

statement was good strategy by Sontag, and it is with evident glee that she announces that photography “has managed to carry out the grandiose, century-old threats of a Surrealist takeover of the modern sensibility, while most of the pedigreed candidates have dropped out of the race.”

I think we have to remember at this point that Sontag was growing up at a time when Abstract Expressionism was having its greatest triumphs. To a sensitive young American the “revolt against calculation” was what 20th-century painting was all about. The “pedigreed candidates” she mentions were the members of the Surrealist Group in Paris. The Surrealist painters had *their* great time in the 1930s and '40s. Almost

all of them are dead, and it is a long while since any of them hoped to change the world. What Sontag has against them is that they were *figurative*, and she finds the idea of figurative painting in the 20th century so contemptible that she casts around for an insult and calls the paintings “mostly wet dreams”, not a well-considered phrase from someone who admires Pollock’s drip paintings. It must be quite confusing to have to argue, however cleverly, that nothing could be more surreal than a photograph “which virtually produces itself and with a minimum of effort”, and at the same time be aware that André Breton’s famous definition of Surrealism—“pure psychic automatism”—fits some of Pollock’s paintings like a glove.

## Official Portrait

O, but you should have seen him on the day! . . .  
Such robes, so debonair,  
And such assurance!  
He looked a picture.

Well, he has been one,  
Paid for, exhibited, and hung  
Where an Old Master ought to hang,  
Above his hearth,  
An oiled celebrity  
These twenty years.

And now they take him down to clean him,  
And find what’s often found behind a picture:  
A blank; a wall,  
Shielded against dust,  
Never exposed to light,  
That might look whiter than the wall surrounding,  
But for those rat’s-tails of grey fluff,  
Old cobwebs, damp, and other blemishes.

Are these a truth about him  
The picture tried to hide?  
O how did the face look,  
And the wall, how did the wall,  
The night he turned to it,  
Who has turned back in oils,  
So smiled, and seemed so confident,  
These twenty years,  
Above the fireplace that he used to block?

*Michael Burn*

*Frank Ormsby*

## A Memory of Summer

Most of that summer I remember now  
A girl with supple arms, in her hands  
The blackest pot of shamrocks,  
Or by a brimming river under trees,  
Kissed to the tolling of a monastery bell,  
And cobwebs laced with water near our heads.

And I remember what was in her eyes  
The first dawn that found us in a room together.  
And a garden rinsed with rain.

Half of what happened there I carried back  
Through murderous towns. She kept the other half.  
And bloodier summers may have left their track  
Before we step that road again or laugh  
Together, or again my fingers trace  
Her waking face.

But if tomorrow I should cross her way  
Where walls are scorched and broken and the trees  
Are sunk in pavements we will make a day,  
If not to cure, at least to mock or ease  
The times with loving, its hours as bright and still  
As in that summer, as unrepeatable.

*David Rokeah*

## Alone

When did I lose my faith  
when did I find my faith again  
there is no trace in my diary  
nor in the public records.

Alone with my heretical speculations  
alone with the unresolved arithmetic of my loves  
alone with the intricate heritage of my dead fathers  
alone with Jerusalem in exile  
alone with the Mediterranean Sea which is God  
alone with the desert which is God

I was born on the day of the Temple's destruction  
I was born on the day of Agnon's birth

*translated by Matthew Mead*