ROOT, WILLIAM PITT. The Storm. (1967) Directed by: Fred Chappell. pp. 93.

Of the two main divisions of this thesis, the first (sections I-VIII) consists of poems selected from a completed, but as yet unpublished book manuscript, The Storm, and the second (Addenda) consists of work taken from a projected second book of poems.

The former poems are very approximately in the order of their composition and have been chosen from the poems in The Storm manuscript because they constitute the bulk of my finished work and can indicate both the development of my grasp of technique and the influence this development has had upon my discovery of themes. "Passing A Sawmill At Night," for instance, is a forerunner of the more ambitious title poem, "The Storm." Although both poems can stand independently in one volume, the shorter one is clearly related to the longer in both subject and treatment. Both poems undertake the exploration of a father-son relationship (as do "The Wavering Field," "The Gulf," and a later poem, "The Circle Of Struggle"), and each utilizes flashback techniques. In "The Storm," however, this technique is augmented by both dreams and a dream-like vision, and the narrative itself is far more elaborate and is textured more suggestively.

The appended poems are arranged only in alphabetical order, and at least one of them is unfinished. "The Circle Of Struggle" is a poem I did want to include even though it is not wholly satisfactory to me at this time. In these poems, as in some of the poems in sections VII and VIII, the reader might notice that there is increasing use made of direct statements in such poems as "From The First And Lasting Dream," "Stopping

At The Zoo," and "Woods At Twilight." The earlier poems depend almost exclusively upon the accumulation of details to convey their meanings. This is especially true of poems like "The Wavering Field," "The Jellyfish," and, most obviously, "Holocaust." I am finally beginning to concede that while the latter is indeed one way to write a poem, it is not in fact the only way, nor necessarily the best way.

Inevitably, though, one who writes is trying to render what he feels, believes, and thinks in a manner which is immediate, honest, and complete. The crucial question is not so much a matter of which technique may be best as it is of which technique a particular writer is capable of using most effectively.

THE STORM

by

William Pitt Root

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The Woman's College of the University of North Carolina
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro
January, 1967

Approved by

Fred Chappell
Director

APPROVAL SHEET

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

Thesis Director _____

Oral Examination Committee Members _____

January 12, 1966
Date of Examination

A number of these poems have appeared or been accepted to appear in the following magazines: Beloit Poetry Journal, Carolina Quarterly, Catalyst, Coraddi, Greensboro Review, Sewanee Review, Shenandoah, and the Southern Poetry Review. Two of these poems have appeared in the anthology, Red Clay Reader 3, and several others were included in a group which was awarded the Academy of American Poets' first prize for the University of North Carolina in 1966.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

My writing is not programmatic: I am innocent of philosophical intentions. Or so I am tempted to claim. However, in trying to arrange these poems I find that the progressive interaction between my grasp of technique and my development of theme has resulted in the emergence of a tendency if not a plan, a coordination of insights if not yet a vision. These poems are arranged to bring that tendency into prominence.

But not to define it. I have no real wish to define it: If I could do so, my efforts would be critical rather than creative. And although these two aspects are not necessarily opposed, at this point I do not want to jeopardize the one by invoking the other. From the poems themselves, I think it is clear that my thematic clusters derive from the treatment of such elements as these: Dream and reality, father and son (or daughter), detachment and involvement, change and stasis, youth and age, innocence and experience, observation and communication, isolation and arrangement, birth and death. If this roster is ambitious, let me make it clear that I claim to have done justice to no part of it.

Of the two main divisions in my thesis, the first (sections I-VIII) consists of poems taken from a completed, but as yet unpublished book manuscript, The Storm, and the second (Addenda) consists of work taken from a projected second book of poems.

The former poems are in very approximately the order of their composition and have been selected from the poems in The Storm because

they constitute the bulk of my finished work and can indicate both the development of my grasp of technique and the influence I have said this development has had upon my discovery of theme. "Passing A Sawmill At Night," for instance, is a forerunner of the more ambitious title poem, "The Storm." Although both poems can stand independently in one volume, the shorter one is clearly related to the longer in both subject and treatment. Both poems undertake the exploration of a father-son relationship (as do "The Wavering Field," "The Gulf," and, more recently, "The Circle Of Struggle) and each utilizes flashback techniques. In "The Storm" this technique is augmented by both dreams and a dream-like vision and the narrative itself is far more elaborate and is textured more suggestively, with an extended parallel established between the father's physical existence and the means of his livelihood (part 2, lines 5-10) and another set up between the memory of the narrator as a boy and the literal planting of his father's crops (part 1, lines 10-13; part 6, lines 20-36), and several other correspondences less easily isolated and pointed to.

In the last part of the poem, having relived an almost obsessive and certainly nightmarish episode (which is rather like a paraphrase of the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham, but one in which lightning rather than the voice of Jehova interrupts the action), the narrator conjures a familiar memory he has of his father watching herons near a swamp, a scene the remembrance of which has clearly become almost a ritual ("For

years your shape's been paralyzed/ among palmettoes' silhouettes"); however, this time, and presumably for the first time, the narrator immediately identifies himself with that heron, rising with it and looking back down at the figure of his dying father "through the burning veil of flashing wings" only to see him "kneel at last" in an ambiguous gesture that may be either prayer or utter physical collapse as his disease forces him to kneel. (There is, by the way, the merest hint that this moment of union, heightened union, is to be thought of as a moment almost sacramental, almost, in a mystical sense, a marriage ("through the burning veil").

The problems in this poem, the themes, are the problems of heritage-- of what can be passed on and what cannot be passed on from generation to generation-- and of integrity, or what is involved in the persistance of the habit of self in the face of both natural and unnatural adversity, internal (disease), external (the storm), and spiritual or metaphysical (skepticism). The solution the father has endeavored to realize is essentially stoical and fails, but the failure, as recorded by the narrator of the poem, is of an almost tragic stature. Concerning the first aspect of the problems, that of heritage, it might be noted that the narrator, who is essentially a passive figure and is capable of being overwhelmed by the father as he "crouches against the sun," is most nearly united with his father at a moment when the father, too, is an observer, and that at the very instant when the son's perceptions transform to become the heron's, the object of the father's attention,

then the dominance of the father concludes. In the last lines of the poem, the son procedes to recognize the nature of what has been passed on to him and the absolute limitations of that endowment.

The appended poems are arranged only in alphabetical order, and at least one of them is unfinished. ("The Circle Of Struggle," especially part II, is unsatisfactory to me at this time; but I did want to include at least this draft of that poem in my thesis.) In these poems, as in some of the poems in sections VII and VIII, the reader might notice that there is increasing use made of direct statements ("From The First And Lasting Dream," "Stopping At The Zoo," "Playing In The Park," and "Woods At Twilight"). The earlier poems depend almost exclusively upon the accumulation of details to convey their intentions, poems such as "The Wavering Field," "The Jellyfish," and, perhaps most obviously, "Holocaust." I am finally beginning to concede that while the latter is indeed one way of writing a poem, it is not in fact the only way nor necessarily the best.

Still, I do think the details in a poem should provide passage through the inevitable obstacles to understanding, in something of the way that the spaces between pegs on a pin-ball machine provide routes for the steel ball to reach the pay holes, and that the conclusion of a poem is like the score lit up before the player-reader, high or low but depending upon one's skill as well as luck. The conclusion, the summation (note that the metaphor changes slightly), must come down

to the reader as a result of the preparation made by each detail in juxtaposition to every other detail. I think that this is how poems such as "Reflection," "Living It Up," and "These Branches" may be understood to work.

To shift metaphors radically, a poem's flesh is in its details and even though a central notion gives the mass of a poem its skeletal support, its approximate form, nonetheless, if the poem is fully developed no one line can be singled out to explain the whole work; or if it can, then what you have is a monstrous cripple where you had every right to hope for a wizard. The logic of the kind of poem I like is female, including, absorbing, and compounding each element before there is the issue of a conclusion.

Concerning what the purpose of a poem might be, I would have to fall back on Coleridge's evasion and agree that its immediate object is pleasure. And I would suspect that the ideal poem would be such that its surface attracts readers while its submarine currents seize, dazzle, baptize and otherwise astonish their souls before letting them worry back onto shore, strangers forever to the readers of mere prose.

Finally, inevitably, anyone who writes (with the possible exception of one who has written an introduction to his own poems, thinking such an introduction would be required of him) is trying to render what he feels, believes and thinks in a manner which is immediate, honest, and complete. And the question of which technique may be best is never so crucial to him as is the question of which techniques he is capable of using most effectively.

I.

THE DREAM

I dreamt that I would die
and could not wake. A space
of darkness, viscid, warm,
engulfed me-- I floated. A fold

of fire split the dark,
gave vision, spilled
a shallow light that burned,
burned as I saw it build

its swollen rim, and heard
a cry, then watched it issue
smoke and ash and fire.
It closed. I dreamt I woke.

II.

THE WAVERING FIELD

The plow has stunned the farmer's hands with callous.
Waiting for the boy, he attempts to balance
his body's exhaustion with the land's. From above
the sun's oceanic glare discovers
the wavering field, where seeds root in the waste
of crops plowed under. He runs with sweat,
his face and raised arm gleam. Both feet
hidden in the broken earth, he leans
against the stock and shades his eyes-- his legs
a clay of sweat and dust smoked from the acres
his plow has cut-- to watch his youngest son,
real against the shimmering horizon,
run from the house and past the family graveyard.
A mason jar of water shines in his arms.

THE GULF

How they burn,
the manes of horses
in the light-torn
waves, like curses

in an ancient dream
or Viking sailor's
nightmare, brim
with serpents, failures.

From the cliff
the father shouts.
He shouts again,

and hears a laugh
as the surf shifts,
surrounding his son.

FIELD LATE IN THE AUTUMN

The dry sleeves of the corn stalks
flap and rattle, alive with gestures
of wind, as the wired black feet
of the glistening crows hold fast.

Bobbing and swaying on hollowed spines,
they bow when the stalks are bowed by wind
that whines in their empty black beaks.
Their eyes shimmer with ants and beetles.

Above them, heavier birds call and wheel.

IN LATE WINTER

In late winter, when stone-colored trees
steep longer in the tilting light-- not yet green
as nuthard buds bundle-in unseen March red,
orange and yellow, bunches brightly locked
and swollen into nubs like toned Indian corn
not ripe, but ripening-- I am drawn toward
water.

On the dock I walk while dust shakes
from sun-loosened boards. No one comes
while winter stuns the lake with rain.
Fallen specks, locked on water, float
indented into dimples such as needle-footed
insects prick in stepping the taut water's skin.
While the dust disappears, I bend and kneel,
looking through the face surfaces juggle.

PASSING A SAWMILL AT NIGHT

The road was straight. A gully braced by stumps
plunged from the edge. Beyond it, a fall field
widened through the darkness toward a clump
of trees etched in fire against the sawmill wall.
Slowing down, I watched the bright smoke
scatter ashes dying into stars.

Years before, without a word spoken,
my father stopped the jeep as we hunted his farm.
Our years together ending, the stubble behind us bright
with frost, we watched a distant mill's dark walls
pulse with swollen squares of fire. "At night,"
he told me (he still moves through the smells
of oil and gunpowder, night itself,
reaching to release the brake), "a man knows
more than he can learn of death, or life."

I stopped the car slowly. My wife leaned
against my arm, asleep. Across the road,
through the living trees, the taken burned.

NEAP TIDE AT A CHILDHOOD BEACH

My feet are bare, and I am here again.
I feel the press of sand and hear it squeak
as if each track I make contains a sec-
ret powdered mouse. And I, a child again,

must scuff away the mounds that just contain
a bottle-top or shell, or sand, then sneak
barefoot along the beach. Here again
I feel the press of sand and hear it shriek

as, moving, I pretend my ghosts remain
in all my tracks-- or will until the neap
tide, slight and sufficient, rises to drain
the dreamer's shallow grave, his castle's peak.
And now, though barefoot and somewhat young again,
I feel the press of sand, and feel its shriek.

ON THE TIDAL LEDGE

Near a headland
while I closed my eyes and listened,
I heard them cry, drowning, in the wind.
I looked, and the illusion disappeared.
They hovered bright above the waves
as cresting edges shattered
on gusts of wind the sky alone imagined
while I watched.

Excited, but cold,
I hunched a bit and moved on toward a cove
where the tidal ledge is pocked
with cup- and basin-sized pools.
I found a ringed anemone
open in a vulgar bulge of moss on a rock.

Curious with an idle kind of jealousy,
malicious,
I teased the ancient total mouth
with little stones.
Wiser than I'd known

the anemone ignored the bait of pebbles,
then closed around my finger
sinking shut against its stone. I felt it
fix its tiny hooks.
My finger stung, I jerked it free.
The flesh had barely tingled,
but I was tense with dread
at how cold seaflesh is
and how it feels: It clings like a kiss.

I watched the soft jawbelly
dilating slowly
on its deep bald face of stone,
the cilia, like eyelashes, wavering
with hunger on their round blind lid.
Swollen wide, it spilled out grains of sand
that tumbled toward a growing pile
already at the bottom of the pool.

I moved beyond decaying stone

and trapped water, its creature.

I left it

waiting at the temperature of death, and tried

to find again wings and eyes shining

in a knowledge of the light.

NIGHT PASSAGE

As a train in the night gains speed,
I wake to darkness, think of light
careering through frail galaxies
of frosted wire and weeds
that glitter and vanish in fields
beyond the town, and farther still
through foothills and the dark passes
blasted from their darker stone
that dangerously lean
against the passage of the living
through the darkness, through the sleep
of children dreaming, men and women
dreaming as the dark cries to their dreams
and their dreams cry back.

MATINS

Now the starlit dew burns on the branch
and spins the tree, spins the rooted earth
in planet light, and falls. Brightness burns
the angled stones, consumes the darkness ripe
within the yawing trunks and bouyant underleaves.
Dawn burns and the creatures wake and stare.
The creatures wake from desperate sleep and stare.

III.

THE GRANDFATHER

At A Family Picnic

From wave to wave a flat rock skips,
skids. An edge catches. It flips and sinks.
Each time he throws, the watch in his pocket clinks

on the coins and collected pebbles. How many trips
he's made back here, to pry stones from their chinks.
From wave to wave each flat rock skips,
skids till it catches an edge, flips, and sinks.

His wife complains, insists that his pocket rips
from carrying "sharp, dirty stones." She thinks
aloud: "He's my oldest child." Their grandson blinks.
From wave to wave the flat rock skips,
skids. When it catches its edge, flips and sinks,
the water twinkles. He flinches. The watch in his pocket clinks.

TOWARD NIGHT AN OLD MAN DROVE TO SEARCH

for rotted firewood. He'd started late
and from a hill above the darkened curve
where coastlands hunch along the sea, he made

uncertain guesses at where the house he lived in
stood. A closing lid of fog had changed
the ocean to a rumpled field of vivid

silent clouds. And as the coastland's shape
surrendered, on the hill he carried sticks
and crumbling, fungus-covered logs, laid

them in his trunk, then slammed it shut. At peace
he coasted down the road. The sun had faded
like an aging eye. He couldn't see

-- with lights or without-- and all the way
he breathed the wood's narcotic, ripe decay.

THE LADY IN A DARKENED HOUSE

The question of commitment broke the ice.
He chatted freely, smoked. The Misses twittered.
One served tea, one closed the window's lace.

"Like frost I'm told, so bright. So sheer it glittered
once, and our mother told my beaux Jack Frost
was jealous-- yes, of me! Can you imagine it?"

He tried. She smiled, her smile froze.
"First
time we've had a man who smokes to visit.
Sit. Sit still, while sister finds a bowl.
Yes, well our problem's this: Each day she'll come
for tea, but then won't leave."
He watched the ball
of yarn twitch as she worked the needles home
and spoke, each stitch neat and tight as a knot.

"She has nowhere to go, sir. Nowhere, none
since Arthur died, her husband. Once he brought

her flowers. A man his age-- can you imagine!
O we'd hear them laugh late into night.
Poor Sissy couldn't sleep, and then the silence.
We'd wonder what was wrong. It isn't right
somehow. One never does get used to silence
after all that time. And through the lace,
the moonlit lace I made and my beaux loved,
I used to look and see the darkened house
and know that all was well. The way they lived,
the hours they kept, I tell you they were fools.
Poor Arthur's heart was always weak. That's why
I turned him down, that's why.... She always smiles
to hear me call him Arthur. O, she'll try
to anger me, refer to him as 'Arty'--
that's their son, the boy who was their son,
and he's dead too. He could have had a lady,
a fine lady for a wife, instead of one
as unmannered as she."

"But Miss," he said.

And she said,

"Sir, be still. You've much to learn.

She is insane, what you'd call 'senile,' old,
incapable. The clothes she wears she's worn
until they reek. She won't improve, not now.
There's nothing left for her, nothing left
but visits here. I just cannot see how
the man endured her talk. Why she's bereft
of common decency. She makes him sound
an adolescent fool. A man his age
would not do what she claims. And she's so proud,
yet so naive. She says, 'He loved the hodgepodge
our home was always in.' That filthy sty?
She keeps appearances, the lawn. She's always
on the lawn or in his garden. But lie,
why should she lie to me? And what she says
is rubbish, vicious fiction. She must be mad.
I'd tell her what I'd seen and she would laugh.
'O no,' she'd say. 'It wasn't salt. Good heavens,
what you must think of me!' So coy she is,
so vicious and so coy. She has her reasons,
so she thinks. I see it in her eyes.

But she's mistaken. I have always helped her,
helped her learn to knit and cook, watched
their child. And when he died, Arthur said, 'Your
own, you'll never know unless...' He retched,
sir, on this very rug. The stain's still there.
Some things just won't come out. I scrubbed, I scrubbed
for hours and finally wept. It still was there,
still is...."

"Miss, I don't want to sound abrupt,
but--"

"Don't then. Please don't interrupt. I know
your job's important, but then this is
your job. A woman's going mad, and now
she needs the kind of aid the county gives.
He left her little money, just the garden,
memories. She killed the first. I watched her spread
the ground with salt. She cried, 'You must be mad.'
Can you imagine? That's when I knew the truth.
I watched her, had her over here for tea.
She's all alone, I thought. Her heart's a wreathe
that needs taking down. She needed sympathy

and understanding from her other friends,
but only I could realize how much.
I'd known her longer than the others, frauds
who'd try to make her live as if that hush
she knew when Arthur left had not occured,
as if-- but they were fools. I made her speak
of Arthur, asked about him. You see, I cared
enough to want to help and knew she'd break
if no one helped her realize he'd gone.
She just does not accept the fact he's dead.
She speaks of him as if when she goes home
she'll find him there to laugh at what I've said."

"Perhaps--" he began.
Again she cut him short.
"And yet she won't go home. She'll stay for hours,
the smell of her remains for hours more.
I have to air the house. That scent of hers,
so cheap and so persistent. You'd think she still
had someone left to please! But look: Her lights.

It must have gotten late. Of course. It's fall again-- how soon it's late. Such chilly nights, these long nights, and such silence. And this the first winter since Arthur's death."

He left the place, but turned, and through the window blind with frost he saw the lady's shadow caught in lace.

THE END OF WINTER IN AN OLD NEIGHBORHOOD

I.

Today is not quite spring
but now the Marchlit windows
widen,
show the screen
of thin dry twigs that flinch
as sparrows hop.
Cracking buds
perch
like beetles split
for flight.
Gables jut,
bay windows
belly out against the wind.
This neighborhood of ancient rooms
pulses
as creatures flock,
disband
and come again,
one by one,

to fill the twitching branches

and the empty sunlit rooms.

A green vine flares along the twigs,

steady on its amber claws,

and as the branches heave

the hook tips catch,

it rides.

The seasons

tremble everywhere.

II.

Today from Minnesota came a letter

from grandmother:

"bright storms raged around us

but they missed us and we have

a lovely sunday morning

nice and cool

though saddened by the stroke a patient had

last night she lost her voice and cannot move

her eyes

"my boy you'd see my second childhood
if you could see me now i crawl along in bed
quite on my own
                and in my infant fashion am quite free
        i feel
so free
        after these months stiffened in
traction and ridiculous in casts
we even have some fun

"the wind changes direction
often so the nurses run opening and closing
windows asking how we feel too warm too cool
                too late
to write much more now
i must nap

"and now we've had our evening meal one
hears the cart that clatters like so many bones
and pauses

and the opening and closing
of the doors to all the rooms as it passes stops in silence
starts moving room by room along the hall
at the end
it waits for us
to finish
then the clatter once again
of glass on hard white steel

"they say my bones are hardening again
like sponge they were so soft i couldn't stand
they wouldn't
hold my body up i weigh just ninety-five now like i did when
i was twenty and all day long
i wear a nightie this one or
another but they're laundered here so often that they fade
bleached without light
and how i miss the color
of my hair
'scarlet mane' your mother called it

and your father 'burning bush'
so short now they keep it
cut so short

"it's good to be in bed
with the moonlight on the snow
two pillows prop my head
and the snow is like a sheet that wraps the world the room
is rather dim the other patients sleep
and i must close
or i will wake and think this letter was a dream
and write again and say this all again
but i can feel our winter's
nearly over"

IV.

THE FIRSTBORN

Our first child
was early, "easy"
they told her, and telling me
she smiled,
pretended to smile. The pillow case
was white, the sheet-stains hidden, her face
familiar, strange.
And full of guilt
beyond delivery, I felt
as strange
as Adam joining Eve, feigning pride
while I brought her a rose bright as blood.

THE VISITING HOUR

As I drove the road I raced the night before
my headlights' steady glaring hid the stars.
They weren't yet sure our seven-month daughter
could live. I'd known her first night, her horror

muffled by the glass room and Isolette,
the crescent bruises where forceps took her face.
I smoked as I drove, smelling the room where I'd waited,
its shallow cactus of dead cigarettes,

the insurance salesman whose daughter wouldn't breathe.
I was leaning against a curve when I saw the eyes.
I braked and swerved but felt the thud and cry
before I could stop. I looked, and found a piece

of bleeding fur, wedged in the front bumper.
The bright racoon was gone; dead, or perhaps
-- stunned and hidden in the roadside grass--
waiting till I left to move, or whimper.

Where headlights turned the trunks of trees to stone,

I made my frightened search through weeds. I knew
the racoon lived; but only shadows moved
as I passed the dark curve later, driving home.

LIVING IT UP,

While The Wife Is With Her Folks

I hear my watch ticking in the June grass
as my dog leans its head against a fast
thumping foot, and then rolls over.
Paper-littered waves slop below
our dock where splattered brace-planks gleam.

The blonde who rents next door seems
to wave as she cleans her picture window,
using a sponge and a rubber glove that's yellow.
I feel I could wave back, so I stare
as she polishes the glass. However, finished there,

she moves from sight to a window on the side.
Behind a corner of the house her body hides
as her busy arm wipes on, detached. And when a
sparrow twitters from her T-V antenna,
the dog whimpers, gnawing at another flea.

A dog's life, I mutter, and turn to see
a runabout riding on a crown of white water:

The crowd aboard is sporting all the colors
of the flag that flaps on the stern above the wake.
The people in it wave. Finally I wave back,

and listen to the ticking June grass.

THE JELLYFISH

There isn't much a man can do
about a grounded jellyfish
except step over it, or prod
it with his walking stick, and if
he has no walking stick, his shoe.
My feet were bare, so I leaned
to watch the waves relax around
the shiny melted-looking heap.

The jellyfish didn't move,
but then, of course, jellyfishes
don't. They navigate at best
like bottles: When the tide shifts
they bob and drift away. But who
has ever seen a living creature
with a note inside?
                I found
an iridescent fish, uneaten
and still atwitch, inside the gluey
drying bowel. I saw it jerk,

expand its gills, then quiver, arrested

loosely, loosely and forever.

It shone with pink and green, blue

and yellow, flashed profoundly silver

in each spasm. I knew it was dead

already, and only seemed to work

to free itself.

As I tried to remove

the notion from my mind, the mound

it moved in, like a glassy brain,

was taken from me by a wave

that slid from the ocean without a sound.

HOLOCAUST

The burning church shuddered in the mire of its light.
The steeple tumbled. A loosened bell broke
the altar into sparks as stained glass windows
burst. Afterward, sorting through the bright
shards of mosaic stories for Moses' burning
bush, I found an infant Christ whose face
was blank with melted lead. The whole place
stank of scalded ash.
A month of spring
conjured the fire of flowers from shrubs scarred
by the blaze. Some stiff, fire-scalded leaves
were dead, black on top and pale underneath,
but half-bushes bloomed. And now, charred
twigs kink toward the church's shell
while blossoms nod like innocents near hell.

ABACUS

Proofs of God

like beads of jade

shuttled in silence

click in the dark.

With jade-bead

proofs of God

the groping fingers

total counters:

All the while

the dark ticks

the dark ticks

the dark ticks

STARLINGS

Like cones that screech they fill the barren trees.
They think it's spring. I've seen them huddle, huge
with snow-clogged feathers, on withered vines outside
our bedroom window. I heard them late one night,
and rose to watch the whirling dark alone.
They think it's spring. A thaw exposes garbage
in dirt-pitted banks of snow that waste to molds
and curves of sensuous ice. I hold the marriage
ring my flesh has warmed, its weight, and hear,
mid-winter, starlings sing that starve.

V.

WHILE THE OCEAN TURNS

I see
their long, thin stems

-- straighter than the white ribs
of a perch
sea-worms
have partially devoured
on a shelf-rock near the tide--

the thin, green
stems themselves
rising to my shoulder's height,
the fork of blooms widened
from the flower's green,
narrow brain,

and know

the waves are taking
rotten flakes
like blossoms
from the perch's side

while Queen Anne's Lace
illuminates the hill, conceals
the sudden prospect of the cliff,
consumes me.

THE CITY DREAMING OF HORSES

Each dawn we watch the bus descend
through lifting mist, come shining down
an emerging hill's decline to the sea.
We mount its trembling steps, feed
the chattering meter quarters, sit,
begin to sleep-- but first sway round
our tightly curved tidal bay,
begin the lifting road up through
the hillside pastures, passing every
day the dewdrenched buckskin mare
who comes to lean against the leaning
fence and stare as, from our serial
windows, we stare back before we
enter the city dreaming of horses.

SILHOUETTES

In one of the nation's culture-minded cities
-- and quite likely in several dozen more--
wait semi-transients, patient human remnants
who gather every morning by the score
in a union's hiring hall. Against the wall
where cracked plaster discloses the mean ribs
of lath, they sit on benches. The papers call
these separate men "the labor pool that gives
our State potential."
Slouched, they wait and read
the latest news. "The war'll help," says one.
When the others grumble, ashamed, he shakes his head.
"It's true," he says, and stares... Against the sun-
lit skylight, a relic from the building's past,
the rain-dropped tadpoles are still, sperm-like, and black.

LUNCH HOUR

Behind a department store
whose glassy face displays on Market Street,
a one-way alley stretches
a block at a time through the city. Out of sight
and mind, with butts and wine,
it's here the morning drunks slump as papers
blown from refuse boxes
scrape along the asphalt, stiff as crabs.

Because it's quieter here
in the corridor of red brick walls
like cliffs, I sometimes eat
propped against a knobby fire-plug's stump
on the curb. In the sun,
the men around me watch as I wad up the sack,
toss it onto the street.
While it crawls along in the wind, I sit with the others
empty-handed. Hunched
like men at a beach, we listen and watch. We wait.

STOCKROOM

Early In The Fall

The stockroom fills with clocks at noon
-- thank God they don't come wound. Until
that time has come, I'll work balloons,
I'll sort deflated faces. Tell
me what they'll mean-- a child's puffing
swollen face, his tears, a mother's
breath, his joy, another thing
the wind can pop on thorns, another
thing? I'll sort and count and stack
or hang brassieres and blouses, trusses,
knee-length socks, keeping track
of tennis rackets while the busses
murmur past nine floors
down.

Once I dropped and broke
a bottle of cologne. Whores,
genie-like, appeared from smoke
no eye could see, no nose ignore.
Dizzily I kneeled to dam
the spreading stain with rags. "More

pantie girdles," wheezed the man
from lingerie. "But these are all
there are," I said, pointing beyond
the toys, cosmetics, and dresses for fall
to garments stacked on the pricer's bench.
They glistened like skinned fish.
He winced and, turning from my stench,
he moaned, "There must be more than this,
there must be more than this."
At noon,
poised on the window's tilting ledge, I eat
my lunch, repeating with the cadence
of a clock's neat tick:
there must there must be more than this

EXORCISM

In my fever I would dream, remember
nothing of the dream but darkness, heat.
And in my fear and darkness, I kept a candle
by my bed and watched the shadows pulsing
till I slept and dreamed of darkness, heat.
Finally, on the last night, a fly woke
as I lay and tossed in the flickering dark.
I listened to it tick against the walls,
whir in the air, discovering limits
it neither remembered nor understood
as it ticked against the walls, whirred,
and I tossed, pulsing in my heat.
I slept, but woke to hear the candle
sputter with dry sudden wings.
The flame crouched, then leapt, widened at the base
and steadied while the room stank of singed air.
I woke in the morning cool, dreamless, diminished.

VI.

WALLS: THE CAVE-IN

on a Girls' School Campus

1. Foreman

Yes, the walls were reinforced
that fell. Last night it rained, so they
were helping bail down to the firm ground
under mud as we stood at the edge,
hauling bucket after bucket
from the pit. I felt it, called,
jumped back. The boy looked up
and disappeared...
We couldn't dig,
no footing. It took us half an hour
to reach him. One man cried, I stared.
I'd stare if he were mine. I never
saw a body look so dead,
so much like clay, so much like what
he died in. I guess the planks
cracked overnight, but I'd have said
that hole was safe. In fact, I did.

2. Man From The Emergency Rescue Squad

Took ten minutes from the call,
fifteen more until we reached
his hand and pulled him free. Or pulled
his body free. That's all there was
and I knew that was all there'd ever
be.

Never seen a clay
cave-in before, and hope I seen
my last. His face was hard to tell
from what it laid in till I scooped
the mud from off his nose and mouth,
then his eyes. His eyes was shut,
thank Mercy, but his mouth
was in a scream and jammed with mud.
How deep it got inside him's hard
to know, for sure. But he was dead.

Even so I tried to clean him out,
tried to clean his mouth and throat.

I had to try: rescessitator

caint work till you do, or then.

Machine aint made to breathe life

into clay, but this one's work some wonders

other times, I'll tell you that.

3. Girl Student

It's such an inconvenience, all
this building. I told my parents too.
But I was at my window, watching
rain fall through the twigs
and buds and new green leaves-- I thought
the cold-snap killed our vine till then--,
then it happened.
I heard a shout,
a plopping sound, and saw the workmen
gather by a shallow crater
where a pit had been. But they
had made such noise since spring began--
that I ignored them, mostly. Once
a boy with blond hair laughed because
I tripped and nearly fell. I dropped
my books, and let him pick them up,
but only saw him once again.
I don't know who he was, but he
was nice...
At first I didn't know

a thing was wrong, imagine that!

Mostly I ignore them.

4. Other Man In The Pit

Ma'am, I was with him when it happened,
I was with him, so I know he couldn't
feel a thing. Believe me, I know
because they had to dig me free,
and I was numb for half an hour
or more, at least that much. He didn't
feel a thing.

We'd just been makin
jokes, ma'am, makin jokes and laughin
like the Lord Hisself'd smile
to see us do. The men above
were laughin with us, laughin, workin,
haulin buckets up to drop em
back... But he was happy, ma'am,
he was strong and happy at the end.
It ought to count for somethin, bein
happy, young... Believe me, he didn't
feel a thing, not a thing.

5. Same Man, Later

There's times I think it's every night
since spring I had that dream, them pullin
that boy out, and leavin me.
I don't know why a man dreams
such a thing night after night. And when
I told my wife, before she left me,
at first she'd listen, let me talk
and tell her how it felt, the weight
of all that clay, the tons and tons
of clay, soft as blood but heavier
and heavier, movin deeper, deeper, full
of stones that press my back and legs
until they break like sticks that drive
clean through my skin...and tryin
to breathe and breathin all that muck
like blood, holdin back, but breathin,
breathin deeper, deeper... Then
she'd turn away and say to sleep.

Can you imagine sleep with dreams

like that? I'd lay awake, I'd lay
awake all night and hear her breathin,
afraid to shut my eyes and hear
the buckets fall again, or see
them pull the body from the mud
and clean the face, to shut my eyes
and watch, and recognize myself.
But please, don't turn away, don't turn away.

VII.

WITH MY WIFE BESIDE THE WASHOUGAL RIVER, STILL STRANDED
DURING THE FIFTH WEEK OF THE AIRLINES' STRIKE

All day now I've been restless,
camera in hand, waiting
while the day burns slowly clear
and wishing I could say just what I want
of you.

This is frightening, to be so far
from how we live or want
to live. The weeks take
my desire to think
away. We came

to see the friends
we only write all year, and spoke
of how we show our age
by saying they show theirs,
laughed

but could not sleep. The sky
is clear now and your face is buried

in sleep... Our friends are gone.

Remember one, his photographs

of stone?

JENNIFER BY MOONLIGHT

A cricket with a short circuit
whirs in grass behind a stone.

The dark electric sound
seems to shine,

attracting our daughter with her
mouthful of mothwings

toward the porch's edge
where she teeters

on her hands and knees, inarticulate,
and stares.

A second cricket sizzles like a star
dunked in a dipper

as she giggles first,
then jabbers at the moon

perched on our Ford.

Carelessly it spills its light

like milk across the yard.

Absorbed

in what she cannot comprehend

our speechless lady pouts,

serene, celestially

aggrieved.

PLAYING IN THE PARK

Spiralling down out of the Guggenheim,
our daughter packed on my back and giddy still
from her first encounter with the colors
of Chagall, whirling in the eye
of Wright's great twister, we venture past
Good Humor men and into Central Park.

Here bums and tourists, the wealthy's colored nursemaids
free of Harlem until dark, and men retired
from everything are gathered on benches
with fallen leaves.

We are tired too, and come here to forget
what time it is and where we are. The child
is our only innocence, and here this afternoon
on the dry grass of a park, we play at being young
while she believes us.
                Above and behind us
on a boulder half-hidden by trees,
a man on his haunches squats to photograph

a friend who masturbates. His picture
will include us at a distance, playing in the park.
He has made us strangers to ourselves
and strangers to our child in the silence
that has stopped our game. We move on,
and trees conceal their figures on the stone.

Beyond the lined-up benches, we take a path
descending to a lake. All around are nurses,
families picnicking, men asleep with newspapers
and women sitting near them, alone, staring
beyond their children and each other
into those waters of their world
where sullen swans bask, adrift
in the breakage of their own reflections.

CHECKING IN

at 1 A.M., dead tired,
I watch two strangers
carry out a third
across their shoulders,
stiff as a board.

In the step-down lobby,
two whores and a jealous queer
ignore the body
as its eyes open to stare
at me, and these roses for my lady.

An elevator grinds me up
to 3. Stepping off
I breathe again and stop
to check directions: Snuff
and canned spaghetti smells, pop

bottles along a hall
of dead wallpaper flowers. The slick carpet

creaks along a narrow darkness full

of doors locked on regret,

sneak-thieves, and the wounded who can crawl.

FROM THE FIRST AND LASTING DREAM

As I hear crickets threaten from the dark
beyond our window, and watch the moon's old hunt
among sharp branches, my wife curls
in her own deep warmth and stillness.

The car is ours, the house well on its way
to being ours. Whatever ruins memory
has ruined mine: These woods have no beasts left,
my life no fairytales I can forget.

There is a train that sometimes comes
to shake these woods, a loud and prying iron worm
whose windowed belly glows with fetal heads.
Once I dreamed of trains, and how the distance
changes, but worry now: What if the child wakes,
or cannot wake?
Chilled in the silent instant,
I see the small, lit, moon-stunned form.

I wake my wife who gently moves now

out of sleeping innocence
and shapes to me, conforms,
admitting deeply the proud surge
that must come with death's urgency
through every generation of desire.

Slowly, Lord, and surely, from the first
and lasting dream shall issue all
our sudden lives, shaped of flesh
and riven by desire, conceived in loss.

VIII.

THE STORM

1.

My father was a skeptic
but a farmer. He believed
in impossibility--
                waiting
for the Gulf Coast's holocaustal hurricanes,
he'd cut the earth
and seed each fresh wound
with a row of curses,
ram the tractor into gear
and tear his land apart
to put it back together, me beside him
watching, my memory planted
with each season's violent crop, ripening
as each acre ripened.

2.

                This was near
the Everglades fifteen years ago
while I was a boy learning to live

from a man learning to die.
His life: The steady green profusion
of hot leaves devouring air and light,
sucking rain dark under wide steaming fields
with underground acres of tendrilous roots,
a pale brutal ferocity spreading its strength,
unthinking and gradual.

3.

Mondays, coughing blood
in handkerchieves he buried in his fields,
he'd disappear, the high pitched jingle
of a tailgate chain following
toward Colored Town. There he'd bail
his fieldhands out of jail, tallying
that cost against their wages.
He'd disappear, leaving me to stare
at walls the early darkness hid.
I'd hear
my mother tossing into sleep, and often woke

at dawn from dreaming of her stifled moans
and turned my pillow over to protect her
from my tears. Then, watching palms
fixed against my window dawn,
I'd wonder what was wrong
and sleep again.

4.

There was great preparation
before storms. When 48 hour warnings came
he'd hire triple crews at doubled wages
-- Puerto Ricans, Negroes, Whites, men
and their wives, truckloads of workers
laughing at first and singing, then anxious
as the cloud-thick sky bulged downward
through the darkness, truckload after truckload
raising dust from each storm-colored road.
He did what could be done against disaster:
Every crop that could be picked was picked
-- tomatoes, eggplants, corn or gladiolus,

watermelons-- everything ripe enough
to save.
As I grew old enough
to help, he let me. I bent down
through the hours of song and through the sting
of rain, picked on through the hour of hush
before the wind, excited by the lull
as others whispered, "It's getting time
to stop, it's time to go."
Then the wind
would start, and then the leaves belly-up,
revealing each green bulge left to the storm.
As distant trucks coughed to life,
"It's time to go!" And large clear drops
like fear fell, chilling our shocked skins.

5.

At home our grass was flattened by the wind.
The ancient palms in front arched and creaked,
fronds flinging like the tails of rushing horses.

The boarded house crouched like a cat.
Wind held my door closed till father helped,
then, pressed against the truck's cold length
and awkward, we crept past the garage to the backyard.
Before we hid in the house, we'd take a leak
and watch wind make it spray for twenty feet.

6.

This is the close time of candles, of windows
black with boards, their cracks blackened by the sky,
when windows are opened to keep the house
from exploding, and even his laughter is silence,
trapped in the dim fragile rooms of our home.
In this last longest storm, I am the candle-carrier,
checking every door and window in those rooms
the storm won't let us use. By candlelight
I see rain flicker on the bedroom floors,
and roll up rugs as coconuts like cannonballs
clatter on the street. I bring us blankets,
pillows, sheets, and secret handkerchieves
for him.

At night we sleep in the depths
of the house and I dream of my father, coughing.
His crops are ripe around him, tall and still.
Behind his back the sun widens and blinds me
as he coughs and crouches, coughing again.
Trying to scream, I am dumb.
I see his gladiolus
dying, the wreckage of 10,000 blossoms floating,
wide useless blossoms, ripe and flimsy,
drowning in the armpit deep floodwater
of flower-shining lakes. The storm
has flushed out cottonmouths
and alligators, leaving coons to starve on stumps
and cypress knees or feed from the bobbing carcasses
of rattlesnakes and rabbits, their long black hands,
meticulous, waking the smooth surface
of a sky pierced, row on row, by phalanxes
of swordlike stalks, the broken harvest
of my father's curses.
And as these waters sink

I come with him although he cannot see me
to slit the throats of pigs, bloated and blacksnouted,
their lips soaked back from white gums
and stained tusks. When the corpses
will not bleed, I stand and watch his anger rip
while my blade, thick with gore,
hangs still and helpless. The stench
of vegetables and flesh is rotten all around us.

He crouches against the sun. Above me
his black shoulders heave. One hand is full of light.
The other hand extends toward me from darkness, gently,
turns away my face and lifts my chin.
I cannot scream, my tongue is dead with fear.
I cannot see his face.
Lightning
blinds the room: The storm is over
and I wake.

7.

Father, your farm is in the hands

of strangers now and I, a stranger,
waken in strange rooms filled with your presence
as a sky after lightning is still filled
with the scent of light. Faced with glass,
dismembered by its seams, I see you
gaze at herons on a mudflat at sunset.
For years your shape's been paralyzed
among palmettoes' silhouettes,
and now you cough-- tossing water
like a shower of fire,
a single heron stretches into flight
and through the burning veil of flashing wings
I see you kneel at last.

The living darkness curls around your back
and you are gone, the dark rising around you
as you bend to plant your blood.

But father, O father,
what silence.

ADDENDA: Recent Poems, And Poems Not In *The Storm*

CEREMONY

Deep in the calm of a drawing room of flowers
the only hand her father holds
is dead.

Years ago,
behind a locked and broken bathroom door,
they found a man with eyes of dull blue silk
hanging from a tie stretched thin and knotted
in his puckered throat.
She felt her father's love
as in a shock of tenderness his hand quickened
her arm, and loosened, dropped away. She left
them kneeling, one still, one slowly
turning, head cocked, hands loosely bound
and naked in a small bright room,-- her father
in the slowly turning shadow of his son.

She sits apart, alone
in the alcove reserved for close relations.
Staring through the arch that frames
her mother's face and brother's

in her memory, she knows that if her father sees
he sees her framed in that same arch of flowers,
watching, heart and buttocks clenched
as at his touch.

Among the heads before her,
she sees a former suitor's dull profile,
his wife, her father's business partner
and a friend, then half a dozen friends,
a row of strangers who look up to turn away.
She knows the faces dark with memories
she cannot know, and watches each face
patterned by the shadow of its neighbor,
watches features vanish, then reappear as restlessness
shifts a wife or husband, or a stranger
turns to stare and look away.

He is gone now,
he is gone, and who are you to sit prim
among roses and lilies, breathing
this sweet stench of bright dead flowers,
breathing? Now he's gone: without him,

who are you? Breathing among roses,
half-opened and dead, breathing
among lilies and roses, who are you?

he is gone now

he is gone please now he is gone
the grass is soft and look the house
is empty we're alone now please

the grass is soft

the grass is soft and

he is gone now

please the grass is soft the grass
is soft the grass is soft

with hands and

please the grass is

blue eyes

please

dull blue

please

Please

Please! she cries,

and sees them turn to stare. The blank profile
turns and starts to rise, a stranger, a frightened face
that says familiar words. On everyone
his neighbor's shadow falls.

Outside

the sun is green in summer leaves and grass.
She sees his boy, a face pressed to the glass
as he stares from the car at their approach. They enter,
sit in silence, and watch the child run to his mother.
Passing cars flash the sun's sharp light
against their faces.

Are you all right?

he asks. She nods an answer,
takes the hand he gives.

And now the hands are dead by which she lives.

THE CIRCLE OF STRUGGLE

I.

This morning, when I had to kill
a mouse to free it
from the trap,
I thought of the rat's gnawed foreleg
father showed me once: sheer bone
protruding from a thin
clenched paw.
                Such was our secret,
father's and mine, kept
from mother, safe in her kitchen
for years. When he died at the verge
of my manhood, she fled North
with me to our birthplace.

There I learned the seasons
in a long strange year.
I saw the crippled trees
crumple into colors, shedding
the brilliant disease of leaves

that left the branches dead
and trembling in the snow-white wind,
magical and stark
between streetlamps and starlight.

I learned to set out traps
for foxes, mink, and rabbits-- declaring
I would never marry, never.

Each dawn of the long first winter,
silently I hiked through
the frost-bright, mysteriously
dream-like sleeping trees
that jutted like black bone
from wounded snow. Among
the drifts and banks, I was fearful
and desirous of the grey silent wolves
a crushed thing's single shriek
could summon from the dark.

My strong Confederate bayonet

pried the frozen steel apart,
freeing stiff legs severed
in the traps. Now and then
a worthless skin.
One morning
early in the wind and while
the blowing moon still wobbled,
jostling the dark fixed trunks
of night, I heard a chain snap tight.
Then beating wings. Something white
fumbled at the base of the trees.

Like snow rising from snow,
a silver fox locked
in its talons, the great white owl rose,
then fell, dragged back by the trapped weight
and dazzled in the brightening
air, lunar eyes blazing
in their mask of blind snow.

I tripped on ice, then reared

to meet its stare. It challenged:

I froze.

Its white breast wide

with the heavy wings of a warrior

angel, it dipped the hook of its beak

in slow deliberation, stealing

a vivid eye from the skull,

then turned to me. Impatient,

with an outburst of brilliance,

it battered up

out of the snow, blindly clumsy

at first, then-- transfigured

by the high light of ascent--

aglide

and glowing in the pale soaring sky.

Wet blood, bright

in the decomposing snow,

wound in a desperate

circle of struggle, round

and round the strict radius
of the staked chain.

All around me the horizon tensed
for dawn, encircling my vision
with the limits of a saw-toothed land
sharp against the sky,
and from this trap's dead center
I looked up at the fatal stars,
acknowledging the slow prison
of seasons and hours.

II.

This morning, when I had to kill
the cripple, later when I wrote this poem,
I sent my wife and daughter from the room.
Willingly they fled, as if
the knowledge of death were death itself.

My wife will not consider death, mine
or any creature's, while my daughter, lacking fear,
is merely curious, but stares until

I wonder what I've done,

what I can tell her.

So I

am the child again, facing your candor

in secret, the trap, but knowing this time

you must die, your face pass into my face,

mine into hers.

With her stare

and her mother's glance of fear,

I feel my own head become

the small nodding skull I crushed

and mine the one bright eye

staring from its ruin.

What shall I tell them, father? What

can be told to these strangers

we have made from our love?

III.

Somewhere,

in the belly of an owl,

we all stare incessantly from

darkness to darkness soaring.

THE FAMILY GATHERING

The feral boys in Sunday suits
can scarcely be distinguished
from the grey branches they seize,
rattling them to fling the pecans down.

Their fathers are below them, gathering
what falls; they are motions anxious
in fallen leaves the patriarch
despises, but will not rake away.

At twilight in his wasting house,
the women-- intimidated by relief,
regret, or willful love-- surround him
to implore the eyes fervid with decay.

Above them all, below them,
moonlight and dry frozen roots spread
and clutch, contending for a world beyond
the coins and curtains of his tended sleep.

REFLECTION

Consider the failing
politician's grin,
the widow grieving
as her helmet-headed husband
shines from the tabletop
beside her clutching
hand, the debutante
and vacuum-cleaner
salesman, Vincent Peale,
or Price appraising
Brueghel at arm's length
from your coffee cup
and in the subtle hollow
of your spoon, consider
how the brimming face
you gaze from is contained,
content, grotesque, and
for a time, your own.

"Searchers could not find
the driver's body although
blood was discovered leading
from the wreckage toward a
distant monastary."

RETREAT NEAR MT. TAMALPAIS, CALIFORNIA

There is a place, a valley
dropping through hills
toward the sea,

where a man-- whose body
spills, whose twilit eyes brim
with the shadows of Sequoias--

is allowed to hear vespers,
as if at a great distance,
whispered from assembled stones

cold atop a hill and dim
with candles: this
in the impulse of a dumb

maggot furious
at the base of his skull.

STOPPING AT THE ZOO,

After A Visit To The Clinic

Trembling, as if with joy,
palsied in her shining chair,
the girl confronts the beasts that turn
and turn before each cage to stare.

Once long cages braced her legs
now brightly hidden by soft wools,
but from those early secret nights
when, innocent, she'd study how her muscles
dwindled till she slept,
she still remembers tingling tigers
creeping through her flesh in darkness,
stalking men of sticks and ice
in dreams of snow, dreams of cold.

Now the back-and-shoulder jungle parts
and brightens: A leopard's stare
blocks the bars. His urine-yellow eyes
alert, sharpened by her helplessness,
stir her with their deadly, hopeless sympathy.

THESE

These are the women walking and walking
hopelessly the tired streets.
Gazing back at shop windows and bloody meats
cellophaned at their fingertips
and hoarding all their stamps, receipts,
and memories of weekend trips,
these are the women walking.

These are the daily husbands working,
crediting their day-long lives
and nightly dying. Into the deadly calm of their wives
they press the automatic seed, impassioning
each anesthetic womb that craves
her startling daughter-Queen, his son-King,
each life-long husband working, working.

These are the children born
and bearing
all the generations of desire.

THESE BRANCHES

These branches, sharp and brutal, blossom
softly with green light, expand
their fruit from hard tumorous knots.

Children wrench the limbs that bend
and dangle, sweetly dazzling, then pox
feeds on their faces, blinds their flesh.

O lost children! Listen to them
root beneath these lucent trees,
burning, burning, full of golden trash.

WOODS AT TWILIGHT

The hours loosen and the trees are dim.
The lights of distant houses fail to carry
to me where I move through twilight woods
among the creatured shadows of late summer.

The close dark of the sky gathers in branches
overhead, and through the thick leaves, starlike
eyes of squirrels and sparrows peer.
The long hour of the night commences now.

Stars spin slowly in the looming woods
around me and I wonder what I'm doing here,
failing to do, as I lose myself more gladly
in these woods where my dreams can only deepen.