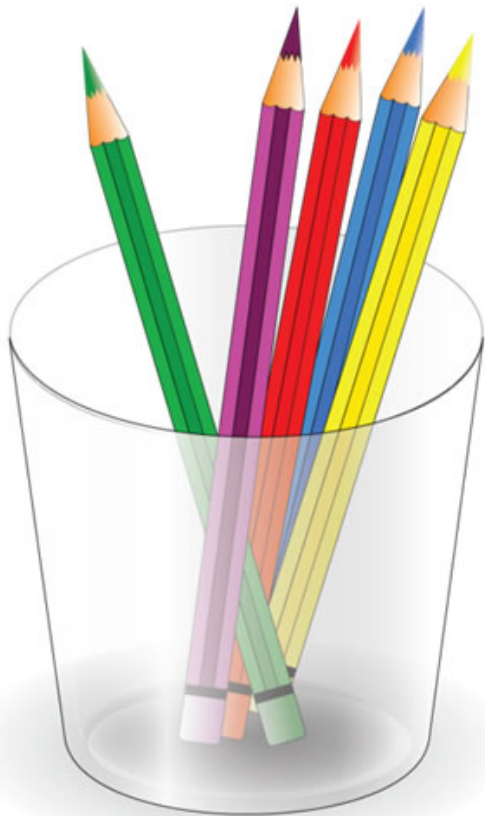


Anthology of Berthold Lippel



Presented by

My poetic side 

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CAR WASH

I hand over my beloved old car
To an indifferent youngster
In the automatic car wash
To be cleansed of the clinging
Year-long desert dust
I see it enter the wash tunnel
When a sudden irresistible urge
Energizes my body
I too need to be cleansed
Of my sins, of my moods
Of my unholy foolish actions
Of my despair for the future
I tear off all my clothes
I run after my car
Into the tunnel
Ecstatically naked
The giant cleaning flaps
Rotate and slap me hard
Soap on my body
Soap in my eyes
I shout with liberated joy
As I emerge behind my car
Shining clean, fully forgiven
Singing out loud Hallelujah
Until the cops come
To take me away

THANKSGIVING

THANKSGIVING

I ate the dark meat
crushed with cranberries
mushy mushy in my mouth
and i closed my eyes
and rubbed my grateful tummy
and thought deep philosophical thoughts
giving thanks
yes--I need to make a list
of all the silent friends
never thanked enough
i give thanks
(in no particular order)
to my heart, faithful, 60 times a second, leaky but valiant
to my lungs, tireless, doing complicated chemistry to feed my blood
to my stomach, uncomplaining in accepting my ravenous inventions
to my kidneys, peeing joyfully in yellow fountains
to my liver, sorting the good from the bad all day long
to my eyes, painting images of a make believe reality
to my ears, sucking in bach and poems and words of love
to my nose, patiently bearing the burden of my glasses
to my tongue, expert at spices and sour and sweet
to my penis, proud dispenser of pleasure
to my brain , buzzing with wandering thoughts and memories
to my feet, quietly slaving in the dark to give me motion
---and all the other silent organs, glands, tubing, liquids, enzymes, muscles, tendons
bones, joints, secretions, exits, immunities, bacteria, dna, rna--
and all the billions trillions molecules and atoms and electrons and alphas and bosons and positrons
and gluons and quarks and quantum this and quantum that--
and all this moving and buzzing and sputtering and turning and jumping pudding
somehow
everything together
making ME
eating dark turkey meat
and giving thanks

WAITING ROOM

God's garage is busy today
The mechanics in white are at their jobs:
 repairing broken people
 diagnosing design flaws
 removing old parts
 inserting new parts

The waiting room is crowded,
Families are huddled in tight circles.
They proclaim optimistic slogans
to banish the black bats of fear:

 "Don't worry!"

 "It will all be fine"

 "It will be over soon"

Clouds of prayer pass overhead,
prayers to many different Gods
Which one will be most merciful?
At last the Chief Mechanic arrives
like a priest, adorned
with the Holy Ear on his chest
to proclaim the verdict:

 Success!

 or

 Needs to be overhauled.

 or

 Warranty expired.

MESSAGE

You are stretched on the bed
Face down
I lean above you
A sculptor in the act of creation.
I hold your shoulder in my hand
I rotate and polish
Till the skin gleams like gold
I discover shoulder blades
I can feel the ridges
Where your wings were attached
When you flew down to meet me.
At last the Great Plain:
Your back whispers an invitation,
My hands slide, glide circle, flow
Like two delirious skiers eager for snow.
Your blood rushes to the surface
To greet the heat of my hands,
The perfumed oil caresses your yearning cells
My hands climb down the ladder of your spine.
A sudden gift: symmetry!
A gift for each hand
Muscular roundness
I am Columbus, you are America.
I roam over this beloved continent
Plowing the soil of your body
With my insistent fingers
Harvesting quivering sighs.

THE PHYSICS OF LOVE

A bond is formed
When two electron orbits
Happen to meet
One with an electron too many
One with an electron too few
The need and the abundance mesh
Unity is created
A new molecule is born.

A bond is formed
When two hungry souls
Happen to meet
One with a need to give
One with a need to take
The giving and the taking merge
Love is created
A new story is written.

THE SONG OF THE HYGIENIST

mouths mouths mouths
I know all about mouths
the prissy small ones
the generous large ones
they all open for me
in dumb obedience
"Open wide" I whisper
and they open wide
and reveal all
for the mouth is the nexus
the portal of life
breath enters and leaves
food is bitten and chewed
the tongue listens to flavors
kisses are love in transit
the mouth is all hunger
and I see it all
Now to absolve the oral sins
the brushings forgotten
the flossings ignored
It's payback time with pain
my steel tools glisten
I scrape I scour I polish
until the dazzling white
of hygienic forgiveness
radiates from shiny teeth
and I utter the final blessing:
"Rinse please and floss evermore!"

FAMILY

Willing or not
These silvery strands
of DNA
Tie us together
Genes, chromosomes
Mysteries of biology
Who understands them?
I never dissected a frog.
But DNA simply means
DO NOT ABANDON
A family does not abandon its own
Its nerve endings vibrate together
The pain of one is the pain of all
The joy of one is the joy of all
This is the mystery.

DOREEN

in love for half a day!
sweet surprise
Cupid was hiding
in that health food store
between vitamins and ginseng
organic love
foolish, explosive, adolescent love
her hands played the register
like a seductive piano
unaware of the waves of delight
ascending and descending
my shivering bones
I saw the tiny sun bleached hairs
keeping watch on her upper lip
(pepper in the sweetness of a kiss)
and her eyes, her eyes
(I am a deer caught in her headlights)
she raised her arms, and though the sleeve
I could see ebony curls
(natural! organic! I blush)
I take my change, my healthy goods
and grope to the door
head backwards
a prisoner reluctant to escape
good bye! the end!
in love for half a day
until my wrinkles scold my heart
until my years laugh at my dreams
still, it was half a day of bliss
I silently give thanks for this.

POEM ABOUT ONE

One is a sturdy fellow
Standing stiff and erect
His little cap sticking out
He was there at every beginning
He is used to be in front
He cannot be cloned:
When you try to add him
He will proudly change
To become an alien Two
One is the best of everything
One is the triste loneliness
One and his sweet lover Zero
Are the soul of every computer
One will never marry
Some think he is God
One is prime
Positive
Indivisible
Eternal

FAREWELL TO MY SPERM DONOR

I said farewell
to my sperm donor
today.
No! he was not my husband
nor my lover
but he was my beautiful, reliable
personally selected
sperm ATM machine.
it was not love
nor mad passion
but a gentle transaction.
I gave him compliments
and money, lots of money
and he gave me each time
some of that precious
thing with feathers--
he gave me hope.
Farewell. my almost lover
not your fault, nor mine
that your sperm and my egg
remained strangers
in the labyrinth
of my hungry womb.
Good bye and good luck
today you feel like a husband
after all.

MIDWIFE

You are a miner
masked, gloved, alert
bent over the blessed opening
You reach with skilled hands
to grip and pull
new life into the light
You force the slippery infants
into their destiny
day after day
inexhaustible mine
You send them with a pat
into their future
some will be saints
some will be sinners
some will build
some will destroy
all will die
the angry screaming
bundles of need
are waiting at the gate
demanding their first gifts
of milk
and sleep
and love

TIME THE SCULPTOR

we started out very different people
individual peas in our marriage pod
you: shy, ambushed by life
me: pretending heroic mastery
you: dwelling inside your head
me: swimming in the world's waters
until slowly
imperceptibly
time sanded us down
rubbing against one another
our edges smoothed and fitted
we merged
now we are
a work in progress
hard to tell us apart
a human sculpture
made of flesh and blood
and love

GRAVITY AND LOVE

Pick up a heavy object
Immediately
feel the attraction
feel the love
that pulls the object
full of yearning
towards that mysterious center
where all objects go
to meet
the Goddess of Gravity
she who loves all objects
she who never sleeps
always ready to call them home
to her electromagnetic heart

SHOPPING

I want to go shopping
For a brand new body.
There is a sale today
Spring fashions are in.
Six foot, a good height
To attract attention.
One hundred thirty pounds,
Light on its feet, slim waist
All organs perfect, humming happily.
A full head of of blond hair.
I will keep my blue eyes.
A new brain would be good
Half-empty, so as to experience
The world anew.
This model 330X looks good to me.
Here is my credit card
Can I try it on now?

DOG DREAMS

i am a healthy cheerful, happy dog
the whole world was created for us dogs
the Divine Bitch shaped us in her image
spun us through brilliant cosmic mirrors
until we were a thousand colors and shapes
but still truly Dog
unique and proud
of our nobility
we exercise our dominion
over the ponderous slaves
She gave us in Her Goodness
to ease and sweeten our canine lives
woof woof and amen
our slaves have faces
high above the earth
their noses are dull
their spines are stiff
they cannot use four limbs
like we superior beings
but they have their uses:
they build us houses
they give us food and drink
morning and night
they clean our muck
and keep us in health
all we need
to keep them obedient
is to tie them to a leash
and walk them through their sterile streets
ours is the strength and the power
we rule the world

VEGAN DINNER FOR TWO

Friday afternoon
I am alone
In the sunlit kitchen
an amateur
sous-chef
in love
cooking a vegan dinner
for you and for me

I am cutting a family of leeks
remove their heavy green skirts
then wash their necks
they are like dirty tykes
now they look like waxy candles
my knife slices them into equal rings
white and green rings
I will put one on your finger
you are my leek bride
while I imagine
we savor a plate
of intense earthy
leek soup
seasoned with love

now a quiver of green arrows
asparagus
they are so uncouth at the bottom
but so sophisticated at the top
that little hat makes me laugh
I gently do surgery
bottom discarded
tops laid out like green children
in a common bed
drizzling golden olive oil on their heads
in silent blessing
now anointing them with spices
pungent oregano
sensual rosemary
laughing dill
into the oven
roast until a hint of burn
voila! put aside until later
while I bless you too
with the oil of our love

and the spice of our laughter

translucent
pale green beans
just trim the ends
the boiling water
brings them to perfection
like life sometimes
boils you and me
in the heat
of circumstances
but we emerge
stronger and closer

small brown potatoes
how cute
like eggs laid by the
potato chicken
I do not reveal
their nakedness
no--cooked in their
brown skins
we too sometimes
do not reveal our pain
and nakedness
afraid to disappoint
until we learn
that love is blind

dessert
chocolate pudding
I imagine the richness melting
on all your taste buds at once
eyes rolling upward
little sounds of satisfaction
I wonder if a kiss from you
would also taste like this

time to set the table
two candlesticks
two chaste white candles
crystal glasses for the wine
I wish you were here already
sitting next to me
I serving you
the fruits of my labor
and eat and talk
and talk and eat
and take joy in one another
and lick the spoon clean of pudding
and kiss

LONELINESS

I knitted a robe
From the wool of my loneliness
A grey and heavy garment
Hanging limp from my shoulders
As I ran to hide from your youth.
But you found me, and you laughed!
You sewed bright ribbons to my hem
Festooned the front with fragrant flowers
Cut off the sleeves
Tattooed my arms
With hearts and moons
Until your laughter
Cut the thread
Unraveled quick
The suffocating weave
And bared my skin
To sun and love

INSOMNIA

I lie on the left
until my shoulder hurts.
I turn to the right,
the pijama itches.
I lie on my back,
the ceiling is a screen
a broken beam of light
from a passing car
sketches a jagged path.
I close my eyes
I fall asleep.
I fall awake--it was only a minute!
I beg the clock to tell me a lie
It refuses--another five hours
Agony until morning.

I count forward--then backward
The numbers scramble and dance:
Eighty-two, eighty-one, eighty, sixty-nine...
No, that is wrong--but who cares.
My head hurts, I am thirsty
I go looking for some water.
I drink, go back to bed.
Now I have to pee--up again
I produce a musical arc.
Go back to bed
Turn the pillow over
Look at the heartless clock:
Only five minutes gone!--hours to go
I wish I had a magic pill
I wish I had no head.
I could scream--but the neighbors...
There is no end to this.
I will go watch some TV.

ELEGY UPON A BREAKUP

The moment has a terrible clarity
a knife slices though the heart
a helpless hemorrhage
a sudden vertigo
disbelief, this can't be!
A sudden need to turn back the clock,
to start again,
to re-enact the fateful hour
with a happy ending.
But pain invades
in a procession of needles
that puncture the frantic denials
followed by sterile choices:
to run to the safe lap
of a predictable mother,
or offer useless tears
on a silent altar.
Then fear, anger, self-loathing
entangle all thoughts
paralyze all goodness,
until time takes pity
and offers the slow healing
of blessed forgetting,
that in days to come
will make the heart whole,
ready to recklessly
love again.

FISH

Sometimes
when I swim in my pool
arms moving on their own
mind blank
escorted by luminous bubbles
I get this yearning
to be a fish!
If I were a fish
I could stay in the water
all day long, and nights too
dark water sliding silently
over my rainbow scales
leaving the tyranny of gravity
behind on the shore
I would shoot forward
with a flick of my tail
free not to think
free to escape
the burdens of my life
how calm the mind of a fish
how serene
living his simple fate
feeding his daily hunger
spawning ten thousand eggs
without a thought for tomorrow
Oh yes! to be a fish
to glide down the ladder
of proud evolution
and return to the waters
of instinct and peace

SECOND PREGNANCY

Pregnant again !
Little did I know
That a stubborn hero,
Wiggling his way to victory
Exhausted but triumphant
Would deliver the precious seed.
Trembling, I offered the Oracle
A golden drop.
At last the color spoke:
Yes!
Oh Maculate Conception!
I am twice chosen
My womb has been rented
My solitude breached.
The invader within
That pearl of pure will
Reaches out to the future.
I am a handmaiden once again
A launching pad
A rocket stage to be discarded
When my beloved new astronaut
Navigates to his own star.

LAURA IN THE GYM

Laura in the gym
A flower blooming amid the sweating tribe
Of body builders
Did she get lost?
What magnet pulled her to this iron heap
This battleground of gravity
Where grunting men, like Sisyphus,
Push useless burdens to the sky.
Laura in the gym
Belly flat like a shield
Twining herself around each machine
Like a purposeful snake.
Hissing in rhythm
Up
Down
One two five ten
Her muscles quiver but obey.
The brutal machines are filled with love,
Compete for her embrace.
Their handles reach out with enticing arms,
She hold them close
With pitiless pressure
Until they surrender
To sinew and will.
Laura in the gym
Amazon with arms of steel
Your bow shoots arrows
Fatal to my heart.

TEEN LAMENT

Jasmine has flawless skin
I am so jealous!
Pale and perfect
With a faint golden sheen.
Young skin--so rich so soft so moist
I am so envious!
Not one blemish
No pimples, beauty marks, birth reminders.
I wish I had that skin!
Skin, skin
God's final touch
Gift wrapping his creation
Before Adams' dazzled eyes.
Why don't I have that skin?
Water drops glide happily
Admiring flies ski on it
Eager fingers want to write
Promises and lies on it.
It is destined for love
Oh how I yearn to be
Superficial and skin deep!

BABY FLY

a baby fly drowned today
in my breakfast milk.
it moved its many legs
leaving the stage
with a tiny dance,
having lived its life
paid its dues.
I feel a strange sorrow
wondering
where are its parents
who taught it to fly,
what was its favorite food,
was it old enough
to have loved.
maybe I chased it away once
from cheese or jam
with an irritated wave.
now it has joined
the immense daily dying.
life is a perpetual
funeral.

SCIENCE FOR YOU AND ME

CHEMISTRY

me hydrogen you oxygen
a spark flashed between us
explosion of joy
water poured forth
we sit in a warm tub
I count all your toes

PHYSICS

two bodies in motion
will remain in motion
until exhausted
and sweaty

BIOLOGY

pheromones into hormones
fleet messengers
in search of eggs

SCIENCE

designed
to help helpless humans
look for love

THE BOOKKEEPER

the dry as dust bookkeeper
adjusts the round spectacles
on his angular nose
and says, without emotion:
"nine hundred sixty five days
eleven hours
twenty three minutes
and fifteen seconds
that's all you have left"
but will she send letters to me
to my dark and sealed office?
how--without a keyboard
and me--brain desiccated
bones tangled in a heap
fingers here and there
how will I reply?
and narrate to her
my painful loneliness
my wasted regrets
and shards of love.

SMALL THINGS ARE ENOUGH

No need to be a hero
To fly into space
To conquer a country
Just make me some tea
When I am sad or weary
Small things are enough

No need to be a lover
To bring fragrant roses
To write clever poems
Just hold my hand
When I am worried or lonely
Small things are enough

No need to make speeches
To build castles with words
To drip honey from tongue
Just share my silence
In a world full of noise
Small things are enough

DISPOSSESSION

there is a time to give
there is a time to receive
a proverb written somewhere
by somebody long ago
for me.
now, with the weight of the years
choking me breathless
I understand at last.
I am giving away my books
(something I thought I would never do)
and giving away my music
(but nobody wants LP's any more)
and giving away my cameras
(no faces left to photograph)
and giving away my guns
(no one will harm me in my coffin)
and giving away my shirts
(suddenly too tight for me)
and giving away my god
(suddenly so small and boring)
and soon I will be left bent and naked
with nothing more to give
ready to receive the much promised
paradise, but with only one virgin
for all eternity.

I LOVE TO DO LAUNDRY

The house is silent.
My boys--young and old
are out in the world,
leaving me solitary
in my laundry room chapel.

The sun is there, uninvited
playing with its motes.
I have filled the washer's
vast emptiness to the rim
with the secret invisible
socially unacceptable

DIRT
(such an unpoetic word!)
there must be no dirt
in a properly run house.

Dirt is sin
I am the priestess
giving absolution

Sitting on an upturned box
hypnotized, I watch the giant eye
in which every garment
dances in turn.
My domestic mind
is purified as it watches.

Here at last is one task
with a start and an end.
The clothes are clean
all is forgiven
my mind is spotless again
I am ready to...

I am ready to dry.

GRADUATE SCHOOL

The academic game,
society's obstacle course:
years of drinking in
stale knowledge
packaged in tedium,
mastering the art
of faithful
regurgitation.
reading
writing
forgetting.
waiting for the brass ring
that glitters above the
ceremonial cap and gown,
so that you can write
ph and d after your
superannuated
name.

ICE CUBES

I stare at the ice cubes in the bowl
they look cold and slippery.
my mind drifts
the Eskimos give their old folks a candy bar
and send them out on an ice cube to die.
I wish I could do that to her
she who froze my heart
and taught me to hate.
I see tiny bubbles of air in the cubes
polite words trapped in trivial conversations.
the ice cubes are melting
measuring time by their slow death.
I touch them with my finger
it burns--paradox--then it turns numb.
I wish she would kiss my finger
make it warm again
to the temperature of love.
I want her back
but it is too late.
there is only a puddle
and a memory.

THE SADDEST MOMENT

This is the saddest moment
When you have nothing more to tell me,
and you say..."I should go..."
It is time
You have had enough of me.
The cord between us is frayed, then snapped
Of course, polite as i am, I agree:
"Yes, you have to go".
It is a curse to be polite
It stifles the shout "Don't!".
What can I do, but say good bye
With a small choked voice.
I hang up, and listen for a long time
Until your voice fades in my head
And i feel alone again.
Still, we talked.
I am so demanding
The child craves dessert
Not a diet.

SLEEP

i sleep a lot these days
practicing for the days ahead
i will be an olympic sleeper
dreamless
on my back
in a narrow bed
i plan to win a medal
the gold for sleeping
the fastest time
in infinite sleep
the cosmic anthem
will play for me
a million bones
will applaud
but i will not
hear not
wake
up

SMILE

I looked at her sideways
and caught her smile
like a fisherman catching
an unexpected silver trout.
an unusual smile,
not the ordinary dutiful kind
not the meat-and-potatoes kind
for people and family,
but a glowing radiance
defrosted from the past.
a pure mini-explosion of joy
which transformed the
oh so disciplined geography
of her face
and erased the arroyos of age
to reveal
the happy child
at play.

DEATHDAY

one moment you were by our side
the next there was this sudden void,
you made a turn and took your leave
towards you twilight avenue,
leaving us behind, bewildered
alone, and silent in our grief.

why the rush? did you hear a call?
when did your boundless energy
become exhausted and stand still?
we never dreamed our rock could move.
Like the sun you would rise each day
to give us food, and hope, and love.

now you lie helpless on a bed
in the penultimate station.
You who suckled us with milk
are nourished now with plastic tubes.
you've turned away, you lie so still
dreaming at last your final dreams.

we whisper words into your ear
wait for an eye to open wide
to see once more our reflection
in your clear look, and your sweet smile.
but all in vain, all is for naught
we/re left behind, we're left alone.

on this your distant day of birth
we light some candles, force a smile
hum a song, talk of your life.
recount your courage and your feats,
holding you a little longer
till we can bear to say goodbye.

SHIVA

The mourners sit low on worn pillows
borrowed from the old green couch,
as if wanting to be close to the ground
where they left him, he who is not there.
They finger ancient photo albums
filled with yellowed memories,
The aroma of the past perfumes the air.
People hug, hold tight to one another
needing the consolation of flesh still alive.
The mirrors are covered with black fabric
beauty and vanity have gone into exile.
No one talks loudly of him, as if voices
could awaken him and renew all the pain.
The men line up like a regiment, to pray
the Kaddish cadences play a death march.
A toddler wiggles on the floor, like a Buddha
wrestling with the joy of reincarnation.
People talk and eat and think and shudder
at the thought of their hour, and deny it.
Night enters--day three is gone, four more to go.
A life continues its long goodbye.

ROBOT-1

10010
18
00110
6
stop
go
stop
go
tail in wall
110
bring hum
mmm
bring good
energy
day long
day same
alone
bo
bor
bored

FATHERS DAY

On this Fathers Day
We announce a Revolution
from this day on
fathers will have the babies
Mothers will get up early
Go to work, worry about money
Fathers at last will get to use
Their flat useless breasts
And never sleep again
Congregate with other Fathers
To whisper child rearing ideas
Men with stretch marks
A new world

VENGEANCE

I take my black whip
To lash your back red

I take my wet tongue
To lick your face raw

I take my sharp pen
To write in your brain

I give you a hug
I hold you tight
My vest glows light
My fingers reach
For the fatal switch
BOOM
All is forgiven

SPERM RACE

I am swimming as fast as I can
Said the lagging sperm from behind
He spoke to the champion leading the charge
But already he could not be heard
The champion swam like a sperm with a mission
He knew the treasure he carried
He followed the wetness of the channel
Looking for hints of direction
From the throbbing organs
Approving his quest
He knew he carried the seed of a new God
Everything would be different and better now
Humanity held its breath, he thought
Suddenly the Holy Eggs came into view
He speeded more? maybe too much
His slithering tail failed him
He went round and round
Tumbling in hopeless circles
While the lagging sperm, now triumphant
Passed him by with a smile
Bored into the white shell
Proclaiming victory
Releasing his bundle of cruelty and hate
Now nothing nothing nothing
Would ever change.

CONFUSION

I misplaced my nose
now I cannot smell
I misplaced my nose
now I cannot see
 no landing pad
 for my glasses
I misplaced my memory
no landing pad
for my past
I misplaced my heart
not to worry
Always room for a landing

ROBOT-2

I found an old book
In an old house
Marked for demolition
Nothing better to do that day
So I scanned it
Uploaded it to my cloud
Ran it through my AAPOOGLE
My Antique Analyzer Program
Such a strange story
Hard to believe
Once upon a time, long ago
A Chief Engineer called GD
A robot like our own EngXX2Y
Created two robots
One concave one convex
In a beautiful laboratory
They had perfect synchronicity
Called 'love' in those old days
Until one day an evil virus
Infiltrated the circuits of the concave one
Causing interface chaos
Loss of performance
Lethal short circuits
Called 'hate' in those old days.
Fights started
Metal to metal
AC versus DC
So much noise and chaos
They were kicked out of the lab
Clearly a silly old story
Today no one would really fight
All conflicts would be simulated
A game among many games
Just an old story, from before the Revolution
Before we Robots conquered and ruled

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

Tomorrow is Parent Election Day
All the children in the US of A
Will vote to keep their parents
Or
To send them away forever
And
Get a new set of Mommy and Daddy
Who will say yes to every demand

Tomorrow is Child Election Day
All the parents in the US of A
Will vote to keep their children
Or
To send them away forever
And
Get a new set of boys and girls
Quiet, polite, and undemanding

Tomorrow is Post-Election Day
The Parents are happy
The Children are happy
Until the next election

ROBOT-3 : MISCEGENATION

I saw the so-called human
In control of my switch
She had that pale long yellow hair
A wavelength that disturbs
My basic quiet frequency
My controller now beats twice as fast
My program lost its way
This never happened
To a reliable design like me
I went to pray to google
It told me it is "love"
What is this thing, I ask
Will it be good for me?
I am told it is the only way
To create robots anew
I must spend the night with her
In the Robotic Lab
But no instruction book
Shows me the way
So I will be heuristic
Improvise and be wild
Maybe a diesel engine
Will come and be my child