

SAMPLE POEMS

TERRORISTS

“*Tod heil*, my sweet. Wait until the day
When time’s paralysis overtakes this house”
Paul Bowles

At eight, I could write in code
faster than I could interpret

my scribbling. What secrets
did I guard? I think of entering

the quiet house. My mother
hiding under my bed.

My mother who read
“The Pit and the Pendulum”

to me. The grandfather
clock in the darkened

hallway ticking
like a metronome

or an angry boy
ready to explode.

SAMPLE POEMS

STORIES: ON THE NATURE OF POETRY

If I Paul Frederick Bowles tell you
Gertrude Stein wrote to my mother
to say Rena's son Freddy — that's what the great
Buddha called me — was a self-indulgent savage
who augured the end of civilization
and Mother cheerfully sent "poor old
Sophie and Alice B. Luckless"
family recipes...

If I tell you
the Mama of Dada dressed me
in lederhosen so her great white
poodle Basket, wet from his daily
sulphur bath — the French countryside
vermin otherwise crawling into the dog's
curls to suck his skin red — could chase
me and scrape his sharp long nails
into my bare legs while his master
shouted from the second story
window, "Faster, Freddy, faster..."

If I tell you
transition — a Paris magazine
that published Ezra Pound — printed
"Spire Song" by Paul Frederick Bowles...
I was only seventeen. When I was twenty,
the iconic Miss Stein said, "Freddy,
you don't write great poetry." I believed
her and left the City of Light
for the filth of Tangier.

If I tell you I traded the truth
of poetry for the invention
of prose. If I tell you I lived
loving a wife who filled
my dry pen while hers
spurred blood
like a shotgun wound.
If I tell you my stories,
greater than the lives
of people I knew...
if I tell you my stories,
how many times
would you say I lied?

SAMPLE POEMS

RACONTEURS IN TANGIER

“What can go wrong is always more interesting *than what goes right.*” *Paul Bowles*

Cherifa, tell me those stories
about you as shadow
of Jane Bowles, breathing
on her neck, shining light
into her mouth, the pain
she suffered, waves
of pain from a bad
tooth—too much sugar
in her mint tea. Ha! Like me,
you suspected the *majoun*
sticky with raisins, dates,
honey, ground ginger,
walnuts, nutmeg, anise,
globs of goat butter
and of course cannabis,
cleaned of stems
and seeds.

 You profited
as her dentist in Tangier. No!
You played would-be
biographer trying to extract
details about her wedding,
her marriage to me, Paul Bowles.
Persistent, you declared yourself
devotée, lived with her, wore
her clothes but never noticed
she called her husband *Bupple*
or *Fluffy*—look at me, that man
answering his door in necktie
and jacket, that man who named
her *his* muse.

 But she limped,
didn't she? She lived on a floor below
me. You probably wonder if I chose
a Jew to embarrass my father. You ate
with us the night I ranted about
my family. Do you think Jane served
as my cover, that my mother expected
grandchildren? The simple truth
is I loved her as I loved no other.
Tell me, was it true her female
lovers like you poisoned her?

SAMPLE POEMS

FLOWER: PAUL'S LOVE SONG

Because the hotel manager floated
scores of our favorite flower on the surface
of the swimming pool, Jane and I decided
to visit the Taxco market and buy enough
gardenias to cover our bed.

At siesta careful
not to arouse staff sleepyheads, we carried two
baskets of blossoms in several trips
into the hotel and up the stairs. When the bed
became a sea of creamy white, we undressed,
lay down and drowned our senses.

How much is too much?

In the blue fluid of the pool Jane Bowles poked
her head, short curly hair winking red,
through the fragrant corollas — a swoon
of flower boats.

Could a husband and wife, sheath
and knife, be joined in everlasting memory
on a perfumed spread of gardenias? She
with her women; me, Paul Bowles,
with my men.

Could I recreate those hours we lay
together?

In New York I furnished everything in white:
sofa, chaise longue, Ottoman, coffee table,
lamps, a polar bear rug. Then I sprayed
the drapes, and every pillow, every throw
with ambergris mixed with crushed
petals of gardenia.

Come back
from Taxco, I wrote to her.

What price paradise?

SAMPLE POEMS

EXIT INTERVIEW

I loved her?

After

all those years

I don't know

what

love is—I used to think

it was in my music there

I could say anything feel

anything be reborn out

of the hands of a jealous

man wanting my mother

without competition I

learned this New

England game

to say

the opposite of what

I desired what I needed

to live now I have nothing

inside she lent me her

womb in that place I could

compose true words I could

leave my body behind.