deserved neither credit nor blame for it. Bill's easy, dismissive grace in the face of difficulty, pain, loss, and loneliness was an ancient and honorable form of modesty.

Bill was the first of my particular generation of poets and writers to die while writing fully mature work, the first to enter the anthologies with two dates after his name and become thereby a part of "literary history." Consequently, long after our personal memories of Bill have gone up the chimney, it's his poetry that will keep him around. Poetry is connective tissue that binds the living to the dead and the dead to the yet unborn. I think of my grandchildren and great-grandchildren read-

ing his poems in a college classroom in some small town (will there be small towns then?) somewhere near Phoenix or outside Lawrence, Kansas, and I wonder, will it matter to them what kind of man wrote those poems? Will they want to have known him personally, to have been one of his students or one of his dear friends or lovers?

Of course, they will, just as I wish I could have known personally all the dead poets whose poems I love and have learned to live by. Perhaps that's the purpose and best possible use for this book of remembrances and elegies, as an intimate portrait of a poet whose poems will outlive all of us who have in these pages remembered his life and mourned his passing. And still remember. And still mourn.

## Preface

However else we respond to a person's death—physically, emotionally, ritually—poets also respond to the death of another poet by honoring him or her in words, the very medium in which they excelled and through which they touched and transformed so many lives. Hence, the idea for this book. We had begun to notice the many elegies to Bill Matthews that began to appear during the years following his death, and the many poems dedicated to him, a sure sign of his stature and significance among his peers. The idea occurred to us that such poetic tributes ought to be collected together in one volume that might result in a poetic portrait of Bill, preserving his character, his inimitable spirit and personality as depicted by his fellow workers in the craft.

We began collecting the poems we knew about, the ones we had already read in magazines, and sent out a call for others. Soon, poems began to arrive from every quarter of the country, in envelopes, via e-mail, over the fax. And accompanying them were letters of gratitude and reminiscence. Many felt that a published festschrift like this was in order, that a book of poems about Bill Matthews would make an appropriate shrine to his memory. Others spoke of Bill's gracious spirit, of what a caring teacher and human being he had been, of how much they missed him and loved his work and his excellent company. Phrases of affection abounded with regard to his generosity, his high standards, his warmth and capacity for friendship, his ability to make you feel that he was talking directly to you and you alone. Some expressed their respect for him as a person, and their admiration for his work. All agreed that he had influenced their own work and their lives in various and profound ways.

In his life, Bill Matthews brought many people together. In the same way, after his death we were brought together over a period of many months to discuss the book we had planned, to sift through a large number of poems, to discuss ways in which the book might be structured and designed, to delegate the many and various tasks necessary to compile such a volume and prepare it for publication. We couldn't use

*every* poem sent to us, of course, but we wanted to be as inclusive as possible. We are certain that, for one reason or another, there are hundreds of poems about Bill that we never saw, never even heard about, and that many poets whose work deserves to be represented in these pages have been neglected and left out. To these poets we extend our regrets, and hope that they will at least be able to share our joy in this tribute to our mutual teacher and friend.

## William Matthews

William Matthews was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, on November 11, 1942. He earned a B.A. from Yale and an M.A. from the University of North Carolina. During his lifetime, he published twelve books of poetry: *Broken Syllables* (Lillabulero, 1969), *Ruining the New Road* (Random House, 1970), *Sticks and Stones* (Pentagram Press, 1970), *An Oar in the Old Water* (The Stone, 1971), *The Cloud* (Barn Dream Press, 1971), *Sleek for the Long Flight* (Random House, 1972), *Rising and Falling* (Atlantic Little Brown, 1973), *Flood* (Little Brown, 1982), *A Happy Childhood* (Little Brown, 1984), *Foreseeable Futures* (Houghton Mifflin, 1987), *Blues If You Want* (Houghton Mifflin, 1989), and *Time & Money* (Houghton Mifflin, 1996), which won the National Book Critics Circle Award and was a finalist for the Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize. A thirteenth collection was published posthumously as *After All: Last Poems* (Houghton Mifflin, 1998). *His Selected Poems and Translations 1969–1991* was published by Houghton Mifflin in 1992. A final volume, *Search Party: Collected Poems*, was published by Houghton Mifflin in 2004.

Matthews is also the author of two books of essays: *Curiosities* (1989) and *The Poetry Blues* (2001), both from University of Michigan Press, the latter edited by Sebastian Matthews and Stanley Plumly.

His translations include *Removed from Time: Poems of Jean Follain*, with Mary Feeney (Tideline Press, 1977), *A World Rich in Anniversaries: Prose Poems of Jean Follain*, with Mary Feeney (Logbridge Rhodes Press, 1979), *The Mortal City: 100 Epigrams from Martial* (Ohio Review Books, 1995), and *The Satires of Horace* (Ausable Press, 2002). He is also the translator of “Prometheus Bound,” in the volume *Aeschylus, 2: The Persians, Seven Against Thebes, and Prometheus Bound* in the Penn Greek Drama Series (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998). Many of his translations from the Bulgarian are included in *Selected Poems and Translations 1969–1991*.

Matthews served as president of Associated Writing Programs and of the Poetry Society of America, and was a member and chair of the Literature Panel of the National Endowment for the Arts. He has edited literary magazines (notably *Lillabulero*, which he cofounded with Rus-

sell Banks). He received fellowships from the Guggenheim and Ingram Merrill foundations, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, and in April 1997 he was awarded the Ruth Lilly Prize. He taught at several schools, including Wells College, Cornell University, the University of Colorado, Columbia, New York University, Sarah Lawrence College, and the University of Washington. In addition, he was a visiting poet at Houston, Iowa, and Bucknell. At the time of his death, he was a professor of English and director of the creative writing program at New York's City College.

William Matthews died of a heart attack on November 12, 1997, the day after his fifty-fifth birthday. He is the father of two sons, William Matthews IV and Sebastian Matthews, the latter of whose memoir, *In My Father's Footsteps*, was published by W. W. Norton & Company in 2003.

*Sebastian Matthews*

Things My Father Passed Down to Me and My Brother

The Marx Brothers

Oscar Robertson

Bob Dylan

The Big Red Machine

(Perez, Morgan, Concepcion, Rose, Bench,  
Griffey, Geronimo, Foster)

Marley Tosh Stones

Underdog

The ABA David Thompson Dr. J

James Bond Beer Burgers

French Roast Cabernet Sauvignon

Miles

Trane

Monk

Art Pepper Charlie Mingus The Pres and Lady Day

Travis McGhee

Muhammad Ali

*Lolita*

Ashe vs Connors Borg/McEnroe Jack “the Bear”

*Sleeper Love & Death Take the Money and Run*

the '79 Sonics "Hotel California"

Snow Leopards at the Denver Zoo

Rothko Hopper Roethke Hugo Merwin Kinnell

Patrick Ewing and the Knicks

Easy Rawlins

Tommy Flannagan

*Rigoletto*

# Poems



Cynthia Atkins

Birthday Poem

Lately, every morning I wake  
to a death, its length stretched  
taut across the hour.  
It is a process, pulling  
myself out of bed,  
if only to find what is loss,  
what is gain. Dying  
is a private thing.  
Bill, did you drop  
in the shower fully lathered  
and clean for the taking,  
one day after your birthday?  
I wonder what last line  
you were uttering  
as steam rose to a contrail  
of words. Maybe Coltrane  
was hitting a high note  
on the stereo, as the cat knocked  
a pen off your desk. At that instant,  
a ripple skimmed the world.  
Someone honked at traffic.  
A push broom washed across  
a diner floor. The raucous  
opera of *grief* and *loss*.  
Arbiter, were you the dreamer  
the teacher shook the shoulders of?  
On a long winter's night  
of ink, coffee, snow,  
you blew wishes into words  
like butterflies lost  
in Nabakov's closets.

*Coleman Barks*

## Bill Matthews Coming Along

They say the best French wines have *terroir*, meaning the taste of the lay of the land that works through and gets held in the wine, the bouquet of a particular hillside and of the care of those who work there.

When I see Bill Matthews coming along, I see and taste the culture of the world, a lively city, a university campus during Christmas break, a few friendly straggling scholars and artists. I taste the delight of language and desire and music. I see a saint of the great impulse that takes us out at night, to the opera, to the ballgame, to a movie, to poetry, a bar of music, a bar of friends.

When I see Bill Matthews stopped at the end of a long hall, I see my soul waiting for me to catch up, patient, demanding, wanting truth no matter what, the goofiest joke, the work with words we're here to do, saying how it is with emptiness and changing love, and the unchanging. Now I see his two small sons behind him.

Bill would not say it this way; he might even start softly humming "Amazing Grace" if I began my saying, but I go on anyway: god is little g, inside out, a transparency that drenches everything you help us notice: a red blouse, those black kids across Amsterdam, braving the cabs, a nun. You sweet theologian, you grew new names for god: gourmet, cleaning woman, jazz, spring snow.

What fineness and finesse. I love Bill Matthews, and I did not have *near* enough time walking along with him, talking books and ideas, or sitting down to drink the slant and tender face of Provence.

*Judith Baumel*

Notes for the Elegy

Without	Not yet
But	Still
Because	Unless
Despite	After
However	Within

Your friends—good talker—all  
admiration of your talk.

It was the silences I heard, how we  
become most ourselves at our boundaries.

In the surrounding silence remain  
we who do have rights in this matter

not those late devolving lovers—  
tongues cleft to palates.

*Body betrays brilliant will*  
your last quaking quip taught.

A kiss, not yours, at your street corner.  
Flesh of lips answered,

muscles of fingers stretched the skin—  
that yielding organ—learning.

In all the days of my life since—  
in all the nights of my life since—

each *since* a workbook of exercises;  
the habit, bad, good, is put on daily.

*Jeanne Marie Beaumont*

After

All long labors, whether for hunger, for duty, for  
Pleasure, or none of the above, one day wrap up.  
Put down the itinerant's beaten pouch, pluck no fruit further;  
Linger over the melancholy taste of *last* on the tongue.  
Even a switchblade wit can't sever another stem.

Plenty is a relative measure—if less than paradise,  
It's more than enough. The prolific orchard will, of course,  
Continue, other soles trod ladders into the heady  
Kingdom of weighted boughs. Insatiable, you might even say  
Incorrigible (as though mumbling in winter sleep), the way they can't  
Not keep coming back, grasping, tugging, lifting down those  
Globes that swell and blush to be handled so.

*Marvin Bell*

Bill Matthews

The most fluent of poets, Latinate in sneakers—  
his third-story study overlooking Puget Sound  
was awash in mutual fund reports he never opened.  
Bill's nimble, stylish speech defined that household  
atop Seattle's Capitol Hill where Sebastian, too,  
wrote poetry into the night, the sin and delight in  
such avid fluency early demonstrable in the son.

Bill could make a sentence from your best four words,  
move you to see the slumminess in it, all while  
healing you with wit, affection, and a grace naming  
your virtues as he pulled the rug from under  
the *poseurs* of the latest poetry fad without spilling  
the location of his weaponry or a drop of red wine,  
as athletic as Coltrane cornered or Walt Frazier

directing traffic on the court. Bill had a fair jump shot  
from the corner, and he boogied with a stamping  
as if, and as always, parody were truth itself, a path  
apart from the ironists of his generation, for Bill  
could chant *It's so easy to fall in love* while hotfooting  
to a goofy Bread Loaf Conference lindy,  
wildly good-mannered, since, as he explained it,

“If you're invited to dinner, you don't spit on the plate.”  
The young Bill was quick and willowy, a Dionysian  
Donald Sutherland with experienced eyelids,  
at times red in the morning after a nighttime of wine,  
by which he loosed the savvy, flowing, woven  
verse that bore his classic intelligence, brimming  
with blood pumped from a politely gasping heart.

*Earl S. Braggs*

## Remembering Bill Matthews

When last I saw him, I didn't tell him  
I was going to St. Petersburg. I didn't  
tell him I'd fallen in love with Akhmatova

and I didn't tell him I needed to see  
my reflection in the icy black Baltic.

That evening at his New York City apartment  
decorated with classical music, he played  
an opera concert, I later learned,  
he had planned to attend. At the end,  
the night rolled over and I was drunk

on vodka and verse and voice. Yes,  
he had a beautiful one. I can hear him now  
stumbling through the perfume of visiting ladies.

When last I saw him, I didn't tell him  
it was the Stray Dog Cabaret I hoped to find  
among the smallest of midnight tables

and light blue circles of cigar smoke. I didn't  
tell him about the tragic topcoat Anna  
so often wore or the azure shawl she so  
carefully placed recklessly over her shoulders,

and I didn't tell him about the fragileness  
of her sacred refinement.

That evening in his New York City apartment  
decorated with impressions of the Impressionist  
movement, we moved out of sync and into  
rhythm and blues and magic tragic carefree laughter.

In that city that never sleeps, we slept  
wide awake in his voice. Yes,  
he had a beautiful one. I can hear him now  
ambling from pocket to pocket of his plaid jacket.

When last I saw him, I didn't tell him  
I'd fallen in love with Akhmatova. I didn't  
tell him I planned to visit the wild and simple country  
she refused to leave, and I didn't tell him

I planned to walk the left bank of the Neva,  
then through the gates of Great Peter's Summer Garden.

That evening in his New York City apartment  
decorated with myth recalling Roman and Greek promise.  
The last silver summer before October 1917, I  
didn't tell him.

That evening, he cooked Italian pasta poetry.  
He recited each boiled spaghetti string line,  
each diced perfect onion, each cubed bell, each  
sad spin of garlic as if he knew  
when I returned from Russia, with or without love,  
there would be no leftovers.