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Directed by:  
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pp. 42

Most of these poems were written over the past two years and reflect, hopefully, a growing concern with form; the most clearly structured poems are most satisfying. But all of these poems are concerned chiefly or only with imagery and rhythm. So, if there is any complexity here, it is in the things described, in the beauty presumably intrinsic to anything and, by imagistic recognition, to everything at once.

Patricia Peters

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

Greensboro,  
April, 1968

Approved by

*Robert Watson*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairman

42

APPROVAL SHEET

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

THINKING ON SIDEWALKS

by

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Thesis Adviser

Robert W. Watson

Oral Examination  
Committee Members

Robert W. Watson

James Applewhite

Wam Ashby

Guy Owen

April 26, 1968

Date of Examination

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### Sidewalk Bone

Something majestically clumsy was slaughtered,  
 Devoured and then its thigh bone carelessly  
 Tossed on the sidewalk or rather by night  
 Trash cans are raided and expressed.

In daylight that bone is shoddy and degrading  
 Like a specimen from a shallow Indian grave  
 Sprinkled with sapless leaves like scales or ashes.  
 But at night it is brighter

Than ivory and glowers  
 Beside those cans as if it might  
 Batter them into urns or kettledrums.  
 Also it flies through gaping eyes to detonate the back of my skull

Where darkness invades like molten lava  
 Until I am entranced like a bucket rusting  
 On a pump primed so that that filthy bone  
 Siphons my strength

Like a leech or a skin  
 Filling with wine or a grape  
 Bending its vine toward the ground or a seed  
 Erupting into a jungle where twining branches seal the air like  
 cattle into pens.

In Grandfather's Glasses

They cloud the mirror, when I put them on,  
The way a leaf spatters a clear pond or  
Snow pounds like breath upon a window pane.

Their velvet box was hidden  
By an oil slick of scarves like  
A creature crouching in bright leaves.

And when I put them on their fine gold wires wormed into my ears like  
Tuning forks or high-pitched tones that  
Dynamite miniature bones shivering like flecks of dust in light.

Yet when he died I didn't mourn the way my sister  
Did. I walked to school and  
She was taxied past me in the car;

Tears raked her eyes like acid or a claw but  
I saw her, though bleating like a black sheep with  
My sympathetic gang.

But that was overshadowed as a childhood fright until  
Today I saw  
His glazed sight tap our mother's mirror like a

Cane or  
Moth or  
Plane clenched in insubstantial clouds tattering like cobwebs on  
wings catching flame.

## Easter

Spring limber dances twirls and lifts up hands.  
 So Grandfather on a juvenescent day  
 Came striding from the grave as  
 Naked as a ghost ill-fitted  
 In a flat fedora,  
 Divested of decay  
 Came marching through the door.  
 Himself beyond a doubt  
 Since he was mantled  
 In retired years,  
 An air of being kite-like to our floor.  
 Of course our shock  
 Was strong but greater still  
 His charge of not recalling  
 Where he was  
 Or why  
 Why memory  
 Should reappear in life-  
 Begotten shells to shoot without the  
 Walls of our dried love  
 To crash like hyacinths past stationed  
 Bulbs past coffin shroud  
 And raise a fragrance quite beyond themselves.  
 Small wonder that he sighed and  
 Faded out again  
 Or we were whipped like tinder through the wailing room.



## Transplanting

Transplanting was a dance beneath grey clouds as  
Roots like spider legs or thin barbed bait hooked briefly on  
Invisible strands of air and reeled the  
Clouds toward earth like large-mouthed bass.

Or maybe the sky was near because that sandy soil looked  
Black just as the storm would turn the clouds like  
Night or skin flayed thin with stars for pores or  
Salt waves breaking like glass jars on rocks locking a shore like teeth like  
headstones in a jaw.

So roots jiggled quickly in the air like mating flies  
Then gagged ground gaping like a baby bird  
While rain was generating like mosquitoes on a pond and  
Worms wound silky as a breeze around the roots a sense of pregnancy.

## Pet Store Fruit Bat

Bat, it was such a wild relief to find  
You tarred in these black wings,

Swaying like Italian cheese or sausage  
From the ceiling of your cage,

With a face soft as a dog's  
Or mild as dawn rinsing the night from our eyes.

## The Shed

The shed transcepts the summer air;  
Its wormy planks swear  
Green-veined camisoles with vines,  
Or shadow, tent-like, sun-bewizened thoughts.

And in these foliate eyes of flies,  
Dust peregrinate ships air;  
Dark dreams are weaving baskets;  
Perhaps soft silence stiffens in a box.

The shed insinuates: a garter snake,  
A dark-green glinting weed, the suck and clamor of a buried clam . . .  
Yet hanging gardens barge away from it  
When mornings swathed in brazen rays erase the spireme night.

## Green Stockings

Green stockings are tying rose branches around  
 An old fence that  
 Rets by the path to my yard;

They bind fence and plant into  
 Siamese twins or as  
 Tendons match muscle and bone.

But why lavish such trappings on a bush?  
 Maybe a can-can dancer  
 Crippled with age

Laced with her silk branches like  
 Love birds gilded with a golden cage or  
 Flowers with a porcelain vase since

She can do nothing with herself  
 Plain as a shadow or sparrow.  
 Now wind can whip these stockings to a kind of trot and

Thorns impale them like  
 Furious bees or needles transfusing  
 Their tint like spurious blood from branches much greener.

So after all this resembles  
 Varicose veins hiding a woman's  
 Legs as decrepit as that moldering fence.

## Transient Poem

Here is my last meal in  
This apartment; I'm nearly finished  
Moving away with only the kitchen half-empty.

I snatch dinner at twilight like  
A hummingbird stealing a meal amid flight and  
Life comes from outside since my radio is gone and

I've wide-opened windows to dusk as in  
A hospital where death chambers are aired as if  
Dying is everywhere a

Vacuum collapsing walls like emaciated cheeks.  
But I'm leaving with no great regrets since  
I've lived here alone and lost nothing I cared much to own yet just now

This place seemed almost beautiful,  
Almost like straying into an old graveyard and catching  
Birds flash like ashes through cremating sky.

Shadow of a Ladder

I sailed over the shadow of a ladder  
Slipped from the roof of a parked truck by  
Street lamps and the moon.

That was very simple climbing;  
I felt like a lizard flicking over ribs tracing a desiccated cow or  
A squirrel or monkey lacing a tree like vines.

Birds pause so on telephone wires before  
Riding swift winding currents;  
It was like walking on air or water.

Or it was being a fish gliding cloud-like over  
Trees outlined in mud and even  
Sidewalk cracks were scratched in wet sand by the tail of a turtle  
relinquishing land for the sea.

## Child's Marble in the Leaves

Oh I passed that thing so many times  
 It was a familiar  
 Sight like an ex eye yelked to a clouded specimen jar.

Perhaps it watched me too the way  
 Stars stare at everything through  
 Gravitational hooks and lines; and so I flew

From it like a kite like paper crucified  
 Losing interest, for awhile, in everything but  
 That egg or seed dormant in leaves like broken shells.

And then naturally it hatched into  
 A dream about an embryonic face  
 Perhaps my own but it was hard to tell on a platter like

An Aztec calendar spinning  
 Like a psychedelic disc mesmerizing  
 Me until

My brain was a blister  
 Pierced by a passing bird and flung like meat in a zoo to  
 A pile of leaves pointed like beaks and trembling like lava sur-  
 facing or an ancestral fish being seduced by land and pressing  
     its fins to roots choking the sand like hands.

What if Flannery O'Connor

What if Flannery O'Connor when she died  
Found nothing?

What if she just blackly fell asleep  
Like a dog?

What if her skin was pinned to her bones  
For nothing?



## Boredom

Is a cloud of dust or  
A tumbleweed that

Rattles my arid brain where  
Thoughts disperse like drying leaves

Or rats with empty stomachs  
In a barn swept clean of grain.

## My Enemy

My enemy is my ex-landlord who  
Evicted me because my dog, he said,  
Might chew furniture, spread fleas and  
I seemed attached to the dog.

But there's a girl with a cat right  
Next door wailing and rank but, he said,  
Her husband's at war in South Asia;  
My dog's an extravagance, her cat is a keepsake, a diamond ring.

So I had to get out since he insisted  
Dogs are for hunting while cats are attractive,  
Alluring like tiger lilies or perfume at night.  
He meant better I should live alone than

Keep a dog in a room like a box;  
Dogs belong out-of-doors and should  
Sleep at night with other dogs like healthy beasts;  
He meant my enemy is myself.

In Reference to a Bloodless, Bleeding Art

The girl before me is a poet or  
Anyway she looks the part;  
Her blond hair reaches to her waist and  
She moves lithe as smoke  
(I'm a pallid brunette with a dog).

The night is a dank cave and like gusts of perfume or  
Magnolia petals the clouds are  
Flapping around stars keen as snake eyes or  
Diamonds in jewelry store engagement rings.  
We follow the same sidewalk for awhile then

She turns aside and I take the dog straight home  
To the seclusion of a catacomb where  
I write this poem to remind her of  
My footsteps in her shadow  
Rattling behind like a chain.

1.

To Cheryl

Cheryl is five years younger than I but  
Blond and well-rounded and  
Her two-year-old son charms like a wild buttercup  
(I told her he looked like a cherub but  
She didn't know the word).

She came to use my phone to  
Call an old love; she was lonesome because  
Her husband was off for the night;  
He's a wonderfully jealous man and once  
Commanded her not to visit me because

There might be boyfriends but  
She guessed that wasn't a problem.  
I played with the child while she fooled then  
After she left took my dog for a walk and  
A sly wind unbuttoned my coat.

2.

## Cheryl Again

Later she told me that  
The boyfriend she  
Called from my phone had years ago  
Fathered a little girl kept now by  
A grandmother in another town;  
She worried about  
When the old lady might die and vowed  
She was still madly in love with him.

So she must have had that first child when  
She was fourteen or fifteen and  
God knows what pain it caused though  
Now she looks as undiminished as a sunbeam or  
Wildflower or honeybee.  
I wish I knew what to say but  
The only things we share are the phone and  
Glands hidden like seeds or like thorns.

3.

Cheryl

When I look at my son Wayne sometimes  
I don't see a  
Little boy or  
Little girl but  
A cloud over my eyes like  
My grandmother's cataracts.

I have two children but  
Own only one and sometimes  
I can't face Wayne because  
His shadow looks just like the girl.  
I feel my sex cracked into two parts like  
A clam yanked out of its hole.

Needle of Ice

Somebody who at the time seemed  
To love me said  
He felt at my core  
A needle of ice in contrast to  
My best friend who was  
As warm as a southern field  
Saturated with noon sun.

So he turned to her and  
I was left alone to contemplate  
My womanhood stitched together  
Like a snowflake or  
Frost barricading a window pane.  
I see myself a barren tundra  
Never wholly penetrated by sweet spring.

The Golfcourse at Night

where we raced  
was moth-covered,  
tongue-like

under the moon;  
into our brains  
spun an old game,

a summons, a challenge.  
where we gathered  
like arrows.



## Giacometti's Art

I bought Giacometti's etching of Anette because  
She was recognizable like a sister but  
It's become like placing a skull on my desk;

She is the wraith of myself entangled  
In his lines like a fly in a web or  
The shell of a fly, paper-thin and stark like the last remaining leaf rattling  
like a gourd dry on the vine.

Twins

Twins, I read somewhere, committed suicide by  
Running a hose from their car's exhaust and  
Sucking deadly gas as they once shared an umbilical cord.

They did it because they knew they were homely and  
Each accused the other like a mirror;  
They saw no way to deny that

Nothing on earth could make them whole.  
They were just girls, fifteen or sixteen, and  
So full of their own importance that

They demanded to be born again  
In a stunning diaphanous light but  
In the end they were just like two sides of a nut in a shell or a brain  
in an autopsy skull.

Broken Hip

Sprawling on the night, she slipped  
And broke her hip as if it were a shaft of wheat,  
Dry as bone, buried in those years of premonitions  
That this was how it would just have to be,  
That her telephone was a thing to crawl toward,  
Painfully, across the floor like a snail,  
But shellless, without support, forever after falling.

Before the Storm, After the Funeral

quiet now  
because the petals have faded  
into grey dust;

but this grey air fidgets like  
a nervous hand in  
some garden where

petals will still be  
falling like raindrops or  
lids for dry eyes.

Epitaph

I saw myself under a microscope with  
The clarity of a researcher watching both  
A bacteria and its antibodies.

So I saw with the confidence of a diver  
Looking through clear air, his back arched  
I could easily do  
A Crematory

A rock here is a paper boat  
waiting on dark waters,  
ashes after flame.

under the ice,  
I saw what your shadow's  
grey fingers  
unlace.

there is no sound  
when a curious swan  
swims in completion.

I was wrong but the words were  
her words were freed on a steady  
Then I related my image of

Being in hell while my family were  
A flower of flames opening around my  
I was dead water in their world.

And as I wrote to you, a friend wrote through  
Understand and so far, there I  
Directed by my childhood's my mother and father

A sparkling pyre will  
That hole blurred to a spinning top as finally  
My sightless eyes rolled like dice in my mindless world.

### Suicide Note

I saw myself under a microscope with  
The clarity of a researcher catching both  
A bacteria and its antibiotic.

Or I saw with the confidence of a diver  
Looking through clear air into dark water that  
I could easily drown myself like

A rock heading straight for  
The muck like  
A homing pidgeon.

But first, before I died, I had to tell you that  
I saw what you knew  
All along: myself as monstrous as a praying mantis that

In extremis eats itself alive.  
So in that note I relived  
Mrs. Curran informing the five-year-old me

I was worse than the weeds in her garden and how  
Her words were frost on a seed;  
Then I related my inane dream of

Being in hell while my family waves gaily from heaven at  
A flower of flames opening around me,  
A worm dead center in their world.

And as I wrote to you, a friend remote enough to  
Understand and so forget, those flames  
Shimmied up my childhood's dry remains and lit me

A crackling pyre until  
That note blurred to a spinning top as finally  
My sightless eyes rolled dice-like in my mindless skull.

### Recalling Dreams in Vermont

The cottage in Vermont beheld the lake,  
 And now unmoor the lake, the hill, the field  
 All swaddled in the wind, New England air,  
 And raise the sails of thought with threads of light.  
 Oh, launch us winging like ten thousand birds  
 Behind the dayset clouds of summer night.

Then from the perch we crept with dreams through night  
 And fell beyond ourselves to test the lake  
 With fins of fish that ferried us like birds  
 Whose voices were the waters of the field.  
 When we were children, spiders traced the light  
 With webs that lingered in a crescent air:

The moon was always spider of the air.  
 What haunted through the branches of that night?  
 White birches taut, aspiring, bent with light  
 Like ribs around the whispers of the lake;  
 They arched like dancers gathering in a field  
 Where dreams flood deeper with the passing birds.

Time's mourning is just pause in threats of birds  
 Who glide like children's boats through anxious air,  
 Go larking into song then our still field  
 Must rise and fall with denizens of night.  
 We lift, unfinished creatures from the lake,  
 And live to breathe the nightlong water's light;

Our dreams must scull like galleyslaves of light.  
 So beg for wings to join the distant birds  
 Who wheel and sing in dreams above the lake,  
 Command slack threads to tighten in the air  
 And turn the whole scene down to cover night  
 With green desires stalking in the field.

The lake could climb the hill to reach the field  
 And we were hauled in nets bemeshed of light  
 And then the moon would guide the dance of night;  
 Once dreams could make us weightless as the birds  
 Whose moving shadows recollected air  
 And dove like ghosted fish beneath the lake.

Vermont once made for us a field of light  
 Where birds could deathless circle in the air  
 And night was washed with dreams about our lake.

Freaks of the Zoo

"What dream's enough to breathe in? A dark dream." Theodore Roethke

27

1.

chime  
in the nighttime,  
alive,

bound re-  
fugee,

my spine,  
twist amok the tinder

shore, break  
weekend in

another tune, on  
fluttering tide.

2.

pity  
the shambles. into  
a spidery light

our nerves  
come weeping and

cling like  
bells

to the moon,  
the shank

and the rib  
of night, the web.

3.

where  
creatures veer  
into bones

after life and  
dance for their

breath,  
flooding

an instant with  
marrow,

with mercy  
and fright.



4.

thinking  
fails on thin  
black wings

dive lower  
in my brain,

flock south  
diluting sight

with open air;  
death is thread-

bare life, quick  
sail to there.

5.

the edge  
of dreaming is  
a drowning time

where all that's  
said is hove

in dark lungs  
of the air

and there is  
nothing left

to do but  
sing of dust.

## First Poem

leaves  
spread hands  
across the path,  
across the snow  
so where  
I walked  
their small bones  
died  
and underneath  
would go (and then)  
Go far,  
Go wide  
so where  
will find  
last way to listen  
voices small and  
steady  
into  
snow.

## Thinking On Sidewalks

Now wander beyond that soft dove day by  
Sidewalks skimmed at night, in wayward  
Fabric clinched on headlong needles of light;  
The stars upsurging sweep like snakes  
Past lidded eyes, uphaul  
The drift, the voyage of uncharted thought.

Veering on byways as light bends toward dust;  
And I am touched with immaculate distance where  
My casket swiftsails over moonlip  
Sidewalks like a febrile weed  
Or a grey cardboard box.  
Heigh casket! shell of this windy night.

So shaken the soul can do little but  
Waver both blinded and doused with wild air,  
Singing aflame and swilling bright water;  
The arrow arching overwhelms the bow;  
And the last prayer scatters, unbroken volley,  
Covers these salt-splintered boardwalks wave over wave.

## Suicidal

Night air in autumn brandishes new knives  
As sharp as stars or fast foolhardy dives  
Through jet-black water still half-stitched with ice;

It spins my summer jacket into straw;  
Such wind tears snarling through October fields  
With harvests scythed and stacked for Halloween.

And so tonight I'll slash my hairshirt skin  
Until I flail beribboned from my spine  
Like rags unlucky tourists hoist at sea

Until eyes bright as falling stars commerce with sand  
Because then wolf packs prowling in this air  
May scratch a meaning on my pearl-smooth skull

For desperation wells like marrow or  
Like bleed from wounds that flare out in the air  
In imitation of the wind-thinned spouts of whales.

## Shadows

My shadows war-danced a crazy quilt under the street lamps;  
At certain junctions of light and movement they  
Split like amoebae or a malignant cell.

Sometimes there were two of us, then three or  
Four or maybe five; I was a dervish or a  
Top spinning out of the corners of my half-shut eyes.

They scared me like muggers or a  
Pack of wolves half-hidden behind  
Snow banked around trees with branches dangling like flayed skin;

I flew home with that flock following my  
Every move like carrion anticipating  
My flesh. They sprayed like blood from a wound then

At last rejoined somewhere inside me where  
They lie in wait, ready to slide  
Out like my own ghost taking to night like an owl.

## Decapitated Bird

The odd point is not that  
This bird is dead but that  
It has somehow lost its head.

Perhaps a cat bit it off after  
The fact but skulls must  
Taste like pebbles or marbles.

More likely that cat killed for  
The inviolable glee of  
Consummating violence or

Maybe the bird itself  
Sang higher and wilder than  
Ever before recalling its

Head to clear air like  
A wave leaving on shore  
This shell of a body for me.

Emeraude

I imitate my grandmother and wear  
Coty's Emeraude which smells  
Like Shalimar but cheaper.

Still for me it is a potent charm and  
Must be lucky because  
It snared her a marvelous husband.

I have a friend who swears her  
Great-grandmother's cold cream always  
Conjures the past

Like an old diary;  
For another friend it was a  
Grandfather's after-shave still haunting the family Bible.

So Emeraude is my tabernacle veil;  
I am a temple dancer and  
My feet trample like rain flowers in the dust.

## Shanties in Autumn at Dusk

A train in passing clicks dry pods like wayside castanets  
And files rough rails to silver white  
The sun polishes leaves like apples  
Worth reaping for their gold.

And in that light the shanties loom  
Like yachts sailing across unfrozen water;  
Or twilight paints them clean  
As blowzy curtains billowing

Through windows open to  
Air shimmering like a sheet of foil.



## The Fishpond

so light in  
the pond is  
the wind's web  
and fallen leaves like  
the gills of fish  
are certain of  
air and water.

## Thinking of January

without the white moon  
clouds could not  
bruise like smoke the  
bone-thin branches.

The air is a  
ring for our memories

and bells are ringing on  
snow and dry air

swinging baskets.

## Christmas

turns us as if  
we were lanterns and

the air is a  
rind for our memories

and bells are ringing as  
straw and dry as

swinging baskets.

## Night Trains

A train's whistle woke me tonight for  
The first time in months since  
I'd moved from a room rented near tracks where

Each streaking train shocked the house  
Like a cat shaking a rat and  
Whistle blasts shrieked through my ears like locomotives off-track.

Yet tonight that distant sound was as marvelous as  
A conch ringing out from a cliff or  
Seals barking in fog.

And involuntary as a mating cry I thought of trains  
Streaming beneath my window when  
Three-years-old I watched from high in a New York apartment;

I would press against the glass to see them flash  
Like slippery fish below; I was a nestling bird of prey and  
They were the swift river I would suspend in my talons though it  
reared with uncounted waterfalls.

## Going Back

I left them furious  
Or not quite furious but so  
Relieved to find the wind outside closed windows and closed doors.

I left them quite indifferent to my road  
And sailed as if I levitated  
Like a flag

Or kite the way we brandished them in fields  
Beside that road. So buried mole-like in old memories or  
Like a child I turned around.

That going back was like collapsing  
Rigging in a stern;  
My skull caved inward like a sodden cracker box;

Or, strange to say, I faced the wind to crumple like a cracker in my cage;  
The air sustained a hurricane of unfed rats;  
They nibbled in the grain around my bones.

## Tin Can

Somebody kicked a tin can in the night  
And I was in a speedboat at the Falls;  
The trees were filed away in paper sheets  
And from the eaves the bats swung out like bells.

My mind was ringing with the swipe of time.  
The stars were rattling in a comet's wake;  
The air exhaled like sand inside a wave;  
A heartbeat was a parachute downwind.

I waltzed, a speck of dust, through specious skies  
And heard clear rust impinge on tripping veins;  
Somebody kicked a tin can out of sight  
And open windows battered down the night.

## Fire Hydrant Poem

The night sky stilled me to  
A pagan uninitiated to words or  
Reason and then I saw that  
Fire hydrant butting out of the grass like a stump.

We were enclosed by buildings and  
Dissected by sidewalks but for  
That night only the hydrant and I were  
Together beneath the sky that

Seethed as with migrating birds  
Tossing like bobbins yet  
Seethed by clouds like spilled milk or streaks of white hair.  
The hydrant and I were nothing

Compared to that; we were like  
Anchors buried in sand or  
Boats stranded on land and  
Dying to be washed away, I with blood, it with water.