

A Heretic's Sacraments

WALTER KAUFMANN

Baptism

We chose a name, knowing that you, not we,
must bear its burden, and we recognize
this symbol of responsibility
almost too great for us. We are not wise—

hence you exist—and we shall fail while prone
to feel you failed. May you some day forgive
your parents, and we hope when you are grown
you will sometimes be happy that you live.

Wedding

Grateful and joyous love discerns
all that is best, all, all
that calls for hope.

Wounded, an animal, it turns
and turns round what is small,
and has to grope,

deprived of sight, for what is strong,
and, sleepless, cannot dream.
In agony

it charges, counts, and recounts wrong;
and features, once loved, scream
for charity.

Knowing all this, I wed thee: wound
my soul, be thou my rack,
let us unite.

Love is not love that dies when pruned:
cut deep, true love grows back
to greater height.

Death

When I am dead do not play dolls and dress
my body in a suit before you lay
it in a box to sleep! Should I sleep less
if you disposed of me some other way?

Drown burn or bury me—forget
sometimes but when you do remember me
recall us as we were without regret
and honor our love with honesty.

Nothing can equal deep love's deepest thrust:
we suffered much but hurt each other most.
We sailed together in a gale were lost
and I my love was first to reach the coast.

❖ WALTER KAUFMANN teaches philosophy at Princeton University. He is the author of *The Faith of a Heretic*, and among his other books are *Religion from Tolstoy to Camus* and a verse translation of Goethe's *Faust*. His translations of *Twenty German Poets* will be published soon by Random House. These three poems are from his forthcoming book, *Cain and Other Poems*, to be published this year by Doubleday.