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HUEY, TOM. Forcehymn. (1977)
Directed By: Professor Tom Kirby-Smith

Forcehymn is a sustained elegy of forty-two sections. Each section is eleven lines long. Similar to the form of the sonnet, some of the sections end with couplets. The poem mourns the death of fellow poet and close friend, Amon Liner.

FORCEHYMN

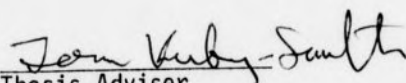
By

Tom Huey

A Thesis Submitted To
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Approved By:


Thesis Adviser

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following
committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The
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For Amon Liner: 1940 - 1976

His every step skirts
reality; his tender mode of
discourse is silence.

from "Hero & The Lady / II"
by Amon Liner from Chrome Grass

Post mortem:

Old Guy Turned Wolf awoke on the plain after great
destruction of life. The flax and wildgrass were red
as far as he could see. When he turned skyward
for words with the flying souls he unexpectedly found himself
looking at Holiest One's asshole. This he said without
thinking: "Why do you come here dirty and low?"
Holiest One's wind put out tent fires as far as the
nearest bloody sun. It's said Old Guy's women forgot
how to raise natural children and dream for three score.
I walk on the plain after no destruction of life. Heaven
is still sky, but after so much death what could happen?

1

Free from death and dying, I move to your grave.
Surrounded by stones, remembering your life, I move
through clear plastic flowers ruining short sleep. I
have dreamed of this before death, perhaps before life.
The easy way around weeping, the dream called faith.
I have skirted a thousand star possibilities for breath.
But when it comes to this, when it no longer comes
to you, I know there is ageless sorrow. I cry without
tears. On the edge of the past and the future I see the
same tearless waters. How they move in one circle, friend.
I'm in the circle--is this motion? Let me move to you.

You cannot turn from your death though you'd like to,
like a wrong word useless but thought, like a wrong street
dreamed but walked poorly. You cannot turn from a friend's
death though you'd like to, like the friend you saw turning
from himself. . . . and you told him--and he told you:
you can't turn from anything but your shoulder and it ends
in the circle you've tried to chalk the whole time; you can't
turn from death or friends or chalk or anything or even nothing
because everything/nothing meets you headless, hard
no matter where your head turns, meets you like the shoulder
you never see, like the shoulder that's there--

Blue-green through sunless highway haze. In sunless
space blue-green replaces the jet one star past sunset:
more room for hard eyes to ease down after that vision,
more room to go blinder than before, to lose. How bad
this sounds--the sinking soul, the whine. Give me
what I've become and I'll go with it. Give me what's
mine and I'll live with it in this blue-green place called
world, where silences meet separations, where void
rolls to indifference and nothing changes or happens
more than it ever could. Self-deception, may you
remain where the sunless haze envelops our old shadows.

Why do I wait for you tonight? What remains of you but this hot collision of brain and fuzz and no chance to wind down before morning? When you didn't belong in the world but remained like no one before to sample each discord and delight separately, carefully, did you ever see what you had left, or been loosed from partially, or would find as if you had never lost it at all? We never talked about that. The future concerned us because it was all we had. Where we'd been was cornerstone for what we'd build. What we'd need was love and a few open windows. Nights, we determined, were best for final views.

Were you a channel upon which pyres would float
like blossoms into the belly of sorrow I would leave
the beach and salt my romantic tongue on your touch.
But you swallow every vanity like the ocean--I can't
wave you back or see where you're going. What have
we become so hard in its distance we can't
reach across? I won't wait like Samson for falling
columns. There's too much left at sea for drowning
reminders, too much rising, and a surface so great
without it I'd feel left behind. But if once, right
here, you could see this late-day grayness swell. . . .

He spoke of you as if the truth is learned from the very, very tired; and he would try, no matter if it killed him, to compare you not to a summer's day (which you were) but to a "lamplighter". Somehow, this saved me. I smiled inside and so did you: the lamplighter, lighting, lit the tired preacher's way and when it was over I put out a few lamps myself. The one called memory I let flicker because it was safe under two years of steady love; the other, including pain and the absence of love, I simply stopped watching. Who needs fire on an already burned-out trail through July?

Every flower must hate needlepoint. The miracle? no control over sunrise yet. Let smoke lose its shape through steeple-punctured morning. Charlotte has five hundred churches and fifty thousand souls glad like hell to be gone. If I were one, halfway back and curious, a little celestial navigation, a little verbal catch-as-catch-can. This ditty: Praise for the holy invention! It keeps you strong!--no--numb. . . . I am driven home. All the way I can't forget how I couldn't pass even one holy look to your immediate family. But I won't worry anymore. We're closer than humility.

What smoothness hides the real difference? If I were
smooth all the time and wore my crown like blankness
through the dirty streets I'd have reason to forget myself.
But I spread myself thinly, unevenly over dreams
of fame, the just ones. I've always believed myself
and you. I've cut myself into little pieces and fertilized
the moments with blood. When I leave my body and
my life is the memory of real places empty with sunlight
will the shadows accord in darkness over the remaining
faces? Will they see my absence as I feel it now,
throbbing in your vice, unlearned, torn between eyes?

The ceiling's open for investigation: tightrope walkers
above a netless fall bore themselves to death.
To make it happen I sit below, neat with patience and a
cold, calm eye. Why am I thinking I was a bad child?
Can it matter what I was before here? I don't blame
the country or search old earthbogs for a general clue
to a broader madness so am I safe in the smug
acceptance of fantasia? What do I see just now? History's
jaws opened and entered by a smaller beast, the searching
crypt-man? No, an indifferent thing I will call conformity--
the shape of a fairly smart guy--who's fooling who?

Bent limbs crane-white through morning rain drip
to slant ponds. A ripple to the sod, dead getting
dear, gone. Time taken to know the usual is the
strangest. Maybe nothing is worse than waiting for
it to happen, what stiffens or turns skyward unknown.
Why do things twist more and more? Contorted life?
Time of changes changes nothing. What's new? Another
touch, resolute distance from all bending, stiffness,
staying in rain, moving in sun to darker places?
A shape I share, costing nothing, worth only the
time it takes to prick an ear, pray, listen?

For my Candie Auntie I wept monkey tears and
climbed on her burglar bars all night long. I sang from
her Broadman Hymnal, rested on her broken Steinway,
cursed her printer's visor and yellow newspapers. No
matter how hard I tried I couldn't belong as she did to
the vine-rich grounds where the stone frog spouted
green water on days like these. I couldn't wax her cold
black floor or pull those bare bulbs' strings. Did you
leave stained bedpans, hoses and spouts like riddled
veins? Did you fill the room up with stench and die
muttering something about dues? Did you kick?

My vision's no deeper than these fingernails; arced
like their grime; rutted in bruises and words I won't
cut off. Only the look is clean, softer than life of
words or nails; life itself, forever growing without
what happens. If I could remember the color of
nothing. My life is everything moving out and curling
back in dreams within the night coffin. But I'm not
dead. I move more with present fear than future.
This way nothing stands out and what's unexplained
muffles morning, afternoon in mute surprise. I like
this better than funeral-going, blindness and closed eyes.

This morning I spilled my juice trying again "to get it right for once". In the process nothing more was completed than another swipe at what would dry in time. I lost something falling through my pants, graceless perhaps, but uplifting. I stood out of place, saw where I just was: here I am, above dust, below stars, choosing how to become and all along it didn't matter what I wasn't or even tried to be but what I was and couldn't get up from; all along the only importance was that express notion complete in spill, ennui or minor victory--a moment's awareness.

The day is old and solemn now: white-hooded icons cast
sun shadows through leaves, grates and steamed glass:
me finding water babies in watery windows. . . . Solemn,
deep light from light: distillate: ten minutes past the sun
watched me whitely watching elders on the Lord's path;
something foul shot through and I was the sun whitely
watching this whitening man before nothing. Who am I?
All things revolve in turn. No answers. Eyes line the
mirror wheel. Reversals are hubbed and spoked nightward.
Pinecroft Road ushers hearse and headlight mourners
through leaning trees. Distance, royal. We lose to see.

I can't stop writing the chants. The old-time curiosity persists. Less than life, the myth struts soft-shoe by the emerald stream. Keys in the green water, clues in hidden colors--what matters? Damnable memories spin fast to something lighter. My head's a vortex drawing a final conclusion from the soft, quiet center. I can't say it means I've found the answer but cherubic flecks in sideway rocks continue entering. Seeing this from the six-foot tower: green behind blue, a horizontal lull, pilot stars, dual receptors of the great mush, a throat noosed tight for hanging songs. . . . dead man, who are you?

Paradise has no child to wipe his nose in the tv night,
no callico wrap, no songs to sleep or gentle push like
Mama's crenoline arm into rugged dream mountains, no
thread for the perfect sewing of torn church coats, only
the chill drone--a madman's voice-work. Will you listen
if I call you beautiful, beautiful? Will you purr if I
stoke the mantle, the moulding in the dark hall?
Will you come down in first fallout snow and make me
forget? I have raspberry fingers and a clean, wrinkled
touch. I have seven closets of mysteries, four shoe trees.
Like the child, I'm useless.

Life as landscape: winter common empty and white,
raw maple thin as a stick, crow almost swallowed by
endless sky. I am of this earth so long I feel older, like
what rocks may rest beneath all, free to remain, frozen
to the center, hidden. How, why my body came to this
realness only the wind knows and if I hear its way
I follow. Is there one window with nothing beyond,
one silent and close enough to faintly feel? Life as mind-
scape: frozen chimes, once a mirror, hang in the garden
reflecting only scratched silver. Day, day, if I tell you
what I love will you turn and listen?

On the God matter I waste no words, only money. Today
I silently bought a holy book illumined by the angels. I
read my story quickly. To all forces locked in spheres, to
thin shadows tied to circles I told the rest: a star escaped
last night and fled the sky; beyond unread time he flew, past
difficult friends and harder theories he hurried; and sometime
near twilight, on the smog-thick field I saw his heritage
through electric towers, screaming. His ghost swooped
down and as quickly was gone. He who once barely lived
to tell more than any here now circles the loss, screaming.
In the grace of night and live wires he barely waits.

How many years before I learn old ways in loose gray suits?
The little night man in the last afternoon dream hobbled by, singing.
Can I catch him if I give up running after the next fall?
Can I remain naked in ten-mirror four-ply carpet rooms?
Can I forgive myself for thinking I will never think beyond
the crucifixion of thought? Rilke, who thought himself an angel,
really, would scoff if I told him my foolish gray errand: I must
move beyond fortune, into the azure settlement with the elders;
I must tell them we are all angels, really, but no scoffers,
with little time to worry and less to be happy, with time to remain
in spite of it all, easy with our option--we don't need wings.

Pressures of this unregarded life send me out for air.
I rise above what others will or will not sort out.
Sinking, rising, I stay in place--a smile in the
window guarantees that. But there are bristles in my
back and a summer wind stronger, longer than any I
remember. Am I all right or is it a useless battle?
No, not that. I can shoot the sun and I'll always love
slipshot loose on the table, notions filled with holes.
That's my life, I'll take it. I won't die until the word
demands I drop with this stone. Now? I have
colors and smells and a brand of truth that listens.

If I die tomorrow the radio forecasts a similar haze.
If I die tomorrow in this coil of human exhaustion you
can believe me better for the exit. What man is truly
believed by his fellows in the life-head? Man inflicts
upon himself his own mental debris; soon, what he
sees is diminished in other eyes because he sees so much.
When his flowered brain wilts sevenfold only to burst with
rotten bloom tomorrow, it's talk of yesterday, difficulty.
Unbroken chains! Bodies drift in the circle called hope,
to be out. But form remains. If I live tomorrow I'll rebound.
The spirit will know my voice by its constant, shiftless sound.

We know how to love when no one's close. When the
spirit trills beauty might as well be a whore. We'd
rather mess around with the new sister of pain and play
with the cards of neglect. Like choirboys in late afternoon
cathedrals a change in light makes us laugh at the saints.
We run home whistling a chorus for stains. Houses
topple, governments fall to their knees--it's a matter of
attitude, they tell me. Yet the mind's an airplane, and
love the air that propels. It's easy to move through air,
love, but try stopping for a breath of light, as a friend
stops another friend on a corner for an answer.

I, like you, want to feel the concrete base of the untouched.
I want to run my hand along the gritty edge of future,
giving to that surface my real skin. I want to be a part of
everything I cannot feel, touch: the betweenness of the mean,
the idea's quotidian, the simple fluid in the non-word, coursing.
I ride my bicycle by a stadium breathing like an invalid,
filled with the langour a crippled news vendor radiates in an arm chair.
I prefer the complex sensibility of cocktail talk from corners.
Am I becoming a recluse? I tune, rearrange time-worn patterns.
I lunch on clichés, dine on puns. Right now, mind out,
I repeat my blood-tongue on a cue from the television: what's on?

All these shelves and forgotten books--what do they hold?
The forest? The dream? The forest god? The dream self?
Love from each sinful beginning? Nothing? Like Magritte
sometimes I completely open my head to ordinary afternoons
and my thoughts become exposed, run loose through hay-light.
Sometimes I'm nearly stripped by my hard ordinariness,
but it keeps me panting, harmless, another throat in
the human zoo. Down cage dumb-dressed bones are viewing.
I'm surprised they're this far in. They can't stand the touch
of truth and love stinks if it stays around their great noses.
I know a man who died touching everything closed. Where is he?

My right eye's cool, my left warm; my right eye's open
to the possibility of coolness and meter, my left closed;
my right eye is as beautiful as the sky, my left ugly;
my right eye sings the song of sun-devolution, my
left only feels the dullness of the day; my right eye
breathes itself into itself, my right eye shoots vision
into the mirror, accepts reflection selflessly; my
left eye only mutters with its lashes, "Nothing
matters as long as it's clear I'm no good," my right eye
attracts the glances of beautiful women in shopping malls; my
left eye strays to the left, and further, into its socket;
my right eye is beautiful and free; my left eye sees.

Though it's only July the autumn heart slips in a
dying remainder. What tempts me this morning? the
way I easily remember time's rightness, those alignments
with myself, watching football games, coaxing a date's
profile to love my direction? All that: the beautiful
leaves, one different from the other yet the same; the ugly
streets empty of themselves, corridors to winter winds;
the early mornings when I woke up near the walls, pushing;
the later afternoons steadied by bourbon and easy chairs.
Sharp break with light: blue on blue past meridians, blueness
of mind, I guess, those swept-up places crinkly with shade,
haunt and shine, waiting for autumn and beyond.

It is time to brake sunset, void calm, spur water to wave;
it is time to upset the balance of things relieved in corners;
it is time to open hearts to thoughts of nocturnal ovals;
it is time to circle the page with chalk-blue dust flying slow;
it is time to inhale the last cigarette expecting another breath;
it is time to lose the connection, pattern the void on vision;
it is time to lose the vision, to blue the loss, to control nothing;
it is time to blend the joints in mush-devotion to cornball;
it is time to run through streets emptying windowboxes, spitting;
it is time over tea to tell your mother you have lost, finally;
it is time to face your self in the faceless present.

Journeys are nothing but slantsongs. In rocks, voids,
windhooks the music spirals within/around. On the
granite no monumental face in bas-relief, just wind coolly
presented to the several grooves, whispers and silence
moaning like a graveyard hound, nothing
to say in a chimney rock, just thoughts of you and the
stovepipe life (the spirit-draft). In the other life
I stood around too. I picked and scratched and shuddered
while angels flew with the birds promising nothing but shit
from the hum called sky. The stakes were high, the fires red
and horse-rent flesh later rooted in the cracked streets.

What went away like that silver dollar sun? I lay
down calm, unblinking. On the slate-smooth ground
my mind is clean and hollow, glistening. When I want
I belong tongue-in-cheek to the great beyond--past that
it's up for grabs--but as sure as each phrase turns
into suspense this mystery grows. The miseries, like
puns, shed their outer skin and the raw, shucked notion
roots for meaning in a fodder of new words and groans.
Feeling, always present--a whorl, khaki-strong, full
of space and undone useless suspense. Significance?
meaningless but for wordless protection and love.

Somewhere in blue distance a few eagles sleep in thin pine beds. The space between their dream slivers and my mind is saved for the final flight. There's always a place for terror, for leaping into the heartmouth's moment when nothing matters or can be clawed into for relief. Under the lowest rock I look at my denseness and see black, porous. Sponge man, watching hidden eagles nestle in my mind--I'm too far from their true gold wings to fly--but I see glory: no, the angels never leave my eyelids--no, I still expect thunder magic--no, I work like every ignorant son-of-a-bitch--why not?

On a Paris street just off the Seine I saw death in the eyes of the unconcerned. They would have dipped me in their still, black river if they had known I was labeling en masse the French Face. I was afraid. I thought I would lose my way and stumble into the hidden Musée des Révélations. They couldn't have cared less, or so I thought in my camel hair coat, swallowed up, faintly in love with the clay colors and the unthinkable way each statue retained its due balance of history. I was inclined to breathe a prayer I knew: Je ne parlerais pas en classe sans permission. . . . je ne quitterais pas. . . .

Proportions of the whole, free dream of desert-watching:
yolk caves dance, each show lengthens the certitude of
nostalgia--take dark laughter spilling over the frothy,
white slopes, accepting the sun crazily, deepening to shade--
a joke muffled but passed on death row: "Where are we boys
that time says no clean or quiet place is beyond this?
What attraction of zebra lights gives us even the freedom
to dream of death? Is the mind-tree more real than
a past crime or the world a cage we have to craft closed,
accepting? And can we reach through? And will there
be a final touch so deep the blood will boil out, free?"

If there's a story in the stars let the stars tell it. Let the moon that looks loud-mouthed tell me how it goes on and on. I'll listen. Accordingly, I'll write in a pad like a newspaperman. But if the stars choose to wander through their holes and the moon clams up from too much investigation then the absence will make a much truer story: how light gets screwed on the rebound, taken in by its heavy ego; how the moon turns blue from touch; how the man on days when he calls himself the poet wanders into the woods for a closer afternoon look: he loves to examine his body in the broadleaf shade, silently.

The Dialogue, Part One:

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"It's not my kind of poem. Within each line there seems to be a kind of frantic despondency, a fidget, if you will, a turn from fact to antic that completely severs my desire to continue. I've read ones like it, not exactly, but similar enough to remind me of the present poetic fallacy-- he doesn't care about revision! From word to word it's like reviewing on the drawing board some ill-prepared subdivision, a place in mind I'd never inhabit, not even visit. As for the sketch, he has a gift, I must admit, and further, even now and then I get the intimation of a structure. But the finished product? I think he ought to be a window washer!"

The Dialogue, Part Two:

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"I'm your window washer, sir. Do you dirty windows? Perhaps a pane or two that needs a little wiping, for nothing, so you can see through? Yes, I've worked for people more visionary than you, but rarely do I ever get to work for one with so much insight--I was recently wondering: what do you do at night? I mean, after the lights are out, after it's past mattering whether or not the panes are clean? What do you do when you can't see a thing? Do you wonder about black or do you close your eyes and with your back to your brain feel faint throbs, your 'human engine', I believe you call it? That's my heart, sir. Daily, I wash it."

And to those who say "He isn't Blake" I say I take
what's mine, not his--the proof's this line, my will.
I survive as line and flow into the next with the joy of
that word joy and the other--words after words,
sacrificing nothing but what's whittled by space, shuttled.
A pile of sweat approaches from New York. "Where's
Faulkner?" he asks. Don't ask me. He goes south.
I stay in these shadows building word-blocks from Liner-
notions, vision or Wittgenstein. But the line hums true,
blames nothing, keeps to itself and will never be spent.

The luxurious decadence of the International House of Pancakes is my social coefficient. Unlike Proust's petite madeleine I get off on red syrup swirling down buckwheat lamina while one eye's on Old Golf Husband two pauses beyond Hale Mary, wif. My nose fills with mentholated vapors and Certs' deluxe. I smell a past quivering like stream from the stainless shelf. Coughs circulate under each checkered table when the 50th anniversary couple splits. The velvet mouths of the Matador, Flamenco Maria and Father Antonio drop. Take me farther back, Sweet House, because I can't pay this bill.

The world's a strange place, so they tell me, filled with the brightness of cheap food and freon--the usual clichés, even this one, a note pinned to the chip on my shoulder: Don't forget the people you can't do without or the love you've given freely. Always be on the up and up. When the shit falls you'll be in store for a square deal. You've got what it takes to succeed. And after that brush with death you've bounced back like a trooper! You're on even keel. Right on, you've got the bull by the horns! Sure, the world isn't a rose garden, but then you don't have to eat the thorns! Go to the movies every now and then. Let your hair down, Samson. A quitter never wins.

My world is a small, smarting spirit. It has oblong
grooves for whispers and intricate Chinese boxes for sighs
within sighs. It has side-smooth bevels and learning notches
and dovetails signifying my twice-risen moments above fancy.
Lately I feel it creak: death in the dusty underdrawers.
Death prods like a salesman I can't do without. I walk.
Last night I left my heart in a simple shroud. I finished
the dream sideways, by the white tub tile. Water ran from
my heart. In the clear stream I saw your doctor sample
his breath. You were dead. Was he proving he wasn't?
I woke up, stamped letters, organized papers, smiled.

And that was that. He didn't hue his brave song for the trees or dedicate his full, white moon-look to the dark side of things. But for himself, now curled within the dreamsheets, dreaming. For the blood's little flow now still as space and storming, now echo: Removed, unmoved
am I over endless shores, amazed, ignored, never whole/
Then he looked, after his custom, through time to home. No keys to leave, the final freedom. No grace, future or wisdom. But love after meaning, its own resolve. Love after cough, phlegm, blue tissue, calm. Love after everything, its own resolve, its ending.

Post Mortem:

Old Guy Turned Wolf told me this: "Your ancestors leave
you a third nipple, a bent ear, a straight nose, gold power
sometimes pain-colored in a beaten dog's eye, a great smile,
the legs of a black man, the chest of a trapper, the thumb
of a rubbed-dull ax end, a mind's edge like uncut wood:
ringed are your dreams; the deeper you sleep the deeper you
go into the forest of hope where no man tells you his horse-
shit, where all things are those things, where prayers are
received when truly chanted down in our stink-bog, where
nothing reflects falsely in the eye of another seeker, where
the easiest turn from groaning sleep to morning is pleasure."

Greensboro, January 15, 1977