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Mr. Fred Chappell. pp. 38

The poems of this thesis, although not in chronological order, make evident two distinct periods of development.

The earlier poems are characterized by the short line and a freedom from strict regularity of stanza length, rhyme scheme and metric pattern.

A larger group of poems represent the period during which the poet attempts to formalize her verse by imposing various disciplines on her writing style and, at the same time, on the idea of the poem.

The poetry in both periods has as its primary objective the expression of ideas and observations with clarity. There are several poems which comment on the human condition and others which are descriptive.

This thesis has no unifying theme. The title was derived from the poem which represents, to the poet, a major effort and accomplishment made during the two years of writing represented.

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

Greensboro
April, 1967

Approved by

Fred Chappell
Director

IN A GREEN TREE

by

Janet E. Hamer

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APPROVAL SHEET

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"For every day they die
Among us, those who were doing us some good"

IN MEMORY OF RANDALL JARRELL
d. 1965

I

His face distinguished clearly
Rare expressions of poetry
And words ran out as he talked
Through the twisted mouth.

He danced Hopkins around us
Making high note sounds
And left in us by his teaching
Is a place for music.

II

People heard the sound of his death
A hard quick loud sound
In a still night between seasons

There were two fair days after his death

The third day got cold.

I saw him walk out across a field

And into tall grasses.

As you who were to this strange, desolate highland
With the cold white sun of Scotland in their eyes,
Their love is spread along the hillside deep
Against a southern slope. The fields are rich
And lush with wheat that leads into the valley.

The hills were soft beneath their feet, as soft
As their women's Highland blood. They
Between the mountains, the captured waves
The ring through the mountain valley.
The stones of elders lean on the high land
Where men were gold with white sun in their eyes.

This field that dips into the valley
Is filled with this, grey stones and slow deep
Bent to the wind. Above the power
Crawled another bank in rigid stone. The eyes
Of marble made shed their tears, a slow

SWANNANOVA VALLEY: SESTINA

Behind the clapboard church, I read the names
Of men who came to this strange tempered highland
With the cold white sun of Scotland in their eyes.
Their town is spread along the hillside deep
Against a southern slope. The fields are rich
And flash with warmth that bends into the valley.

The hills were soft beneath their feet, as rich
As their women's Caledonian blood. Deep
Between the mountains, ten repeated names
Now ring through the Swannanoa Valley.
The stones of elders lean to the high land
Where men came cold with white sun in their eyes.

This field that dips into the valley
Is filled with thin, gray stones and birch deep-
Rooted to the wind. Above the names
Graved heather bends in rigid stone. The eyes
Of marble angels shed rust tears, a rich

And weathered sign of years in these highlands.

I walk among the stones that bear full names
And legends, pass cairns that chronicle the valley
To a stone beneath two laurel shrubs graved deep.
"Here lies fair Jean MacKenzie claimed when rich
With son," her callant gift to these highlands.
Ah, child, your blood runs pure, Scotland's in your eyes.

Swannanoa is hushed in thick clouds deep
Below the late sun on the east high lands.
Day's keen angle has cleared this narrow valley.
Beneath a heavy pall of mountain fog full-rich
With mist, the songs, faces and Scottish names
Fade, that droned and danced before my eyes.

Silver birch leaves scuddle through the valley
And catch on stones. A cold wind burns my eyes
As I place a bow of purple heather rich

Of bells beside her grave. Here among the names
One claimed from the thick red soul deep
Inside my body holds me to these highlands.

STRAWBERRY PICKING

We looked out on the rows of people
Bent along the trenches of dried mud.
"Strawberries - pick'em - twenty cents"
We walked along a narrow row on the blood
Of trampled over-ripe rejected fruit until

After an hour, the box one corner full,
Our hands looked as if they bled
The juice of berries. The noon sun
Bore down on our backs. The bed
Of strawberries ripe for our experience

Lay under the leaves heavy with mud.
The red flesh unbleached by the sun
Streaked the wood quart box like veins.

WINTER'S NOT GONE YET

From a green porch chair
His head nodding time
As accurately as a farmer's almanac,
Grandfather waits for the planting signs.

The forsythia bells
That swing in March winds
And frost at the end of an Austin summer
Are fool's omens.

Winter will steal, my son,
From the warmth of Spring.
First grass and thin green leaves
Are not your signs for planting.

The faint red buds
Against gray trees,
And a crocus breaking ground
These are your signs of the season.

The Winter's gone, my son,
 When the creek rocks cast
 Green on the water
 And the even time has past.
 From a green porch chair
 His head nodding time
 As accurately as a farmer's almanac,
 Grandfather waits for the planting signs.

THE FAMILIES

The family circle is about to copulate.
They confer upon the imposition
Of the names into history
And oblivion. And it is timely
That they will bear them
A new generation before
The great aunt and the great mother are dead.

While the elders propose a name for the son
And remark on the fine features
Of this sensible arrangement,
My father's brother speaks of education.
From the far corner he selects a role
For the child who will never dream.
The young mother smiles
The inbred smile of slow-witted
But well-mannered concentration
On the pride of bearing infants.

MY YOUNG YEARS ARE SHOT
Framed, sustained for me
In a random chronology
On the entrance hall
Wall to the right of those
That pass through my stages,
Round oval ages the same shape.

Only my waist changed
Over the years her gray streak
Weakened white. Those laced years
Of puffed sleeves and pressed pleats
Ingenious feats of anxiety
Brought on by a fat child.

They tell me about my years
Of their lives as I conjure
A childhood. Choosing to hear
How they spent and I felt

With braces on my teeth THE CH WINTER, ENGLAND

My young years are unclear:

How I looked, the white cat

I choked with love at three.

All this for my poor memory.

Certain, probable, or conjectured
 Not with an answer, unpermitted
 Through the dark arch,
 which is all left of the time ago,
 into the dark period - the only
 All to show - the ground - the ground
 The ground - the ground - the ground
 Taped as - first, or here, or possibly
 The papers of people and identified
 as notes - some notes by Edward, the Elder,
 the second then
 for the purpose of doing,
 The - not original - the original
 Thus the distance from,
 for Professor 2214's
 the note - the note

AN ARCHAEOLOGY LECTURE ON WINCHESTER, ENGLAND

I

Venta Belgarum, the Roman Winchester,
Is a map of Roman streets -
Certain, probable, or conjectural -
And walls or ditches, cross-sectioned
Through the dark streak,
Which is all left of the Iron Age,
Into the Roman period
And to now.

Tagged as flint, or bone, or pottery
The layers of people are identified
As broken coins left by Edward, The Elder,
Who hoarded them
For the purpose of dating,
For our surgical incisions
Into the cloister green,
For Professor Biddle
Who asks our support

To dig into the tummy
And find parasites in the cess pool,
5,000 per cubic inch
Delivered by medieval men.

II

No one smokes at archaeology lectures
And no one really moves.
Except the Professor
Who points to a map in feet and metres
Until he has had enough of archaeology
And is full of the blood of Romans
Left for us in hard pieces of culture items
Representative of Venta Belgarum
Now, cross-sectioned Winchester, England.

The lecture is ended by a benediction
Pronounced by a mad or drunk woman
Who, proud of her Alabama heritage,

Gives thanks against the space age
 As the audience embarrasses itself about her
 And Professor Biddle smiles.

SOUTHERN SNOW

We watch the birds that come before a snow
Into the yard for food. The air is rude
With hysterical sounds. The bread we throw
Yellows as they calm and sounds become subdued
By wind that ruffs against their small bodies
Along the branches set like nodes. The cold
Is thin and clips our throats. Snow catches trees
And builds up on one side. The old ones fold
Their wings more tightly, huddled down to last
To pass the winter of another year.
This morning we walked out and found a cast
Of bones, a plaster mould in snow austere
And cold, a mould the shape of a sparrow,
A light imprint of death on Southern snow.

LITTLE DISTINCTION

Before as it was in the beginning
Now as it seems to end
And after for ever and ever
They will walk into the rooms
Assume the pose on white canvas sheets
And tell one another, "Most of all."
All are rare to the night's pleasure.

He will walk from the room
Down the vaguely lighted streets
And it will be as other mornings.
Avoiding cracks by half steps,
The sidewalks will follow him
Into the morning's completeness.
The night has provided little distinction.

She has slept away the harshness of morning
And has not looked upon the dresser
For what she knows is crumpled lying there.

There, more or less, remains the night.
The nights have provided her well
Less now, but well. Give her this day
Loaves to spread indifferently with honey.

They will come together again into the room,
To find unmoved the bed in a different place.
She will find another chair the same chair
And refold and replace her coat.
He will walk into yesterday's morning tomorrow
Unconcerned that he had left her more,
Child of God praying his soul to keep.

AT THE EDGE OF THE SEA

I am at the edge of the sea.

At the edge of the sea I sing

The songs that sailors swear

Are the winds shifting.

The ocean laps under me

Under my bed

At the edge of the sea.

I am not so much alone here

As when you were with me.

I am not so much afraid here

As when you held me.

I am no longer so much in love with you.

Why should you not believe me?

Because I feel as strange

As the objects I find

On the sand in the morning.

My eyes are as odd
As the eyes on an anemone and
My body is the same strange shape.

The sea stings my sore
With its rough tongue
But doesn't heal me.
I have sand in all the cracks
Of my body.

THE CELEBRATION

I never remember what I sing
or how I celebrate anything
that's happy.
Except that someone
does a dance with me
on his pointed head
one side red, one side green.
Turning red and green,
I get two-sided drunk.
My head splits into
hearing an idiot singing.
In my ears applause is ringing
from the harlequins on the wall.

THE PICTURE

Against the frozen sun of February
Trees glisten with a crystal coat of ice
And bend like thin stems of willows.
Night has resolved with an armistice

Of Winter's forces and morning
Supports the flight of a white pigeon.
On the ground ice lies like shattered glass
And broken tree limbs flash in the sun

Unweathered wood sores. On the street
A wire spits green sparks that arc
Across the concrete to a black cord
Swinging from the next post. The park

Is a rare collection of glass
Trees and shrubs with dark spines.
The shutter clicks instantly closed
As my camera's eye goes blind

In the glare and the after-image
 Of an ice forest is defined.

Figures peered in the mist
 Begin to threaten me,
 While I stare of waiting
 The silhouette kills the tree.

Washing children off the grass,
 People stare at me as they pass
 At the old woman.

Beating the roof with a cane,
 Women! they call me insane,
 They call the old woman.

Things beat against the glass,
 Daily I weep overpass
 And pigeon feathers struck to the shingles
 To the jungle the children sing

Lighter colors didn't work

I AM AN OLD WOMAN, I AM AN OLD WOMAN

Pigeons posted in the oak
Begin to threaten me.
While I tire of waiting
The columbine kills the tree.

Witching children off the grass,
People stare at me as they pass
At the old woman.

Beating the roof with a cane,
Insane! they call me insane.
They call the old woman.

Wings beat against the wire.
Daily I sweep droppings
And pigeon feathers stuck to the shingles
To the jingle the children sing:

Pigeon poison didn't work

She wired the eaves instead.

At night we children lurk

Cooing the mad girl to bed.

The floor is
That I hadn't noticed and the smell
Of the prison is heavy and hanging

It had been a long time but
I was over your face.

I was getting ready to come alive.

I will sweep the dirt away
And open the curtains for you.

I will see you fall both real
In front of the mirror... both sides.
And scream laughter through the walls
To neighbors who thought I died.

GETTING READY

The floor is showing dirt
That I hadn't noticed and the smell
Of one person is heavy and hanging.

It has been a long time but
I can see your face.

I am getting ready to come alive.

I will sweep the dirt away
And open the curtains for sun.

I will see your full body real
In front of the mirror. Both sides.
And scream laughter through the walls
To neighbors who thought I died.

A QUAKER PROTEST

Everything else
Being uniformed,
The guard noticed him.
A clean-cut man
Of medium build
With dark hair
Waiting restlessly
For the Department
To jam cards
Into clocks
To total
Time clock defense.

They would witness
His immolation
Against their war gun,
For his Quaker gun,
Pop hollow
Dummy gun pointed blank

Nonviolent

In specific protest

Of the dead ratio,

Civilians to warriors

In war.

The rectangular cards

(Do not bend, fold, spindle or mutilate)

With names (last, middle, first)

Marched into the street

Toward the concrete altar

At the river entrance.

These were the ordained witnesses.

These were the sane

Defenders of the Republic

For which he burned.

BRIGHT THREE ROOMS

I lived underground for two years
In the dark where dust didn't show
Because the sun didn't glow on it.
I had forgotten the feeling of light.
Now I sit hour after hour in the trees
On my hill watching the movement of leaves,
The movement of cars one way home
Down under my bright three rooms.

On my hill everything passes under me.
My view stretches out like country
Until it meets the far hill houses.
When I get drunk from speed, and the sun
Makes my eyes ache
I lunge forward
And grab the ropes for darkness.

FORTY-THREE PAINTINGS

I

The artist exhibited himself
On food splattered walls
And along MacDougal Street by the park
And in one gallery without a sign
That only the artists themselves knew about
For ten years.

In the restaurant,
Along the block of MacDougal,
And in the gallery
Were forty-three paintings.
The ones in the restaurant smelled like food.
The ones along the street were bright.
And the ones in the gallery were good.

II

The artist is no longer in these places.
He was praised early,

And he rests now
Under a worn, green-bronze crown
Which was well-made for his young head
Which has dipped now into folds of success.

You cannot buy him anymore. Museums do.
He doesn't have forty-three paintings to sell
Because he can't paint that fast
But he's getting faster.

THE STORM

The ivy is straining against
Free-hanging wire to the roof.
The wind chimes are beating
Free-hanging wood-hollow sounds.

In the late day clouds are moving fast.
Cars are speeding home-free.
There are no birds or children out.
No clothes on the line.

Rain cannot come unnoticed like the sun.

THE PRICE OF A YOUNG POET

For the new reality

There are new directions.

The young kneel

As words are emptied

Out of lines

By the high poets.

Extracted for the sake of

The Yale Series of Younger Poets

Designed to provide first volumes

Under forty and unpublished.

Rules of the contest will be sent

Upon request.

THE RUDE GUEST

A light rain slants in the soft breeze
Tapping shell chimes and the leaves
Easing our patience. We watch leaf machines
In the park commit the season for us, careening

Between the trees, sucking leaves and spitting
Confetti in one roaring breath. Their dust is bitter
And chokes us as we bend to corner the sheet,
Together dragging the canvas to the street.

Wind has no control over the leaves
We heap on denim. Wet and submissive,
Weak colors of a dry Fall catch on our rake.
Tough sprawling roots of dockweed break,

And acorns stored in haste for winter lie
Exposed in furrows behind us. Each year we deny
The Winter with abundant rye seed and the attitude
Of impatience we have with rude guests.

IN A GREEN TREE

I

After they suck my soul out
And wire my mouth to smile
And after they turn away
Stay and plant a green tree.
Watch the Negro men
Pack the mound down with shovels
And throw the winter rye across
The plot to seed my place green.
This will give you something to do.

I want no flowers planted potted or with me
No eternal wreaths pronged in the ground
But one tree seed to grow a ring
Registering each of my dead years.

II

The pines cap off our light
Sap straight to the sun

And will have to be brought down. The taps
Were cut away and yet no pattern lay
Landscaped around us after thinning.
The old ones were cut into and filled,
Black creosote brick cracks
Benign for another hundred years.

We took poor ones and left a royal forest
Around the castle clearing. The blueprint
In our minds married this ground naturally
And grew up slowly from it like a green tree.

III

Nothing has ever grown from us
And nothing lost. Our sanctuary
Of seven acres and our saving
Up of soul for We grow old.

We remember the mill stone fell on ten May

The day a storm tore through
A vista to the highway. We observed
The anniversary of another decade
Before new growth remade our wall
Fall before I died.

IV

I climb to the place
No one else will go
And yell to the Negro girl
"You're afraid to climb the nigger tree."
We three together, my brother and I
Look at each other. We all three
Feel different. "It'd be a pure treat
If I could do it but I ain't."

No one else will go.
I grow to where my feet curve
Over the branches in a green tree.

V

Still it hides me, my head bent out
 Under the lowest branch we shinned
 In four pulls.

The initials are dark
 From train soot on the nigger tree.

We
 Were black when we came down to the back door.

Two boards lie from the clubhouse like a bier
 But there are few dead limbs.

I fit
 In the tire awkwardly.

Nests
 In the nigger tree are at rest from us now.

VI

The tire has cracked and grayed
 Hanging on the swollen braid of rope.
 On the tree as old as I am

Planted at the time of my seed for the children.

Whose children test the hemp and limb
Curled inside the tire spinning
Are my children inheriting a green tree
Left for them who would come
Out of my unreamed womb to this place.
My face the years crack and gray.