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ZIGLER, DONALD N. Within the Chrysalis. (1976) Directed  
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The poems in this collection are unified, if at all, by nothing more than my own personal view of the world; a world which changes more rapidly than do our perceptions of it. I suppose all poems can be seen as attempts to crystallize the fluid substance of time, and mine are no exceptions. Since I am neither a seer nor an anthropologist, it should be no surprise that they focus not on the butterfly or caterpillar, but on the constantly changing creature within the chrysalis. The world which I present is as much a mystery to me as to anyone else, and for that reason no answers are offered here; what I have attempted to offer instead are clear statements of certain questions.

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:

WITHIN THE CHRYSALIS

by

Donald N. Zigler

Thesis Adviser

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  
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Greensboro  
1976

March 30, 1976  
Date of Acceptance by Committee

Approved by

Robert W. Yarn  
Thesis Adviser

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J. Kirby-Smith

Fred Chappell

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For their help and encouragement, I would like to thank Robert Watson, Tom Kirby-Smith, and Fred Chappell.

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A BIRTH MARK THIS

The Rescue Mission

Here it is:  
 Last stop for old men  
 Who carry their blood in their pockets  
 Wrapped in brown paper,  
 Here they are transfused,  
 Trade their Social Security  
 For a hard bunk, easy work,  
 Corned beef and Jesus,  
 Their heads are rigged with trip-wires  
 In the name of God.

By day they work to gospel hymns  
 On old clothes, furniture, stove, I  
 Brother John makes radio  
 For donations, canned A PATH WORN THIN  
 After vespers  
 They perch on the outside stoops  
 Like shuffling gargoyles;  
 Back into their sleeves,  
 Spit,  
 Toss bats into the street,  
 The Lord is their methadone.

Before the mission opened,  
 Brother John got down and called on Him,  
 and God saw that it was unavoidable.



### The Rescue Mission

Here it is;  
Last stop for old men  
Who carry their blood in their pockets  
Wrapped in brown paper.  
Here they are transfused,  
Trade their Social Security  
For a hard bunk, easy work,  
Corned beef and Jesus.  
Their heads are rigged with trip-wires  
In the name of God.

By day they work to gospel hymns  
On old clothes, furniture, stoves.  
Brother John makes radio appeals  
For donations, canned goods.  
After vespers  
They perch on the outside stairs  
Like shuffling gargoyles;  
Hack into their sleeves,  
Spit,  
Toss butts into the street.  
The Lord is their methadone.

Before the mission opened,  
Brother John got down and called on Him,  
And God saw that it was unavoidable.

## Love Song

## The Blind Turtle

The farmer spraying crops could not foresee  
 These burnt-out sockets, clean as walnut shells.  
 Turned over in my palm  
 The legs wave, neck extends  
 To roll his head across his plated back  
 As if to see past some black hand  
 Before his eyes.  
 I used to carve initials on the undersides;  
 This time there's no need.  
 Freed, he draws in--  
 With a hiss of the hinged plate  
 Is double-sealed in darkness.

The clock recalls him, ever out of time,  
 "Father, won't you come and stay with us?"

Sighing the old man utters  
 His solitary know, not rising with a groan,  
 Slides weightless through the olive silence, unimpeded  
 Weightless, like dark and sleeping unobscured  
 No world exists outside this zone,  
 The brooding antique listens as he dials  
 The light switch, hear the rusty hinges creak  
 "Father, won't you come and stay with us?"

Strinking up the livid system,  
 He struggles in the wake of the system  
 That arrives up Fourth Street, gasping ancient laws,  
 "Father, won't you come and stay with us?"

## Love Song

Face contorted, wasted body bent,  
One more darkened figure in the gloom,  
He probes the oaken flesh, resplendant  
Beneath the paint and varnish that will soon  
Be scraped away. The walnut highboy looms  
Paternally above them in the dust  
From which the wrinkled letter glares into the room,  
"Father, won't you come and stay with us?"

The old man's careful stroking sends  
The years in pastel flakes careening down.  
They drift into the space where once had been  
The rolltop desk she sold that June  
To buy the trip. She never left her room  
In Paris; Doctor never knew the cause.  
The clock recalls him, ever out of tune,  
"Father, won't you come and stay with us?"

Sighing, the old man unbends  
His aching knees, and rising with a groan,  
Sidles crablike through the olive silence where, suspended  
Weightless, like dark and sleeping creatures for whom  
No worlds exist outside this room,  
The brooding antiques listen as he claws  
The light switch, hear the rusty hinges moan,  
"Father, won't you come and stay with us?"

Shrinking on the livid avenue,  
He struggles in the wake of the uptown bus  
That screams up Fourth Street, gasping noxious fumes,  
"Father, won't you come and stay with us?"

## Epitaph

Here lies Sam with his Annie at last;  
 She passed on a good five years before.  
 He still loved the Lord, put up a store  
 Of vegetables from the garden  
 And wondered why  
 Till the day he died.

## Monument

Once Henry had a mind  
As clear and perfect as blown glass,  
But it burst like a light bulb,  
Spewing shattered fragments and precious gas  
Into the cold Sicilian wind.

Once Henry had a uniform--  
Brass buttons winking in the sun--  
And Henry had a gun.  
And all the guns and uniforms marched together.  
Now, in any weather,  
In a tattered woolen overcoat, misbuttoned, old, and worn,  
Henry stumbles on alone.

The bursting shells, the gas--  
All is fused into one bright revolving mass.  
Tanks, milk trucks, men falling,  
Stealing ice, amputations, skipping rocks,  
Children throwing rocks, laughing,  
Nights with women, nights alone . . .  
The war came home.

Henry stumbles in the street,  
Swears through yellow teeth.  
We all see and hear  
And try not to recognize  
Triumph in his bloodshot eyes.



Though our skin was getting redder  
 We thought life was never better,  
 For we knew that dread bacteria and germs were in retreat.  
 If we sweated in the meantime,  
 Still we had eternal springtime--  
 Constant pine and rose and lilac--life had never been so  
sweet.

The foliage just kept dying  
 With mankind slowly frying  
 In the rays that beat down endlessly without impediment.  
 Yours was such a sweet seduction  
 As you drew us to destruction  
 And the cinders left behind were such a fragrant sediment.

Yes, we bought you and we sprayed you,  
 You infernal can of Glade; you  
 Just devoured all the ozone, Aerosol.

How we loved your deadly hiss!  
 We didn't realize the kiss  
 Of death could come from such a sanitary Judas as you.  
 If somehow we'd only learned,  
 We might have been the ones that burned  
 You, though I guess that the explosion would have zapped  
the ozone too.

I suppose yours was the best way;  
 Did you keep that can of Vespré  
 As the final fatal bite of apple hidden up your sleeve?  
 Did you chuckle at the irony  
 We should burn up in the fire that we  
 Kindled 'tween the legs of that hygienic latter Eve?

Heaven blast that can that sprayed her!  
 Someone should have told Ralph Nader  
 You were eating up the ozone, Aerosol.

## Homesick

It's persistent as the enemy, this old house.  
 I've cleaned it enough:  
 Scrubbed the rust stains in the tub,  
 Swept up fist-sized dust balls in the closets.  
 It all remains, resettles,  
 Sinks into its old indifference.  
 The sofa holds my husband's shape,  
 The paint fades like my oldest dress.

It's familiar as my face, this old house.  
 I've seen it enough:  
 The pipes that clog,  
 The doors that warp and swell.  
 We age together.  
 In the phone book, there's a dog-eared  
 Yellow Page of wrecking crews.  
 I've looked it over many times,  
 And many times this vision stopped the call:  
 Myself, settled in my husband's image, smiling  
 As the crane swings its steel fist through the wall.



The Union Street Methodist Church

Dead, it seems braced up by wires--  
 A brontosaurus' skeleton in a museum,  
 Half-fleshed, empty but for signs of torn-out organs:  
 A hole in the carpet where the altar stood,  
 A path worn thin with piety.  
 Rows of screw-holes mark the missing pews  
 That face a dusty pulpit hiding spiders,  
 A choir loft gone to rot.  
 Open sockets stud the monster's spine.

Still, there is a presence here  
 As real, though different, as the organ notes  
 That once reverberated on these ribs.  
 It is not composed of, nor broken by  
 The black jabberings that seep in  
 Through the broken stained-glass panes,  
 The rumblings of glass-packs in the street:  
 It is not the smell--  
 Or memory of smell--of soap  
 From pink-scrubbed faces,  
 Or hand-rubbed oak ripped out in haste:  
 It is the sound and smell of righteousness  
 Crusted with the residue of fear,  
 The memory of a God who failed.  
 It rains down with the motes drifting off the rafters,  
 And rises on the creak of floorboards at my feet.

A crash of glass sounds outside.  
 Under the lanky boxwood by the south wall,  
 A goatlike face--the only white one  
 On the street--stares out, jaundiced eyes unfocused.  
 The man lies back,  
 His stubbled cheek against the brick;  
 He is at home on any street.  
 Up the sidewalk,  
 Three girls with faces like mahogany  
 Lock arms, prance to their own voices:  
 "Ah know ya wanna lea'me--  
 But ah refyoo-ooze ta letchew go."

The church stairs sag;  
 The houses on Union Street give back  
 The rueful grin, their faces full of shadow.

I should go;  
 It is best to leave before dark.

When I was young I was so proud,  
 By night we roared our rage on fire--  
 The spoils of war,  
 We knocked the teeth out of tyranny.

Now, I wear my scars and burn at the hearth,  
 All tales to children  
 We knocked the teeth out of tyranny.  
 They laugh (the little heads):  
 Ask, "Grandpa, take out your apples."

In the Great Country

By the Fire

When I was young I wore my colors proud.  
 By night we roasted corn and pigs on open fires--  
 The spoils of war.  
 By day we knocked the teeth out of tyranny.

Now, I warm my corns and bunions at the hearth,  
 Tell tales to children:  
 How I knocked the teeth out of tyranny.  
 They laugh (the little beasts);  
 Ask, "Grampaw, take out your uppers."

My friends and I pose for talent to you--  
 We have not come  
 To perturb you under  
 A striped parking lot  
 Or surround you  
 With a roaring cloverleaf.  
 Even in a cemetery,  
 Our vast face wind and weather.  
 We are here surveying  
 For a system of stone drains  
 To clear your plots of puddles  
 And protect your coffins from explosion.  
 Your headstones like victims,  
 These equipment-laden gentlemen in the dirt  
 Are here to build these channels.  
 We will try to disturb you as little as possible.

Uncle Jimmy pulled across the yard  
 For a check on 6-3;  
 And I straddled across the grave,  
 Assisted by a slight jerk  
 Of his white head  
 As the jackhammer bit the pavement.

### In the Greek Cemetery

After the final benchmark shot  
 I leaned on my rod, scanning  
 The consonantal names around me,  
 Uneasy at the round-faced  
 Merchants, butchers, clerks  
 Grinning from the headstones.  
 One monument,  
 Its owner dissatisfied with the photographic discs  
 Embedded in its neighbors,  
 Wore instead  
 A marble bust.  
 The gravity of this pallid head  
 Demanded explanation,  
 And in my best rhetorical manner  
 I began:

Sir, my friends and I pose no threat to you.  
 We have not come  
 To pave you under  
 A striped parking lot  
 Or surround you  
 With a roaring cloverleaf.  
 Even in a cemetery,  
 One must face wind and weather.  
 We are here surveying  
 For a system of storm drains  
 To clear your plots of puddles  
 And protect your coffins from sogginess,  
 Your headstones from erosion.  
 Those equipment-laden gentlemen in the drive  
 Are here to build these channels.  
 We will try to disturb you as little as possible.

Now Finny yelled across the yard  
 For a check on G-3,  
 And I strode across the grave,  
 Dismissed by a slight jerk  
 Of his white head  
 As the jackhammer bit the pavement.

## Running Traverse\*

Pencils scarred this forest,  
 Scored it,  
 Slashed these trees and bushes into paths  
 Cracking through the leaves.  
 The ragged gash looks straight and black  
 in Al's notebook.  
 His hub staring from the ground,  
 A wooden eye tacked with a silver pupil,  
 Is shown as a circled dot.

What does it see, this earth eye?  
 He drouched above it, plumb bob jangling  
 by the wall that drops it down.  
 The back of stakes? The  
 Lashed with sap, plumb  
 Can it see the sky filigreed with branches,  
 The trees and patches heaped against the creek bank,  
 And Al leaping into his transit down the stubbled swiveler?

## II

## EYE ON THE STRING

I see him, hunched in flame-colored leaves,  
 Telling in his book the essentials--  
 Distances and angles.  
 He also the transit's tunnel eye at me:  
 I stand and hold my plumb bob steady,  
 Point to pupil.

Behind me, sparrows rustle leaves  
 Like sheaves of paper, focusing,  
 Al keeps his eye on the string.

\*When "running traverse," a land surveyor establishes  
 a loop of reference (traverse) points around the approximate  
 perimeter of the property. Hubs (flat wooden stakes) are  
 driven into the ground flush with the surface. The traverse  
 point is marked by the head of a metal tack driven into the  
 top of the hub. The points are "located" by measuring the  
 distances between them and the angles formed by them. In  
 the poem, an angle is being measured. Al sets up his tran-  
 sit on the point which forms the vertex of the angle; the  
 persona of the poem and another man are stationed at the

## Running Traverse\*

Pencils scarred this forest,  
 Scored it,  
 Slashed these trees and bushes into paths  
 Cranking through the leaves.  
 The ragged gash looks straight and black  
 In Al's notebook.  
 This hub staring from the ground,  
 A wooden eye tacked with a silver pupil,  
 Is shown as a circled dot.

What does it see, this earth eye?  
 Me crouched above it, plumb bob dangling  
 By the maul that drove it down?  
 The sack of stakes? The brush hook,  
 Smearred with sap, planted in its face?  
 Can it see the sky filigreed with branches,  
 The tires and bottles heaped against the creek bank,  
 And Al leaping into his transit down the stubbled corridor?

I see him, haloed in flame-colored leaves,  
 Noting in his book the essentials--  
 Distances and angles.  
 He aims the transit's tunnel eye at me;  
 I stand and hold my plumb bob steady,  
 Point to pupil.

Behind me, sparrows rustle leaves  
 Like sheaves of paper. Focusing,  
 Al keeps his eye on the string.

\*When "running traverse," a land surveyor establishes a loop of reference (traverse) points around the approximate perimeter of the property. Hubs (fat wooden stakes) are driven into the ground flush with the surface. The traverse point is marked by the head of a metal tack driven into the top of the hub. The points are "located" by measuring the distances between them and the angles formed by them. In the poem, an angle is being measured. Al sets up his transit on the point which forms the vertex of the angle; the persona of the poem and another man are stationed at the

## Collage

Twelve butterflies, identical;  
A tremulous cluster  
Of light in the road,  
Each wing a slice  
Of beaten gold  
Filigreed with jet.

Twelve butterflies, symmetrical;  
Twelve weightless bodies  
Alight on a toad  
Pressed flat  
Black  
And brittle in the dust.

(continued) nearest points on either side of him. These men give him "sights" on their respective points using a plumb bob--a pointed metal weight on a string. The plumb bob is held by the string so that its point is over the tack. The string then defines a straight vertical line above the point on which Al can superimpose the cross-hairs in the scope of his transit. By doing this first with one point, then rotating the transit to focus on the other, Al can measure the angle. Paths have been cleared with brush hooks (brush axes) in straight lines between each pair of points. "Maul" is another name for a sledge hammer.

All art partakes of death.  
Oxblood, camel hair, rotting wood  
Brittle hides, fossil-muck;  
This is the stuff of art.  
With each impending birth  
We catch a glimpse  
A glimpse . . .  
But always we abort the living thing,  
Wrap the shrivelled fetus in a skin  
And throw it on the ash-heap  
"Creativity"  
From which we vainly hope  
By piling the offal ever higher  
To eclipse the sun.

But who knows what can rise  
From those ashes?

A croaking toad! A creeping slug  
That leaves behind  
A trail of slime;  
At best a peacock  
Who struts and frets,  
Fanning his plumage  
To hide a hen's feet.  
That thing which immolated itself in air or wood  
Is gone.  
And the flames,  
The flowing orange flames . . .

And so I went away  
Smiling at his words.  
That night I dreamed  
Of a buffalo that rumbled down a hillside,  
Indian paintings rippling on its back;  
A silver maple,  
Music drawing upward from its roots;  
A great whale grinning scrimshaw  
At the harpooner.



## Cherokee

Cherokee squats at the Smokies' feet,  
Rubbed raw by the river's edge.  
When tourists come,  
The Indians dress for scalping parties--  
Pose for pictures, hustle tips.  
And Cherokee's not bad through the camera's eye.  
Bears lie along the streets of Cherokee;  
They never wreck a store  
Or maul a tourist, being caged--  
They pose for pictures, hustle tips.

The Cherokee recall their past;  
A taco stand assumes Sequoya's name,  
Ridge runs a fun house,  
Tsali sells cold cider and moccasins.  
Above the sidewalks,  
Totems in boiling neon wink  
That it means much to be a Cherokee,  
That it means nothing to be a Cherokee.

Above the town,  
The mountains hug about them  
The threadbare blanket of their mystery.  
At the city line,  
The last black bear, supine in a bathtub, grins  
--This is Cherokee. If you have the nerve,  
You can cross the mountains into Gatlinburg.

## The Locust

The locust's crystal wings split the wind  
That lifts him from the swaying willow tree.  
He leaves behind a replica in brittle skin,

A clinging husk on the reeling limb.  
The hollow eyes, wind-blasted, cannot see  
The locust's crystal wings split the wind.

The locust's song, unwinding like a spring,  
Throbs on the air. Exultantly  
He leaves behind a replica in brittle skin,

Its broken back the only imperfection in  
The shell, which frantically  
The locust's crystal wings split. The wind

Thrills his green flesh, crisp as crinoline,  
And stings his scarlet eyes. Old injuries  
He leaves behind. A replica in brittle skin

Still shudders on the tree, its grim  
Face shaded. As carelessly  
The locust's crystal wings split the wind,  
He leaves behind a replica in brittle skin.

Market Street  
or  
Exploring the Human Psyche in Size Nine Shoes

I didn't expect to see you here.  
These streets are mostly bare at four AM.  
Night is the best time of day  
To see this town.  
So when the party broke,  
I thought I'd take a walk;  
I put on these shoes--  
Don't know whose they are,  
But they must be nines--  
(Sure hurt my feet)  
And bounced on down the street  
Till I stopped here  
To listen to the traffic light click  
As the street turns from red to green.  
But now you're here, let's talk,  
And don't think because you're a rabbit  
You won't have to hold up your end.

Don't tell me you're late--  
You're not white, and I'm the one  
With the watch and the pink eyes.  
Before I came here  
I went by her place again  
--Don't wrinkle up your nose at me!  
I know she's been a pain in the ass  
But I thought I'd give her one more chance.  
Anyway, I got up the stairs somehow.  
She came to the door.  
"You're drunk," she said.  
Shit, I says, I knew that fourteen beers ago.  
"You're just an overgrown adolescent."  
--I tell you, that girl can get right down to it.  
But then she goes all wrong, says  
How I'm a coward,  
Got drunk to escape.  
As if anyone would want to escape into adolescence!

To bubble over with pimples,  
Hear your voice crack,  
While your knees and elbows  
Fight the furniture,  
And you put your big feet  
Down in dog shit.

She made me so mad  
I didn't even stay long enough  
For her to throw me out.  
--Leave that clover a minute,  
And I'll lay some truth on you:  
Inside each of us there's a tiny little person.  
In me--don't laugh now--  
There's a miniature Rudolf Nureyev.  
That's right--he's down there,  
With perfect control  
Over muscles he don't even know about yet.  
Trouble is  
He's trapped down there  
In this big ridiculous body.  
Now when we're children  
These little people can control us easy,  
But when we get bigger  
Other arrangements have to be made.  
So they set up this system  
Of electricity and plumbing  
To make us walk, talk, and secrete.  
Now, when you're an adolescent  
You don't walk so good,  
And you don't talk so good,  
But you sure as hell secrete--  
That's all because the system ain't together yet.  
But by the time you stop growing  
It's all fixed,  
And Rudy's down there  
Like some rippling Oz  
Throwing levers and flipping switches  
That make us move like beautiful machines.  
There's only a couple things  
Can shake up Rudy in his Trojan horse,  
And one of them is booze;  
Throw a few beers down

And circuits start to short out  
Till pretty soon the system's all fucked up.  
It's just like adolescence,  
With Rudy jerking all the levers,  
But those clown's feet and crazy elbows  
Go their own way,  
Till finally old Rudy's lost control.  
Just like Jonah  
Peering out the whale's mouth  
When he's nearer to the other end.  
Or like--  
Well, you pick a simile.

So that's why she was wrong;  
Getting drunk's an act of faith,  
An act of courage.

Don't get me wrong--  
There's something to be said for sobriety too.  
Just wait a minute, I'll think of it.

In the Mandapa of Andal\*

Krishna, eighth avatar  
Of Vishnu, flayed his steeds.  
Andal's lord--and she ignored  
The trampled castes that bleed.

hare krishna hare krishna  
krishna krishna hare hare  
hare rama hare rama  
rama rama hare hare

Andal in her mandapa  
Weeps against the stone.  
Krishna's bride--he tore aside  
Her veils and cast her down.

hare krishna hare krishna  
krishna krishna hare hare  
hare rama hare rama  
rama rama hare hare

\*A mandapa is a temple.

## At the Lodestar

"The Beer that Made Milwaukee Famous" lights  
The rain that blows in with each customer.  
On her tiny stage,  
Pasties a-dazzle in the black light,  
Kaye rams her pelvis to "Knock Three Times,"  
Eyes locked on a picture of palm trees, blue water.  
Men clutch their glasses, elbow in at the bar to watch  
The Eagles try a field goal.  
Behind the bar, Dutch fingers his blackjack and watches  
The Scotch back of the stage  
Feigning jabs with his cue.  
Shirley scuttles with foaming pitchers  
Past the blue-lidded blonde at the jukebox.  
Playing Double Flash,  
I crouch like a cat at the bowling machine,  
Muscles tensed, eyes narrowed at the lights.  
Slowly,  
Slowly the weekend dies.

## Meat

My shining cart rolls down the aisle  
 Past rows of "ground round," "pork loin," "lamb chops."  
 Behind the one-way glass, perhaps,  
 A blood-specked butcher stops to smile  
 At the curled girl who'd cringe at a steak too pink,  
 The man made queasy by a blackened vein in his drumstick.  
 They make me sick.

I want to push this cart away,  
 Shout, "I am carnivore!  
 Give me cow, pig, and sheep!"  
 In a slaughterhouse once  
 I saw an old gray horse led in.  
 A little weapon held to his head  
 Drove him to his knees  
 With a piston's stroke.  
 I passed a washline full of sheep,  
 Their legs kicking  
 As the blood ran from their headless shoulders.

Behind white aprons, plastic wrap, we hide  
 Creatures carved to shapeless lumps,  
 Plucked and trimmed and dressed  
 Like hopeful daughters for the prom;  
 And yet we smash the spider, axe the snake,  
 Shoot the owl, hawk, and fox.  
 The truth is living  
 In their teeth and claws.



## Osceola in Moultrie

This is Osceola  
 Painted at Fort Moultrie in his cell.  
 That barrel chest is Catlin's compensation  
 For the way that fate and white men  
 Had broken the half-breed Muscogee from Alabama.  
 Billy Powell--who fled with his mother  
 The white man's conquest,  
 Joined with the Florida runaways.  
 Among cypress and palmetto,  
 Powell sang and served the black drink  
 That brings the purifying sickness,  
 Shed his white man's blood and name,  
 Became Osceola.

Osceola--black drink singer--  
 Who stood with chiefs at the Fort King conference,  
 Heard the soldiers planning removal,  
 Heard and feared for his outcast brothers--  
 Mikasuki and Apalachee,  
 Plantation slaves, Yemassee, Red Stick--  
 Saw it was the land that made them Seminole,  
 And signed the treaty with a scalping knife.

Osceola--war chief of the Seminole--  
 Who drove a knife through the heart of a nation,  
 Cleansed his people in the blood of traitors  
 And perched on the back of the white man's army--  
 Perched like a squirrel on a hickory limb.  
 Through Spanish moss like gray hair hanging,  
 Past cypress knees sharp as sabers,  
 Osceola led his people.  
 Cottonmouth-silent, dark as panthers,  
 From the shadows they struck like panthers.

But this  
 Is Osceola, prisoner at Moultrie,  
 Taken by treachery;  
 Risen from the moldering floor to dress  
 In his ceremonial best.

Days later,  
 Alone with the memory of the white flag snapping,  
 The sudden glint of rifles round him,  
 Osceola died in Moultrie.

This is Osceola,  
 Black drink of the Seminole.

As when you go with ice-blue eyes,  
 Kings of life, the hypocrite  
 And holds you fast with clamy thighs.

The offers hope of self-protection--  
 With words, a golden will--  
 And when you're alcohol beyond detection,  
 Cleave them off with bloody knives.

But still you crave the glowing witch  
 And still, with smiles, she lets you down;  
 The stage is a hell of a hard-wood hitch  
 And leaves you all alone.

## The Stage

The stage is a hell of a hard-nosed bitch  
Who draws you on with ice-blue eyes;  
Sings of life, the hypocrite  
And holds you fast with clammy thighs.

She offers hope of self-protection--  
Goblin masks, a golden veil--  
And when you're cloaked beyond detection,  
Claws them off with bloody nails.

But still you crave the glowing witch  
And still, with smiles, she lets you down;  
The stage is a hell of a hard-nosed bitch  
Who leaves you all alone.

The Love Bug: A Sonnet

Pulverized to viscous muck  
by a passing garbage truck  
when he tried to come across with her,  
antennae and ovipositer,  
abdomen, twelve legs entwined,  
wings, aborted eggs begrime  
the windshield, mucilaginous slime  
that clogs the boiling radiator  
telling how he almost made her--  
one calamitous copulation  
climaxing his week's duration  
turned to vile evisceration  
at a lowly altitude  
where he didn't quite get screwed.

"except for e e cummings jesus i  
wish people would go back to punctuation capital  
letters paragraphs carefully constructed  
clauses and other forms of verbal organization  
instead its all so slipshod runon nothings  
clear anymore crap i swear they even think and  
talk that way just jump from here  
to there

and back again they  
never finish anything just talk alot  
sort of uh like wow you know what you call  
they never stop to think they let it pour  
must the language of shakespeare be a mess?"

He sighed. And laid his head down on his grade book.

### Marbles in the Hallway

Low as a mounted Mongol horde,  
 It was best played when my parents were gone,  
 Barricades were built at each of the hall's ends,  
 My trumpet case, the dictionary, several  
 volumes of the Book of Knowledge  
 tucked tightly and to end  
 to hold the wubbling catyvas back.

If one got through,  
 It bounced against the wall  
 and splattered down,

down,

### III

down the stairs

### THE SHINGLED HOOD

Into the floor register  
 Once through this funnel  
 That belled by mother's skirts  
 And dispersed the stair like desert air.  
 The marble was gone,  
 -Until my father cleaned the furnace.  
 Then it could be retrieved  
 Along with coins and pencils  
 And the white chessman also dropped in,  
 (When we fished the bishop out,  
 He was bowed at the waist  
 Like a Chinaman.)

## Marbles in the Hallway

Loud as a mounted Mongol horde,  
 It was best played when my parents were gone.  
 Barricades were built at each of the hall's ends,  
 (My trumpet case, the dictionary, several  
 Volumes of The Book of Knowledge)  
 Fitted tightly end to end  
 To hold the rumbling cateyes back.

If one got through,  
 It bounced against the wall  
 And clattered down,  
                   down,  
                   down the stairs  
 Into the floor register at the foot.  
 Once through this fuming checkerboard  
 That ballooned my mother's skirts  
 And shimmered the stair like desert air,  
 The marble was gone.  
 --Until my father cleaned the furnace.  
 Then it could be retrieved  
 Along with coins and pencils  
 And the white chessman also dropped in.  
 (When we fished the bishop out,  
 He was bowed at the waist  
 Like a Chinaman.)

## My Mother's House

## Ice Storm

Through the night I hear the crack  
 Of trees that snap and fall  
 And rake their icy branches down the walls  
 And lighted window panes of houses;  
 Lights that flicker with the fire  
 Of ice that grips the taut electric wire  
 On which a crystal-coated pine tree bows.

I am plunged  
 By a slab of darkness.

The darkness lifts.  
 It is a bleeding towel.  
 My mother's face, drained white, above  
 Says, "It's all right."  
 She is wrong.

The darkness lifts again.  
 I smell gasoline and sweet vinyl.  
 Hear the grinding of the neighbors' truck,  
 Trucklike, jerking us down the drive,  
 Spinning us through trees flashing black  
 And white  
 And black and white  
 And black and

White light fills the room.  
 Ether and alcohol swirl from the nurse  
 The doctor, black mustache bristling, needle  
 spurting,  
 Says, "Don't panic." We'll fix him good as new.  
 He is wrong.





I am white--  
Swathed in sheets, helmeted in gauze;  
Laid on a white slab in a row of white slabs.  
Holding coloring books,  
My aunt leans down, laughing  
"By the time you're married,  
The scars will all be gone."

IV And she was wrong.  
Like all, I pass my life  
Behind a pane of glass,  
And cannot see it.  
Like few, I am alert to its reflections:  
On my face, a scar where no beard grows--  
Or in my mother's house, a book,  
Its pages edged with spots of brown.

## The Summer Camp

The dew stands breathless in the breathing leaves,  
 Hatches the new bent low in the brush, then  
 Surely brushing a leaf.

Within a hard green fragile chrysalis  
 A butterfly becomes.  
 The secret of that noncommittal shell is this--  
 Only time and self can form  
 The firm gold wings, the bright composite eyes.  
 Break the shell; the tender creature dies.

And once again through its plastic shell again.

And nature keeps a restive hold on man.

The forest sweeps itself around abandoned building sites,  
 By swollen stream down mud on ball field and parking lots  
 And always there are the eyes;

The birds that jump from dark patios at your feet,

The squirrel on the hickory stump,

The raccoon rifling the garbage cans,

The warps and sparrows nesting in the bath-house eaves,

Over the trees

All watch with the same solemn eyes.

Are the children?

A few, perhaps

Take back to their crowded lives

The feel of those changeless eyes on them.

## The Summer Camp

The doe stands breathless in the breathing leaves,  
Watches the man bent low in the brush, then  
Barely brushing a leaf,  
Melts back into the mountain laurel.

The man remains  
Crouched at his work.

He is used to these silent eyes.  
The clamp in place, he stands. The pipe  
Will carry water to the farthest cabin,  
Till mice gnaw through its plastic shell again.

Here nature keeps a restive hold on man.  
The forest wraps itself around abandoned building sites;  
The swollen stream dumps mud on ball field and parking lot;  
And always there are the eyes;

The toads that jump from dark paths at your feet,  
The squirrel on the hickory stump,  
The raccoon rifling the garbage cans,  
The wasps and sparrows nesting in the bath-house eaves,  
Even the trees

All watch with the same solemn eyes.

And the children?

A few, perhaps  
Take back to their crowded lives  
The feel of those changeless eyes on them.

## Wedding Poem

Two single raindrops ran down my window  
Leaving slippery liquid trails behind.  
With each precious inch  
Each drop that much diminished  
Until they came together  
Mingling into one amorphous drop  
That rolled along the faster to its finish.

How unlike you and me, I thought;  
These foolish droplets racing,  
Wasting themselves in headlong dash  
To lose themselves in one small splash  
Of lover's mediocrity.

You and I are Yang and Yin  
Those ancient Chinese principals of life.  
Like curving teardrops  
Each embracing each  
Making of two sole imperfect selves  
One profound perfection.  
Yet by a slender membrane,  
A thin diaphanous frontier,  
Still maintaining  
The oneness of each single tear.  
A universe of two  
Separate  
Inseparable

## The Dormer

Houses weren't so clean and claustrophobic then;  
The lawn was clogged with hulking shrubs and trees,  
Nooks hid dark beneath the porch and cellar steps,  
The tin roof rattled with rain, sheltered eaves  
Were barnacled with nests of wasps  
That bobbed like marionettes outside my dormer window.  
This was best of all; it stood  
Like a castle battlement in the slowly sloping roof.  
The stone wall crumbling in the drive,  
The dogs that barked beyond the neighbors' house,  
The woods, the wind that brushed the grain  
Like fingers in a blond boy's crewcut--  
In the tunnel-vision of the dormer  
All stood framed  
By the green tin that fell away beneath me.

At night  
I sailed off to the stars,  
A spaceman in a rocket's cockpit,  
Or, a pioneer in a Conestoga wagon,  
Creaked along the Oregon trail.  
I slept,  
A shipwrecked sailor in his cave,  
A soldier in his tent.  
Whoever I was,  
Wherever I went,  
I saw from my shingled hood  
A narrow view.

It was nothing like the panorama  
From a picture window;  
We're so much freer,  
More frightened now.

Sebastian:  
At the Concert

Your voice rang down like rain on the roof  
And we were lulled away into your daydream;  
A time of candy-colored shirts and smiling singers,  
Love that radiated like an aura from our faces  
And lit the darkest recesses on earth.  
Hopeful, tearful teens  
We danced on your guitar strings.  
Pick it, John, pick it.

Wailing like a southbound freight  
Your mouth harp swept us up.  
You wept to see us go  
And beat our crazy heads against the sky;  
A sky that didn't fall when our idols did,  
Around us in the streets,  
Where we sweated, marched to nowhere.  
Pick it, pick it, pick it.

Your autoharp proclaims  
Your music makes the daydream real.  
But who can tell its meaning  
To old Walrus-face  
Who comes to drag away a happy cripple  
And fright us with his purple nose?  
Pick it, pick it, pick it.

Smiling singer, banjo-faced,  
You chase away our hopelessness  
For now.  
We still believe in magic.  
We must;  
Sometimes we even smile.

## Meeting Again

If I were wiser, or if I could fake it,  
(My eyes a-twinkle, sipping on a scotch)  
I'd pull a panatela from my pocket  
And start the old fire burning with a match.  
If you were stronger, or at least amusing,  
(Your smile so coy behind your sloe gin fizz)  
You'd finger your pearl necklace without pausing  
To think how déjà vu the whole thing is.  
Instead I suck my beer, you wring your fingers;  
(Sophistication never was our game.)  
We haven't mellowed with our weathering, or  
Forgotten lies we told to ease the pain.  
Though piled with props, we'd still be undisguised;  
You never have been strong, and I'm not wise.



I'm in favor of worms!  
(I say this you worm-haters to convert.)  
I remember how both ends would squirm  
When, a child, I shoveled through one in the dirt.

But with normal maturation and sincere reflection  
This sadism turned to true affection.

My father kept a bucketful for fishbait in the yard  
But never saw them for the lovable  
And loving creatures that they are.  
He never knew that his moronic avocation  
Was the start of our platonic relation.  
--The worm and me, I mean.  
His name was Cornwallis.  
I fled with him (because he was the smallest)  
Before he was impaled and drowned.

I never had to curb him when we went for walks in town.  
He never ran away from me (or crawled)  
And kept his ear to the ground in case I called.  
That's a worm for you;  
They're quiet, clever, cuddly, and loyal  
And, I'm told, quite beneficial to the soil.

I seldom play with worms now  
But I think of them a lot.  
I never could tie one in a knot.