

The Woman's College of
The University of North Carolina
LIBRARY



CA
no. 492

COLLEGE COLLECTION

Gift of
Charles L. Wyrick, Jr.

WYRICK, CHARLES L., JR. *Between Parentheses and Other Poems.*
(1966) Directed by: Dr. Robert Watson.

This collection of poems contains thirty-nine pieces. The subject matter of the poems is the body of experience, sensuous and otherwise, that an observant person in a modest Southern community with access to the ocean might gather without much difficulty. There are reflections, too, about topics familiar to twentieth-century youth: student life, the Berkeley rebellion, the puzzle of back-spinning wheels on a movie screen, the assassination of President Kennedy, Malcolm X, and so on.

The forms used in these poems are employed mainly to keep the observations under control and prevent their fading. Occasionally there is a conscious attempt to suggest a style--as in the imitation of Cummings--but mainly the form is functional, and devices are kept to a minimum lest they call attention to themselves. The framework of the whole is suggested by the concluding poem, which gives the title to the collection, "Between Parentheses." The first poem suggests a comparison between the poet and the collector of butterflies. The last one suggests the way that poems may be "pinned" for permanent exhibit--that is, by keeping them rigid between parentheses or other suitable marks of punctuation.

APPROVAL SHEET

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

by

Charles L. Wyrick, Jr.

Thesis
Director

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 in Creative Writing

Greensboro
April, 1966

Date of Examination

Approved by

Robert W. Watson

Director

APPROVAL SHEET

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

Silage

A Negro in Our Lives

Two Nations

The Doppler Effect
Thesis Director

Deep in the Heart of

Short Lines

Oral Examination
Committee Members

In the Reading Room

Reflections of a Consul

Stella In Storm and Drizzle

Gate City: In Memoriam

Deadlines Waiting

The New Best

As the Night

June 2, 1966
Date of Examination

Fishes of Xen

Dear Drowning

Love In the Country

Home Burial

Robert K. Watson

Robert K. Watson

Gilbert K. Thompson

Fred Chappell

Peter Taylor

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| The Collector | 1 |
| Killing the Gars | 2 |
| Umbrellas | 3 |
| Caves | 4 |
| Silage | 5 |
| A Negro In Our Dreams | 6 |
| Two Haikus | 9 |
| The Doppler Effect | 10 |
| deep in the heart of | 11 |
| Short Lines | 12 |
| Portraits From a City In the South | 13 |
| In the Reading Room | 16 |
| Reflections of a Conservative Professor | 17 |
| Stella In Sturm und Drang | 18 |
| Gate City: In Memoriam | 19 |
| Daedalus Waiting | 20 |
| The New Beat | 22 |
| Mississippi: At the Edge | 23 |
| Easter In Florida | 24 |
| Fisher of Men | 25 |
| Near Drowning | 27 |
| Love In the Country | 28 |
| Home Burial | 29 |

| | |
|---------------------|----|
| The Yo-Yo Man | 30 |
| Morning Song | 31 |
| Sledding | 32 |
| Field Firing | 33 |
| Sleep Talk | 34 |
| The Gathering | 35 |
| Between Parentheses | 39 |

The Collector

The poet collects his words
 and pins them carefully to dry
 like moths or butterflies.
 He wishes to be heard
 yet waits for time to pass him by
 rather than edify
 the confluence of his words.

Killing the Gars

In the August heat the river runs
Slower than the sun. The surface boils
And explodes in spots, as gars roll,
Turning flaccid bellies to the sun.
Someone hears the sounds, the hollow pock,
Staccato slaps of tails, as gars submerge.
And boys come from the town. The yearly urge
To kill the gars begins. There is a knack
To the timing of the shot. First
The water heaves and then the great fish cleaves
It with a burst. The guns begin to pop
And the stunned fish dies. Belly up,
It joins the river wrack that slowly weaves
Among the eddies, moving to its rest.

Umbrellas

Umbrellas

pass me on the street.

A solemn, bobbing, bright
parade. Multicolored blooms.

Dark mushrooms
reaching for the rain.
Bomb bursts spreading down the street.

On corners

in the summer heat
women carry
parasols. Faded black umbrellas.

Negro women
waiting in the shade.
Ragged nylon blown against the sun.

Caves

Something about a cave
attracts the young or very old.
Children dig for days or weeks
in clay banks or on wooded hills.
They search for dark and secret
places: shipping cartons gathered
from the grocer; blankets draped
from tables; tunnels through
the high grass in a nearby field.
The shadows hide the ever-
growing shadows of themselves.

An old man lights his house
with twenty-five watt bulbs
and mold may even grow beneath his bed.
He walks the chilly floor on curling toes
and stumbles through the caverns of his mind
where everything is cool and moist
and almost not quite dead.
He curses Plato soundlessly;
for he has seen the sunlight,
and caught his shadow many times
before and after noon.

Silage In Our Dreams

Somewhere in Nebraska, soldiers sing
 Twenty feet below the fallow ground.
 The duty clock churns on without a sound;
 The men wait for the silent phone to ring.
 In the field a farmer makes his round.
 The missiles lie below, but he will cling
 To rake and hoe and plow and wait for spring
 To help him fill his silo pound by pound.

A Negro In Our Dreams

1.

They had not planned on martyrdom
In the summer mud of Mississippi;
When we unearthed them there
We could no longer ignore them.

That God was on his side,

In seeking restoration
Of a given right,
We cannot restore them
And, somehow, it is better

In the world

That we share the shame.
For who else can we blame
But the wailing Negro in our dreams
Whom we vainly try to push away.

That brought his down.

All fell down that day
And silently the shovels turned,
Shoving them
Beneath a ton of clay.

2.

Reeb came down to Selma,
Came down like many others came
Except he thought

That God was on his side.

He had no fear of death
Nor did he fear the life

Which he had wished to see
In the world

In which he wished to live.

But he was not prepared
For this extraordinary world
That brought him down.

For you, Malcolm
Malcolm, Malcolm

Even the King of Spades
Can't save you now.

3.

You Malcolm

You the unknown entity

You ex-factor

You ex post facto black

You preached the X of hate

You negated the Y of love

In you

In every Harlem street

In every mosque

In every mask we wear

In every Southern town

In every cross we burn

For you, Malcolm

Malcolm, Malcolm

Even the king of spades

Can't save you now.

Two Haikus

1. The words of lovers
Quarrelling; wind blown petals
On a summer day.

2. All day with gentle
Murmuring the winter rain
Grows old, now lies white.

The Doppler Effect

Somehow the turning
doesn't seem just right:
the backward spinning
with the forward rush;
a stagecoach, buckboard,
all the rolling stock
that spins across the screen.
They can only right the turning
when they stop;
thrusting a proper vision
back in place.

deep in the heart of

BIG D, little a,

doublell A S

which, being in what once

used to be

as these call

(before Seward's Icebox
gained ascendancy)

the LARGEST state intha

three and four

wh O le US,

fit the rhytha

now has so much less

to B*R*A*G about since

JFK got ess-aich-oh-T.

Short Lines on a City in the South

| | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| Even a short | The duty of the |
| poem which is | poet is to push |
| confined by | these margins |
| margins such | back, to break |
| as these can | the paltry |
| have validity. | bonds that |
| After all, | hold his |
| even Emily | language in. |
| wrote in | He cannot take |
| three and four | refuge in what |
| beat lines to | others have |
| fit the rhythm | accepted as |
| of the psaltery. | their walls. |

He grunts and heaves against the wall,
 Bounding the heavy wooden
 through his coveralls.

He stings the air with galling words,
 Shows words against the air
 like ancient incantations.

Portraits From a City in the South

1.

A man stands bent below my window,
Shoveling great mounds
Of cool primordial sand.

I see the way his back is hunched,
The stoop of his ancestors
Bends him toward the ground.

Son of a Pennsylvania pitman,
His long forgotten lineage
Dates to Pleistocene.

He grunts and heaves against the wall,
Sweating the heavy weekend
Through his coveralls.

He stains the air with garlic oaths,
Shoves words against the air
Like ancient incantations.

2.

Flat-up against a fly-specked wall

C-Man Watson sucks a little sun.

C-Man comes to town on Saturdays;

He brings his hand-carved high back chair

To lean against a wall. The old men

Hunker there and whittle sticks away.

C-Man hocks a long brown stream

Across the rail. It settles somewhere

Close to Joe-Bob's shoe. He grunts

And shovels sand into the pool.

3.
I see a man uptown
who rolls himself around
with a little cart
on roller-skate wheels
and he has no legs.
But he has a box
of pencils, chewing gum,
and penny candy canes
that he never sells.
People pass him by,
looking straight ahead.
I sometimes find myself
looking for a way
to escape his gaze;
I go around the block,
duck through a ten-cent store,
or look down at the curb.
Dogs go by and stop
to see if he's alive;
they sniff his withered hands.

In the Reading Room

The girl who sits
Across from me
Looks wistfully
Indifferently
At the laddered racks
Of Friday's news.
Her legs are crossed
So carefully
That just the right
Amount of flesh
Will show.

She looks beyond
The New York Times,
The lettered records
Of the world.
Her youth unravels
With her gaze.
She looks beyond
These walls, this world;
Her gaze stops somewhere
Just behind
Her eyes.

Reflections of a Conservative Professor

You wonder why we heard about Berkeley?
Students are finally forgetting to keep their cool.
And at many of the other schools
Students are rejecting apathy.
Some people say the kids are simply fools.
Others say the kids simply don't see
Enough of what we call reality
To know just what they ought to ridicule.

Looking from the outside in,
An uninformed observer scoffs at them.
How can he know what it's all about.
As I look from the inside out,
I sometimes am inclined to side with him.
I turn my back; I have to save my skin.

Stella In Sturm und Drang

Stella sits naked
At the window of her room,
Combing, combing
Hair into the wind.
Once or twice each term,
She sends reports of saucers
To the dean, and dreams
Of making love to Mr. Clean.

Her hair hangs to her waist
Like the untouched habit
Of a nun; a nun
Who strums a cheap guitar
And hums a freedom song,
Wears sandals in the winter,
Sends unrhymed poems
To little magazines.

Gate City: In Memoriam

Here green is not a color but a name
Echoing down the concrete lane
Where once the elm trees grew.

To those of us who one-time knew
Bright summers in your quiet streets,
Limber afternoons in nearby fields,
So little now remains; we yield
To newborn monuments of steel
And empty shells at corners of the Square.

Out of these faces that we now compare
We build a sometime city of our own
Where we shall sleep

And let our children's children keep
A memory of spring in Irving Park
Or elm trees in the heart of town.

Daedalus Waiting

I vault the cold turnstile,
cheating the three steel arms
that would have grabbed my knees.
Mounting the observation deck,
turning sideways to the wind,
to my right a Cyclops grins,
turns, gleams again:
a beacon for a new migration south.

Whooping cranes are almost now extinct,
I do not care to see an albatross;
I cannot mount those wings
and I cannot be drawn like moths
to that deceptive beacon
there. It's cold up here.
I crawl down to my
glass sequestered womb.

Flight fifty-three is late,
grounded by a fog in Louisville.
I guess I'll wait; it's only
half past four in Tel Aviv.
After all,
tomorrow is today
if Western Union
has the right to say.

Perhaps I'll go up
to the roof once more
and mount my rocking Pegasus,
or lift myself
while darkness saves my wings;
a strong nocturnal Daedalus
who by the morning
will have reached my son.

The New Beat

Elvis sang me into puberty.

He rocked me out of innocence

And swung me into the world.

And he continues to sing and swing

While I, I can only try to whirl

My thighs above my head.

There is a new beat on the air today.

The Beatles help me through my exercise

And Elvis is a dozen years behind.

Churning this aged air, pedaling as though

I might keep pace with time,

My legs turn like some windmill in a dream.

Mississippi: At the Edge

We drove until the road gave out.
The rutted tracks led to the bluff
And stopped among a patch of bittersweet.
Below us, over rusted stones,
The water burned against the bank.

Somehow it wasn't right to be this close,
To reach the edge on foot.
Great rivers, so they seem,
Are only reached by bridge
Or viewed with altitude.

I approached with the temerity of one
Who kneels for holy water in a shrine.

Easter In Florida

40 miles north of West Palm Beach
 The road turned to the east. Each
 Store we passed was closed and
 We stopped at a roadside stand.
 Inside, a sweaty fat-assed man
 Was stacking grapefruit in a bin.
 The humid air was fruit pulp sweet
 And the fat man's wife, teats
 Suspended just above her waist,
 Unpacked a box of chocolate casts.
 A caramel nativity,
 Disciples of divinity,
 Christ himself in chocolate
 On a sugar coated plate.
 I turned to Tom, who bit the head
 Off Mary to get to the bed
 Of cherry cream. Have a bite,
 He said. Take ye and eat.

Fisher of Men

I have walked these shifting sands for years,
lacing the dunes with intersecting lines;
tracing the ebbing sea on nimble feet in summer
and hunched against the northeast wind of fall

when bending forward from the waist
with knees and elbows pointed in
and head bent down, I slowly move--
an aged beggar looking for a shell.

Walter Clark arrives in late September
after the tourists leave,
after the sea turns green
and washes everything with yellow foam,

purgings the bones of horseshoe crabs,
leaving seaweed to rot in
iodine soaked piles along the jetty walls.
Clark has come to fish.

He casts his line and bait out,
out to an indifferent Atlantic
which gradually rolls it back to him
untouched. There is something

about the way his shoulders move;
an acrobatic tenseness there;
a rhythm as he leans against
a wave. He comforts me.

Clark, you are an unrelenting fool!
To call you fisherman would be too kind;
you are a hunter here and
you would drag Poseidon himself

to sandy grave. You hate the sea
and all it represents: the constant
surge of life, the coming and the going,
and most of all, the fact that it is there.

Yet, somehow I would follow him
happily through many long Septembers;
even beyond the flight of distant gulls
his eyes may see more clearly than my own.

Near Drowning

The hands that held me
Dropped me when I squirmed;
I gasped as I settled
To the wet white sling.

Someone caught me as I fell,
Slapped me back to breath
And swung me from my ankles
Like a fresh cut side.

Halfway to the door,
Charged with the sudden air,
I coughed my death
Against my mother's side.

Love In the Country

We half believed
that land always existed
but still were unprepared
when it was gone.
Each time the lightning came
we reinforced our vision
of the land. Raw pines
on the hill, rough stones,
a rush of leaves against a door.

Without that light
we lost the land and sought assurance
in each other's arms.

Home Burial

And if you should plant a tree for me,
 Strip it of the tender leaves of spring;
 Let it stand naked in a snow-cold field
 Where you can watch it while you sing

He's gone away for to stay a little while.
 But if one winter tree is not enough, well
 Plant me one for summer; take the child
 And let him set to root a solitary snowbell.

The Yo-Yo Man

When we were young and there was sun
Beneath the trees, we met a man
Among the trees at one corner
Of the playing field.

He was a stranger to our world
Of sun and cedar. A Filipino
Dark as the shadows pasted on
The sand beneath the trees.

He held a yo-yo in each hand
And made them spin and jerk and go
Around the world or walk the dog
On the well waxed strings.

We bought the yo-yos that he sold.
He taught us tricks we could not do.
He crouched beside the cedar trees
And began to carve.

He carved our names in cryptic strokes,
Carved pictures that would fit the names:
Gary, a dragon, Carolyn
Encircled by a rose.

Morning Song

And what causes you to sweep the
 constant dust beneath your feet
as this morning when you rose
 and walked the silent floor
before the light had even warmed my
 chin. And suddenly you were there
and bending over me to reach the shade;
 not to keep the light out of my eyes,
but holding to the last damp breath
 of our sweet-ethered darkness here.
Fall not upon me now nor ever sleep
 again. For when I sound my trumpet
of the morning, only you respond.
 Struggling from the depths I seek
your praise. And audience enough is but
 your hand, clapping simple rhythm as you bathe.

Sledding

I
When the first snow falls in Nocho Park,
usually in December,
the Negro kids come out to play.
With packing cases torn to shreds,
dish pans hurried from the kitchens,
the children make their sleds.

Loudly they gather in the streets;
flat out against the slopes they glide,
pushing their cardboard sheets
against the slickness of the hill.

II
In Irving Park, white children come to play,
if I remember,
they wax the runners of their shiny sleds.
They gather on the golf course;
silently comparing each for speed
they launch out with a burst.

Along the road their parents wait in cars,
words turn to frost upon the glass,
circles fading from the edges in.
The trees. Don't let them hit the trees.

Field Firing

When the weeds in the back lot
got too high to mow
we simply burned them out.
Armed with brooms and hoes
my father led a crew of neighbors
through the rusted fence wires,
under green balled sycamores,
to where we set the fires.
The July heat had left
the grasses dry and brown
across the field. They snapped
as we pushed them down.
We wrapped some sticks in gunny sacks
and doused them with the gasoline
we'd siphoned from our car. Run and ask
your daddy if he's ready, said a man in jeans.
The gasoline vapors rose
up in multi-colored streams
above the weeds; a swirling haze
hung waiting for the flames.

Sleep Talk

Last night, while I was listening to the wind,
I heard you say, in muted tones,
While hanging from the cornice of a dream:
I am dancing on a stage with no music
And I am acting in a play without words.
A policeman saw me in my morning window
And ground me through his siren all day long.
He sent me screaming into another night.

I am living in a house with no windows,
My soul is fitted with a sliding door.
I hear the voices of an existential chorus
Chanting litanies above my bed.
My heart no longer spins upon the table,
My feet lie neatly shined beneath my bed.

The Gathering

1.

Slowly treading water

I look up to the sun;

the cold Atlantic

pushes from behind.

The children come to swim;

dropping towels at a run

they race down to the edge,

then gingerly retreat,

backing off on tiptoe

from the strand.

They soon regain bravado,

taunting one another,

clinging tightly

to their rubber rings.

One soon makes a dash

followed by the rest,

screaming as they high step

through the waves.

I arch my back, pushing
toward the shells below.
When I come up for air

the kids are gone. A wave
breaks and I see them
sprawled upon the sand.

Their mothers rub them
till they shine.
I drift in with the tide.

I shake the sea
out of my hair;
my eyes still burn.

Children chase minnows
in the rock pools.
Mothers chase the children.

Even fathers chase the mothers
at this time of year.
The minnows swim too fast.

2.

Thinking of myself
when I was eight or ten:
I used to walk above the beach

on boardwalks, catwalks,
rough plank walkways
built above the sand.

At Lumina and Station One
the lifeguard stands stood high
and white against the sky.

Beside them, in the shade,
the lifeboats sat on rollers,
ready to be pulled

into the tide. The siren
on the fire house roof
sounded the summer drownings.

3.
The sea is calm today.
The boats float lightly
on their own reflections.

Taking a motorboat southward
through the sound,
skirting Harbor Island

where trawlers rest in dry dock
losing barnacles, gaining paint,
I turn into the waterway

heading north into the wind
winding ahead through marsh grass
I ride the morning tide.

I find no solace in this place.
The crabs that scuttle in the dunes
remind me of the world behind.

The morning smells of drying mud,
shrimp steam in a shrinking pool;
only the gulls gather here.

Between Parentheses

I see my name in print
and realize
I now am finalized.
A note is added
to my existential tune.
Later in my life
I'll join the line
of poets who have been
anthologized,
or mildly lionized
by friends, two children
and a wife.
Beside my name a date,
a dash, a space;
a number in a pair
without its mate.