CALLOW, NOEL. Poems. (1970) Directed by: Dr. Robert Watson
pp. 38

This thesis is a collection of poems I have written that, for one reason or another, I consider finished. I think the "workshop" vocabulary for talking about poetry is usually silly and imprecise, but when we are talking about the actual writing of poetry it is difficult to avoid it entirely, and in this furniture-making section of North Carolina it is somehow natural and fitting to speak of a poem as if it were something for the house, to be used and pushed around as needed.

So, I can say, because the vocabulary is convenient, that some of the poems here are finished simply because I am through working on them, through fixing and repairing them and making them comfortable. Others are finished because they have been deliberately "polished."

That is, the only division in the text separates the poems whose forms were especially important to me during the writing (the poems of section II) from those whose forms were not especially important to me during the writing. I know the difference is often indistinguishable to the reader. That is because for as long as I have been writing poems I have been conscious and respectful of their formal aspects, whether they are most evident in the complicated demands of a long-established verse pattern, or simply in the balanced arrangement of a poem on the page.

Incidentally, the poems in section I were all written earlier than any of the poems of section II.

POEMS

by

Noel Callow

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro
April, 1970

Approved by

Robert W. Kaes

Thesis Adviser

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

Thesis Adviser Robert W. Kase

Oral Examination
Committee Members James Applewhite
Francis A. Laine

March 18, 1970

Date of Examination

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I

RAINY

When Pecci's leftover rain
floods my grandma's gangway
God she has a fit. It all
runs rumbly down the cellar stairs

straight for the washing machine!

and gives the dog a grand excuse to bark.
Mr. comes out to see what's up.
Nothing. Now Mrs. Duggan.
He talks to the shut back door

for what his lovely lawn can do without
she wants no part of. People are
my grandma when the sky
cleans out its cellar, Pecci with
his perfect patch of grass.
Some have the instant grace to be
that crazy water-loving dog

and let me tell you he has fun.

He says it was his idea,
jumping the moon.

URSA MINOR

In just such a round and bear way must I
farewell you, sort of a sad, furred blossom,
part of a starry corsage, from the night sky
long deconstellated, ragged now. Yet not one
limb of me but would yield permissively,
loving you as when first you hugged me home.
Read in this shaggy concentricity
grizzly reluctance ever to disown
the lovely image of you I still cage
beneath my coat, sleeping between my paws.
This beauty I'll defend in savage ways;
for this truth only will I value claws
while I nap forever and dream of your voice
through the long hibernation of outgrown toys.

CHEERS

Here's to the frenzied archer for the breasts
that nursed his young desire the muses kissed
when his sad mother did them newborn nurse
before she bore her changeling nebulous
diurnal sign of God's amused distress.

Here's to the centaur self, vaned southerly
his arrow keenly warped swerves oriental.
Nor rider nor ridden this two-bodied one
shuts his own barn door against the thief.
His empty quiver a teleidoscope

this visionary has no single hope.

LADYGO

Straddled firmly on my careless
rising cleanly from my poems
I will ride them as that lady
shocked the Monday morning town
in her certain evening body
bearing all she bore in common with her steed:
bright hair, great limbs, fullspeed for a gift.

The folk would gape awonder not at all
on my glad hips but at the poem beneath
between them selfsame seeming with my mount
until I rose to jump in jockey style
away from my dark heedless keen and terror stallion
for the instant of control:
the silken purse is won, is fine,
the wheat is honey over the flying land.

SHE IS IN A WOOD

She is in a wood the darkest tree
of all the tallest, reaching out her arms,
the only one deserving, so lovely she,
an undivided sky and sun and warm
wind in the morning. All night
she kisses with the moon and every
dawn can be seen before light
rushing home to resume her heavy
protective posture for the day,
when all who pass and admire
wonder at her attire
and joke of the forest queen and her starry fay.

GUITAR

Silk spun silver wire and half gut tension
manifest, whimsy and courtesy permit my twain stray
unto your vacant wilderness of womb who know
when July lets her belly show that moon
does not resist: my withdrawn hands

coax even day sustain a crafty tone.
This maladroit who threatens not your fine
hispanic throat has harmless left
the daisy breasts of morning satisfied
among the grass to crackle for the sun

with no beware. I am of stealthy strum,
delicately borne. Hard by my being you are bay,
a place to be drunk on rum, then dance alone
into furled heart's intransitive,
that summer nonstop black Virginia shore.

TURNING COLD

It's pockets for hands
    that each find a pen
down fisty burrows after the deep
    November, five p.m.
I walk through this small
    town of high taxes twilights
when no coat's good enough
    and the chill starts in.
In these houses I pass comfort's easy
    as lamplight, dogs nap,
pies bake, children do work I've assigned.
    At the highway corner
the citybound bus goes by
    toward all that's love to me:
one's real pies and lamplight
    feed beggar mind supper
light heart's front porch
    for soul's coming home.
Lately I go all day
    expecting some word, mail
perhaps, or a call. All night I know
    I shouldn't have waited
that way, I shouldn't yield up
    my meager supply.
Blank trees bear no message
    but the grace familiar:
stripped, they wait without shame,
    arms upstretched for the snow
less pain to us all than this
    dry from damp frozen ground

fertile for destruction.

I invent an ad that reads
"Hope Comes Harder After Twenty-Five.
Feed the eternal spring,
replenish the breast, feather
that thing Emily bred in her soul."

WHAT IS IT IN THE MIND

What is it in the mind that makes it so
eager to pack up all its things and go,
and what in the heart that would remain
rejoicing in oftenkind, open and same?

Ruthly the ruthless longing for home
for sooth or for soothing rips body from bone.
One fusses and fidgets and waits in the car
while heart gleans her last glance and backs out the door.

I HAVE BEEN A WASP IN A CLOSET

I have been a wasp in a closet
    stinging the tweeds,
matching wings with wrinkled silk,
    have been a collar pin,
napping out of sight, tense and decorative
    seething immobile, unmoving
spending effort standing still.
    Eyes hard on the doorcrack, this plan:
not to get out only, I will have no <u>in</u> this way.
    Zooming out is not enough,
I will not be a wasp, must
    rearrange the wings, the black
music-note shape, the sting. Sting
    flesh, sting skin. It is
entire air needs wingmatching,
    to be, notes must be heavy with song.

MINNESOTA FATS

Seven women were having a party,
    just the girls together in the dining car.
One had on: her fat, her black slacks, bathroom blue
    autographed shirt, a rhinestone crown.
She was captain of their team that was best.
    She toasted, and led the song,
drinking creme de menthe with roast beef.
    We're Here Because We're Here!
should we teafolk wonder.
    Make Me Out At The Ball Game!
Jeepers Creepers! Make Me In Saint Louie!
    Did they want it? I don't think so.
No e dint yes e did no e dint yes yes
    called for another round of frothy green.
Well they were having fun and that's the thing
    I guess. We teafolk liked the young sheep field,
the Boney's Restaurant and Coin Laundry sign,
    but still we ate our cookies by ourselves.
Those trying-to carousers, innocent loudmouths
    wanting to be awful had their fun,
had their rhinestone crown, comfortable clothes
    could get drunk in public with no shame,
had their loving cup, were resting athletes,
    could hit the mark, knew that ringing pull
through arms legs back skin hair
    body alive when they played their game.

URANUS AND GAEA

Let the sky come down loving the earth again;
she will laugh this time, make it better than before.
She will have her rivers ready, one thigh
weightless as her hands, womb for rooting
heavy at this wedding. Hair alive and roaring
his approach bears more lightning than his thunder.
Any trees he destroys disappear. Tenderness
would be suspect. Fine eyes or sweet fingers,
fireflies, wildflowers for another season;
not in the love these two make and are in now.
Power, hardness rising is the order.
It is his earth today, shape is what
he seeks in his finding, death in this home.

ALONE IN THE SUMMER HOUSE

Swishing the back lot's grass
on delicate gloomy toes
midsummer's real belongers convene
encircle the tight cottage
haphazardly in a silky lumbering dance.
Only wet grass squeaks
grasswindy music, as underwater
or wrapped in film, in web.
Past midnight this half-country place
becomes deep country. Suspicious
nobody's creatures peep in at me
changed to a timid intruder
who am not swaying gliding
for want of knowing the tune.

Uneasy an hour before I have locked
against unlikely human scare
turned the radio up down or off
whatever slight particular glimmers
or failings of sound outside require.
As soon as I lie down
in the big back bedroom bed my eyes and ears
are less and more than eyes and ears
afraid of highway carlights
across the wall toward town,
the softly whipping hammock
I forgot to bring in.
All my body stays listening tense
alert even tending to sleep.
Every nothing raises hairs.
I would not move awake

I would not disturb the tuned air.

A month here and I have learned
    in the morning not to look at
what remains of the animals' picnic:
    racoons have been disappointed
in the garbage can, the neighbor's cats
    have been pleased by slow young birds,
have eaten most of a few in the side yard.
    Early in the sunshine I am easy
drinking coffee in the yard
    until I notice the scraggly woods
over the field watching me
    drink coffee in the sunny yard:
What is it runs under July high weeds
    in that south lot, what tiny eyes?

WHAT AT THE FAMILY PICNIC

How fusses right along with the busy inventor
reflecting purest scientific why,
supposedly gathers who when where
beside the novelist, good journalist,
fine writer. May I suggest the poet
as a used-up relative relentlessly squawking
what at the family picnic planted
in his last birthday lawnchair
beneath the shadiest tree by children mistakenly
hoping to please him. He wants
the hot sun, to be in the way of the women
murmuring affectionately around him
wishing him and his nylon & aluminum chair
his second newest light blue sweater
his way of attracting and not feeling the flies
his tendency to fall asleep and drool
and jerk awake yelling what and what again
out of the way while they prepare the meal.
What about the police car stopping at a house
on the block, what to the children's teasing
about food drying on his front, what to his oldest
grandnephew when he presents his bride.

A LITTLE MAN

A little man
    carried his great umbrella
way high up
    above all our heads.
It rained hard before the ballet was over.
    We ran to our cars when we could.
Handle at chin height
    the black web floated
doing the guy no rain good but some other.
    Did he try to be taller?
That's too phallic. He just wanted to fly
    or protect everybody
from the beautiful rain. Maybe
    he reminded himself of that insurance ad.

RELIEF FROM IRELAND

Adam and Eve
before the sinful fall
sufficiently clothed
in love with open eyes
delight and pleasure one another
themselves
the earth
all adequate
to their wholly tender sight.

They take and give
no dream of resistance
every breath is disclosure.
The two stand face to face
beneath the sweetly cruciformed tree
suggestion of exotic joys
in arching branches dangling
perfectly thick leaves
upsidedown-heart shaped.

No design could be less or more cunning:
cast in Irish turf
reproduced in soft wood stained black
this travel gift
brought home on a fast plane
too slow for me wanting the giver
reminds me world is earth
adequate is sufficient
hearts are upside down

Irish men have exotic dreams
giving and taking become the same
as the fruit here seems to but does not change hands.

STUDYING LESSON THIRTY FOUR AT THE ART INSTITUTE
WHILE I WAIT FOR SOMEONE WHO IS VERY LATE

Sunday Afternoon on the Grand Jatte

Dans un million points
Tante Richardine et Oncle Charles
marchent immobiles.
Toujours ils ont les mêmes visages,
jamais n'arriveront les papillons de nuit,
jamais ne mangeront-ils le chapeau de la femme.
Il est toujours trois heures
pendant que leurs yeux pointillent l'eau d'été.
Où est le Port de Tangiers, mon mari?

CONTINUING TO WAIT,
DAYDREAMING ABOUT A STARRY NIGHT

Vincent to His Brother

Theo, I need some ocher, black, and white lead
soon. I saw some trees that needed doing fast.
Follow with more of yellow, sulfur.
Is my nephew the baby colic?
A star, if you like, exaggerates itself.
A dozen may explode, the last one rolled.
I have a hat lets me paint them, with candles
on the brim. Is it a tree or a black flame?
That upright splash that burns me, does it have
a proper name? I have a misery so deep
anger eats me while I sleep. At St. Remy
I ate some paint. I think it cured me.
Arles' spire mimes my cypress chime.
The old, when I rattle the sky like this
pick their somber way along the road as if
it were all wet and they will slip.

II

PRESS CONFERENCE

My mayor calls a conference for the press
to comment on the youth in wild undress:
He warns the "flippies" not to feel at home
or that they are not wanted will be shown.

There will be no display of pubic hair,
stern measures will be taken if they dare.
He will permit no loving in the park,
particularly never after dark.

International Amphitheatre guards
may not accept agitators' press cards.
The Poor People's March may march in its place
but this is no week to talk about race.

As soon as any bonfire smells like grass
the park police will utilize tear gas.
His positive jowl shakes negatively --
There will be no piggie nominee.

I HAVE BUSINESS AT THE CONRAD HILTON

I have business at the Conrad Hilton
two days after the what do you call it,
the day after the convention ended,
the morning everyone moves themselves out.
The hotel guests are ready to go home.

Usually the lobby aisle smells fresh:
fresh air, fresh whisky, fresh flowers, roast beef.
Now vomit and gas hang heavy and sharp,
the red flowered rug shows spots of fresh blood.

It is noon but almost no one talks yet,
a few people make quiet arrangements.
I notice these liberal delegates
wear sunglasses and nod with deep concern.

Foolish McCarthy continues to flirt
with the leftover gangs across the street.
The evening papers will call it a speech.
Shall I go home and write a sad poem
or meet my friends at the Palmer House bar?

ALL SAINTS' DAY, 1968

I have now ordered that all air, naval, and artillery
bombardment of North Viet Nam cease. --Lyndon Johnson

My body feels shy in summer clothes
wants wool and lake wind
to wear wool out against.
I mistrust this easy being,
the women's speech.
Inside warmer than outside is my weather.
My Novembers do not know trees glad so long
reluctant to pour
their postcard colors down.
I cannot detect the fever
must burn in these lingerleaves
not careless not prudent
how handily postponed is their hellbending!
Rich conservative North Carolina fall
is too much goodness late in the year.
Join us in a drink angels
sing a halloween song
saints cut the cake
lend us a crumb
congratulate the leftover bomb.
Our war is not done let it not go long.

THE PHILTRE

Iseult, amie, et vous, Tristan, c'est votre more que vous avez bue! -- Joseph Bedier

She offered a half-emptied cup.
She had looked for the wine to make his head clear
enough to stop his boasting tales against death
or stop talking to her at all. Her bright face
made him smile at her more: she looked a young witch
peeved, everything he did annoyed her so far.

She wanted to go home, the ship was dull. Far
from her mother's stern eyebrow, she served his cup
after she drank first. Instantly what the witch
mixed for the girl and an aging king shot clear
through bodies summer-tired: they burned. Each face
could face only one other, knowing what death

their gaze dealt. Magic wine spelled death
now to a good king's plan for long peace, far
friendly lands come to recognize his queen's face
in marble towers, straight avenues, gold cup
brought to the shore, the language of welcome clear.
That fine drink sent by the Irish village witch

to encourage royal love, witch
crafted lovemaking, was drunk too soon: the death
of a provident king would not provide clear

unchallenged properties to brave sons. Too far
from old local slyness, the wine in the cup,
devised that a past-love body could save face,

put the right look on the wrong face.
Had she been a proper alternative witch
perhaps she would have cancelled the potent cup,
fixed a new potion unimagined thus far;
or, a fadelove brew might have bored her to death.
No antidote mentioned, just this much seems clear:

One heavy summer morning clear
skied, too stunning for the sad young lord to face
cheerless, the wind's delay left time for wine. Not far
from his desire the hostile girl found the witch
wedding gift. They drank it, swore their <u>welcome death</u>
loving in her tent, love from the fatal cup.

Later, supper clear, sipping her second cup,
warming her owlish face, banking a slow death,
tidily faraway dwelt the cozy witch.

LIVING WITH THESE TREES

"This one is my tree," said the little girl with whom I walked.

I never looked at my tree
when both of us were there.
My parents said
Grandpa gave you this evergreen
to grow with you.
Later I wanted it
in a new town another yard.
What a difference to have it
with me: I spoke carefully
imagined playing in the presence of my tree.
It heard me laugh watched me run.
I nested was myself a nest.

Here with you now I find that memory
older than you or your house
in the pine woods. I know you,
in Illinois, dreaming in the snow
my tree knows yours.
School buses flit stop
to stop orange and yellow appear
from the trees disappear in hills
turn country roads. For a moment I ride one.
Your father says it is ten below
in Chicago. It is news to hear
living with these trees.

IN TIME OF DEBT AND DANGER

I owe money am too fat I feel bad
I have no right to be so round
dollar sound A good debtor
should be thin with pale skin
stretching to cover a single chin
More than enough in need
is just disgusting too much
needing more is more too much
Oh oh oink I look rich
I am plump to pinch full of flesh
bones secret You would not guess
I owe What do I have to sell?
My radio body typewriter lamp a witchcraft book
hair if they still buy it a half bottle of scotch
camera watch my grandmother's ring
I would not get enough what would be left?
What would remain of my me my
precious undistractable debt?
Today I am poor bad fat and feeling mean
do not like you either We are all bad people
suspected of wanting more than we ought
already too old to come through slim and clear for free.

POEMS DO MY BODY IN

Now that some are finished I am half done
full of wants empty of whatever real
held me together. Not to be alone

is what I need, vacant as I feel I
think I am all ready now to make love
would settle for a meaty hearty meal

immediately. How entertain love?

I am not strong enough to fix the meal
I need I am so tired. All my love
rests in my mind tonight I do not feel.

I make a lonely circle drink alone
bore myself with magazines let the real
stuff of my body lie on the desk done.

IMAGINE PSYCHE COMMUTING

The hardest thing I have to do is leave.
I practice going every single night.
I always watch those willow branches weave
relaxed together as I keep delight
at your last smile or shake with my worst fright,
that we are done, that I must simply go,
go simply straight away from your porch light
small circle out past where I put my toe
dead wrong each time I pass as if I did not know.

To stumble as I go may not be wrong.
The yard stones force that too symbolic thought.
My short walk to the car is cold and long,
the place I drive to is not where I ought.
Just as we wave goodnight I am most caught
most selfish and my true love feels least true
until that certain knowledge never sought
occurs again: do what you have to do --
but every time I leave I want to stay with you.

AN UNLUCKY LOVER

Orion, the handsomest man alive,
hunted for pleasure then hunted for love,
hounded by Eros thought Aero to wive.

Her jealous father saw fit to deprive
her lover of his eyes. She lost sight of
Orion, the handsomest man alive,

who moved east, expected fortune to thrive.
Helius did cure his eyes with foxglove,
hounded by Eos, whom no one would wive:

She loved every body. Forced to connive
an escape to pursue a more chaste love,
Orion, the handsomest man alive,

chose Artemis his pure joy to revive.
She failed him, changed her friends into doves
hounded by him who any one would wive,

would, but could not a nasty sting survive.
Cool Artemis tossed his image above.
Orion, the handsomest man alive,
hounded by Eros got no one to wive.

A SIMPLE EASTER TRIP

Walking on the cold blocks of lakefront stone
behind Grant Park I know this busy place
is my city always but now not home

when I come. No loss of love nor any fall from grace
with loved ones brings my faroff feeling on
no lack of welcome nor any sense of waste

puts distance here. Today I am far from.
I am here for a week wanting to go south
to trees and hills, back to quietly drawn

remains of waves. A beach taste in my mouth
brings to mind a beach I napped on all at ease
my body like slow water the beach both

held and let go. There will be flowers on trees
down there next week. Spring will be double spring
sweet whole months rather than a few pale days

carefully spent. New names for new budding things
new home people things wait. Goodbye you hard place
I fly now down the warm draft on my new wings.

I AM SHOWN THE SIMPLEST CONSTELLATION

Cassiopeia's ordinary chair
was not an easy one for me to find.
That queen would queenly fidget to recline
had she been waiting to seat herself there.

It appears now as a collapsing line,
some flimsy splintering stage furniture
useful forever once more in the poor
nightly mythological pantomime.

Sitting down here I am comfortable, sure
every good thing will last a long time.
My occasionally literal mind
is satisfied to see what was obscure

telescoped. This evening is the best time;
I stretch and rock on the trickiest star,
praise Cassiopeia's top-heavy chair,
this fine eyepiece, each invisible line.

A CONDENSED BIOGRAPHY OF AN IMPORTANT LADY
WRITTEN AFTER I READ HER OWN LIFE STORY

Some incidents in the life
of Miss Harriet Monroe
will furnish an example
of how good editresses grow:
Young Harriet began small
by her own brave admission,
was "a silly little crybaby"
at the Centenniel Exhibition
where her father took her
without her mother's permission.
After Harriet survived
The Great Chicago Fire
Robert Louis Stevenson
inflamed her young desire.
Meanwhile, she ate her hearty breakfasts
she enjoyed her delightful lunches
she thoroughly enjoyed her
delightful, hearty dinners
but, yearning through it all
for a life that would be higher
Harriet aspired to retire desire,
or, as she herself wrote
without a trace of resentment,
"unused faculties become
gradually less insistent
deprived of life's supreme fulfillment."
The full grown Miss Monroe was straight and strong,
sensitive, soft, dark, and somehow also round.
She published Yeats, Eliot, Joyce Kilmer's "Trees,"

then had to listen hard to Ezra Pound.
I won't mention any others;
the list is long, all the rest
were just about best. Thus progressed
the blessed virgin editress.

IN HONOR OF THE NEW SKILLET

"The Beautiful Changes in Such Kind Ways" -- Richard Wilbur

A rim of bronzy darkening gold gleams
around the new cast iron frying pan.
Early in the evening I notice it
just before my fingers reach the lightswitch.
A few weeks ago the new skillet shone
like modest brass, a greenish brownish gold,
handle and pan, outside and in, the same.

As should be done we cooked eggs in it first.
A square of butter melted, bubbled, frothed,
then settled down to sizzle in a dance.
After breakfast I saw the pan was changed:
Outside where the electric heat began
the brass was bronzy browny green, inside
the hot butter had delicately stained.
Economy dinners with fried ground beef,
onions, more eggs, kidneys, gizzards and hearts
have turned the beautiful skillet dark brown.

One day you left the stove on by mistake.
You poured oil in the pan while it cooled down,
made the skillet a mirror, catching sun.
When you shone it in my face I felt shy
the way people feel sitting for pictures.

We season it and season this season;
the pan darkens, blackens, loses its shine.
Tonight the wind makes noise outside, and rain
polishes the dull sidewalks for an hour.

The Elusive Nature of Southern Fried Chicken

I wonder how southern is the chicken
fried in the brand new Griswold number eight.
I have a friend who will not hesitate
to opine on the matter when he's asked.
Regardless of where the pan was made
or where the chicken or the cook matured
or what the Fannie Farmer has to say
he will probably say if I intend
the chicken to be southern then it is.

A New Description of Hell

A widow in the Friar's Tale, beleagured
by the evil summoner, cursed him good.
Somehow her new frying pan got mixed up
in an exchange of souls. The summoner
tried to take it but the devil got it:
in hell, a frying pan is in the fire.