

THE NEW CHILD

a collection of poems

by

Sylvia Eidam

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by

Frank Chappell
Director

Sylvia Eidam

Francis A. Laine

Submitted as an Honors Paper
in the
Department of English

J. B. Bryant

Robert W. K...

The University of North Carolina
at Greensboro
1965

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Sylvia Eidam

With bottle and bread, and with fingers which never had met,
Some small graveyard we chose that morning for rest,
Unholy pilgrims, we drank up all of time
Beneath these garden trees
With words half hidden, like sometime green, vague fish
In a mossy pond.

Then you were Christ, hungry with the taste
Of sweat-vinegar in your mouth instead of beer;
In after years hours of wine and old
Had a staving of our hands and li
For I danced a drunken dance upon the graves
To resurrect the dead.

Approved by

Frank Chappell

Director

And after they had some in-suff
And you, being first to dare, were g
With my wine-colored roses by your ear,
I sang the fish to sleep
And have watched for a year or more our empty bottle
bobbing on the pond.

Francis A. Laine

J. W. Benjant h

Robert Watson

Yet will you come again to touch
lighted by an earlier sun
than I have ever seen rise,
We shall fill that bottle again from our pond
and walk the grasses in wine-dancing
with those laughing, lovely ghosts.

LILAC SCENE

Then she walked between the drooping
lilac boughs, straining pulp of skirt
PICNIC curling thumbs and fingers, gloved;
tipping chin at gauze of slatterned light
which widened pupils like drops of petrol

With bottle and bread, and with fingers which never had met,
Some small graveyard we chose that morning for rest.
Unshod pilgrims, we drank up all of time
Beneath those garden trees
With words half hidden, like sometime green, vague fish
In a mossy pond.

Then you were Christ, hungry with the taste
Of sweet vinegar in your mouth instead of beer;
And after warm hours of wine and old rye
And a sharing of our hands and lips
You danced a drunken dance upon the graves
To resurrect the dead.

And after they had some in muffled steps,
And you, being first to dare, were gone
With my wine-colored rose by your ear, dear!
I sang the fish to sleep upon her wrists,
And have watched for a year or more our empty bottle
Bobbing on the pond.

Yet when you come again to touch my lips with fingers
Lighted by an earlier sun
Than I have ever seen rise,
We shall fill that bottle again from our pond
And bend the grasses in winedancing
With those laughing, lovely ghosts.

the flowers, strewing them along the grass;
the lilacs crushed, he rubbing his nose.
The lilac smell was strong, aphro-
disiac; the spiders chewing at the air,
shredding leaf to leaf; the black ones
bending, etching on the light, continually
spinning.

LILAC SCENE

Then she walked between the drooping
lilac boughs, straining pulp of skirt
through curling thumbs and fingers, gloved;
tippling chin at gauze of slatterned light,
which widened pupils like drops of petrol
staining ivory boats--the eyes: those eyes
reflecting spiders' lattice work
among the leaves, treillissé with catching
silver wire; the little nets flecked
subtly with beetle legs, abandoned
by their sculptors who drowns inside
the shade, on lilac scent.

There she met her lover, fifth
in three years space: gangling, splotched
with beard, and spoke: "I do not think
that it can come to marriage.
I yet enjoy the hill, for rolling down,
to gather lilacs here at bottom,
while you pick out embarrassments
and cause for weddings."

"But dear, but dear!"
he cried, bumbling hands upon her wrists,
picking at her sleeves.
"I cannot stay,"
said she, dwindling. "I do not love thee
anymore," and turned away into the leaves,
diminishing.

Lilacs plumbed his eyes, those eyes
like pools of brackish water, the lashes
wet like feeding streams; bridged over
by the images of webs on which the spiders
had run out, jerking as he picked
the flowers, strewing them along the grass:
the lilacs crushed, he rubbing his nose.
The lilac smell was strong, aphro-
disiac; the spiders chewing at the air,
threading leaf to leaf; the black ones
bending, etching on the light, continuously
spinning.

CROW HILL

I.

AGAIN, THE FLOODS wrapped in raincoat, such as this,
With cobweb drops strung on empty trees,
Wet and shining, their branches punching
At the wind and drip. "Time the destroyer is time the preserver,
I remember how you Like the river with its cargo of dead
Of crows in a place Negroes, cows and chicken coops,
You boarded alone in The bitten apple and the bite in the apple."
Wass windowpanes were steamed
With close breathing, your eyes T. S. Eliot, in "The Dry
On the first evening crow. Salvages", from Four Quartets
Every day you saw them go with the waning
And return to roost on the hill.

It is difficult to hear again the rain
Which whacked about the shingles and tickled
The chimney shaft last month, when Death I
Seem still to hear beyond our high hills,
Railing on the mountain backs and snoring out
The dreary sleep of several centuries of leaves
Which purl against the slough and bring
A childish face to dirt. I hear Him prancing
Still, binding the rivercourse to His desire and bobbing
Cattle in His new lake like apples in a full tin tub
On All Hallows' Eve. lived on the hill, those naughty birds,
The hills half-cracked like mouths of idiot children,

Yet when that festive Man of Bones came up
For breath another year to nod a dripping head
At Fa, then put His bite upon that ancient swimmer,
Our wake and mourning were quite brief.
But now, it is I who am left uncured, those waters
Having bleakly pressed against my only fruit,
Imprinted it like clapboards, peeled and shrunk.
Whose tooth, then, shall ever drown the grief
For my child under leaves, who never played
At apple games, who lived unsailored, and who
Sank without a boat? ate, the only perennial tenants
Do that still. Those wanderings
Would be ended by a creek which smelled wrongly
Of trapped water where you would weep,
I thought, because your back was bare of wings.
Yes, with summer past, and you away,
I heard the crows conversing still.
And I, too, cried, knowing you had not envied
Their wings, but had wept simply because
They are beautiful, being alive,
And because they do not want to leave Crow Hill.

CROW HILL

I.

On mummy evenings wrapped in rainfrost, such as this,
With cobweb drops strung on empty trees,
Wet and shining, their branches punching
At the wind and dripping quietly black,
I remember how you wrote once, long ago,
Of crows in a place we called 'Crow Hill'.
You boarded alone in a small room there
Whose windowpanes were steamed
With close breathing, your eyes
On the first evening crow.
Every day you saw them go with the morning
And return to roost on the hill,
Cawing softly in the winter rain
Which settled on folded leaves; sable crows,
Wet and shining, stretching their wings
Across the face of the wind. And you
Declined your head hearing them cry,
And spoke of them as if they were beautiful.

The bud beneath my ribs, and tried to thump
It down in scorn at such a lack of grief,

II.

That last summer you lived on the hill, those haughty birds,
With bills half-cracked like mouths of idiot children,
Seemed to mock me with their croaks
While you argued that they sang. You said,
That in the sunlight they were white, pale crows
As soft as pear blooms, chanting above
Our figures on the grass; and I could not understand
How you could welcome crows with praise
Instead of sticks and shredded clothes.
At eveningfall, you took long walks,
Watching the crows above you
Shake the leaves with their black beaks,
Increasing their nests, the only perennial tenants
On that hill. Those wanderings
Would be ended by a creek which smelled wrongly
Of trapped water where you would weep,
I thought, because your back was bare of wings.
Yet, with summer past, and you away,
I heard the crows conversing still,
And I, too, cried, knowing you had not envied
Them their wings, but had wept simply because
Crows are beautiful, being alive,
And because they do not want to leave Crow Hill.

A NEW WIDOW

A woman carriaged in from town to tell me
He was dead. She drew herself upon a stool
Beside the fire, like an elf atop
A mushroom, and spoke of how it went: Had fallen
From a roof, she said; was fighting, had been
Drunk. And then she took a basket stuffed
With chicken legs and soup from off her arm
And left. Across the plot which he had stomped
To creases before he cursed away to fetch the seed,
I walked, and did not argue back with Death
Who laughed in fieldmice twitters and picked
His teeth with last year's silver cornstalks.
I could not care. Then anger shucked
The bud beneath my ribs, and tried to thump
It down in scorn at such a lack of grief,
While stubbornly the infant clutched his cord
And sternly placed his mourning hands
About his feet, until I feared of being
Brought to bed with an unbearable child.
We'll have to take our sun
elsewhere. Then shall we ride our horses?
No, we've outgrown such bovine things.
But at least, he won't be all a waste;
we'll keep his bones to stoke
our fire next fall, to keep us warm
while aging, as he kept
us cool when young.

SISTER TO BROTHER: AN ADMONITION TO REMEMBER HIS CHILDHOOD

CLEARING OFF

Tell me brother, how old are we?
A kettle crouches on the unfired coals; your hands
They're unsoldering the house, dear, the table top
plank by plank, noisily. Pigeons outside which knots
are running on the roof, chasing are growing older
down the slant where we took Remember how we said
our sun without our clothes. that we are nearing
Over there, see, the saws are nibbling at least
at those four dark trees, who to sing itself to sleep
altogether are like a horse, green-spotted, notice,
which runs in imperceptible gallop, and buckled
its coat frothy, its tail flaired out go the flames?
and stuck with burrs, the moon which crisps,
a towering horse with spindly legs
whose hooves are always lost wind which strives
in grass, are very large, and move his vagueries.
more slowly than its head. tongue to wooden words.
Excuse such childish speaking but tomorrow is your
This morning in our new house here reminded
we take orange juice in the bed.
and watch the quick unbuilding.
We'll have to take our sun
elsewhere. Then shall we ride our horse?
No, we've outgrown such bovine things.
But at least, he won't be all a waste;
we'll keep his bones to stoke
our fire next fall, to keep us warm
while aging, as he kept
us cool when young.

SISTER TO BROTHER: AN ADMONITION TO REMEMBER HIS CHILDHOOD

Tell me brother, how old are we?
A kettle crouches on the unfired coals; your hands
Confuse themselves with whittling on the table top
And I rest, thinking of the wind outside which knots
Itself about the chilly moon. We are growing older
Than we ever wished to be. Remember how we said
We'd die at twenty, and now that we are nearing
Twenty-three, think that we shall live at least
To thirty? The kettle starts to sing itself to sleep
Since you have stirred the fire. I did not notice,
Folded as I was between your fingers, and buckled
Up in silence by the wind. Now, how go the flames?
They will not touch the moon which crisps,
A small red ash, against the pane,
And cannot warm the burning wind which strives
To heap before us time with all its vagueries.
Your frowning nails my tongue to wooden words.
Excuse such childish speaking but tomorrow is your
Marriage day, and I am everywhere reminded
That all we ever have is memory.

with a swilling of old wines.

A TIME OF GRAPES THE SNOW

These grapes hang low and desire your beard
To be eaten here in the arbor freezing
Within the dark of their vines, that no tree
And, love, we are hungry for harvest. can you
Greedy moths consume the light by mouthfuls
And July has set into dusty October:
Yet for all that roaring time the melting days
Fitted like crowded fishers upon the tide,
We found no place like this, of moss with a hound,
Where lying close, we peep our gun in fist.
Through tangled life and pick no asses
The fat ripe grapes and lip them slowly. peels
Come winter, we shall boil abrasure.
The whitest hours for distillery new old
Of such sweet liquors gathered here spinning top,
And, cask-like, hold them to brimming age
Until we bear spring in
With a swilling of old wines.

TO AN OLD MAN IN THE SNOW

There you are, catching snow in your beard
Again, stumbling and nigh onto freezing
Just to satisfy your curiosity that no tree
Has picked its way across the ice since you
Have been inside. Now you stoop to taste
A flake, dry and brittle as your bones.
Hunter, what will you do with the melting days
Which follow after this? How you jump
Along those stiffened banks of moss with a hound,
His left eye blind, with your gun in fist.
Surely you forget your wife who ages
By the fire with toes so warmly socked,
Not locked within this deep embrasure.
Yet I am sure, if life itself grew old
And deemed to finger stiffly on its spinning top,
Your hands which now chill all that moves
Would keep it nimbly turning.

POEM FOR A CHILD, RECENTLY ADOPTED

SOMEONE WALKING

Someone walks in the rain which comes and goes
From the squatting sky like an old woman
Urinating.

Someone walks along the streets stuck
With the tatters of hay like the new legs
Of quaking calves.

Someone walks close to me; like lean
Rare steak is the smell of his coat
Against my nose.

Someone sings out of tune in the evening; peels
The taste of his music like green oranges
Against my mouth.

Someone blinks across many faces,
Mine only one, with wet eyes like shirts
Hung out to dry.

Someone passes me open-collared,
His neck a marbled pillar, as if
From Solomon's temple.

Someone walks away in the rain which lifts
Its fuzzy feet upon my nose
Like a centipede dancing.

TO HER ABSENT LOVER

POEM FOR A CHILD, RECENTLY ADOPTED

Beneath my window the pebbles
lie quiet, unstirred by quickening feet;
At sunset, my new child upon a rock
Lapped at by greening sea
Sits leaning legs and paddling salty feet,
Composing eyes against the inked-in limit,
Against the figured ships
Which trot their sails to port.
In wrack spat passively upon the shore
By lungs choked full of tide,
I watched this morning those fishers go;
Rough plowmen lusting after four hard winds
And reaping slippery crops on full-bellied boats.
I, too, have gleaned that which I did not sow,
Upon that Boaz field
Where only crabs seed vacant sand
And corals root the bantam fish to net.
The child grows frightened by the hungry tongue
Drinking up the sun and licking wet his rock,
And comes to take my hand.
His fear must I expend
And pace this evening off to dawn.
Tomorrow I will move more slowly,
Brightly turning back the quilt of hours
And the sheets of trees
Until his bed is bared again for love.

TO HER ABSENT LOVER

Beneath my window the pebbles
lie quiet, unstirred by quickening feet;
there is no rustle of the branch
beside my window, worn smoothly
from your climbing; the shutter
unlatched since last you came.

If you care, how can you keep me waiting?
for I am a woman, no part time lover.
Here I sit, forsaken for a tavern,
brightly lit, and, oh, boisterous.
There you sit, with ale in one hand,
cards in the other, exchanging quips
with dull male friends, and, who knows,
female. Well, remain there then a country
but I'll to bed; I'll wait no longer.
I am a woman and no part time lover.

But yet, why should you be so tardy?
Could it be your mount has tripped,
that you are dead and robbed beside the road?
that you'll no more pass the nights
beside me, breathing on my neck,
touching tongue to cheek and hair?
Oh, now the clatter of a rock upon the sill!
I am a woman, and no part time lover.

LINES FROM EGYPTIAN FRESCOES

This sepulchre which we approach in caravan
Has not alone been charted round a fear
Of death. Our Europe, too, has designated valleys
For its catacombs, with some late centuries' hope
ABANDONMENT

Breached triangles, with its inlaid Journeys
Of the Dead. But we have misconstrued
In this hurried station, three small girls
Hide beneath a coat and fight Marestis: Each
For a banana; the eldest shares it finally
With the other two, then pulls their single wrap.
Around her small, bruised knees.

Where is their mother? Their little mouths
Are ringed with grime, the dresses
All too short and printed out of season.
Who cares for these three sisters?
The youngest laughs with quivering chin;
Her sticky hands play at a clapping game.
Oh, had I a home, or time; had I a country
Spirit instead of this ascetic city style--
But then, what would I ever do with children?
It is very cold and the sparrows
Pecking at the scrambled paper on the floor
Ruffle up their feathers.

The call goes out; my train is on its track.
The children talk upon their wooden bench crusted
And count aloud who comes, and who will go.

The lines along this pier: Observe
The flecking paint upon this eye, this unique
Rose. And there, Anubis, dog-headed-burial
Of the dead, hauls down his sails
In dark beneficence against the city docks,
To gracing ladies and well-oiled pharaoh
Who wings a fan and grasps the sign of life,
A man in miniature.

Look on that river wrapped in nightly
Winding sheet where the Light god's barge
Nods to and fro and the chief is hooded
With the scarab's face, the rudder falling
In the helmsman's hand. Those waves
Will crest tomorrow and hold our Sun
And Setibue on silent points, as now they rest
Along this sandstone wall; at last will come
The ice-man to Heliopolis, to freeze
The variable ashes of heron phoenix who
Perches feathered here in thermal blue.

LINES FROM EGYPTIAN FRESCOES

This sepulchre which we approach in caravan
Has not alone been charted round a fear
Of death. Our Europe, too, has designated valleys
For its catacombs, with some late centuries' hope
Of resurrection, such as this of Egypt's
Parched triangles, with its inlaid Journies
Of the Dead. But we have misconstrued
These murals since gaudy Alexander rode this way
And Ptolemy cast for ducks on Mareotis: Each
Kingdom's history rolls still to synthesis
In graves and Europe's river is the same as Nile.

Let us dismount upon this level span
And clear away the sand which climbs
Like oaken leaves against the bolt. Before
Us, thieves and excavators have been here
Who opened up this tomb and carried off
Its jars and bowls and pickled occupants.
Think how this sand has held the prints
Of camel herds and seven fattened kine,
Instead of our poor-ribbed mules; imagine
Those who hewed this rock, the arms which shoved
It to, believing it moored forever.

Their blocking stone now yaws to left,
And our torches show these chambers to be crusted
With an art; some crafted hand has worked
The lines along this piece: Observe
The flecking paint upon this eye, this unique
Nose. And there, Anubis, dog-headed burier
Of the dead, hauls down his sails
In dark beneficence against the city docks,
On prancing ladies and well-oiled pharaoh
Who swings a fan and grasps the sign of life,
A man in minature.

Look on that river wrapped in nightly
Winding sheet where the Light god's barge
Rocks to and fro and the chief is hooded
With the scarab's face, the rudder failing
In the helmsman's hand. Those waves
Will crest tomorrow and hold our Sun
And Retinue on silent points, as now they rest
Along this sandstone wall; at last will come
The iceman to Heliopolis, to freeze
The variable ashes of heron phoenix who
Perches feathered here in thermal blue.

TRISTAN UND ISOLDE (excerpt)

"Now, queen of my heart Isolde,
Now must we part from each other,
And oh, when will there ever be

THE SHELL COLLECTOR: A CHILD TO HIS MOTHER

Hours for us two?

Let keep firmly in your mind,

It is lonely here at evening
when the wind walks in from the sea;
and I walk with it in seagrasses
and scatter the mingling birds
to hunt for shells, few, cracked, and bleached,
to bring to you, in ragged pockets.

It is then I think: You are a ship
riding waves--an old grandmother
rocking those waves, who grins
for tomorrow's children, drops
shells for them to find.

While night is pressing a salt-rinsed mouth
upon sand and white crabs come out
to sit and gaze in the hollows of my tracks,
their stalked eyes tickling my feet,
I hear the fish beginning to speak,
their words rolling like logs
washed ashore: they talk about me,
stealing shells on their beach,
while you sail above,
like an orange shell-boat, puffed
astray by an old grandmother
whose gifts were not meant for us.

Then look at it and think thereof,
How woe has come now to my heart.
My life goes on with yours from hence.
So come here then and kiss me!
Isolde and Tristan, you and I,
We two are always
One body in our love and sorrow.
Let this kiss the signet be
That I am yours and you are mine
In constant fealty until death,
Inseparable Tristan and Isolde."

--from the German, by Gottfried
von Straßburg

TRISTAN UND ISOLDE (excerpt)

"Now, queen of my heart Isolde,
Now must we part from each other,
And oh, when will there ever be
Here on earth again such sweet
Hours for us two?
Yet keep firmly in your mind,
How, faithful in love, we
Belonged to each other, til this day:
See that you will loyal stay.
Leave me not out of your heart;
For out of mine, until it break,
There will you come, not now nor never;
Forget me in no distress!
Sweet, splendid Isolde,
Farewell, and kiss me thus once more!"

Back she stepped in anxious torment
And looked away toward him with sighs:
"Sir, our heart and mind, all
Oh, these are yet too long a time
And with too full desire
Devoted each to other,
For ever in this life henceforth,
To learn what Lethe is,
Here, take away this little ring,
And leave to me that which a token is
Of faithfulness and love,
And if your thoughts it might as well
Ever distant in a foreign land
Be turned to someone else,
Then look at it and think thereat;
How woe has come now to my heart.
My life moves on with yours from hence.
So come here then and kiss me!
Isolde and Tristan, you and I,
We two are always
One body in our love and sorrow.
Let this kiss the signet be
That I am yours and you are mine
In constant fealty until death,
Inseparable Tristan and Isolde."

--from the German, by Gottfried
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FOR TIFFY TO CHILD WHO HAS COME OF AGE

Dog will have his days,
and you've had yours for twelve
years long. We shared our house
with you, crowded though it was,
bedded you in castoff cashmere
blankets, of which you can't complain.
Why, you ate so well the doctor
diagnosed a not uncommon cardiac
disease. Did we complain? We merely
paid the bills and kept you off
the streets three days. Remember
how you wheezed all night
with asthma? Did we complain?
You never even spoke with us,
incommunicate; touch was all
with you, and, I think,
enough for us. But now
you're dead. Well, what of it?
Dogs don't last forever. Really,
your eyes were foggy from old age,
and if you'd lasted any longer,
you'd have worn a hearing aid.
So what of that? Just another
dog is dead, though it might as well
be one of us for all the grief
it brought. At least you died
at home, not in some stranger's yard;
at least you'll have a monument,
as, I suppose, all things loved
should have. Still you're
not satisfied, stirring in the box
we put you in. I know; I hear you.
I know, like me, you'd spare
the moment's falling, and even when
past giving breath, you'd mourn
for you own ordinary death.

A MOTHER TO CHILD WHO HAS COME OF AGE

DEATH OF A RICH MAN

Come and sit beside me,
Child that is mine halfway,
And I will tell you of another child
Who wanted to run away.
Tomorrow seemed a month of maying
On the day I left, summer sidewalks
Leading me like a calf
Through the balley of the light
Of life, to which place I've come now
That's colder, almost,
Than the good-bye's I didn't speak.
Yet, go, as you must, being silent
About it, until on some green evening
You think of my land whose sky
Will then be cast by black pearl clouds;
Whose beaches will be salted, drawn
Like ancient men; whose trees
Will be few and empty, turned
Toward the hills. Then,
If you should wish to walk there with me,
I'll gather my bones,
Picked clean as they are by the gulls
On the shore, and will come out
To meet you in an old narrow boat.
When we're together, after teeth
Have touched teeth, we'll run
Hands flying, feet lifting the sand,
And the beach will be quiet of gulls.

DEATH OF A RICH MAN

After all, am I only a transient wolf blinking
At an orange eclipsed moon, now burning back
To shadow? barking out rough words as vain
As the rattling of fine coins
Down dry wells? licking glass cup
At wax masks and pale paws, these cool as beach sand
Before ungrieving dawns, It is . . .
As blue silver? for resuscitation.
Dionysus blows his wine cool, a soup
Come near, my cubs, this ebbing rim of time.
My children, you will keep I ever thought
The family sorrow this brief evening fired.
In your embroidered ease, you who were orphaned
Seasons before this niggling hour. Now, stand close
And hear your blessings given, bringing
Of much silver. its dirty face to face
the stars. And I am among these who touch
This death well-wrought reason cannot
Prevent. Do I regret? Shall I at last be
Unreflective, and hope that such an unconsummated
Parentage may have no piteous end?
You will not mourn for very long. My only issue--
An untouched propagation of this dying,
This diamond-cut dispassion,
So like quicksilver.

IN APRIL

Jouousness lies in a red glass cup
below flowers drenched in green rain:
the cup contains wet ashes. It is. . .
it is the time for resuscitation.
Dionysus blows his wine cool, a soup
for the hungry. I hunger. The trees
are short-skirted and all I ever thought
was lovely: outgrown and tersely desired.
Protracted silence in night green-riven,
birds sleeping in the skirts, green flamed;
brown legs, bare, up driven, bringing
the new child with dirty face to face
the stars. And I am among these who touch
and find a renaissance.