

SONG OF THE BLOOD

AN EPIC

by

JARED SMITH

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dedicated to:

Russell F.W. Smith and Russell J.W. Smith

Song catch
 me
 as
 snow
falling into air.....
Sonf of the blood of this land,
fill these veins.

Song burning in earthen fragments,
filling the granite bonds of city,
building the bones of time,
Sing in the arteries of my mind.

You insubstantial but emanating source,
pass these individual walls
and course through the pavement we have come to hate,
the plate glass windows of white collar bribery,
the sweat in synthetic cloth of the labor force:
Pass through and sing
of night roads
of the cold fire glittering beyond
 imagination
 of the unity of solitude.

I stand upon the edge of Redlands California
looking out across the san andreas
and her waters as
evening pulls the separation of industry
in a yellow wall down the valley from los angeles,
this night as many in the year,
the city becoming clear until the sand
 beneath my feet
which city shifts and rubs against itself emitting life

which city in blue horsemen dancing into the sky

I stand and lean into the wind removed
from the stink of generation and of
indolence

removed,
placing my hand before me until
this glittering vision is erased.
The sand speaks quietly which city
drawing the distant rattle of coins in phonebooth
bars.

mai lai distant
 which city
a fogged vision of twisted mouths.
I did not know that women would die
 like that;
that sex could dissipate so quickly
in the earth
and remain in its most violent form
a crater in the scaffolding of life
like the metal chassis I build in Detroit
and carry home with their moonless roads
 in my overalls
I no longer see the torn bodies I create
year tho I walk through the valley of the shadow of death
lying empty along highways or even gaping
silent across the bottom of a Chappaquiddick pond.
 song Song of the blood of

There are mistakes.
We all make mistakes,
I tell my wife when she burns the toast
or when our child fails
 to come home.
There are mistakes.
The gray mare which parades these streets which city
at night comes riderless jingling

its bridle
as it turns to gaze in windows as
it passes.
It comes alone
and the metronome of my heart swing back
through the desolate space of memory...

the demonstrating in the rain
 back and forth on Pennsylvania avenue.
And I remember the woman met there
and the fog of love lost into her hair
upon the pillow,
the drinking and the marching and
 the laughter.
I look down the assembly line and the twisted years
 remembering mai lai

Song of the blood of this land

My body lies shattered
in Brooklyn pool halls of the sixties,
the blue chalk of my eyes erased against concrete
a sound of nails along the spine

and

I hear the horses
heavy on their brains as they come through mist...
sometimes six sometimes seven...inevitable
as gold through colorado rivers

We are the light lifting
around clean spring limbs
maidenly in the airy distinction of step

and the stubbornness of disposition,
a part of sunlight through silhouette—
a solid erasure of solidity
leaving us turning lightly upon a music
pounding within our blood.
Oh, blood of the land,
my body lies shattered.

When I wake it is Sunday.
A gray man without eyes tells me
I am fine...
all of my wishes are increasingly being
 taken care of,
and he has filed papers in my behalf
in some secret corridor where the wind does not blow.
He uses my fingers to create a smile
and the black holes of his compassion draw me in,
oh, Song,

We are going to do something now, he says.
I have seen that the dark horses which surround you
will stay far away upon their sunswept hills
while you sleep.
Come...that is the thing we have time for now...

rubbery fingers passing across my face;
and, yes, the horsemen are drawing thin
and I see instead a line of numbers printed
white upon the horizon:
and yes they pass insubstantial in and out
 beyond control,
beyond the range of my words or hands.
You have elected them, he says
they are my guardians if I will have them
when I awake fully taken care of in all
 that matters...

From the distance I see

those shapes now losing form in scattered confusion,
withdrawing into earth and rocks and trees.
They are no more than trees! I say,
and he takes my hands to make him smile a loose
flapping into eternity.
They are only trees!

They will not ride upon your heels, he says.
They will not bother you, for we have time.

Song of the dust of this land,
Song of the dust...
Out of dust, the thought;
Out of thought first the dust
slowly shaping/settling between the stars
through eons of non-existence
 drifting—
out of thought, out of energy;
the tiniest specks of matter settling,
drawing together by some spaceless force
 into the seeable; the float evolving and the mineral sediments
the ions, the growth, the settling, the life.

The morning gray
a heron freezes into shoreline
its stark bone beak poised between clouds
and the silver rattle of scales about its feet;
the eye pinned dark into a static motion.
I draw back into the reeds
too much a part of this, thinking
No, if I wait long enough there will be Words,
dreaming I will touch this thing as it touches me;
watching as the brightness of the moon in brightness
falls into the ocean's growing luminescence,
lost from definition;
thinking, No, a man does not need to think to be a man...

As the Half-king once said
when speaking to Major Washington once said
*In former days we have eaten
from a silver basin wherein was the leg of the beaver,
and desired of all to come and eat of it.
Now, fathers, it is you who are the disturbers in this Land.
Both the others and you are white, George Washington.
But we live in a country between (which city);
and the Great Being allowed it to be a place of residence
for us.
I desire you to withdraw, George Washington.*

Song of the blood of this land...
Even as now, I sit at the mouth of the everet claim
looking back from sun-cracked Colorado rock
into earth and dark
stained memories of men who spent their gold
in Eldorado,
a boomtown just west of here whose name was changed
still booming perhaps in anticipation of deception
to Eldora:
then a boomtown; then a weathered scattering of shacks; at
last almost resort
somewhere west along the shaft behind me.
That darkness from 1905, I think,
once mined by the family I have married into,
stretching out beyond me.
But the price of time changes
and I turn so that spencer mountain rolls
heavy to middle boulder creek and Nederland.
The price of time changes, and the heritage of families
cross and swirl. My father's last estate
for his family:
built on printed words on careful shelves.
My father-in-law's: a miner's cabin from 1893

where we sleep at night
but not tonight,
looking down toward barker dam and its darkness
hidden water,
sitting here, still sitting with the golden lights
sparking silently on and off
in the tunnel behind me/matching the occasional car
to Eldorado
lighting up its distant road long before it comes in sight.
The cars at night along to the road to Eldorado,

Song

I walk along those dirt tracks
the ruined buildings
ELDORADO!
and an old miner swaggers from what once was the general store
and waves. I have seen him teaching math at colorado state...

Here too in the echoing bowl of stone
rippling through aspens
catching the metallic glint
my mind comes around upon itself again.
These shuttered windows upon sand!
these worn boards hiding something
even here where
paint does not exist.

Song

Turning
until I too look half back
through the window black now within the tunnel
and her face translucently reflected
hollowing out in shadow as the passing lights
pass and then
etching her features again into the glass
in dark
as our train speeds now deeper into Grand Central in
new york among the concrete roof supports.

The passengers seated, forgotten, (whichcity)
she stands there between the cars forgotten,
her eyes/lips detaching my skin
as I raise the *Times*, Forgetting.
And brightness falls into the ocean beyond the east river.

Until half sleeping I am shocked awake
seeing her passing down the aisle of the car,
gray dress passing lightly over hips
and a gold cross hanging down before her
 from the chain belt worn loose about her hips.
And the cars rattle...we are alone:
and I think of my child, and of all my children
and of the miles of time which separate them.....

Song of the blood of this land
Song of the dust of this land
you are my death.
you are my birth.

*

Old Edmund Newstart climbed
up to the top of Mayberry Hill
and leaning back against a firm boulder
looked down over the city and counted the lights.
There's one and two and...well, a whole lot more
than there were people living there when I was younger,
he said and tilted his head back so that the moon fell over his lips.
And I guess that most of them living there now
don't have what I have: I own this hill, he said.
I own this hill; and what else; and what do any of them own.
And his hand reached out until it touched a dry stalk
and he pulled it from the sand and sucked it to his mouth
and he closed his eyes and smiled.

Out of all the fear of grabbing an acre of land
and the drinking times with Him and the other bankers...

well, they're gone now, but after all someone had to live
and together we lived it well
and maybe better than one man alone might live...
but I've got the money to buy another pair of shoes to climb this hill...
no better than what I had but just as good.
I wonder old friend moon, how do *you* fly without replacing wings.

And he answered himself
You don't need wings on Mayberry Hill.

*

A man is walking toward you wherever you are
the bushes bending back from his raised arms
brushing through evening space toward you
with his mouth open the tears running from his mind
until too soon his hands will curve outward and his feet leave
the earth almost in their speed
until out of the night about the time you rise to walk the streets
he will reach you and clasp your knees,
and he will say nothing
because through this time he is unknown to you.

But you have drunk many times
to the sheltered things which you carry in memory.
I know this,
as I know that now you are sitting in some room
where you do not wholly want to be
and are reading this along with other discarded words
and then pausing to stare outward toward the sheltered things.
And are wondering what this faceless man comes to you for
and what the gaping lips you pass flapping in restaurant windows
may be meaning;
and why it is that houses and children
but never works of art
grow from these
shapeless patterns.
Or what it is that weighs some men down or makes them

become horses sailing across the moon or
of a small white bird sitting upon the ice on a lake
which stretches as far into here as you have wished to go.
Perhaps you do not see the horses, or they are not horses...
but only something which travels as swiftly as you. You will know.

And I know you will say
that you have seen this movie one time on the late show
or have suspected the setting some time in Dreiser or in Norris,
but that it was not poetry.
But you are wrong
because it was never filmed and because
even the word is a hollow cave echoing with massive earth groan
shifting endlessly on itself.
And because he does not have a face and is approaching silently
until some day when he reaches you and you
will look down and know an overwhelming closeness
and will not know his name.

*

My body, like yours, is filled with love,
with hatred.
My mind too, a gray river,
a writhing with patches of light rolling across its surface.
I too have debated the office clock,
have slammed its metal tongue against the floor,
have stalked out with freedom in my lungs
and bad liquor in my belly,
my belly a hairy animal moaning in the night
and going softer in its sides with sedatives.

The animal of hominid
gnashes its teeth along these streets at night,
whispers to itself when the wind blows,
huddles in shaking silence upon the sweat of pain and labor.
The deadly struggle in the alley. the blood.
The hairless paw passed lightly on a face.

*

Bending sheet metal

connecting wires

stringing signs:

HOTDOGS FOR AMERICA

or

CHOPPED MEAT THE WAY TO GO

or

VENUSIAN PLEASURE PALACE

twisting above the concrete cracks.

Light of this light

balancing equal weights upon each other

turning themselves upon themselves turning.

Sometimes one above his head,

sometimes others.

A SOUPCAN FOR THIS CIVILIZATION

A WARM HOTEL

And always the round rubber wheels

bounding across a continent of flesh.

Dressing male and female models radiant

colors of the forest birds;

pale silhouettes twising against winter.

And the snow of the creator obliterating tracks within his mind.

We sat down together one

at a trucker's stop in Arizona;

he with a map spread between the coffee and

the saltshaker.

And I drakn the coffee and smoked a cigarette

while we talked.

So, I interrupted,

THE AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY will get me.

Yes, he said, the country will be free

for the clean.

He pushed a pin into the map.

I put fifty cents on the counter

and went out into the night.

Many years from then
when I was standing at the top of Flagstaff Mountain
in Colorado
leaning into the wind and watching
the stars twisting far back through the space of time,
I looked down to see a set of headlights turning toward me,
drawing up the mountainside from Boulder. And I thought,
Those lights are death coming up an unlit road;
and I will wait.
But they were not death.
And he leaned from his window smiling,
his teeth sparking beneath stars
and his eyes the blank of moon over desert.
Hi, old friend, he said.
We are both lost here on top of this half-baked wilderness,
and I am thinking of buying it.
I nodded and turned my collar up.

*

We celebrate the little victories.
The meetings.
The money coming into hands.
The salaries.
Some mornings when we rise
the sun is rising over the river.
The wild horses riding along the clouds
cast eyes above us as we move
inward toward the office.
And weekends...weekends are for sleeping.

*

A visitor without shadow enters the room
pours a glass of liquor and
leans back, smoke pouring from his fingertips.

The phone rings and no one answers.
The body is relaxed.

A light across the street
is a woman writing letters to herself
in the indelible darkness of time on paper.
She does not know that he is watching
or has already walked along, again, the beach
she writes of
small plants and shells long blown into the sea.

She runs her palm across her forehead,
fingers brushing dust blonde hair from flesh,
talking to herself and shifting weight from one arthritic hip,
feels the milk come down into her breasts
and twists as the baby chases antlers in another room.
She feels the keys beneath her fingers and slips them
in as she has for years in light
in the darkness

 across the way

He waits
remembering memory
as his smoking fills the room
and the shimmer of alcohol glows blue
in its pulsing through his veins;
suffusing the heart and eyes and liver
which make a man who casts no shadow
as the corners of the room

 fade out

the body is relaxed.

*

Slate house empty in the moonlight:
A woman's footsteps

*

“Come, have a glass of wine
to celebrate our being here
in this closeness of candles and old tables.
To the darkness beneath the rafters, Friends!”
There he and we lifted our glasses.

There before those sightless orbs
we listened to a tale of time
with each of us removed,
contributing at times.
I could not tell you how.
But it was heavy with smoke
and the bright skirts flew by outside.
Sometimes the trees turning their leaves
 over in the wind.
Sometimes the rain.

Do you remember...
“Yes,” we said.
The thunder. The sun.
The love we had within us.

*

The simple lives
tinkle from our fingers;
the crazed howl of actors
a wind roaring in the earth’s bag.
If there were a way
a way to build these timbers
selected from the hardest pines chiseled from the softest rosewood trees,
if there were a way
then surely we would speak of them;
and your long, salt hair streaked
in the candle light of coast to coast hotels;
your lips curled bitter in the glass.
Nothing spoken. Nothing.

*

arlo and Pete Seeger
singing from the wolftrap.
Not Woody...
No, the younger generation
left surrounded by the older understanding.
The dyed cloth chairs. The
microphones.
we all fail to carry our sons upon our knees
when we come from the lumber mills
and the long dirt roads their legs
can't quite keep up with yet.
But the old friends try, Woody.
They keep your children close to the fire,
murmuring the quiet undertones ,
and listening to the wind rattle among needles
of old phonographs. This land now
is ours, *Sing goddamn!*

*

barmaids in empty rooms
waiting for the offering
listening to the dust filtering through sunlight

the girls of Washington Square
leading their naked children
to bathe in the fountain
to guitar and bluegrass and smoke.
The old professors sitting between classes
in spring evenings and the drunkards,
the students long and dark haired
with faces serious for the business of The Arts.

Lincoln Center
and the rows of hollow husks

torn by a dreadful ecstasy
which vibrates through minds,
terminating in champagne and subway rides,
decaying piers along the Hudson
with their DO NOT SMOKE signs
and SAFETY FIRST among the rotted roof supports.
The couples hiding in the captains balcony
of the second floor leaning over water.

*

The lights pale,
the dusty lines of dawn crawling among furniture
when she came over
leaned smoking across the candle.
Everyone's a poet, she said.
How many publications do you have?
I took her home.

I made it up, I said.
Everyone's a poet.
The clothes lying in secret packages of scent
scattered across the unwashed floor.
Her anger taut across my belly,
the fingers pressed tight into my shoulders.
I have been with Gregory Corson, she said.
He said I was a female Rimbaud.
And so have I: we talked
of a baby gorilla in the zoon, the Bronx,
and I recited The Mad yak from memory.
Rimbaud is dead.
Everyone's a poet, she said,
and left.

*

When you are dragging your zippy new suit
jacket over your shoulders

dashing white sun mad to the subway stop
on your way to the gleaming citadels of your destination
in the heartlands of city filled poor
through shrill dust of the urban rush,
You are kicking a can tied to a dead dog's tail.

And

When you are leaving the brightly lit
to walk sage deserted western deserts
rattling the finger bones of past experience
loose in the pockets of your memory
or polishing the stainless hollow tube of
 the equalizer metal
to burst through the comfort of suburban
houses in a flash of blood upon the screen
or are brooding brooding brooding watching dark
 pirate ships fill the sun,
You are kicking a can tied to a dead dog's tail.

And

if you are reading this
or breathing in the silence of your living room
or reading more than one paper or book
 or page a day
or are thinking
 --most of all this—
are thinking of anything other than NOW
You are kicking a can tied to a dead dog's tail

And

whatever else the possibilities
the tail may break at least
or the dog flip over
if you kick hard enough.

*

She wakes in the night
crying
Who came through the door?
No one I say I have been here
You were hearing footsteps on the floor
 above us
She babble something about money
money money
and rolls off into sleep.
I count the footsteps and listen to the
wind roll by my window.
Their air is thick with sirens
drawing me in their northward flight
through winter.

At last I too rise
too certain that some fast and not too silent
momentum has caught in the marrow of my bones,
hurling me at a speed beyond direction
so that my impressions and ours are meaningless
empty bottles set down empty before a barn
and shattering one by one, the targets of a body
aiming his father's rifle the first time.

And like then or like the evening of that day
I walk into the living room by myself and I sit
and take a slow drink from a glass of milk
looking out upon a brittle landscape of winter.
And like then although the sun is about to rise
 unlike then
I look through a frozen web of ice crystals
thinking although the strangers I live with now
are much less strangers than then,
it is something I have seldom seen and it
is startlingly solid, much more so than the news,
how everything outside that window is more distant
 than this web;
and I think just as I did then, this is something

which must be shared so that I turn toward
the other rooms of the house although the house is new.
And once again I turn back.
Because it is something which cannot be said in words.
There are moments when you too look out the windows
and turn away.

And I sit back looking out through the ice tracks
spreading out across our windows,
the iron straight tracks running forever across space
throughout their lengths crosses at regular
and immediate intervals by shorter iron lengths,
parallel and spaceless tracks of timelessness. Outward
until the lines blur while maintaining their direction.

And I lean forward as each of you has done
while the moon fills each faultless line and the train,
I think of the train even now lurching its heavy metal
sides down canyons toward the city where I carry what I can
in a thin black case to the office where I like you have earned
my keep.

Or like you, I step back from the automation at times
when the sun is dipping low and sweeping from the day
and walk along those tracks, kicking my fee among
the dark ties and loose rubble which contain our civilization;
through the small fields which arise from lost buildings,
falling with their captured memories upon the earth of their immediate path,
past the solitary piles of papers and beer cans which collect
in such places,
and the dark and boarded windows. Like you, I pass in the dark
the rooms where solitary people sleep or share their visions
with the walls.

Or like you even farther down the road,
I come upon those stretches where great machinery has passed
for the last time;
and the skeletal remains of empire-building are shattered,
their ties lying like lost teeth scattered among weeds

where there is nothing to slow the wind but the occasional butterfly
or the dry cricket rubbing its legs against itself in celebration.

Perhaps, even, I have watched you or have tried to say some word,
although you thought that I had gone long ago; or have watched
you from that building you passed just yesterday which was coming
down and was being picketed by unions who were losing work as I
wrote while watching from high above the city; for I have watched.
Or perhaps it was I who was picketing, or who called you one night
when the phone rang and rang; for I have done that as well.

No matter.

The early light reveals the trees outside our window are white
and leafless
except one pine; beyond that pine another, but white and leafless
in this light.

No, there were no footsteps, but the stars are lifting,
withdrawing; and some great and awesome beast beyond our sight
is riding northward through the clouds.

*

Where the car stops
on this Thursday in late November
when I go down to the river the roads are walls of fog
and the buildings which are summer's amusement park
are white as the bone-gray of winter
are the land
are leaves over dry earth when the candy wrappers are gone.
I am the only walking man
moving toward the river bank
in this whole man-built façade of cultivated trees and
hand-carved granite ribs
the only man moving in this place fashioned from the mind
for the family of America.
The oak trees bare brown frames against the sky
this time of year
to the left not far away the rigid statues of the Detroit dream.

Further out the drying winter cattails. And
the soft wind the closing metal fences the missing radios.
I am the only man who walks here and the only man
who will ever see this thing.
I walk into the grayness of the water
and it surrounds me and fills my eyes
carrying my body a small green crab scuttling over broken stone.
Behind me there are voices calling,
but they have their world.

Do you think of the man as you read this,
wondering what it would be like
to share coffee over a table;

Even now, I am thinking of you
as you sit reading these dry echoes;
perhaps even sitting there with you
building on the words like blocks of ether,
and wishing instead were walking drunken
examining the autumn weeds growing in some sacred place
or kicking among the rusted remains of where we lived,
our arms across each others shoulders.

Not talking craft or names
or yours or mine;
since these are meaningless
and since we say only the little we both know;
but walking along the dry gullies together,
collecting the sticky seeds of weed growth
on our socks and on our trouser cuffs.
Thinking if we were the unshucked brilliance of these weeds
we would be poetry, and would not call it anything
and would cry always with the hollow cry
of Life

The stamps CRANE and ROETHKE and JARRELL
glistening posts entwined within the mind,
and the master scytheman WHITMAN squinting through his sweat

and saying I am this and I like this
and This is me.
And the countless overgrown hummocks,
and the swirling fogs of teaspoon-measured mermaids.

Until we would take these home
and sip dark liquor together long into the night
with so many memories we cannot begin to talk;
drinking a toast to this and a toast to that,
within ourselves
and to our children
who will kill the cows which feed upon our graves
as surely as we are sitting here reading these words.

*

There is a stone within me, smooth and impervious...settled deep
into my belly. I keep this stone because it was given me by
time. It grinds my food with the eyes of fragile birds, and
bears outward on my back until I stand less straight.

There is a stone within me. It grows on nights when the moon
fills my bedroom window and falls on the white flesh at my
side. It too is white, but hidden in the dark redness
rolling from side to side in blind despair.

It grows with the shifting strain of continents. Through years
with the broken fingers of men's dreams. The rusted anarchy
of machinery. It bathes itself in the tobacco of the southland.
The fermented grain of the midwest. The camaraderie of
isolation.

There is a stone within me. It was given me by time, and time
will not let it go.

*

Loveliest of trees my family's now

*is drunk with dry rot in the bough.
And since to look at things in bloom
takes me into darkened rooms,
about the country I will go
to see my family's urine flow.*

*Let us go then, you and I,
while there's grease upon the sky.*

My son sleeps.
I sit in my den and type a poem
before preparing for work in the morning.
My wife bends over a table downstairs
writing a study of the Navy on where their planes will fall
when they miss the base.
The house was built in 1870 for studies which were not dreamed of
then.

*Try to remember
how to dismember
this kind of September*

Old wood strong enough to hold six generations,
stone soaked with the seepage of one hundred eleven years.
An old car running on three cylinders
spitting gas fumes into the air
on a three year guarantee expired.
Why do we build these things to fall apart?
Sometimes I think to meet a man who will live longer than I
is the hardest thing which I can do;
knowing he will drink beer and walk these fog-draped streets
when I am no longer a part of them.
The movies of dead men. The wet sheets of Marilyn Monroe.

*In samsonite did Kubla Kahn
a shapely broad decree
where all the sinful rivers ran
through taverns measureless to man*

*you'll wonder where you money went
when you give it to t he government*

I have never been one to be able
to look at old movies and say I know him That is Errol Flynn
or There is Hitchcock standing in that corner with a shopping bag.
He is the bald man.
nor would I recognize James Dickey if he firebombed me
except by his words.
Something in the way the wind blows.

*Oh Chaplin, My Chaplin!
On the burning bible lies...
The Little Tramp!*

I remember only the burning blue signs
shouting wordless on and off into neon night.
It is said when a man is my age he is at his most productive
machinations,
having gathered the nameless in scattered figurines
and building models that cannot fly...heavy bumblebees
descending through time on the needle of their death.

*Fuzzy Wuzzy was a bear.
Fuzzy Wuzzy had no hair.
Fuzzy Wuzzy had bursitis.*

*

I am the night wing
the steel hawk upon darkness
eye bright ore beneath the damp loose earth.
Separation is the spreading of an oak leaf in autumn
and the silt growing in the estuary of some great river.
I live and the room I live is all I need
beneath a lamp as my father sat beneath a lamp
thirty revolutions of the earth ago
illuminated by past death in the glowing center of his room

a glass bulb
as I sit straining the dried blood from his skull.
Books. Bitter ladies.
The sour scent of sleeping fills these curtained windows.
The torn clothes belonging perhaps to those who remain
or those who left
whose names are labels on glass bottles beyond the wall.
This is all I need
battering burning against the incandescent center of my
universe.

*

Something massively large has slept
these last days in the valley outside from my window;
something of unimaginable weight,
along the far banks of the river outside my study;
and yet silent in the ease with which its resting limbs
uprooted trees and boulders, cascading earth and rubble
down to the water's edge, leaving an expanding pattern
of metal frames and the abandoned summer houses
pressed flat into the depression of its presence.
Some thing which I do not have a name for
which has passed the night these recent days
quietly waiting while I slept,
so that when I rose in the gray of morning
the land outside was changed each day,
and the vegetation I remembered further crushed.
So that is why tonight I wait
long after my wife has departed for the bedroom,
and I smoke cigarettes or sip from my drink
as I stare into darkness listening to the wind
as it builds along these valley corridors
and the air inside this room grows heavy with discarded time.

And I listen to the rain in its falling
as it has fallen each of these past days,
rattling along the shingles and sliding off to silence.

And there suddenly I begin to hear
the distant splintering of wood and a heavy settling,
as if the smoke which fills this room were taking solid form
and rolling to a final resting place;
and yet the room is filled with smoke and it is rolling
 without ceasing in the darkness,
moving in or out with the coolness of the partly opened window.

As I write this,
I am staring as intently as I can
out over the valley beneath the distance of the stars'
until almost I think there is a less substantial shape
transforming in the valley, or a gathering of gray within the night.
But it is too hard to tell about, and the shape
or shapes if they are shapes too hidden in their form.
The brighter focal points perhaps the flashlight
of some landowner puzzling over forgotten land,
his eyes every now and then reaching out to touch a stone
and glittering there. I do not know,
but only that something there is hidden from the light.
And I know that everything is fading as the morning comes,
and that the earth will slide still farther down its swollen river.

*

We leave for new York at 1 p.m.
light even for this day to the hudson river drive
through yonkers the heavy barrels of winter sand red
 and white along tarmac arteries
through the woods of fort tyron the borders of the cloisters.
And I think, when the body is ill we go into the country.
When the brain is ill we go into the city.
And we drive without notice:
My three month old son strapped into the back in a plastic chair
looking out the rear window counting his fingers as they wave
 before his face
leaving the road in long bounds where its surface is torn
 by freezing water:

You know when you enter new York, I think.

Down into the older districts and the hospital
and through the older doorway to the waiting room.
The wait within the waiting room from 2 until 4:30;
and the pacing and the endless fear of parents
and the coughing of the patients waiting for a bed;
the hungry wait for milk from plastic bottles because the breasts
are dry.

The slipping off into a brain of rivers and trees
and where there is no language
in the city of the concrete word.

At 5:02 we go up to the northern wing,
to a bed,
to the children without motor development and with speech
impediments,
to the autistic children without words—with rage,
to the lost women smiling to each other
and to me and to my wife,
to the tips of the wing of Hell.

And we sit, my wife and I, beside the crib until the night
and it is time for the father to drive out home.
The drive itself along arrowless roads which somehow
I do not know, lead back into the hills of Westchester.
A descent into my cellar to trip the pump,
drawing underground rivers from my home.
The night. The same long trip by dawn into a maze I cannot
memorize.
The walk back into a brightly painted room
and the blue eyes beginning now—only now!—to smile.

Yesterday was St. Patrick's Da,
and HAPPY ST. PATRICK'S is written on the windows in green,
and clovers,
and GOOD LUCK!
There are no snakes in new York today as I look through the glass.

The message, as usual in the city, is late;
and there are only two kinds of people alive:
The Irish and those who wish they were:
Ask James Joyce.
And then at 8 a.m. my son is collected
and packed in a steel-barred crib on wheels and we walk away
beneath the hospital and the city in a circling ring of dingy concrete
tunnels without signs
to an x-ray room where he is wheeled away;
and I return to the upstairs room.

And I sit watching for hours
the crib my son was lying in.
And see the semicircles which 'Graff
and Moose
and Moosical Squirrel
lay out above my son's pajamas on the mattress;;
foam stuffed heads solemn in the waiting.
I lay my jacket over the pajamas to keep him warm.

My wife is marking city planning maps on the hospital table
sitting in a children's chair—
a little plastic chair; money for survival;
passing time for sanity. I call the office. I write rituals.
My words cannot find the place
they took my son.

11:00, I am somehow sitting in the upstairs waiting room
looking out over an old city.
For up to three blocks I can see the wood frames of brick
windows facing us.
At four, the curtain shades...at six.
Beyond that, for another twenty, the dark black eyes.
Then buildings only. And the haze.
Beyond them all, the river; or I say it is the river.
And the vertical shadowed land beyond.
The sky is overcast. It is 11:00 a.m.

At 11:25 the white man wheels my son into the room.
Asleep. Pupils tiny.
Respiration and heartbeat good.
He screams and the mossical squirrel sings my son to sleep.
The sitting into dark. The drive along the unmarked roads.
The drive back into the dawn.

And the brain scan is abnormal;
the head like my own too large for a little body.
But there are no tumors and no arterial bleeding;
just the fluid settling quietly among the growth.

But there is no need to change this yet, perhaps ever,
like father like son,
thought it will be measured every day.
And my wife and I embrace and cry. And my son cries for milk.

And we go for the time we have back out into the country,
believing it will be forever or for most of our lives at least.
And we know that we are lucky.

*

When I was eight
I used to fish with an old man sometimes,
and he would talk to me about life
 at sea in the war.
He had written a great book
and was a great general in the war
 against Franco.
But I knew an old man in a red wool coat
who huddled with me by the rail
and talked of death at sea.

When a man dies at sea,
and you cover him with a flag,
you slide him from underneath into the sea.
You fight to keep each other alive

but you slide him out into the sea.
And if he would have betrayed you?
You keep the flag.
And if he was your captain?
You keep the flag.
And every ship in the ocean keeps
the flag.
That means something.
And every ship in the ocean is alone.

I never asked him he spoke of the sea
when he had fought upon the arid land of Spain,
or what dark secrets he hoped to pull from the mud beneath
our feet.
But on days like this, I hurl telephones from windows.
All across the city, the dark heavy wires
hanging from broken glass, trailing
loosely down over blanched stone façade,
the dull clicking of receivers in the street
below and disconnected.

*

Last football player,
that's me
spiral into o' number 31.
Shampoo and hairspray commercials
end over end to the goalpost. Hey
pretty girls like ice cubes
on the floor.
Hey, I'm thirty-five selling
my old man's brylcream and punch cards
already
end over end for a handsome fee going
to fat
and it's the last thing I want to grease
my body down...
Toward

that last kick if they let me have one more season.
They said when they put those pompon girls somewhere
 yeahinmypocket
those papers said number 31 would just keep on coming
back and take the ball all the way.
But what am I going to tell my boy when he says how come
 you're just selling used cars, Dad.
And I'm going to point to all them streetlamps
curving up through the back window while we drive,
and I'm going to place his head on my shoulder and say
 Because
I was the last football player, son.

*

Twisted with the crazed light of sixties
 viet nam flesh,
I was there fighting the peaceful fight
 of my country
bleeding corridors of worthless Washington.
I walked them all with the force of youg.
Or, oh Spirit, the drunken moon-ripped
Greenwich Village scare scenarios—the
burning more much more than alcoholic rage
and the phosphorescent searing of our brains.

But never a battle like this!
The dull and ivory handle of the butter knife
pressed inexorably between the eyes
until the flesh grown fat follows flesh
and the eyes are pulled within
the gray mass of sameness coiled
and fit to strike.

Why, the rank, slimy bile green inertial mass
 of Government!
The bitter despair of rationality marching
in neon façade to the open grave of industry!

And all for the cardboard farm of ownership.
This is the battle now,
Against the impatient pusling of the blood
in mad circles through humanity.

No wonder the fascination of our time
with the machinery of death.
No wonder the fascination with Nazi dream machines
flooding out across paperback America.
This ivory handle of the butterknife...

This need to let the skull fly in upon a landscape
to walk naked beneath the moon.

*

Song...
Song of my blood...

*

Indian tortoise moon rises heavy over Westchester
Hudson Valley.
I listen to CONCERTO FOR FIVE KETTLE DRUMS
AND ORCHESTRA.
Heavy earthen doors slam shut across the wooded hills.

Reddish hued in night
the trees...
moss hanging from straining limbs
fastened in place the old estates bordering down
spaceless to the fish's belly of the water.
Song of wind through flesh.

Song of borderless division,
of Irvingstown and New York,
of storms which hardly shape the land,
of brackish Tappan Sea crescented by metal road

and the old ones in their bones
counting time by sails upon tide.

Slow tortoise moon upon whiteframe
woodclap churches of America
long isolate in uncleared land.
The sleeping millionaires and factory workers,
carmakers, papersufflers,
struggling silently upon the edge of some longknown
slow moving song of wind.
The television aerials, the wrecking rews
and half remembered legends written in blood.

Slow tortoise moon upon the eastern passage
to the west.

*

Song

Out of dust the thought
Out of thought first the dust
snow naked woman running toward the village
young breasts high to hand clutched
red flag waving dust clouds from road
bleach dyed pubic thatch rubbed tight
across frontier fence boundaries...
pied piper junky rats dancing the red
immobile stillness in their homes
seductive smile and the rolling smoke dark
filling sodium lighted city air.

Grammy, will you take us riding now>
Pack your bags. The horses are ready.
Ready.
Small young faces generations
trailing out beyond the green tipped New York isle,
porcelain doll pressed tight against the flesh.

I think that I will marry him...
Oh, Daddy, be a dear...
Pick up some thread in town.
I think I'll go. I think
I think
Daddy...

No longer home
the gray salt of winter safety roads
piled for dispersal here.
chain clank December night
or rotting auto body condom urban edge
echoechoecho
stream pebble cool
in the furry frenzied mass of tangled limbs.
Well, you pay your coins
and take the cattle crazy ride.

Cotton sterile room
lips useless confusion of foreign language
eyes only printing unspoken
unspeakable
warning
money is the warning
not pronounced
but
the eyes are the medium
not what is being said
fear and little boy in stretched out flesh
useless for control.
A stroke of luck.

Mass plague death fascinates
the people...
the last ant struggling across cyanide powder
the first bacterium upon a petri dish
the wide wash of tree ribbed muddy waters

perched rooftop spinning along the flood.
You think the dreams and not the bones.
You think the passage beyond the stench.
And you think of what you are...
And out of thought the dust.

Do you think still
it is better
to be
unmalleable encapsuled
limited touch of dead wires on nerve
than loose?
That is is worth thinking of?
I tell you it is not so.

Do you think even that you
are
encapsuled for time?
It is not so
except for the twisting moment
of stars upon night time water.
do you think you are not your own bars
and temporary?

When I wake in the morning
to drool over my texts
I do not throw my arms wide.
No...these fleshless appendages heabvy
and useless as the arms of my chair
paralyzed upon my sexless form.

Only the words I cannot move my lips to speak
have opened arms and match the colors of
the dress I wear today
whatever they chose to dress me in
in my sixteen years and 300 pounds
of broken evening onversation.
My teeth themselves removed

for the straw that draws my food within.
And at sixteen years a girl dreams of ballerinas
and of gods.
And I believe in gods.
And in white swans beating their wings
listlessly across a television sign-off sign,
their feathers choking the air outside my windows.
I believe.

A statue has been constructed within my body:
ticking of metal keys
selectric words on disposable cassettes
chipping out the stone from blood.
Something white and solid as pigeons in the evening
coming home to roost in Kubla cons.
The weather-woven stone of coffee hours and t.v.
The money spent.
The chanting silence of trees upon a country plot
of land.

It comes to this worshipping of leavings
and the drinking of liquors which dissolve the stone;
the arid spaces which have built the flesh,
the feathered thoughts which have become concrete for some.
And from somewhere this icon then has been set aside.
Removed from family and centered in the square.
The years blow against it; and fashion follows form.
The stone becomes itself a feeling unpredictable.

We would walk out into the mountains
when only our feet could be trusted,
and he would say Look to the gnarled and isolate trees...
I will teach you of the trees against evening.
Walk quietly. (and he would speak in whispers)
Stand clear from the moon shadow of that boulder.
(We would sit in sand clearings among pinon effigies,
looking to the trees and the moon shining from beneath their boughs)

And one night we lit a fire from the dead
beneath a neap tide moon.
Stand close within this ring of silver he said.
Do not leave it ever. (The flame will die
I said) Do not leave it ever.

Or winter
and the vast snow prints we would find
and would not follow.

I stand where she stood
beneath the trees
watching as evening lights the earth
as I watched her there perhaps three years ago
...or more...
Marriage makes the time run faster or
the time run slower
or eliminates the time at all
we stood there within the same depressions
flesh so hard against flesh it was not what we expected.

I watched that evening
as wind lifted the dark hair from across her face
and she turned gray eyed to face in my direction
not seeing me
but touching in that way which names do not allow—
as there have been many others who have stood in that depression
looking out among tree limbs over the valley
at that same moment through the years
hobbling crippled only when the limbs began to move
or the broken cacophony of speech intruded
and we were moved away.

Song
Song of the blood