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APPROVAL FORM
THE O CHRONICLE

This thesis has been approved by the following
committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of North Carolina at Greensboro, North Carolina.

by

Ellen Arl

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Final Examination
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APPROVAL SHEET

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ARL, ELLEN. The O Chronicle. (1966) Directed by:
Dr. Robert Watson. pp. 36.

This thesis consists of twenty-six poems. The poems in this collection define things by describing their surroundings. They are personal, or autobiographical sometimes on an allegorical level; sometimes on an analogical level, and sometimes on a metaphorical level.

It is my attempt always to maintain visual imagery in my poetry. This is to make them more vivid and concrete; therefore more lucid. There should be no need to quote the Confucian tenet at work in this attitude.

It will be noted that these poems are circular, metaphorically, in their arrangement; thus, the logic of the title of the thesis. It will also be noted that I have used the rhyme internally in the poems: to season them rather than to flavor them. Metrically, I have tried to synchronize a poetic language with the language of common speech.

INTRODUCTION

The first poem in this collection consists of four short related parts. The parts are made up of very honest answers to an interview. Whether this is a self-examination of the narrator or the brief outline the narrator makes for herself in answer to questions posed by someone else is not important. The point of emphasis is that the woman is being defined in terms of her own description. It is her description of what happened once upon a time that encompasses her and acts as a definition of what she is now. The poems in this collection define things by describing their surroundings. For this reason the title of this collection is THE O CHRONICLE.

Everything in these poems begins as an invisible dot which becomes visible when a circle is drawn around it. The poems deal with the problems of identity as well as those of definition; the problems have to do with the recognition of things and the recognition of the poet's dealings with things. The sense of history, the sense of recollection, is imposed rather deliberately on some of the poems. It functions as a glance at a grander view--a view which allows the poet to say This is how things were, What do you think of things now.

Recollection is an imaginary photograph: it is possible to keep adding lines and colors to it. But if no more lines and no more colors can be added to the photograph, all that is left to do to the photograph is to look at it, to examine it. The tool of examination is inquiry; therefore many of these poems rely on a rhetoric which incorporates question in its scheme. At the beginning of the title poem there are hints of its ending; that is, there are hints that in a decadent atmosphere feeling becomes irrelevant. However, a certain amount of a kind of fear is built up by not naming the heart irrelevant until the very end of the poem.

All of the poems in this collection play upon fear of the unnamed in some way in order to induce a sense of circularity--a moving around the thing by suggestions to the ultimate identification of the single thing. Finally, THE O CHRONICLE attempts to synchronize a group of totally different voices by emphasizing the common factor of poetry, the dependence of the poem on a sympathetic reader.

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THE O CHRONICLE

What We Did Before They Came

The only thing we did was needlepoint
and sew cushions for our feet;
we never sensed decaying cream
upon our faces and our tongues.
We went downtown by train
traveled to the cleaner, church
in taxicabs if it should rain
and to the five and dime.

The lady at the five and dime
endorsing rhinestone clocks
for wrists and rings helped us to waste time.
Some bought diamond clocks beyond their means;
I bought only one small watch
set within a garnet heart,
twelve numbers notched on the flat edge of stone.

What They Saw When They Were Leaving

Who Came and What They Did

Soldiers,
miles and miles of anemic eyes
shoved into heads
jammed on the tops of bodies,
soldiers marched into town.

They tore the town
to prickly threads of burning brick
and bombed the little yellow church.

What They Saw When They Were Leaving

That
one for philosophy had woolen eyes
one from praying match stubs for knees
a man over the hill had no more arm
hair and many teeth were sacrificed.

A writing man,
a historian they had let live,
writes in a lovely bloody Palmer hand
some journals that will make him and them
famous.

What I Did After They Left

I swept the pieces of a watch into a paper bag--
 so much for time--and threw it away.
 Aside from my heart which is irrelevant
 everything can be broken apart.

THE CREATION

Fire is first
Men and women in amber flicker away
Do not expect that they will look the same
after one or two million years

Stars are cast by Chinamen in China
Horoscopes are made
An artist accidentally paints
the zodiac on the ceiling of a nave

Then scientific man
bends sunlines
through the bottom of a clear glass jar

holds the jar to night
to make night see too
a quiet motion
through transparent doors
and everything is embraced
by its own reflection

Simply everything is
caught and secured in eternal intention.

A FLIRTATION WITH GEORGES ROUAULT
OR ELSE SOME KIND OF GOTHIC PRAYER

1.

Rouault, you said my glasses hardly
Frame my face to luster at erotic joys;
I say then in reality,
With cigarette ashes
You could change my late agnostic eyes
Or place in tangles to reveal
Hysteria or complacency

Somewhat with paint:

The way I know you've made
Hurt animals of a certain grace
to fall in lines;

2.

And if my frames are dark,
So you can lend my pardoned glass
(the way it parts two bales
of incense smoke) a Roman soldier
Or a window for an ass, in the way
That you or heathens--I can't say--
Burn animals of a certain grace,
Black skeletons to fall in lines.

THE GIRL ON THE ROOF OF THE EDGEWATER BEACH

In the solarium
On the big building,
She tries to remember then turns to wonder
Whether it is here in the city or there on the beach
that she finds the sun to make her arms a carnal tan.

She does not know;
She does not know where the sun that hits her comes from.

At seventeen, she is a metal iris:
Long stemmed body, sternly rigid head,
Hair that's blowing in an end of summer air--
Of course, the hair is sun-
streaked and where
that sun comes from she doesn't care.

The neck that hides in shadows of the hair
Will always be a pale brass.
Her slender fullness, her fairness, will vanish.
She will become a condensed, dark-lean thing.

So here, preparing for dark days ahead,
In the solarium
On the big building,
She tries to remember then to reason
Why the sun is everywhere.

She tarnishes
and automatically her mind contracts a deal with the sun.

HOW ION DORU DIED

from "Death of Ion Doru" by Mihail Sadoveanu

Death that rose from melted snows
 Came to side with Doru.
 Gently Ion closed his eyes
 And blinked out sun and said,
 "Catinca, wife,
 You think that we are still young,
 It is not so. Dying I am."
 Thawed white Death coming,
 Coming through the opaque frosted windows
 And then warm air
 And the windows warm with air,
 Running with rain.

CATINCA: When you married me,
 I was to you a magpie,
 Screaming at your soul,
 Pecking with my fierce beak
 At your heart.
 To me you were a man for other ladies,
 Laboring to leave me,
 Ladies licked your chin,
 Did you like their artful tongues?
 You never said.
 I never sensed.
 But suddenly,
 As if you saw instead
 A clear bright rush
 Of white snow,
 You looked at me.
 I wonder by your bed
 Was it snow
 That bred the death for your dying,
 You do not say and I do not sense.

Apricot-trees are blossoming,
 Cornering Doru's land.
 Inside Doru's house,
 A candle burns and Doru dreams,
 "I dream," talks softly Ion,
 "Of a man who takes me
 To the throne of God.
 I am in heaven, Catinca,
 And my people are there.
 Dying I am."

Softly talking,
 Death,
 A man,
 Is coming.
 Coming on the scent
 Of Apricot blossom,
 A light wild air from the corner.
 The window is opened
 And wildness, light wildness,
 Flickers the candleflame.

ION DORU: Call the neighbors.
 Bring to me a candle quick,
 I am about to die.
 See how Doru makes
 A fine day for Death
 To come from snow
 And ride the apricot air.
 You do not sense death Catinca?
 You do not.
 You see the snow,
 You smell the blossoms at the corner
 But you do not sense the death
 Catinca.
 I, about to die,
 Lie here stiff
 To make you wonder Is he dead yet.
 You hold toward me the candle.
 I break stillness,
 Grab your hand.
 Instantly the candleflame
 Is blown out
 By a cold-
 Light blast of flower heavy air.
 Sense Death now, wife, here.

The day that Ion Doru dies
 Is Sunday,
 Sunday warm
 And pure and fragrant of the sun.
 It shall be said,
 "The first Rhine
 White day of Spring, Ion Doru died."
 The first fine day of Spring
 Surrounds Ion Doru's death
 And the neighbors
 And Catinca crying are met
 In its just sweet light.

SHORT LINES FOR A DECADENT SCHOLAR

The hay books
of the straw man
are revealed
as the same
as the straw man's mumblings
which
make up
the straw man

and I hear
in manic chords
words
which of their fashion
inaugurate
the petty blisses
to distract
my damn dear
sans persona
graciously
and with no pain.

Carrion mysterion,
carry me off
and turn me on,
or rex regis,
your illegitimate rages
of usquebaugh
and brandywine
show you a propensity
for giving semi-phrases
in a drunk again,
drunken of
spontaneous dreams.

YEARS AGO I LOVED YOU IN BETWEEN THE LINES

Years ago when I loved you maybe
Between the lines of real things
Or between the lines of fairytales
That I could tell you
For all they were worth and
Years ago when I could see you ALL-THE-TIME,
If not more than that much,
In between the minutes there was affinity.

Somewhere inside that time,
I loved you in all your high-strung belovedliness,
You were never strident though,
So I let my love elude
All sounds which did not make
Beautiful words about you. I was
Never strident, never off-key,
I made the only philosophy
For your perfect melody
And that is how I hold you lovely now
In my lineless soul.

LETTER FROM THE HIGH PRIEST OF POETRY
NOW LIVING IN SPAIN

The cows that cowboys ride about,
So well, it's like if I'm a poet
Then I can write poems or
Something on that order: Could I
Ever say I miss the things
You've never seen or is it different
For you. And wishing can't explain
That I can't find the palaces
Or I can't find my Pal's laces
To tie him for the rodeo in his saddle
In the banal Spainal land, the place
Where we're among the Spaniel Ladies.
Who's to say who is the spic and
Who's the bull--after all, those
Dandies Mexicali, they all wear roses
On their hats like horns on bulls or
Fake black cows--who's to say what makes
The inspirating general faces for your poems:
And me, don't you think it's sad?
And me--I must stampede with cows
At sights of snakes or lambs or
(Well really, sacrifice leaves me cold)
Some fat black steer.

A GOTHIC CHINESE NUN

Here was this translucent woman
 Among the oriental aldermen,
 Her dress was plain white
 And there was a hood obstructing us
 From all but her nose and thin
 Pale mouth. About the chin was draped
 Again plain white,
 Was fallen white in temples
 And in you I praise her
 Very long, for this came ten years ago,

 And did I say never that pale line spoke?

AGAINST THE ENGLISH LADY

Whenever
 and whatever she sings,
 the woman of anglican tongue is a meridian
 who spends time slowly and spins her dreams,
 she serenades--
 a moot distinction,
 undisputed nonetheless--
 but her songs are artificial
 like ballet ladies
 in the glass
 like the ballet children at the bar
 making minor mimic of the ballet madame
 tapping arabesques on the wooden floor.
 Their shoes are black, the floor is black,
 the words the woman sings are not separate:
 it is a silly song no one understands,
 her voice cracks,
 she wants to be called Mimi
 she wants to be French.

For this? Yes, forever and
 ever for the taste of lemon
 and the sparing English muse,
 yes, this is what the RAF fought for:
 a frigerated woman who could sew,
 they unwove themselves
 from bandage gauze
 unto her wooden spool--
 they became their socks.
 And she? She began to smoke
 a lattice of indurate rings,
 and through these rings
 she liked to hum lullabyes for boys she darned for,
 boys who flew their aeroplanes cursing her name,
 the non-Working Woman insane
 in the nonsensical World War.
 How now Frau?
 cough cough cough, hacking out a melody,
 the flippancy of scoffing death,
 she liked the look of a curling lip
 she liked to sneer. How now Frau.

ARCHANGEL DAVID WITH A STEEL HAND

He wore an opulent ring
On the thing that was his hand
And when he played his harp
It was the sound of steel
Against gold

(a real tinny band)

And for a special rhythm
He would thumb
The ebony "S" rims
Of his lying lyre;
Such a strum would sing
A moll or animal
to sleep.

Lefty lion, he would lay
With one right eye closed
And left one open
To catch sight of the enemy
And he would sit upon his loins;
But all he ever saw

Was that old strange hand
Struck against the laws
Of music and

The ring struck through
Upon that claw:
It was opulent
And it literally shone.

A DUMB AND VICIOUS FANTASY

Julian totals all life,
exactly fills each pulse,
husband, father, lover, dear man,
substance of my flesh,
circle of my eye,
filling each of two hands with handfuls,
a no one man but many men
I combined to make a perfect man.

Do you hear?
He breeds the spots
that cover my eyes
when I stare at the sun,
talks the voice
that said all
my best ideas in my head
scrapes my heart of fear
when I am afraid . . .
with rough and grainy hands
he scrapes my heart.

I gave to him my inner voice.

I found him because I made him
and if he leaves one night
I'll go. You hear me? I'll go
probably to a long dead island of beach
and I'll see him standing far away from me
I will run and run until I can't breathe
and the weeds will scratch lightly my ankles
first thin lines then
marking with bleeding my feet
and then I'll reach him when I can't even speak
and I'll reach out to him and he will
claw, dig his teeth into, and chew
my slender wrist.

ONE OF THE LAST HAVANA CIGARS I EVER SAW

Dame Anna the Waltzing Banana
waltzed with the intention
of making me act silly and of striking
me breathless (twitch twitch)

--but I did not even notice.

On a red and purple stage,
Anna stood and waved
her lovely arms around.
She carried orange fans in her hands
and, brother, those fans did flutter

--I guess.

I guess
because while Anna
(boomtwitch boom
boomtwitch boom)
did her dance,
elsewhere, in the audience,
a man, front table left,
smoked a Havana cigar three and one half inches
without dropping any ashes.

I watched the ash that was,
waited for that ash to fall,
and at the end of the two o'clock show,
when Anna dropped her fans,
the ash ignored the thunder
(BoomBoomBoom
BoomBoomBoom)
and fell in its own quiet way.

Through an opened door,
the fire escape,
I looked outside at neon-lettered space
and as I thought about the radiant waste
of most bright things at night,
at that precise moment,
the letters
(M-I-N-S-K-Y-S flickerflicker)
flickered out.

AN INTENTIONAL PAGAN TRANCE

O Jesus, when I look to see
the Whitsuntide breaking a curious sabbatical,
I'm struck by the stringency of the turned soul--
liturgical sheltered all my life.
The spurious wisdoms of popes and music makers
minding flashy colors,
plaintive chanting and organized prayer
have mined me Protestant
and now the Jews
fling me on an altar somewhere
and Isaiah lights my hair with seven golden fires
from a brass candlestick.
My brain flames and I
think I could die from the purple smoke
of Catholic incense choking out the dark.

THE WAKE

The pale gods, rose and mum,
Hover over your face
And waterfalls behind your casket blanket space,

A hanging black lamp
Swings antiquely back and back
Past the little golden shrouds of Saved
Past the brittle dirt tombs of the Damned
Some gentle draft swings it saying

"If you are dead
Come to the center of the dark square
Penetrate to the corners of my eyes."

If this death talking?
I pay no attention.

Instead I go to a quiet bronze village
And see myself with you alone
On a light street
Where
Together we watch the lacy ferns
Play on the powder, the satin,
And the finish of your body . . .

Forever and ever.

THE ORDINAL

His father named him I,
And descending I
Made such great litany in the sky
That the small and intermediate
Sun offered praise
To his similar feather wings
As they touched the water chains
Reciting them brass and gold.

Rash holiday dwindled and the weird wind
Confined him in the Emerald Vendor's
Coral drawing room.
The Merman, with ceremonious charm,
Blessed him on three sand altars--
Begging his shame and agony to glory.

I arose then with distressing
Deadly honor and sat in Apollo's chair
Among the cluttered spheres.
He wills their music
Beside the peaceful place which is his father,
And judges the living and dead.

THE WOMAN GOD

when I was God,
 with my red dress
 and my red hair,
 conscious of every satyr
 in my garden,
 acquiescing with my small
 apocryphal
 frame and being very sensuous,
 I gave to this man a gas hand
 so I can see him pray

(if he really prays
 his fingers are green flame)

but also for my curiosity
 to see Are his palms cool

when they touch themselves
 perambulating on my hem
 desirous of one soft full grab of me

THE MUNCH WITCH

I was moon blinded
 And monotony drummed
 Me into the bark of trees;
 My friends could watch me
 Hammered through the sap paths
 Out to the branches.
 It was a frightful affliction
 To be so close to heaven,
 Yet separated:
 Coupled to the gossamer lacings
 Of twigs and leaves.

I fed on rain of waters
 And meteors and felt myself
 (Trembling in a death wish)
 Waiting to be felled by some
 Monstrous ax, when a poltergeist
 Of wailing, hooting and thunder
 Muffled my death in late December.

A moon witch, Moon-blind,
 Fed into a tree, blowing paper
 Magnolias and colored bulbs grown
 From the sounds the lunar cacodemon
 Crooned: These nightless dreams and
 Hollow hollerings. I am the no-eyed
 Silver witched moon begotten woman
 In a distant far away tree;
 Hear me

High
 Whistling

Hear me populating
 The holy frozen night.

THE BUYING OF TOY ANIMALS

At purchase birth
I stain my gray myopic
hippopotamus who is
of peau-de-sole
with brown velvet tongue
by stabbing in his heart

My own initiation
to the world
is warm white linen;
I
was as indifferent to salt as sin
until my resurrection

I screamed at my Baptism.

I am seven,
the age of reason,
and I am afraid,
so God is an elephant
Christ a tiger
the Holy Ghost is snake
not bird.

When I am twenty-one
and I am told
to be again a child,
if they ask me to become a lamb
and if I become a lamb
the Tiger will eat the lamb--

that's how religion works--
better to be a goat.

O Lord
if I become a lamb
and if I become a lamb
the moths will scan
my wooly self.
Please change my clothes
with hippopotami
submerged in somewhat muddy
Jordan waters.

After all,
the helmet of salvation
is gray, my gray
hippopotamus,
my helmet gray--

Saint peter say:
'Dis guy's
disguise
is gray.

A MINOR-KEYED LULLABY
for the dead boy Charles

So goodnight, Charlemagne,
May French lace be tied
Around your sewn eyes
And may you sleep quite late.

Goodnight and lullaby,
The lace will go gray,
Golden bolts on your coffin
Will break and fall away
As will white marble angels
Resting on your stone.

When you left us
You were dreaming,
Gone in wry light,
Charlemagne.

WHEN BEAUTIFUL AVARICE HAS MADE

your euphoric heart stop
 and ideograms of volatile sleep
 fragilely pour the complex variants
 of what is in the back of your mind

into dreams,

if I come with the substance
 of euphemism and your
 euphoria on my glass sleeve,
 will your inordinate desire for gold
 cause you to shatter my small
 harmonious hands when you pull and ring them
 for their wealth?

THE FABLE VOICE

The whine of the hansom
 Wheels in the night
 Produces the game of my voice
 While you talk and we ride,
 A box and players of two camps.

You say
 Something about "Hand me your
 Gray propaganda (the chocolate
 Africans' armada desert-warped war
 Of arbitration), the czar's
 Petitioned position . . .
 His humble human elation . . .
 Justly the harangue of peace!

. . . I sing to you of culture
 And the aesthetic didactic museums
 Of your mind . . . "

But when you talk some more,
 My head bows to your gospel
 Or to sleep. I can't tell.
 The bleat of your words keeps
 Even time.

We ride
 And I am carried by your voice
 To a day dreamed place
 Where I behold something human
 Growing from your words.
 The something breaks the rhythm of the whine.
 Are we riding still?
 Have I fallen asleep?
 Am I dreaming?
 Your words form such chaos in my world.

And what did you say
 Just now
 In one epitaph life
 When you
 With your olive eyes
 Only as the whitest gypsy has
 Talked in desultory tones?

THE GIRL'S REJECTION OF COO, A CORPORATION MATHEMATICIAN

I tell you William Coo . . .

When I was twenty,
I was afraid of the man who would
Someday come to place in order
All I owned; and I imagined

All I owned as numbered things,
As countable things,
Things which would no longer
Have me as their reference.

I did not fear the figure,
The yardstick, the clock.
I did not fear arithmetical sterility
Induced by the taking away of my things,
By the crazy numberings.

I was afraid of the man,
The unit-searching mathematician, and
I was afraid of myself--the one plus one,
The possibly produced
The resulting, to my way of thinking
Hybrid one.

And so I say to you now . . .

William Coo,
Chief computer of petty programs,
Working your fingers
To the I B Mechanical bone,

How can you expect me
To reject all I thought at twenty
For you, William Coo, chief accountant
Of petty computers?

For you, William Coo, like all your kind
Are a counter
Of mere sheer petticoats.
For you, one William Coo--

Computer, programmer, or counter
There isn't any difference.

You are trying to make a number:
Namely, one me; are dying to
Produce (these are the only
Words I can think of)
A single sole solitary individual hybrid one.

NOW THEN--LINES WRITTEN BY HIS MUSE
 (The girl who once played Sally Saucer
 on the corner of his street)

Now and then, quiet love,
 I did not write your poems to be amused,
 But because I had an obligation
 To play sensitively in your lines.

So,
 How can I tell you I've grown up,
 That I've thought up long words you've used,
 That I've bought all your writer's clothes,
 That I was a crafter, and not,
 As you think, the Source of all Craft;
 I'll have to go.

Write me a song after I leave,
 A song that you as leader can lead,
 Like--
 "Catch a white fish, drag it onto land,
 Fill it full of mud, and let it stand."

Or this--and goodbye, I'm leaving now--
 "Go down Moses, ring around some roses,
 My heart has not been here enough time to despair;
 Like child's play this day has gone on too long.
 Somehow Mister you'll have to learn I can't care
 About you any more."

FOR THE MUSE OF CRITICS
(After William Wordsworth died I lied
and said I liked his poems)

Lucy, with your limpid satisfactions
And understatements, I touch you--
Only by the tips of my erudition--
And fancy that if all things came to pass,
You would only know them
In the hours I dread.

Yet we can play at Venice
(The world is sinking, not the sun!)
Using streams for water in the street
And dream of Yardley's lavender
Like grandmothers wearing old black shawls
Together:

And it is not like one line
Which separates us,
But rows and rows of horizons
Coming up to sky as we
Ride against the clouds.

I need you Lucy, Lucy to fiercely watch
The drugged and sorrowful, low-hanging sun.

THE EURYDICE ESCAPE

Orpheus, lead her,
Make the snow cold pulse
With warm vibrations to break
Oppressed silence and
The ambiguous solidarity
Which she has brought
Upon you.
You are not entirely blinded
To see her picture on the holy ground
Of your mind.

But he turned around.

Eurydice, Eurydice, a garland,
A sullied garden of roots and
Vines to twine in winsome
Fashion round your head,
That's the last he will see of you.
So, E,
Why did you call his name?
Tempt him to turn?
You leave him visionless,
Retiring minstrelsy to sing himself asleep
In the poppy fields.
Oh yes, Eurydice,
Your love of ability
Tends to kill.