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This thesis consists of twenty-eight poems in four sections. Poems in the first section, DREAM, are short sequences of imagery aimed at disturbing or energizing the imagination and inner consciousness of the reader. The logic is emotional logic and the rhythms are intended to mesmerize or jerk the reader into a poetic world which I believe is only one version of reality.

The following section, ZIRCONIA, contains poems about a specific locale familiar to me. Here I attempt to expand the world of the imagination to include both past and present, both the physical world and (for me) the mythic.

The poems in VISIT TO SEVERAL TOWNS are my attempts to see the world beyond the mind and Zirconia, reflected on the lens of experience and imagination.

Finally, in ESPRIT LUCIDE I try to reach what is to me the ultimate vision poetry lends to the intellect, the state of total lucidity, the experience of both physical and inner reality seen in clearest terms. It is here the esthetic becomes the religious, and we realize the intoxication of Seeing. The phrase "Esprit Lucide" comes from Baudelaire, and is used by Jean Genet in many passages.

ZIRCONIA POEMS

by

Robert Morgan

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Approved by

Robert W. Kiser
Thesis Adviser

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

Thesis Adviser

Robert K. Waters

Oral Examination
Committee Members

Arthur W. Dixon

J. W. Bryant

W. W. Ashby

Jan 11, 1968
Date of Examination

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Truck Driver

The road seems wide as a plateau
 and from his tower of benzene the world a kind machine.
 Wife asleep somewhere, mind in second gear
 he aims his windshield at DREAM of space.
 People here approach and pass.
 The bricks in his stomach grow
 and once along the ditched side in mist blue light,
 tells him he's alone
 except the voice in his mind and sight
 which snags his on.

Truck Driver

The road seems wide as a plateau
and from his tower of benzedrine the world a kind machine.
Wife asleep somewhere, mind in second gear
he aims his windshield at the edge of space.
Myopic cars approach and pass.
The bricks in his stomach groan
and snow along the ditches sings in mint blue light,
tells him he's alone
except the voice in his mind and Night
which sucks him on.

Poem in Praise of Wittgenstein

To begin at the beginning was impossible.
The surface of a sphere has no beginning much less the sea.
Consistency was even harder, meanings melting in his hands
like snowballs, hardening for a while
then gone before he got them home.
And words refused to come, hovered at the edges
of the keyboard, uncoiled, cracked, worn out by careless use.
Still
there was the rain, ghosting trees along the street
and freezing on the eaves, turning
into snow toward dusk.

The Assassin

Weightless as a dancer, a tiny, whip-like man,
he aims a wire and shatters galaxies.
Steel is plastic in his hands.
He glows at all the windows building anti-worlds of legend.
A suite of Persian dancers and the thunder of guitars
applaud his grace. Twenty years
of hunger fall away behind him like a pile of rags.
The fences of his childhood are consumed.
He disappears, and turns up later in his cellar.
Blue panthers of silence descend around him.

Lost Soldier

For twelve days he wandered in the mountains
lost from his troop.

The sky turned red at his glance
and water tasted like carrion.

On the last day he came to a village
where all the women looked like sows
so he turned away without asking for food.

All afternoon he wandered
till the trees stood in judgement against him.

Finally, high in the Smokies,
he lay down under a black pointed fir
and waited for eagles to fly out of the moon
and carry him off to hell.

Theft

He waits until the lights are out, and enters.
Elephants of darkness almost crush him.
He tinkers with the toys,
steals candy from the kitchen,
pilfers in the bedroom, where the couple is asleep.
The woman's rising breasts excite him,
but he stops himself in time
and leaves at dawn by the window.
Flowers spring up in his tracks across the lawn.

Dream

When I returned through the purple evening to the cave
my father was a puddle of blue paint on black stone.

Where I had left the woman
was only a small lake surrounded by firs
etching the sky in codes of silence.

I ran through the valley near the roar of the waterfall
and wind was kind to flowers along the road.

I leapt like a deer through darkness, alone
as the moon on wet grass.

Soldiers of light
charged through my mind like panthers.

ZIRCONIA

Distances

Mind wanders down the long slope of trees
like small cat fur
turning blue in the midday sunlight of December
into a short valley
with only a cabin and a juniper
and one horse nibbling the dried grass
around an Indian grave.

Clear through the distance of memory
into the cabin where my great grandmother, a bride,
sits by the fire smoking her clay pipe
and watching through the door the gap in the mountains
where her man may come any moment
with gun on shoulder and quail swinging
and steps so rhythmic
they leave tracks in the mind.

Zirconia

Blue as mildew mountains break beyond the town and shadows
swim the valley. Now filled with leaves
the zircon mines bleed dirt into the lake.
Further up the creek
the millpond is a brain of mud,
and crows watch the town seem dead
until the moon
lights
the country like a TV screen.

Awakening

A stone cracks open in a mountain pasture
and a thousand birds escape, imprisoned since the Ice Age.
Water strokes the silence of the air and falls
through valleys lined with fir, black as meteors.
The air above me sings a thousand miles
while I run along the icy streams and fall in darkness
among crows and wind.
Moments tick like dripping sleet above a campfire
in the dream. As far back as Wales
my family farmed the red clay hills of fear.

Wake

Staring through the lens of time the face
is whiter than the moon outside. A candle
pantomimes its story on the cabin walls --
killed by his sons while sleeping.
Trees outside shiver, reaching for the dead man's ears.
The cabin soars upon the peak of silence
and the mountains groan in wind,
disturb the sleepers by the fire who wander
through the dry leaves years ago
hunting deer and turkey.
And wind sucks at the high cave where the sons hide
waiting for the moon to die.

The Firewatcher

Her mind takes on the void above her.
Eyes watch the horizon, elbows on the charts.
The tower becomes her legs,
resting where her fathers worshipped war.
The paint has almost vanished from her cheeks.
Her husband comes home drunk,
smelling of perfume,
and slaps her flabby breasts.
Her son was killed in Vietnam.
She dreams of flying
and her mind drifts in a haze
of forgotten dances.

Prayer Meeting

A bonfire lights the faces, and the Greek
from Memphis sings and beats a tambourine, while his daughter
speaks in tongues, dances in the aisles.
Everyone screams, stamps, or waves
his handkerchief and cries.

Except the children who creep into the shadows
to watch, metal hardening in their eyes. A bitter honey
smears the wool of their minds.
Red salamanders crawl out of the moss. Their mothers
unpin their hair and reel with happiness.
The children watch, expressionless as blind men.

White Church in Dark Pines

White church in almost black pines, white
in the winter air of my childhood, burning with guilt,
ice in the brain.

I crawled through the caverns of a thousand Sundays here,
watched the sky at the window, dreamed
of flying beneath the winter sun.

White church burning among trees, set alone
in the pines under starlight, now weathered and fallen
in ruins, like a rainbow, existing
only in distance, yet close enough to touch.
The memory, this grain of humility, weighs
in my throat like an anchor.

VISIT TO SEVERAL TOWNS

Dawn in New Hampshire

I may see them pass.

They feed in marshes on the coast

The lake steams like a hundred chimneys and fir
the color of moss enlase the lemon sun.

Later the sky dries to petal
smoothness and I find the moon fallen in the woods,
a mushroom, almost purple.

Wishing I could go on pilgrimages.

The only target being distant

and destination endless sunlight

flipped mountains.

water.

sky.

The endless flight of birds.

Key West Anniversary

I watch the sea translating
silence into blue,
Through the doorway of a rainy day
I return to things.
Entering the half life of love.

Durham, N.C.

A lung of smoke and cars the city
breathes at dusk a globe of haze. Traffic swims
like swollen eyes.

From the distance comes the cough
an old man carries in his hand around the world.

Long Beach

Far out surfers rise and die, soar beyond the lace of foam like
gulls,
then fall and walk ashore; the sea follows,
clinging to their boards and buckling under impact;
its tongues smooth and carve the sand.

Dune grass goose steps under wind.

Inverted, the ocean is a mountain range of water. The pier
crawls on its back like a centipede
and clouds ease by
building sierras to the south.

I watch waves gnaw in the jewelry of light,
lunge in and crumble into feathers where the beach
shines like marble, honing the sea to razor thinness
to cut the dunes, retake a continent.

Poolroom Between the Beach and City, Rain

Wind knocked up the sea
and rain smacked like quarters on the boardwalk,
glued the sand and stuck like oil
to girls with copper minds running for the bars.

The poolroom was a meeting of the eyes and wrists,
the crush of chalk, slide of wood on skin.
Tables held up tents of greasy light, and young men
dozed in corners, horses rearing in their veins.

Behind the beach the city worried in the rain.
The light was old as glass, and intersections worn
by misses and near misses.

Far out the wind played on the nipples of the sea.

ESPRIT LUCIDE

Beginning

Mollusks of snow behind cedars.

The darkness inside trees flows out at dusk,

river launching birds of fire.

Its pools wear a skin of ice,

hold a leaf corpse near the surface.

A crow punctures distance.

After days of silence

pin

roar their blackness at the fields.

Senility

Yellow birds of sunset in the grass.
Crushing dew, the old man
climbs high above the waterfall
to gather rhododendrons for his guests.

Night Rain

Fearing something's left outside, guilty that we're in,
we listen to the marching on the roof.
Turning like a herd of deer the river rises in fields of sleep.
Rain stings untold campfires, uncovers arrowheads
and powerlines hum when wind
strokes water from the trees at dawn.

Esprit Lucide

Walking out of a quiet house
after reading for hours
into the woods where snow is falling
is like awakening into a dream.
The movement of the trees, my breathing,
the falling snow, are synchronized
and lucid.
I pass my hands through invisible cities of silence
as I walk.
Everything is within reach
and the snow falls without a sound.

August

The wind soaked leaves sound like shoals in the sky.

I can hear wind on four hills at once.

Fields are dry

and girls with long hair and deep tans come

down to the river to swim. Only the old

remain to watch the leaves fall.

Through the long winter they will sit beside their fires

and wait like stowaways at sea.

November Rain

The sky falls smoking through the trees
and leaves are limp, cohesive, soft as tongues.
Everywhere the sour of frostbite, pungency.
Ferns curl toward the moss
and wind the color of cellars moves through trees, mushroom wet.
Leaves fade like watercolors on the ground,
old Sunday comics melting to a paste.

The squirrels are gone, birds are gone; rain
is constantly arriving, pushed by wind.
Centuries of rust descend, heavy,
on the leaf encumbered creek,
the reddish oaks, the lighted house at dusk.

Mountaintop

Boulders lie like sculpture on the slope, petals
of thunder at rest in the sex-high grass.
The wind opens room after room in the blue mind
where geese fly like black stars,
nerve ends on the skin of space.

House Painting

Smear the wood with white and shine, cover nails
and rust, mold, the grain -- board ends
tunnelled like a nuclear pile.

Hold the brush lightly, make it glide,
wrist relaxed to almost a caress.

Cut it near the window.

Paint flows smooth as oil, flies to wood and sticks.

Balsam, new pine and weathered oak.

House so white it screams, aches in the cold air.

Cold white

and roof green as moss.

Storm

The rose of thunder broke like dry timbers
and petals fluttered on the windows.

Later the wind was a cold mouth; a muskrat
drew its net of ripples through the pond, and the moon
bruised with blue
floated to the surface of the pines.