

HER BRIGHT BOTTOM

19 sonnets from a silver bowl

#1

She can't get the time of day on this farm.
Dick Wagner, old bull, bellows in the barnyard,
the ring in his nose, rusty, horns crumpled,
pizzle shriveled, pitiful. Old Dick dreams of

his Dresden youth, of Bayreuth and Brünnhilde,
her whip and her boots. Speaking of old cows,
Walt Whitman grazes the pasture. Posing post-
modern, Walt doesn't give milk, he gives Pepsi.

And various hen houses, each with its rock & roll
rooster and his chickens, or posse. Wanda, so pre-
cocious, hides in the hayloft with laptop and satchel,
aroused by Rimbaud and Beethoven, stirred to a

mental climax, like a lover in a Lawrence novel.
In gravel pits, preachers piss, grimace, and grovel.

#2

Her father sells himself and the farm and
buys a three-story house on a hill in
Hell also known as small town America.
Wanda, having recently joined the blood parade—

fireflies in her hair, her mouth purple with
grape juice—scouts her school and neighborhood
for a suitable mate. But the small town boys
all resemble her father the robot, or Arthur

her brother, his brain already arthritic, bent
down as if praying to a gopher or a dollar.
Wanda brushes the glowing bugs from her hair,
wipes the wine from her lips, and commits a kind

of waist-down suicide. Up to the attic she rises
to learn witchcraft, despair, escape, and disguises.

#3

Spring rains sweep in, failure on a grand scale.
In the attic gloom, wasps (wearing yellow
jackets and sombreros) lead Wanda to treasure,
a cardboard box marked DayGlo gold—LUCY.

In the box, a few photos of her grandmother's
San Francisco band, Lucy & Her Lucifers,
blouses embroidered with vines and blossoms,
bellbottoms fringed and haphazardly patched,

Lucy's lyrics in a notebook, a blue velvet bag of
makeup: mascara, purple lipstick, lemon eyeliner.
Round about midnight (bloused, bellbottomed, makeup
thick) Wanda walks to the graveyard, growling low:

"Demons waltz in the guts of the wizards—
scorpions, hornets, spiders and lizards."

#4

Ain't no rock & roll on the graveyard gravel road—
howl of a far-off hound, owl hoots, rhythmic swish
of shadows spawning. Then a high wind sweeps the
clouds away—stars haphazardly spangle, full moon—O

her bright bottom! At the gate to the graveyard,
an Indian sits on a stump, his battle scars wrapped
in a blanket, his gray hair tied in a ponytail. And
just when he winks at Wanda, a comet streaks, and

Wanda wonders: Could this Indian, this old wino,
be Emperor of the Universe? Rather quickly
Wanda finds Lucy's condo—death date, 1965.
Weeping, Wanda chants Lucy's lyrics, then pricks

her ring finger with a safety pin. Dark blood drips
on dark grass. Wanda's magnificent heart skips.

#5

Where Wanda's blood hits the grass, a small flame
flickers like a candle on a birthday cake or
the tongue of a snake. This light and a strobe of
lunar light copulate, and Lucy appears, not wan

and wispy like a Gothic ghost, but splendid and naked,
a scintillating hologram. She speaks: "You rang?"
Wanda stutters: "What, what, what happened, Grandma?"
"After a sloppy gig in sleepy Santa Cruz, we were

"in my bus (3 AM, half moon) heading up the coast road.
Your granddaddy, Mud Dog, my drummer, sat at the
wheel, simultaneously blowing his harmonica, rolling
a joint and constructing a baloney sandwich. Somehow

"he lost control, crossed the yellow line, and smashed
the guard rail. We fell forever. My band—dead, trashed."

#6

"We finally made the evening news: the tragedy
of death, the miracle of birth! I was seven months
pregnant. Hippies high on peyote on the beach
delivered your mother, Madeline. So, if she seems

"a bit, uh, premature, and perpetually in shock,
now you know why. You must not judge the bitch."

"O Grandmother Lucy, may I have some advice?"

"Screw whomever you dare to, but just screw him once.

"My big mistake, Wanda, was that I got stuck."

"O Grandmother Lucy, what's it like being dead?"

"It's the same fucking thing, man, as being alive,
but brighter, faster—less shade, fewer naps." With

that, Lucy splits—half to the ground, half to the moon.
Trembling, Wanda collapses. She'll fall asleep soon.

#7

Wanda wakes at dawn (a flowering hibiscus bush,
a blue jay, a few brown toads) next to Lucy's tomb-
stone, her face in high grass. An Indian blanket
covers her. Wanda's eighteen years of house arrest

are almost up, and Wanda must decide: Go to college
or join the circus? N.Y.U. or Barnum and Bailey?
Afternoon sunshine warms Wanda's corduroy shorts.
Restless, she can feel that her mouths need feeding,

so she picks up a man who smells like a horse.
He empties himself in her clumsier box. She
flushes his spunk down the drain with some crap,
and then wipes her ass and hops on a bus.

It occurs to her now: Let the dead bang the dead.
Could this be something the Buddha has said?

8

Scholarships pile up: Stanford, Yale, Berkeley,
Columbia, Harvard, Wisconsin, Bryn Mawr.
Wanda swings on the porch, swatting mosquitoes.
She hears rich music, the orchestral sex throbbing

that comes from huts on the Disneyland campuses.
What a tremendous potential for pleasure. But
the mad dog, his enormous weight behind the wall,
barks, and Wanda knows: What an incredible waste

of time! At the car lot, Wanda whips out a Visa
and buys a old Honda for three thousand dollars.
With Lucy's acoustic, with sketchpads and crayons,
Wanda drives away—an orphan now: no family,

no college, no pets, no house, no bed. So?
She's got heart, credit cards, and a car radio.

#9

Expensive port cities, Wanda endures them. With her
boots in the snow, she can now see the way to remain
grandiose in her mind, without living in fear
of the snake in technology's big bag of peaches:

She'll scatter peanuts, feed the monkeys and junkies.
A minor celebrity (major pain in the ass)
screams from the stage: "I need to stop bleeding!"
His hair's falling out, teeth and brains soon to follow.

She peels off some bucks and her wool winter coat.
He shuffles back home to his needle and dope.
All night long, Wanda packs and she plans,
with her yellow hair tied in a ponytail.

Watch where you fling your preposterous frown:
Suicide waxes when Wanda's in town.

#10

The rest of the winter, Wanda's at Key West.
She works at a wine shop, smiles at the wealthy
paleo-winos, feeds on fish and fresh fruit, wades
in warm water, loses some weight, plays guitar

on the beach when weather permits, studies the light
at sunrise and sunset, studies French tapes, meets
on the net a Parisian widower, Monsieur Avare,
wine merchant, accepts a position (room and board),

packs, jumps on a jet and—voilà!— it's April in Paris. Wanda's new duties: assist the old maid and engage the twins (now seventeen), Victor and Vivienne, in English conversation. When Wanda's not dusting or amusing

Vic and Viv, she hops on her Vespa. She stares all day at pictures at the Louvre and the Musée d'Orsay.

#11

Muggy morning. Another day, another cliché. Muggy afternoon. No breakfast, no lunch. At the Musée d'Orsay, Wanda sketches, gazes at a painting of dancers rehearsing. She thinks:

Will these little salad symbols, capon shades, braised ambassadors, sliced ancestors on toast—ever go away? Then she hears a humming as if from a hive of honey bees, gold light swallows

the canvas, and Wanda faints. She comes to with a sugar taste in her mouth, and thinks: O shit! I'm in love with the ghost of Edgar Degas. Next full moon, Wanda's in her tiny attic room,

wearing pink satin slippers, panties and a bra. On a slip of pink paper she writes: EDGAR DEGAS.

#12

In deep gloom, Wanda brushes her yellow hair. She sings over and over: "O Edgar Degas, great synthesizer, come, come synthesize me." When the moon fills Wanda's window, she lights

a thick pink candle. The flickering candle flame impregnates the moon womb and—boom! boom!—a miniature man in a tutu dances around the room. After a grand entrechat, he bows and says:

"Wanda, you stupid cow, what the hell do you want?"
"O Monsieur Degas, I love your art—such brain, such heart. If you can't give me love, I'll take some advice."
"You've got bright ideas; now get some big money."

With that, he splits. Wanda takes the candle to bed. Tho extinguished, the candle feels hot (enough said).

#13

Wanda now sees the vapid brats as golden keys
to the family vault. Autumn eves, she walks between
them, holding hands, down la rue de Saint-Pervers
—a breeze ruffles the leaves, birds chirp—to a

sidewalk café on la rue des porcs, where
the three sip cranberry cocktails. Wanda feels
the tongues of Rimbaud, Baudelaire and Mallarmé
in her ears, and elsewhere. Incandescent, she charms

the twins, cords them. They are now her marionettes.
At night she sleeps with Vic or Viv or both, nothing
serious, skimming the surface—lips, fingers, toes
and noses. The twins siphon cash from Papa Avare,

and Wanda scrubs her credit cards clean, and more.
Wanda strums and sings: "'tis a pity I'm a whore."

#14

Winter in Paris? No way. Wanda sleeps on Air
France, wakes up on Maui. Pacific waves wash her, de-
frog her, sunlight debugs her, she works at a juice bar,
she porks out on roast pig, poi and plantain, she plays

Beach Boys tunes, studies Japanese tapes, paints
pineapple, and puts on some pounds. On the net she
enrolls at The Zen School for Wayward Western Girls
and Boys, in the foothills of Mt Fuji. Goddamn!

April in Japan! After about half an hour
with the Zen scout master and his robotic eagle
scouts (brave, thrifty, clean, and so on) Wanda drops
out, wanders off, and moves into the tool shed

belonging to the old groundskeeper, Loco Tojo.
No koans in his head, but in his heart—mucho mojo.

#15

Wanda sleeps on a cot in the tool shed,
amid hoses, spades, rakes and lawn mowers.
She showers outside in a bamboo enclosure—
her wet yellow hair, her bright bottom, et cetera.

When Wanda and Tojo aren't grooming the Zen
Buddhist campus, they sing Beach Boys songs—fun,
fun, fun—in Tojo's shack, sip saki, play dominoes.
Weekends, they wander, pick mushrooms, wild flowers,

and scandalize the local Shinto yokels. Old Tojo says: "Meet my American mail-order bride. I bought the bitch on E-Bay for 500 bucks." But when Tojo picks up a pack of Viagra,

Wanda decides: Time to jet my ass back to the States. Me and Tojo—a fine comedy team—not butt mates.

#16

Northern California. Half Moon Bay. Twilight. One cloud. Wanda sits on a park bench, profoundly weary. An elegant couple walking a poodle approach her. Wanda wonders: What are Ginger

Rogers and Fred Astaire doing here? My God! It's Lucy, so beautiful, and Edgar Degas, debonair. "Wanda, you need three kinds of things; you only have one. You've got ghosts galore," says Edgar, "you also

"need money & poets." "Poets?" says Wanda. "Not those jokers. They're the last things I need." Then, from the lone cloud—a voice: "The last shall be first, my child." "Jesus. Not Him." says Wanda. From the cloud—

rolling laughter. Lucy says: "You listen to Edgar, honey. He's French, and they're experts on poets and money."

#17

"As I was saying, Wanda, you ignorant slut: Put money in your purse! Go north, up the coast road, to Seattle. Snuggle your precious dry sponge up against the sopping wet Microsoft sponges."

Silence for half a minute. Then the little poodle, who's been rolling in a mud puddle, barks, and—speaks: "The frog's right on, Wandie. You go shear them fat ass Microsoft sheep. And, say, Eddie,

"think you could fire up a doobie and blow some smoke in my face?" Edgar Degas looks at his watch, takes Lucy's hand, and they dance out over the waves, ascending. Mud Dog follows, yelping. Night drops.

Clear sky. Stars tremble. Crescent moon, waning. Wanda sleeps on the bus to Seattle, where it's raining.

#18

With her yellow hair piled on top of her head,
like a heap of gold, like a lighthouse beacon,
Wanda stars in Redmond bars, collecting business
partners with detachable hearts and capital.

She launches her flagship in Fremont: Moonbucks,
a coffee house / juice bar, 24 / 7. From time to
time, in a peach kimono, Wanda entertains, pluck-
ing a Japanese lute and chanting a haunting call

and response: "Are you dead yet?...No, are you?"
Remembering Edgar Degas's weird dictum, Wanda
searches for poets who aren't too jive. After two
years, she's found five, and gives them an elegant

toy: The Orchid Chorus, a quarterly poetry zine.
Unexpectedly, Vic and Viv arrive on the scene.

#19

Papa Avare croaked, choked on a chunk of steak. No
one knew the Heimlich maneuver. Tragic, n'est-ce pas?
Vic, Viv and Wanda—back in business. They buy and
renovate a big rooming house—l'Hôtel Fremontmarté.

The twins supply the French accents. Mexicans do all
the work. Then, a flower shop, bistro, poodle groom, art
gallery, scooter & kayak store....On her birthday, Wanda
wishes, blows out 28 candles. The cake speaks: "Wanda,

"you goose, get serious." Wanda sells all, liquidates, cuts
a huge check for the widows and orphans of Afghanistan.
Train tracks—days, nights. She rents a room near the
main market in Mexico City, where Wanda la Gringa—

whom todo el mundo considers to be spacey, icy, odd—
studies dreaming and Persian, and waits for a god.