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PRESS
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HERE

SONGS IN THE NIGHT
(English 456)

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00288280

STARTING FROM SOUTH CAROLINA

From the August land of the low red moon
I raise in the heat a song of experience.
How hate moves in the wind of her storms!
How her white linen politicians exude,
Expound, grind and triumph upon hate!
Her stupidity, the stupidity of a bull.
Her insanity, so viciously logical that love
Which shines golden in her sunscape, is sung
But by a few deep in her swamps.

Poor children of the bleached fields,
Westward across the low mountains freedom
Calls as if it would welcome you.
Fresh prairie winds, cool Northern winds,
Surely dreams are there. America at last!
But her white linen politicians have mounted
The mountains, exuding, expounding. Hate
Is grinding triumphantly. The swamps of America
Fill with sad, sullen singers.

(1969)

PERHAPS YOU NEVER WERE

I suppose it is the darkness
To which I am unaccustomed
Or perhaps, it is the peace
That makes me feel so strange.
The night animals make small noise.
The moon is full over the trees.
To the west there is thunder
Where God walks, lightning
On the mountains.

I have heard about you from machines,
Read about you in books, but now
I have come searching for you myself.
Surely you remember the hawks and eagles,
And the buffalo, covering the plains.
Or perhaps, you never were. . .
I have seen people who said they were you.
I hoped they were liars. In any case,
They were not who I was looking for. I hoped
To find you here, working your perfect harmony,
You, extinct on the nickels and pennies.
Perhaps, you never were.

I am alone
When the dawn comes.
A belladonna dawn
In the dead concrete reality
Of an A&P parking lot
Where mechanical reapers
Rape a whirlwind.

(1971)

HOW OFTEN

How often
We are frightened from sleep
By what we have seen
Or seem to remember
Of an old dream.

The half human figure
Comes bounding towards us,
Intent on our throat,
The taste of our blood.

Do not fool yourself into thinking
That the fangs which flash by moonlight
Are figments of the imagination.

They are sharper than reality.
Even the best among us,
Would as soon kill you
As look at you.

(1971)

RAINY SUNDAY

It came a week ago
By first class mail
From a mail order house
In the capital.
Eagerly anticipated
And much dreamed over
As it languished in the mails
For a full two weeks.

An environmental erector set
Paid for in hard saved
Allowance money
Nine ninety-eight, C.O.D.
Johanna barely tolerated the postman
Before rushing to her room
And placing the cardboard box
Upon her desk.

There was a tin foil packet
A small gold fish bowl
And a booklet of instructions
Containing:
Complex diagrams with suns and moons
Earths and neptunes
Jupiters, saturns, et cetera.
Not to mention
Orbits and eclipses, elipses
And horoscopes.
And many other things
Which Johanna didn't bother
To read.

She tore the tin foil
Along dotted lines
And shook the contents,
Intricate mass
Into the gold fish bowl.
And as she watched
Through her magnifying glass
The weightless, suspended, structure
Slowly began
Its delicate movement.

Stars and planets whirled around
In their ordained orbits
Passing perilously close but never clashing.
Like a fine watch
The structure ran perpetually.

Many stars and planets
She observed closely
And finally on an earth
She found living animals
Prowling about killing and eating
Their fellows.
"How horrible it must be
To be an earthling." She thought.
And she watched the earth
No more that day.

She

Saturday noon she again glanced
At the earth.
And to her surprise
The former savage animals
Were gone.
And in their stead
A new animal lived.
These new animals seemed
Of a gentle disposition
Inclined toward kisses and affectionate embraces.
And very concerned
With improving their lot
As by Saturday night
Machines had appeared.

Johanna went to bed
Thoroughly amused.

All went well
Until midnight when
Sharp noises and swords of light
Began to flash from the gold fish bowl.
This phenomenon lasted
Until four A. M.
But Johanna and her family
Were sound asleep by then
And were not disturbed.

Sunday morning was rainy
 Dark and overcast.
 Johanna was awakened
 By a commotion
 Inside the globe of glass.
 On the purple curtain
 Above the vessel
 A red glow lingered.
 Within the bowl
 Many firey balls
 Sounding like flaming
 Alka-Seltzers
 Drifted about scorching the glass.
 And cracks soon lined the walls
 Of the vessel.

In a moment
 The event had passed.
 Johanna peered into the bowl
 With her glass.
 The cindered planets
 Hung in still suspension.
 Odious clouds drifted about.
 NOWHERE
 Was there a living creature
 To amuse her.

The toy (however educational)
 Was defective no doubt.
 And as Johanna placed
 The cracked bowl
 On the garbage heap
 She regretted that her
 Nine ninety-eight
 Would not be refunded.
 As the manufacturer
 Assumed no responsibility
 For faulty workmanship.

(1969)

Kregg Spivey

SILENT NIGHT

It was a silent night
Somewhere in the square states
On the borderline.

All the black boxes hummed routinely
And the young men sat drowsily
At their watchposts.

He was daydreaming inside his earphones
When a mouse squeak opened his eyes
To see a blip, ablip, ablip. . .

The truest believer, a man of nineteen years,
Pressed his finger to the proper button
And alerted the "free" world.

"A homing mouse, never meant to fly,
Is screaming over the snow covered conifers
To you know where, you know who.

A lean shark in the sky, with a rodent whine
Comes to shrink the world in fire
And silent night."

(1969)

WE COULD NEVER SLEEP

We could never sleep
The sleep of dreamless visage.
Even the dreams of death,
The black fall and the black spring
And the million fiendish fallout shelters,
Are dreamed with every blowing breeze.

Man falls
To sleep to wake
To fight the maze
Of swiftly passing days.

And, as dreams are the stuff
From which courage is made,
Sleep through the days
Of fool's rectitude,
The days of war.

But courage never comes
Soon enough.
When the new world breaks
On the sill of nothing
Like an egg full of blood
Staining nevers horizon,
Wake-up with your courage.

Tomorrow something reaps,
Something not descended from apes.
Tomorrow apes will weep,
And sleep is no escape.

(1969)

RAIN COMING

The clouds are preparing to rain
on the farmer's land.
I love the clouds. And they know.
Now it begins! Now it begins!
Small rain whipped by high winds
Splatters against my window.
The heavy blessing is a mile away,
low on the turbulent horizon.
One long roll of thunder, general darkness edging about,
Here it is! Here it is!
The rearing big rain, thudding into the ground.

(1971)

ON THE STRUGGLE FOR IMMORTALITY

AM is the tenant
Where infirmity isn't.
In the time of AM
To the end of becoming,
Fire painfully breathed
Against the night
Of never.

WAS is the tyrant
Where AM capitulates.
Before encroaching WAS
AM sometimes wavers;
The terror of palsy,
The softening of bowels,
The reality of memory.
In the harsh world of AM
Senility is the term.

In the alchemy of time
Where pain is the catalyst
The fine insanity,
Between hot and cold,
Becomes immeasurable IS.

(1969)

I HEAR SOMETHING IN THE NIGHT

I hear something in the night.
O I'm a child about such things.
I know it's nothing worthy of fright,
Probably the wind, or the house settling.
But think of the jaws that gape in the mud,
Think of the bird with broken wings,
Think of a vice that shuts off your blood,
The lethal cloud, the fire that clings.
All things living have their right,
Fish to swim, birds to sing.
I hear something in the night.
O I'm a child about such things.

(1970)

TO THE CLASS OF '29

Somewhere there must be
A weeping eye staring
As you flog yourselves
Out of existence.

Tears must trickle
Down His marble cheek
At the sight of
Sad Volkswagens
Churning down the perfect turnpikes,
Unstrung Indians,
Various machines,
To whom are sacrificed
Lives, fortunes, sacred honor, etc.,
The horror of zoos.

Somewhere He watches
Veterans Day parades,
Speech makers,
County fairs on summer afternoons,
And all the useless youth
Trying to get some action.

And somewhere the patron saint
Of hunchback bellringers
Blows His marble cool.

(1969)

THEY ALL CAME

They all came
To the meeting hall
To honor the oldest of all
Living veterans of foreign wars.

They came in old uniforms
To sit at long tables
And make speeches immortalizing
His bravery and worth.

But the old soldier
Couldn't hear them.
His mind was mostly gone.
His thoughts were incoherent,
His days perpetual dawn.

The middle-aged corporal was speaking.
And when he pointed at the ghost of honor
The hall was filled with the sound of gunfire.

And the old man,
Being deaf and blind,
Was behind
His gun again.
He could hear the Germans coming
Through the Ardennes,
Crunch, crunch, crunch,
Over the telltale snow.
To his right, a frozen gun crew sat
As if the breath of God
Had chilled them at
Their lonely, barbed wire post.

Finger on the trigger, hand on the bolt. . .
RATATATATAT. . .
HOLD THE LINE

It was summertime.
He was at Ypres.
The Germans came charging
Through the field of yellow flowers.
He remembered the face
Of every man he had killed.
Every hand he had stilled
Quivered above the wind-swept petals.
He heard the enemy in agony crying.
He understood that he, also was dying.

He was Cain.
He was Abel.
He was Noah, contemplating the rainbow.

There was the roll of a drum.
They tried to make him wave the flag
(A little one).
But he couldn't move.
His tears fell
On the tablecloth
With a BOOM.

(1969)

THE STORY OF HIS LIFE

On an April farm
 A small boy ran
 Through all his days
 Of mist and dew.
 And sleepy in the green noise
 Of the cows bell and windmill turning
 Innocence and gentleness he knew.
 And though he listened to
 Reverent ranting on Sunday mornings
 He was unafraid all his life.
 And bye and bye despite mother's warnings
 He took a secret lover for his wife.

In the deep woods
 At edge of dark
 He heard the wild spirit
 Flying amidst the cypress and oak.
 And as the wind moved the living leaves
 His heart danced beneath a moon
 Hung and haloed in whispering heavens
 Above the shadowy stalks of trees.

In sedge burning time
 Far from his April farm
 A man now but no less gentle
 He lay bleeding to death
 In a sea of reeds.
 The cows bell rang in the grass of his ears
 The windmill turned in the blue of his eyes
 The wild spirit flew like a sparrow in tears
 As beneath his hands, a heart died.

(1970)

AS I WALK BY THE HIGHWAY

As I walk by the wicked black highway,
Way high cackle the winging black grackles
Nooning it north in the sap laughing Friday
Of a new summer shaking the long gray shackles.

Soon this stretching summer will wear the green
And come knocking its news at winter-soaked houses,
Giving leaves to trees and bright cotton blouses
To flower-faced girls in the blue-windowed mills.

The tourists in cars flash past in the breeze,
While His love's in the telling golden and green:
Leaving lonely cities for bungalows by the sea,
Lifelike automatons, insolent with gasoline.

(1971)

IN THE GRASS BY THE WATER

In the long growing grass
By the side of a lake I lay
With a girl whom I cannot remember.
But it was the last of summer.
And a cool wind blowing gently
Rustled the graybeard moss
Hanging from the tall cypress,
Rustled in the rasping voice of the pines.
Our skin was so white.
We were two long white worms,
Just come to the surface, lazy
In the deep green grass by
The deep black water.
The last blowing breeze of a summer's afternoon
Chilled like milk the soft white skin
Of the girl whom I
Cannot remember.

(1971)

BAD DREAM

Sometimes I dream
That I'm a man
Running. . .
Through crowded streets.
My insane pockets
Jingle jangle
In the human tangle.

A candy wrapper,
Old cigarette packs,
Miscellaneous flotsam,
Whirl about my ears
Settle in my astonishing
Wake
As the product of my years
Rushes rude and aimless
Begging no pardons
On his way.
There's little time in a day.

A faceless, nameless,
Unknown pursuer
Menacing only me,
Was stalking only a block away
When I ran ~~into~~ a tree.

Above the leaves hung waiting
For the wind to set them free.
I heard the horrible footsteps mating
As a voice walked up to me:

"You're George and Martha's boy,"
It said.
"I thought you'd long been dead."

*question:
shift in tense?*

into

je

(1969)

1931 LEFT DANGLING

It was the middle of the year
(The book being half open)

When the locusts flew off
With my calf.

And my dead uncle began to laugh
(Like he always did when his girlfriend tickled him).

It was the middle of the year
(The book being half closed)

When my mother danced with a bat
(Back to hell)

And I ran the doctor off
Calling him fat (a word worse than cancer)

Outside was gray nothing
Over the saline earth

Cold witch-tit weather
That froze the birth

Of a baby chicken in his egg.
It was the middle of the year

(The pages lay in equal heaps opposed)
When a great freight of the B. and O.

Rushed by collapsing our porch in the snow
Causing our hounds to howl all night.

I wished the spring would
Hurry up.

(1969)

I AM RAINING

I am raining
Across the railroad tracks
Laid long ago by a hundred rhythmic blacks.
Sun and steel and dancing feet.

In motel rooms and forgotten attics
Rarely dusted except by fanatics
The cobalt sandwiched Holy Ghost
Caged so long
Is about to explode.

I am raining.

(1969)

WHAT IF TOMORROW

What if tomorrow
The earth should go?
What if we exploded it?
Would the prime mover know?

The earth is in the middle.
And the middle is everywhere.
The earth is smaller than little
And the circumference is nowhere.

And in this situation
Happiness is the end.
Yet have you in your lifetime
Had an hour of it to spend?

The mastermind of humankind
Is sometimes seen in nursery rhymes
Listening to our woes and whines
Pardoning our sins
Reducing our fines.

And this mad puppeteer
Lending us his ear
Drops mercy on us
With a tear
And tells us that happiness
Is near

But at the end. . .

(1969)

A SHADE OF PURPLE

A shade of purple
So slight and fleeting
That no eye can
Detect it
Severs every day
A thought from an action
A deed from a dream
Lovers from murderers
Saints from fiends

A gentle purple dust
Which blinds us sweetly
Enraptures and lulls us
In ourselves
Without it there would be
No churches-or gardens
No fairies or elves

In the mist our souls are sleeping
Quietly in its daze
God smiles at the poet peeping
Through the mist of purple haze

(1969)

BEGINNING THE END AGAIN

The sun rose
Red in the black sky.
The people had been sleeping
On the ashes of burnt grass
Beneath the leafless limbs
Of seared and shrunken trees.

Lonely as the first cave dwellers,
They gazed into the ash shrouded sky
At the murdered sun bleeding
Over creation's mutiny.

Many were weak and injured.
Only a few were yet strong.
Of the latter, the unscathed asserted;
"Even as the Greeks, we must now make use
Of our democratic creed."

And so, amidst war and rumors of war;
Sickness and rumors of sickness,
The lost men sat in council.
The strong men put forth their candidate.
"You must elect him president", they said,
As the mountains fell.

(1969)

YOUNG TOM'S SONG

Teeth gold crowned
I walk loose-kneed down
A purple harlot heaven
Nigger town.

Reeking of cheapy
Sloe-eyed and sleepy
A hot night razor fight
Could find me easy.

No such luck
For this fat buck,
Just a nickel cigar and a big black car
And a woman in the back of a truck.

In a blue pearl town a half a pint down
I glory in an hour of sharecropper power.
Watch, boss man, I dance on dixie land,
My gaudy gay shoes, noisy as beer cans.

(1970)

ANYWAY

Death for you
Wasn't very hard.
Mustang of ochre hue
Parked in my front yard
Siamese cat, London Fog, and gigantic Saint Bernard
Have killed you
As sure as poison due.

DON'T ARGUE

Just give me
One more kid
Before I close
Your coffin lid.
The undertaker can have you
When I get the lowest bid.

Then we'll slide you
Underneath the ground.
The worms can divide you
And pass you around.

Coffin clockwise.

(1969)

A BLACK VEILED WOMAN

A black veiled woman
Stood stiffly on the green sward
Of Arlington cemetery.
Many friends and dignitaries
Came to comfort her.
She stood so singularly
With her bright medal
Resting upon the folded flag
In her outstretched hands.

I, being neither friend nor dignitary,
But a tree climber in a copse
On a faraway knoll, noticed
How ancient and unreal
The ceremony seemed—
The drawing of swords,
The firing of rifles.

And how mourners at a funeral
Remind me remarkably
Of dogs in a circle.
How small children
Perhaps brothers and sisters
Too little to understand
Run laughing and peeping
Behind the crosses.

How flowers neatly arranged
Soon wilt,
Become shabby and brown
When out of their element.

(1969)

A POEM IN SANDSTONE

A hermit lives
In the black mountains
Of circuitry.
Above the fearful foothills
At the mouth
Of a camouflaged cave
His face
Is often seen.
His home near the top
Of the jagged rock,
Where no man
Has ever been,
Is sometimes visited
By ghosts and goblins
And forever haunted
By the wind
(Carving its poetry).
In the grim recesses
Where sanity confesses,
Hydrophobia
Climbs the frozen crags.
He takes his meals
Wherever he finds them
While behind him
His phobia family lags.

They met today
At the mouth of the cave,
Hydrophobia and hermit
At last.
And as the disease
Began to absorb him,
The wind rushing past
Carried the hermit's whimpers
Far and fast
To every icy ridge,
Every last crook and cranny
Of that enchanted
Sandstone canyon.

(1969)

OF THE FIELDS

Come wet or dry
All the days of my life
With my wandering feet
Fast upon your cheek
And the blood of your heart
Singing, welling, springing
Into me, I am myself a crop,
A nomad of the fields.

While the sunlight spins
Gold in the dust, and the bees
Hover over the clover
I think of you somewhere
In fields yellow as your hair,
O warm and windsome girl,
I'm sure as a snail
God loves this earth.

I think of the time
When I shall fall flat
Upon these fields where
I have lived all my life.
My eyes to close and decompose
Into earthworms and sap and lo,
My ghost into the storm wind singing,
My soul into April's bright flowers.

(1970)

THERE IS NO CHILD

There is no child
Like my Christ child;
Gilt framed and glowing in the dark
On the kitchen table.
May he never be unplugged.

No grist like our grist (you and me)
For our mill (also like no other)
Which bakes the bread
Which consumes our children
Ravenously.

No wheel so merciless
As our wheel
Under which are crushed
The seeds
By rattling relics of bookish bones.

No god so black
No skin so white
No threat so terrible
No good deed so ungood

No graveyard so barren
As ours.

(1969)

THE MILL

In the heavy Southern summer night,
Humming like a tireless metallic cricket,
The mill sheds brilliant electric light
Fading through the parasitic village.

The men wait silently in the early morning.
They stare through the gate, still yawning,
And the dew dampens them.

Lint is shot through their hair and lungs.
They never see the full fury of the sun.
And their days are measured
In eight-hour shifts.

Each man will soon be at his loom,
Spinning coarse yarn into fine thread.
Each man will dance to his father's tune
Watching his hours spin into bread.

In each man's face
In his meaningless mirth
I see his unknown longing
For his long lost earth.

(1969)

MEMO:

No,
It is neither brighter
Nor greener here.

The blood of trees
Flows from the sawmill.

And I saw the old God
Last week.

He was a tortoise crawling
Up the crest of a blowing hill.

I could not see the old head
Or the pained eyes.

But I knew he was frightened,
Was trying to escape.

He was so pitiable,
Trying to creep quietly away

Under the night
And terrible lightning. . .

The thunder pounding him
Into the ground.

(1971)


LOOK

Look, amid the city traffic toiling,
Down at the corner by the bus depot,
A little family huddles in country clothing.
Lost in the city's angry boiling, lost
In the sadness of being broken by something larger
And more terrible than God, they cling
To the growing young son going
In a shiny uniform
Off to the war.

Two timid little girls in fading pink hang to
Her skirts, as the tight-lipped woman takes
A last look of her young man's hair.
She counsels him to run. She hopes
He shall desert. But he will not listen.
He has his pride.
His U.S. brass buttons shine.
He waves from the window 'till
He is gone.

He will not return. The ageing mother
Is almost sure of it. The sturdy father
Leads his family out of the desperate city
Into the rolling countryside. He does not
Speak. There will be no help with
The harvest, and no laughter
In his fields.

(1971)



EASTER DRUNK WITH FREEDOM RIDERS

This is the reunion of a tired army.
Do not look so hopeless old comrades.
Though the cause may seem to falter,
It is but a turn in what was ever
A quiet struggle by the half-light.
Let us drink and be glad now. The victory
Is already ours. I tell you the siege of winter
Will soon be broken.

We drink until ~~our~~ our voices
Are like trumpets. We are joined by our souls
Like old friends returning. I know the joyous
Army. My phalanx is crowded with jukebox generals.
We sing. We sway against each other. Spring somewhere
Revives. The cold salt sea spring drives
The last of winter from our hearts and eyes.

In the bar by the ocean
Our faces dance like flowers.
The girls discard their false tits.
We plant promises of new babies.
Our spirits suffuse,
Soar over the rooftops
Like a wide winged angel.
We come to a glorious morning.
The stone of night is rolling away.
We feel the eastern seaboard rocking.
Christ could rise in the cracking day.

(1970)

IF I WERE TOAD

35

If I were Toad
If I were Toad
I'd set out down the summer road
In my gypsy cart of gold
And canary yellow.

If I were Toad
You'd be a guest
In my abode.

On a hill beyond the river's crest
Is Toad Hall, the fanciest and best
Animals' house in the length and breadth
Of merry England.

Though a toad of aristocracy,
I stand for monarchical democracy.

Everyone (who is anyone)
Along the river bank
Knows I'm fat and round
And short of shank.
And that my father,
Thadius Toad,
Left me lots of money
In some bank.

But it makes no difference,
I have the common touch.
My friends will tell you as much;
Rat and Mole, Otter and Badger.
I love them all.
Always happy when they come,
Always sad when they go,
I never visits them, though.

If I were Toad
I'd swim if I was warm,
Fly a kite in a storm,
Bring weasels and stoats
To harm. . .
I'd never reform.

I might even
Write my own songs.

(1969)

Apologies to Kenneth Grahame

NIGHT COMES TO THE PLAIN OF MORDOR

All the blood of middle earth ran here,
Ran for the ring and its evil power.
Here the Nazgul sailed, and the shadow
Of his flight still lingers, blacker than night.
Here Orc and Easterling fought the armies of Rohan,
Felt death on the swords of sunrise,
Blanched and broke in the day.

Now night comes to the plain of Mordor.
The silver moon shines on the land of torn iron.
A brittle peace was won from heaven this day.
But the fire that forged the ring of the world
Still burns in Sauron's mountain. And Sauron's laughter
Rings hollow in the night over Mordor.

(1971)

Apologies to T.R.R. Tolkein

SOMEBODY ELSE'S HOUSE

We were trapped
In somebody else's house.
You were afraid

And I was confused.
We held hands in the windowless room,
Listening to someone else's music.

And somewhere else some part of us flew
Past birth and marriage, war and death,
Leaving gales of laughter, faintly heard,

By someone else, somewhere else,
Making the best of it
In somebody else's house.

(1969)

THE HOSPITAL

place of death,
How I loathe you in your midnight hours
When roaches come to visit.

place of death,
Harvesting disease on carts with rubber wheels,
Eager to steal the blue cross and blue shield
Of the deceased fool who slept in the dingy ward
Where the colored are kept.

place of death,
May the ground floor cashier catch
Cancer of the belly from a bad check.

place of death,
And little bells, and air-conditioned septic smells,
Goddamn your crisp white personnel.

(1971)

SALVATION

And. . .
As the last of the last
Of the immortal Americans
Perishes flaming,
Leaving his legacy
Of porcelain bathrooms,
Only the winos,
Safe at last from the Salvation Army,
Can drink a toast, gurggle tears,
Having known for years
Who was behind it.

The earth sighs its relief,
Raises warm winds gently
As the long winter, banished
By the sure and brief armageddon,
Whirls away cursing the universe.

In the holes of transit
A hunchback stands on a pile of books,
Writes a four letter word above the exit
And "Quazimodo" in the restroom.

(1969)

AN EASTER POEM

The highways are cool now--
They wait for the tourist.
It's springtime in Dixie.
The dogwoods are blooming.
My mother tells a tale about
The symbolism of dogwoods.
The blossoms stand for the cross,
She says. The stained ends of the petals
Are for Christ's blood, she says. And
The crooked trunks are for death.

The buds burst for us, very timely.
The tourists can snap polaroid pictures
From their cars full of kids.
Leaving negatives on the grass,
They'll be off down the interstate
Searching for the purple mountains' majesty
And a hamburger.

(1971)

AND HOW DID THIS WORLD END?

And how did this world end?
Whimper or bang?
When I left the moon I
Promised myself a rose garden.
But dusty tombs
Make me sneeze.

And Robbie said
The only monument these
Great people left is a
Concrete dam
White as a ghost
Back in the mountains.

Yet, all I can find are these
Dark forest seas
Of silent skyscrapers swaying
Like steel trees
In a dead breeze.

(1971)

BY WEATHERWATCH BIRDS

By weatherwatch birds
I am told in slave's songs
That wild winter comes winging
On merchantman cloudships
To mortgage the land.
By cries of oon bay
From the far-ranging hounds
I am told that death is taking place
Far from towns, men, and metal.
Bounding, bounding, in the hills
All night the hounds bewail
The death of our toil.
And when it arrives,
The arrogant armada
Manned by lawyers,
How shall we face
The gleaming mind?
Are we to sign?
Would not the loadstone moon
Drag mountains across seas
To crumble continents?
We cannot sell what is not ours.
Are these birds bound by
The bargainings of men?
Yet they have a law
That sends the spring sap
Singing upward in His tree trunks,
A pledge that mates owls in the night
And keeps me hard by the window at sunset.

(1970)

A DROWNING

I'm back mother
After many weary miles,
My lungs are weak.
I have lost my gills
And aquired the coughing speech.

I come to enter you again.
Accept me, O sea.
The life in the death
Of your cool depths
Was beautiful and clean
When I left.

I have been walking
In the poisoned land.
Where everything I touched
Turned to asphalt and ashes.
I have been drinking the poisoned air.
I stand strangely bleached
On your once virgin beach.

The sun sweating my brain
Bastes the oily lemmings lying
On your sad sands.
I no longer love them, as you taught,
And I shrink from the thought
For which we fought.

(1970)

OCTOBER INCIDENT

44

It was a sunny day
In the dim little town
With great grim flags
Flying all around.
Merry shopkeepers
Swept the silent sidewalks
Like great aproned hawks
Their eyes for patrons
A'twinkle.

While in that far Asiatic land
Many a blond and black young man
Fought to keep those checks and money orders
Coming in.

And thinking of the X-mas time rush,
Those square shooting shopkeepers
Swept the streets
Till their faces were rosy and flush
In that money crisp autumnal air of America.

What then,
Amid all this picturesqueness,
Coming like a heart attack
Past the post office
And hemming up all the parking spaces,
But weirdos and freaks
In a dirty crew
Shouting obscenities
As on wings of hair they flew.

Well you just might imagine
How those mighty fine merchants
Almost jumped out of their pants
So clean-cut, chamber of commerce,
Plastic bag
Jump suit souls.

With all those freaks
Chanting for peace,
Customers forgot what they'd come for,
Congressmen forgot what they'd run for,
The people on ice who hadn't a vice
Thought they were finally done for.

But those savvy shopkeepers
Knew what they were about
And gave out a mighty shout of
"If you can't buy anything get out of
Our great country, land of the free,
From sea to shining sea."

LIGHTS FROM GALAPAGOS

Like lights from Galapagos
The mind signals but cannot see.
Blooms upon the bile tide
Conceal the dark bottom.

On the night above
Three soft hills
A red winged angel dancing
Sows worms in the brain.

And O, the great dead beckon,
Open black heavens to us all.
We charge the soft hills
Wishing an ascendance.

O dancing, flaming angel.
O whirling, soft glowing angel worm.
Smelling beams through
The rolling sea fog.

Island anchor, rock in the sea,
Great eye glazed 'tween sun's cry
And earth's groaning we,
Speaking, speaking, speaking to me.

(1969)

ADOLESCENCE

And do you hear
In the Spring winds' whisper
Questions as to your origin
And substance?
Ah yes, and you are lucky.
My furze faced boy, it is
The old gods' eternal razzing
To stir and make the spirits' beauty.
You will have no sleep.
But must somehow find it,
Learn it, know it, reason it,
Conjure it, and become it by
Induction, deduction, rationalism,
Common sense, romanticism, intuition,
Faith and frustration.
The finding out is harrowing,
Attended by brain fevers
And moon baying.
The old initiation abounds
In lust and humiliation.
The prize is sometimes priceless,
Beautiful and healthy, no limits;
And sometimes rank, sterile, putrid,
And withered.
But the finding out is the main thing.
The rage of the fever, the strength
Of the song, the urgency of the lust,
The quality of the madness
Measures the monument.
And that which you were
And could not answer,
Had no meaning or consequence,
And died at the first heartbeat.

(1970)

EPITAPH

The cold air
Clung to my corpse.
In blacksmith blows
My lips like blue iron
Banged out words.

I shot crystal whispers
On the air. . .
Against ears of ice.

(1970)

48

FROM THE BURNING OATS

Oats in early summer
Are green as the rippling sea.
By the end of July
They are yellow
Tending to red
If the sun hits them right.

Now, the sun hits them right.
From the fiery field of burning oats
Yellowish red and violent with wind,
You charm and taunt me
Out of time.

The hair, yellowish red,
Burns on the olive skin,
You say you are a gypsy
And your gold earrings
Try to prove it.

Red and purple scarves
Wind around you,
Trail behind you,
On the laughing wind.

Your face is why
I always loved you,
The dark, dark eyes
And white smile
In olive skin,
The yellow red hair
Burning like oats
Violent with wind.

(1971)

THE LOVER'S CRADLE

With the blessing of the rain
He was born into his world
In a house of white stones
With a slanted roof.

And he grew every cockcrow
Summer, winter, spring,
With the earth lit in moonglow
And the pines aging, ring by ring.

A young Negress kept him company
In the Saturday street of the market town
When lordly farmers came in wagons of hay,
Their mules high stepping for the barking hounds.

Still in his memory he's found
Lying in the August meadow
Sleeping with blue tick hounds
In the soft sun shadow,

Or lost in moonshining searches,
Or lifting the cool gourd ladle,
Always wakened to chiming churches
In the mind-made lover's cradle.

(1971)

"Negress" has to be
changed to
"A black girl"

WHERE FLOWERS SHOOT UP

Where flowers shoot up
Can there ever be death?
I have friends who say
That death is everywhere
And forever at work.
But death does not work on me.
Death is an old trick
Wrought of simple minds.
Where is the old man who stood
On the streetcorners of my childhood?
He is here still, I just mentioned him.
Does The summer die?
No, the summer goes away
And will be back presently.
Every dog I've ever known,
And all the elephants I haven't known
Are lying around somewhere
Waiting for me to call them.
The girl I kissed at fifteen
Is waiting for my knock on the front door.
Where flowers shoot up
There can never be death.
And death does not work on me.

(1970)

A FIRE

A fire I am
And a fire becoming.
In my twenty-second year
Taking up the song long
Lost with the century.

America dead with her pioneers
And sunk with the cherubim at Arlington
Dead, deaf, and mute under a craning black bird.
Too late to mourn her, too late patriot.

But a fire becoming a fire,
As democracy becomes democracy,
Will not flare like falling stars
But grow from a glow on God's true oil

To light the universe,
Start time to ticking,
Labor to burning,
And man to living.

(1969)

HURRICANE

The night grows wild
And I am dreaming.
The wind flays my forest house
And the spirit awakens,
Ponders the heavy clouds massing.

The storm covers many states,
Covers many mountains, many things.
Blown trees bend with whistling leaves
And desperate waves beat the beaches.
Ten million people turn off the TV,
Sit silently facing in darkened rooms.
Close above them the thunder rumbles,
Near lightning reveals father to mother.
Old clocks tick in wind-tacked lulls,
God comes to mind and time goes back
To before electricity.

The spirit sees these things,
Rides the whim of the storm
Far from the cowering animal
In the fairytale forest house.

The storm blows through vast cities,
Stops their madness in early morning.
Wire crashes to the street with a dying hum.
A strange and silent dark sleep spreads.
The wind screams loudest between vulgar towers
Where trapped men wrestle with guilty lives.
And something has decreed: THERE SHALL BE DARKNESS.
AND YOU SHALL ENDURE THE KNOWLEDGE DENIED
TO SHEEP IN THE SLAUGHTER PENS.

The spirit sees these things,
Flies to the fringes of the storm,
Gathers information for the fairytale man,
Will sleep tonight over the writhing Atlantic,
Will return tomorrow with peace from the eye.

(1970)

53

THE SPIDER

The spider weaves a web
In a corner somewhere
And calls it a universe.
Then things begin to respond.
And some thing like me
(A little greener perhaps)
To serve as spider's food
Begins to move towards old age.
The spider laughs,
Seeing his personal universe
Peopled with such quaint foodstuffs.
Yet, he is nearly overcome
By the void that lies beyond
The web of his mind's weaving.
Nevertheless, by a shrug of his spidery shoulders,
He assumes the responsibility for being
The supreme being.

©(1970)

THE FACE INTERNATIONAL

No face stays long with me,
I recall few of them.
But I know the face of hate
And I will not lie to you on paper,
I think it the most beautiful of all.

A face made of many faces;
The mill worker and the banker,
The wife of many years,
Hateful face of the artist,
Most exquisite of all.

From these expressions,
Most livid in the memory,
I have made a single face.
To be known internationally
And instantly among friends.

(1970)

WAITING FOR THE SUN

The convict paused
In the swamp and night
To sleep beside
The starry pools of suicide.

And through his sleep, through the cobwebs
Of the giant swamp spider,
Came the pealing screams
Of the run-a-way bells.

(And all the swamp creatures hid away
Waiting for the sun.)

Through his pale blue, iron eyelids
Came the vision
Of the hunt you down hounds
Gnashing, gnashing, their pitiless teeth
All around his pitiful feet.

tri

(And the moon hid away,
Waiting for the sun.)

The careful breathing
Of the hunted man
And the sound of iron
Between his hands
Caused God to whimper
Beneath the quicksand
Which was his very special hiding place.

(The bats hid away, in hollow trees,
Waiting for the sun.)

And trembling at the sound
Of the run-a-way bells
And the hunt you down hounds
The whole swamp wondered
What crime ~~was~~ committed
By the one who slumbered beside
The starry pools of suicide?

had been

(And the dreams of children hid away,
Waiting for the sun.)

God's whimpered answer
From the quicksand rung,
"This is one
Who with slip of tongue
Told everyone
Where babies come from.
And true to his kind,
Wrote on a dotted line,
MONEY CAN'T BUY SUNSHINE."

(And the poets hid away,
Waiting for the sun.)

(1969)

TO A COMMON WIFE

If you wish,
You may fill the vacant space
In the back of my caravan
But you must earn your keep.
I'll have no free-loading!
I hope you know how to steal;
There are so many opportunities.
And I think you'll make
A splended prostitute.

Now, as for your everyday duties,
You must learn to mend my clothes.
I can't go around naked!
You must learn to cook hamburger
A hundred and forty-two ways.
You can fish by the way?
You can take care of horses?

And then there are the more
Domestic chores.
When the snow comes
And I am raging with fever or madness,
Can you crawl through the woods
And seek out the magic herbs and roots
Which make me young again?
Do you know the ways of the moon,
The ways of a bull elephant?

And, of course, now and again,
The van needs a touch of paint.
You must never say the same thing
Three times or drink less than I do.
You must never have headaches
Or other excuses.

Do these things and I
Will be good to you.

(1970)

58

FROM WHERE I SIT

From where I sit
The waves break, crash, leaven,
Then soothe-in to shore.

The sun bakes a haze
From the sand. The girls,
Dead in their sunshades and
Bright swimsuits, are browning.

A caterpillar pier is stuck-on
The horizon. Its white-capped lice
Fish for whiting.

From where I sit
Blue and white
Seagulls are smeared
Across pure sky.

(1971)

SONGS IN THE NIGHT

The sun slides down
And sears the face of dusk.
The hot night comes upon us.
To the east the slow roaring sea
Sings in the light of his silver mother,
His mother, the moon burning in a circle
Of brass clouds. The old people say
Such a circled moon is an omen.

The night is deeper than woman.
All belong to the night. All pay homage
To the everlasting silence and peace, the night.
Such a circled moon is an omen. There are eyes
In the stunted black trees. Mouths whisper
In the weeds. Deeper than woman
Is the night. The dying
Take leave in the night.
We shall know in the morning. They shall
Have gone their way, having kissed the last stone.
We hail the ever returning messiah. Death,
Peace, life, all one in the night. The night,
Our black and starry trinity.

I sing songs in the night.
The white moon and roaring sea sing
Songs in the night. The eyes in the trees
And the mouths also sing. The whole earth
Raises song to him, deeper than woman.
The lost and lonely earth puts away fright
With songs in the night.

(1971)