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Starnight Touch comprises three parts. Horse of a Different Wavelength establishes the life circumstances and attitude of the poet. Fignation of the Imagination demonstrates the tactics of the poet's wit, for better and worse. A Cup of Kindness explores the mystery of self-perpetuation. Starnight Touch is about salvaging joy in a world where some trouble exists.

STARNIGHT TOUCH

by

Thomas R. Hawkins

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

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Approved by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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

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Oct. 14, 1973
Date of Examination

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CAROLINA SUNBEAT

Birds and sun rise outside my screen.
I arranged a pine cone, a chestnut, and a thorn
on the window sill. The birds are
bobwhite, crow, jays, a mourning dove. Last year
it was neon, sub-zero,
Milwaukee before day, out the hotel window.
Toward Madison, Sheboygan, headlights
sliced down the cold.
The year before that, the albatross
nested thick as gravestones
in the grass.
I was on the island northwest of Honolulu.
The sound of aircraft throttled up at dark;
fuel trucks skimmed between the palms.
And the year before that, the fo'c'sle
of a wooden ship. We bunked three high.
Saw dolphins and flying fish.
Bolts held household smell in the curve of the hull.
Over the pine cone and thorn I arranged . . .
birds and sun.

LANDED ON THE PLANET EARTH

I.

The sun cooked up some men to watch
stars burn across time.

Outer space is where we all grew up.

Far from anything, from any other star.

II.

You, not the answer to an equation,
held by gravity to geography--

this sidewalk, this roadcut,

there where the trees reach into a ravine--

this is improbably anybody else

held not quite down where

gravity weights your feet.

ALTITUDE TRANSCRIPTION

The Goddess of Grain stood
atop Chicago's tallest building then.
My father took me up
where the windows
overlooked the lake
and opened to the wind.

My feet were warm from hiking
San Francisco--
I went up Coit Tower
(again the wind)
and saw the cable cars
minute, below, and waves on the bay.

One day I rode the stained wood bench
of the tram-car up Victoria peak,
leaving Queen's Road for the sky--
ships and streets grew small,
thereabout the island of Hong Kong.

All three times,
the sky, the same.

MAGIC, SAID THE MOON

"Magic, when you have it,
is a routine burden,"
said the Moon,
tugging in the tide.

"And you draw the envy
of the unendowed."

With her full moon face
she called out lovers.

Then she crescented
in a smile.

"But as jobs go,"
glowed she,

"I wouldn't trade."

THE REAL LIVE DREAM DANCER

Were you the one who
danced in a dream
in real life?
The real life dream dancer?
Who leapt through
impervious sleep?
The one left
suspended in air
just above your bed
caught mid-pirouette
lifted there by
the resonance of a chord
now faded as grain
in the bed post's
lathe-turned whirl?
Were you the one then?
Frozen like Cupid
in a painting but without
plumpness or bow?
Pointing your toe toward
the certainty of a next move,
left dangling against
the entire weight
of suspended time?

(continued)

THE REAL LIVE DREAM DANCER (Page 2)

Yes, I was the one
cheated of death like some
artisan's statue mock-up
featured in wax and clay
for resemblance to life
perched above death's cradle
like a joke against prayer.

The one that spins like
a cardboard suggestion
hung in a dirty campaign
evoking the votes of the poor.
Evoking the votes of silence,
here I hang.

The real live dream dancer.
And in bitterness have found
a resignation so pure
the very suggestion of the taste
makes the movements of stars
the brightest part of day.
And the longer this happens
the greater it seems.

A BRAND NEW BANANA SHIP
OF JAPANESE CONSTRUCTION
BUCKLED AFT OF THE FO'C'SLE

The rope ladder dangles. I belch from beer.
The pickup boat lifts and falls below.

"'Bout to go crazy; they won't let us
go ashore. We stuck here.

We got our Black Label beer from San
Francisco. Been unloadin' that hold.
Once warm, they spoil."

I look down the hull, the plunge.
The ladder shifts. My steel-toe boot
catches the first step.

"Them insurance men been to look
at the hull today. Our anchor is stuck.
We get paid. Rougher luck."

I go nearly down the rope ladder and jump
to the deck of the pickup boat on its way up.
Together in the coming trough we descend.

THAT CAN NO LONGER SHOULDER THE
DISAPPOINTMENTS LIKE HE USED TO

A young building compares
to a youth--for use. But
sustains none of the
information gained by
gradual destruction

thought requires.
Libraries not so good.
Paper pages filter
fields set up
cumulatively by
living brains.

Certain kinds of
construction good.
Certain years. 1929.
Like the hotel where I lived.
Generated sexual energy,
stored, maintains
a necessary charge.

(continued)

THAT CAN NO LONGER SHOULDER (page 2)

What startles us
about ruins:
Absolute life
proof. (Which is why
after three centuries
technique--like architecture--
may be all that's left
of a written piece.)

A FISH

Note: The last line names a specific species of game fish.

Drops of sun burn on the ocean top and sink.
Waves tug lines. Ratchets on deep sea reels
tick out a notch at a time. Today, who will make a catch?
Outriggers roll with the hull in a trough. Rods whip.
The boat drifts in this position as if for years.
The port outrigger bangs, and the reel sings.
Silence climbs like prayer. Arms wrestle the rod aft.
Astern the dark shape shimmies up
from the tip of its tongue to the end of its tail.
This large, swift game fish too rare for
commercial use, dragged by an injured jaw,
by an animal it can neither see nor kill--
has done all this before and knows.
In its mind, in the gray jello
of the muscle working beneath its tiger stripes.
Who is this pounding at the hull, whose brain
we break with a club? We fish in only meat.
It was wahoo. A wahoo.

SEVEN PART FAST POEM

1

Birds after storm.

Morning smokes.

Bush covers mountain flesh.

Black snake flickers under

a stump.

The one ants eat to flour.

The one garnished with fern.

2

My poncho tent slaps like a sail.

Knots hold. The thunderhead

went north. The tent lit

above my face.

3

Storm, mountain, snake and thunder came.

4

Rivers eddied in grass.

Underwater on one elbow

I waited, dry.

(continued)

SEVEN PART FAST POEN (Page 2)

5

This a.m.

mountains quenched.

Failed to make a fire.

Damp tinder. Wind.

Break my fast with cocoa

in cold water stirred

with my finger.

6

See just how the sun broke the clouds.

Came up behind.

Writing you this in ball point pen

a few feet from the poncho tent.

7

Flies land. Coil tongues.

My boots get wet and darken.

The sun warms my back through the jacket.

My fingernails are dirty.

NIGHT ON THE SOUTH SLOPE OF GRANDFATHER MOUNTAIN

The mountainside describes an inclined plane.
Dodge and weave jeopardizing footing through
the rhododendron. Leverage vectors detected
in the spine. Thighs. Time drops from sight.
Candlepower fades. Twenty eyes dilate.
Ten compasses do not orientate precisely as to
place. Seven quart canteens hold less than half.
By these signs, decide to spend the night.
Rhododendron, evergreen and deciduous,
Ericaceous Genus. On mucus membranes
will burn a rash. Much cultivated for ornament,
pink, purple, white, and out of bloom.
Oval or oblong leaves spread like hands overhead,
a living canopy as the body slides
a few feet, asleep, down the slope.

THINKING ABOUT FOOD
ON A THREE-DAY FAST

Trail lead.
tains his interposed.

treads dog at jaw
ni turn his interposed

?tousse absent

PART II

FIGURATION OF THE IMAGINEMENT

task in stand she at it
gnillit's his hair

energy out at antitoll
to score and to

love grows out it it
dwords gnitling team to
stament to old team and

agreement and date of allies that
ititahans for strands the spaghetti
as she teeth by in bevelant
the easy way how by
throat.

(continued)

THINKING ABOUT FOOD
ON A THREE-DAY FAST

Trail food.

Spaghetti and meat.

What is good about
Spaghetti and meat in
tomato sauce?

It is the taste of meat
rich and filling
floating in the grease
of the sauce.

It is the savory odor
of meat drifting through
the sweet bite of tomato.

That calls to mind the tenderness
of the strands of spaghetti
involved in my cheek and on
the easy way down my
throat.

(continued)

THINKING ABOUT FOOD (page 2)

It is the solid warmth
packing throat and belly of warm
spaghetti and meat
next to an outdoor fire.
Spaghetti and meat eaten
with a spoon.

I think of corned beef served
with rice and cheese.
The grains of rice
drawn together in a puff
of cheese that makes
strings of sticky goodness--
the separate rice kernels on
the tongue and the mellow
of the cheese, the
nurture flavor--warm
but delicately sweet--
of cheese and the
bland delight of the rice.

(continued)

THINKING ABOUT FOOD (page 3)

Consider the corned beef:

Dusky hints of salt,
the dry fiber of meat,
chewy between the molars.

Salty and chewy.

Answers the rice and
cheese, good-textured
corned beef
nipped with brine.

Or a trail meal of
smokey-flavored tuna,
long-grained fish meat,
nuggets among the
good egg noodles.
Dry and glowing taste
amid the liquid
starch abundance of the noodles.

(continued)

THINKING ABOUT FOOD (page 4)

Cream of wheat in the morning
on a tin plate,
granulated, springing to wheat
off the spoon, wild
with butter, smiling
with dates and raisins
awake like those different
birds speaking from branches.

Tea after a day's hike.
Symphonic.
All instruments of flavor.
Tuned up translucent.
The darkness of its leaves,
Reflects the sky resolved
in brewing night.

(continued)

THINKING ABOUT FOOD (page 5)

Peanut butter and jelly outdoors--
peanut butter flavor wide
as the tongue, heavy and smooth,
clings to the teeth,
stays with the appetite.
The jelly plays across nut flavor
like chimes above a
sunny town, the sharp jeweled
flavor of grapes and sugar
sprinkled in the oil-rich
spread of peanut butter.

TOWN WITHOUT A RESTAURANT

Could I find a rat?
Follow him to what he eats?
Such a lot of walking I do.
Past the locked grocery,
as locals set their tables
with drygoods and hardware.
Law cruises by
enforcing statutes against
the consumption of jewels.
Thirty minutes sweat lost more
and I will ascend. Aerodynamic.
The breeze picks up.
I spy a rat. He is eating.
He smacks his thin lips around
the last cold ham sandwich.

THE DIAMOND TAXI

Dead perfume rides beside me.

Vinyl rots.

The Diamond taxi's two-way radio
crackles and toots.

"Repeat please.

Repeat." Lateral G's
pitch me around corners.

We splash through a puddle.

The windshield drips.

The driver turns the wiper switch
on then off.

A rubber alligator dances
on the dash.

The driver makes my destination.

Those are the brakes.

I shell up a fifty-cent tip.

Fare enough.

That was my trip.

ON A BUS TRIP TO NEW ORLEANS
ON 30-DAY LEAVE FROM THE NAVY

I came to New Orleans the fastest
Tuesday night of my life.

Saints boogalooed
in the bank vaults.

The river backed up.
The river backed down.

You could see Mississippi catfish jump
all over town.

Bridges lit up. Choirs sang.
Fireworks burst. Bells rang.

Beggars played cymbals.
Police played trombone.

A man played a Steinway.
On a flagpole.
Alone.

THE SKY SPIRAL, AN AMUSEMENT PARK RIDE

Miss Ticket Booth jingles change with greedy feelers.
The operator straps us in a cage and slides the bolt
fro. We feel ourselves inside. Gears engage.
Hot dog crowds stand. Then grease black chains drive
turning the evening star. When my copilot thinks
she screams. We wander churned and unaccustomed that
the ride should cease.

THE PHANTOM LOCOMOTIVE GLIDES ITS RAILS ACROSS THE OCEAN,
oceanic locomotion before the liquid clatter of its cars,
the oil within the clatter of the turning wheels of matter,
the solid bearings turning, bearing up below the stars,
the phantom locomotive puffing over briny ocean,
the liquid locomotion of its ocean-spotted cars.

GLOW ON BELOW ZERO GREAT FATHER

Illuminated advertising wants to glow on below zero;
who's going to buy that in weather like this?
Maybe drunks in block ice in the alley's whiskey palace.
To breathe walking into the wind proves unique.
Ghosts of barefoot Sioux repitch their buffalo teepee.
Walk in from reality and warmth undresses your sense.
You walk in naked, full sleep--doze about your business.
Human days turn to dream.
From spigot to ground down gravity's logical path
water stops. Fangs of bare molecular ice sprout.
Is this what tweety April had in mind?
The leafless bush perches cardinals red with cold.

LIGHTHOUSE POEM

Beaconing off rocks at night
the seas flash.
Forget those protrusions,
their sea anemone, their thoughts.
It is enough to have light
to steer by.
It would not be right
to found a continent
where there is
already
a city of fish.

LIBRARY POEM

All those books.

So You Want To Be A Camp Counselor.

Plumbing groans.

Fast feet tap across the floor.

Someone coughs.

You, Too, Can Sing.

Chunk. A machine stamps

a library card.

Fifty Famous Painters.

Two weeks.

SEEING BY LONG DIVISION

That is your double vision,
and I'm not saying it's wrong.
Who am I, living on small wages,
to criticize?
Larks do not sing in reports.
Crickets issue no addendums.
If you can look two ways at once,
or three, or eight, or more--
well, why else have eyes in your head.
That's what vision is for.
But I can only see
what is more or less in front of me
and shift my eyes this way and that
to see as much as I see.
But when I look at one thing,
and you, you at that and seven others,
and you and I cannot agree:
Don't ask me to trust
your other seven eyes.

THE DAY AFTER THANKSGIVING

The huge convertible
drifted behind
the marching band.
It had white leather seats.
The wheel was large in my hand.
The lady
on the boot
raised her wave
above her mink.
Faces
arranged the street.
I applied the
lightest touch
of gas.
A westerly
off the ice lake
reddened flesh.
Below the windshield
heat pumped
across my feet.

(continued)

THE DAY AFTER THANKSGIVING (page 2)

Parents froze
behind children
who shrieked.

Later,
Santa Claus
followed
laughing.

THE CHRISTMAS CARD

I'm too wild to play the Christmas game. All
my winter nights end angry. Woman
was abducted (huh!) or lied
about being on the way. (Off to Egypt
with some Joe?)

So Merry Christmas. That's what I say.

THE INVISIBLE VOICES OF VEGETABLES

Music grows from the
vegetable garden inside the radio.

Cucumbers, corn,
radishes atune.

Transistors and tendrils, copper vines.

Music advertises the invisible voice
grown in the vegetable garden
inside the radio. Vegetable receptivity
picking up one radiant voice.

SLOW DANCE AT EIGHTY

Keep your powder dry.

Body talcum.

Keep the tempo

down.

This is no

dance for kids.

I am eighty-two.

This dance is what is.

THE RED UMBRELLA

The old woman plods beneath the red umbrella
through which cloudy light shines; the tremorous
old woman is on her way to church in the rain.
She passes the lot where drivers maneuver bulldozers.
The church organist moves earth with hands and feet.
The red umbrella graphs that moving average.

PACIFIC COAST CITYSCAPE JUST
 BEFORE THE SUNSET

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PART III

A CUP OF KINDNESS

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(continued)

PACIFIC COAST CITYSCAPE JUST
BEFORE THE STREETLIGHTS GO ON

1

Above and through dust subdivided,

the odor roams.

Fences chain; wire barbs loop

over the land

of oil from pastel sediment.

2

Offshore derricks planted thick with gardens bore

past barracuda into stone.

3

The lowland ferriswheel, beached, rings bells.

4

Alcohol sniffing needles nip

barechested customers pale.

In the gallery of tattoos

they bloom: Skull, dagger, and rose.

The fleshy muscle swells.

Blood seeps through ink.

The color changes with weather and age.

(continued)

PACIFIC COAST CITYSCAPE (page 2)

5

A Doberman tore the upholstery out
of his Chevrolet, the procurer explains,
negotiating.

Worth thirty a throw, she blinks.

He gives the address of their hotel. Promises
group rates.

6

Orange complicates evening.

Sand shadows. Waves flatten, glaze.

Children turn their water-brightened spines
under the rays of outdoor showers.

Beneath their wetted hair and above,
stars peer from eyes of coming night.

THE FOUNDRY

The birth of about 20 small bronze sculptures.

Artists bank the foundry floor with sand.

They saw apart the rust-clay brick.

These different forms and shapes at work are people.

Wheel (through the crowd) barrow bumps. At last

like the rising moon herself

the metal pot is hoisted on a chain,

with two masked sculptors in metal suits as guides.

From unanimous sighs of heat, lime-juice-clear bronze leaps.

Flames splash at the clay funnels of molds.

Objects cool inside eggs artists hammer open.

Asleep they do not see. But cracked materially free

they open eyes before their solid bronze breakfast of light.

EVEN WHEN JESUS WAS TWELVE,
HE WAS NO IDIOT:
THIS SURPRISED EVERYONE.

Children spring from the romantic collisions of youth

like cops from a speed trap:

Children seeing fathers in tv heroes send tigers

in the bedroom dark fleeing.

Who sends godhood fleeing off the face of youth?

Manchild with hollow tones of perfected feats,

the girl with her winsome whimper, converse.

Such a couple. The wrestling squad and baked goods

have it made.

Who are the old folks trying to kid?

Passing around this burden we all get high, then age.

Lost anyway--

the request is for

a more interesting collision.

More collisions.

MANHATTAN TORCH SONG

Even the neighborhood rapist can love
the scent of your meringue pies baking
golden to benign brown, making everyone
on Manhattan hungry for a farmgirl.

Our lady in her red German convertible
colliding across her beloved West Side,
do you still have the millinery blossom
on the hatrack by your initialed mailbox?

Do you still drink wine by the quart?
Smoke those unfiltered English cigarets?
String popcorn for Christmas?
Swap furniture you find on the curb?

I hope you are still rib thin like me.
That you found your corporate lawyer,
who reads poetry. Never mind about
my nineteen year old virgin. Or me.

You found me under a tree in Missouri.
It started in a circle.
I wouldn't get up. You wouldn't get down.

May New York's Sunday morning calm
breathe you a little country.
May your houseplants blossom children.

SEVEN WAS HER COLOR

Seven was the
color of
my true love's
hair. She wore it
knotted around
the plasticized
spleen of a
South American
river rat.
Glowed in the
mode of a dozen
ungamely
rational hens.
The feathers removed.
And she parted it
with an airplane
ticket to
the mystic Middle East.
Sold basketball tickets
for pocket money.
Did it in curlers
that were only afterwards

(continued)

SEVEN WAS HER COLOR (page 2)

removed. Dried her hair

with a laser gun

captured from

mammals from Uranus.

The men were large and

fierce but the women

looking from the windows

of the spaceship had

a certain charm.

But about this lady's hair,

let me say, it caught my eye.

WARDROBING MILADY

Wear something tight and low.
Faster than the speed of sight.
Clinging like a pair of lips.
Shiny and wet in the play of thighs.
Wear something that acts ambitious
about human limits.
Something that extends
the anatomical imagination.
Let it snap at buttons.
Tease it with a stick.
Bait the garments with raw beef.
Let their rage grow.
Let them come as close as their courage
and adrenalin will go.
Hang them on. All about.
A rout in the devil's snout.
Wear something
lovely.

TWO GIRLS

The space they take is nice.

They talk a tune.

Separately attractive,
their similarities excite
one another's smile.

Not any part of

one or the other--
those full, smooth selves--

it's what they contain

on the sofa together

that drives me

around and around

the nucleus they hold.

FINDING

It's part like being old.

Life slips away.

There's that to it.

Part like newborn, I guess;

counting tears.

But not much like sleep.

Sometimes more like burning

your hand on hot grease.

Sometimes even more . . .

the way organ pipes juggle bone.

Like a spotlight finding

two alone.

The way it aches.

As if

everyone you ever love or hate

all the way

complete

all come to see.

AT THE MAJESTIC

There is probably human luminosity
in hell.

I work in an office
and sleep in the alcoholic's hotel.
After work I find a door left open
to his sanctuary, with his candles'
glass necks.

From the blood in the sheets
you would think bullet wound.

A halo rings against the floor of sulphur halls.
A snake moves the way a feather falls.

THE CARD GAME I TRIED TO LOSE,
BUT DIDN'T, TO THE LOSER

Them oh-boy
little girl eyes
spotted you
first off.

You and your
unzippable
particulars.

Appreciated
fore and aft.

She's lost all
respect for
(but loves)
you.

On your back.

YES, INDEED, YOU CAN WAIT

At seventeen, eighteen, I wanted to father a child.

Talk about money, I was young.

Hot. Hunger hung.

I felt like a piece of public plumbing
flushed with pictures in an overflowing brain.

The vision overheats, goes off praying
about the price.

(continued)

SEX IS LIKE THE NATIONAL ANTHEM:
EVERYONE STANDS UP WHEN THE MUSIC
STARTS, BUT AFTER THE FIRST VERSE
NOBODY KNOWS THE WORDS

The absence.

The yearning

which came.

In addition

to lust

left only

what was

not enough.

The mystery

which had gone

went

unsolved.

The house dark.

Train whistles

nothing.

The human

appetites

do not run

themselves.

(continued)

SEX IS LIKE THE NATIONAL ANTHEM (page 2)

Which is just
the way
we always
told each other
it was.

Tell me now
something else.

I think of you
with the cherry
blossoming.

I lie a lot.
Just what is it

I am not?

Here comes.

I don't know.

A woman.

I'm getting
stranger.

Total.

STARNIGHT TOUCH

Huge ignorant willingness to breed;
that is just part of goodness.

Affection increased by powers of ten
in reducing the subject to one.

We are the subject in this
gentle inquisition.

Don't try to overpower.

Don't offer proof.

HUMDRUM LOVE

In the humdrum of love
all things come
like storm damage.

We are carried away.
The fields are washed
naked. As jays.

We do not explain.
We go about.
We review what has been done.

It would never re-happen
just that way.
That, among other things,
leaves us speechless.