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STONE LOVE THIS MAN

POEMS

By

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B.S., Eastern Oregon College, 1965

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1968

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MAY 28 1968
Date

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"A poem is a tongue for the mute hearts of people."

--Paul Carroll

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STONE LOVE THIS MAN

Sunday Night: LaGrande
for Ronald H. Bayes

I am listening to Canadian Geese
echo their shrill cries over the city,
blinded by the light--
thinking it to be their sun
that guides them south and home.

As I watch them fly low--a reversed Roman phalanx--
I wonder why we couldn't render them an act of mercy
and turn out all the lights in town?
But then I realize it would only be
the next town that would deceive them.
And if they are destined to circle hopelessly
around a false sun, it may as well be here--
here where someone will listen
to their cries.

Camp Starkey Without Logs

Yes. Before the Camp turned Baptist and cold,
I listened to rails hum logs home at dark
and watched fish shuttle under the wood-beamed bridge
where Greeks sat to tell stories and shave wood
thin and light as confetti while the breeze
coaxed smoke silent through trees.

With a cant hook I could vault the roily creek
and walk to beaver ponds stocked with trout
no one could take on a line and leader.
In the elbow of the meadow and mountain,
secret to summer, I commanded a fort,
was brilliant in battle, victorious in love.
I caught a fish hook in my thumb.

Older boys from Upper Camp were braver
and played new games up Marley Creek with Marvella
whose breasts were big as apples.
From our pole corral I talked a colt to water
and split kindling for half a dollar. My
brother sailed a stone that cut my cheek.
Double, Bitsy and I rode without a bridle.

In twin rail cars company grey, school was
measured by the morning bell: twenty-six
students, a pot bellied stove, two teachers
and a paddle. Books were bound with string
and blackboards were pine slabbing. Butch
wore a bobby-pin to hold his hair; Bitsy's
moccasins prayed to older gods in bone and bead.

Named after the owners' initials, the S. K. L.
was home to God and dances. I was a shepherd
in a towel turban, moss for a beard and a mop handle staff,
mad for a star and a straw filled box.

My brother sang soprano for chorus,
I cracked "Silent Night" on my cornet.
From a faller's pint I felt the moon grow dark
and learned the Nez Perce word for love.

Eastern hunters came each fall and lost their way
before elk did. Signs on trees showed cows
and read: "Front or rear I'm not a deer."
In a herd of sheep, a hunter shot
a horse from under its rider.
We nailed old horns on stumps
to collect bullets from passing cars.

Below the flag, raised with dawn, the platform
was pitted where calked boots chewed the soft wood thin.
Around the stove cracked faces glowed red for jokes.
Axe handles were never green as me. From a pipe
driven under rocks, spring water ran sweet all winter
and filled the barrel where peaveys and spike malls
soaked at night. In the Yard, yellow Crummeys kept warm
by wood stoves in winter, waited to shuttle men to work.

Saturday night, hookers drank whiskey
and fought for scars. Kids teased
when Dad made me dance with Norma,
the only girl skinny and tall as me.
Mom laughed too much bourbon down,
I walked her home as well as any husband.
Sunday, we waited for Dad to shovel snow
and warm the outside seat.

Cross-ties rot their beds where rails
once sang for summer. The engine was sold
to collectors and Greeks have gone.
The cabin we kept is now for tools
and the school's piled high with bunks.
No bull-cook lights the morning fires
or stacks cordwood straight as walls for winter.
No names carved in wood stake my claim:
forts are never secret.

East Bound

Leaving Weston bound east and home
you can't help but notice eroded rills
of winter worn like nerves of some green giant
dividing as they run fissure-like
over the horizon out of sight.

The gnarled fingers of farm land
fondle those bald knolls
knowing summer's almost on and winter's
come and gone and still they call it Cabbage Hill.

London, the Smoke, a sweet haze filled flat
a wooden stork and black
stood beside the gas fire place
and Jazman said aloud,
"There is the bird undertaker."
I didn't know I knew what she meant.

Driving the sun behind me
saw the brown bald face of the Blues
black in the shadow canyons.

You can't imagine how fast the climb
until you look back into the sun
down in the valley
and on a clear day
you can see all the way
to Mount Hood.

Mount Emily

I.

Where the Grande Ronde River lingers
it becomes nameless.

But Blue Mountains protect the valley
and hoard names:

Dutch Springs, Tin Trough, Bear Wallow
Imnaha, Kamela, Ukiah.

Emily could tell of Old Oregon Trail
emigrants skirting the valley west
through Deal's Canyon where snow
covered the covered wagons.

Or of flat bottomed boats
rowed from Island City to Boot Hill
and the college built on bone.

From the town named La Grande Ronde,
renamed LaGrande, Emily is true north
and before Whitey Pare, optometrist,
ran the record four-forty down fourth street,
the twin towers on Emily's square jaw
were the test of a true eye.

II.

Geese are geometric clouds
that shape your thought in angles
while old men carve their history
and angels shatter bells.

Indians once hunted where harrows
comb the land and Island City
drills for water. Buried,
bones are hard as arrow heads
and legends live longer than memory.

Emily's not old. Nor will her face
fade in a year. Men build monuments
and leave names, but mountains cast shadows
longer than wagon tracks and monuments
are only names in stone.

Lewis and Clark at Lolo

Imagine that feeling:
climbed from the bowels--
the mother of us all--
and still another
beyond and still beyond
but for themselves.

The earth goddess and their guide Sacajawea
share this moment at the still point
where pines part the water on either side--
Now east--Now west.

I know the feeling of that moment.
Standing one foot on each side
of the Great Divide
the weight of decades pressing
my soles into soil.
The hoof beats and foot fells
of a continent join in me.
At that moment I control my destiny.

Behind my eyes screens scan
a cinema of centuries;
one lonely moment lost,
and then
the vision of a valley.

Jack Hagga Had It

With more faith than a witcher
Hagga mapped roads with a willow.
Young engineers were baffled,
but slide rules bear him out:
each grade the right degree;
each curve made to hold log trucks
like a lover.

Think of it:
Six foot Hagga,
Swedish as his brogue,
walking mountains down for roads.
Degrees of grade
curves
transformed into notches on a stick.

When company men questioned his method,
Hagga laughed:
"In the Old Country
men master their craft."

Pandora's Pond

Choking our silence,
we belly through dry grass.
Our breath makes dust whirl
beneath our noses.
We could be soldiers or Indians
stalking make-believe prey.
But that was yesterday.
Today our game is real,
real as the story about minnows
planted in this pond.

Sure, we've been fooled before:
running importantly to borrow a smoke-shifter;
listening at night for timber squeaks.
But that's summers away.
This pond's cold and deep,
fed by springs
and doesn't freeze solid in winter.
We've never seen the fish,
but the pond's full of beaver.
We can watch them chisel trees
or swim branches across the water.
Beneath thick ice in winter
they're here too,
swimming slowly under our feet.

Trout are different,
never where you think.
They hide in riffles,
beneath banks
or in the shadow of a sunken log.

We've reached the edge,
the sun's behind those trees
quiet as our crawling.
This is the deep end,
black near the beaver dam.
The shallows are upstream
around the cattails and moss
where skippers skate the water smooth.

A fish is there
swimming slowly toward the shade.
Another.
And over there, two more.
We can see them clearly,
large, their rainbows bright
like new plastic or fresh paint,
fins sweeping with the gills' rhythm.
They know we're here,
but aren't afraid;
seem pleased we found them.

The day is duller now.
Has drifted like a long grey bird.
Our faces turn away
to follow our shadows back
knowing we'll never tell them
if they ask.

Reflections at Nimrod

Where nickles made pianos play
we screen soil for old men's metal;
where silver bought a round
we dig lead slugs from walls
and trace names carved in wood.
At night candles flickered fear from corners
and brightened eyes of old St. Louis sisters.
For fear we leave the night old bones
whose breath is silent as stone.

Old photographs tell the lie;
dead eyes staring at a dead eye.
We are not afraid of what they were,
but of what they are.
Mirrors are kinder:
they let you die with dignity
and your history
becomes our memory.

Museum Peace

You sleep the sun dark and old for dreams;
tread a soft step; and watch the falcon
poised in flight, his mind upon a wall.
You feel feathers in space and know first
names in museums. A generation of dogs
have known your smell and sidewalks match
your steps as close as any echo. Your
clothes have been in style twice
like electric cars and wooden Indians.

Snows are cold and high this year. Another
probe has landed on the moon. No otters
fly for fish, but eels swim in fear
and never know its name. Last summer
woods went up in smoke and you
went down in embers.

In autumn's masque, a sack of thin arms
sings down wet streets only falcons and geese
can follow. Minds in flight, wing in space
and know dreams lie in shadows weak fingers
penetrate. You lived your cells old for love
or pride. Listen to electric Indians
echo wooden steps for generations.

"Stone Love This Man"
for Charles Olson

The hearth still stands
at the canyon mouth
supporting no more the cabin frame.
The river bends below broken
while the hearth speaks still
of fire to the winter-wind gone wild.

The rays of sun
lost but lead on
still the light. This grave
monument like a single tooth
in an aged head speaks still
in its crumbling way of many
river mirrored moons and tears.

I have tried to recreate that
spent scene where the chimney
stands of stone and mortar still
but for the wind and river.
Cold to the touch it chides my concern
with dignity I can't understand

in the still taste of night;
"Stone, love this man."

THE BENMOST BORE

Winter Game

That bright sun locks days behind my eyes
and green leaves tent thoughts and shade
imagination. All nature is against
the game that is my shadow.

When rivers run high, spirits dance the land
shallow of thought and I become my shadow.
No image caught in spring could drown
sounds of growing grass or color flowers sun-glazed.

No, mine is a winter mind, my game
a winter kind, played when brown
bones stand for trees and stir
clouds dark as spring shadows.

Sand Castle

Where water lips the sand smooth
and grins toothless to the moon
I build my castle for the waves of wind
and whispers of the sea; watch the light
spin-down of birds stir water white;
count the windows around each court,
the pillars, turrets, and colonnades;
listen to melodies plot small intrigues;
and know the morning's level sun
will cast no shadows on the sand
or trick the wind to song.

Yet I return with the moon and toothless tide
to taste sweet brine; feel the bird's light whisper
frame my castle near the lip of the sea
for love.

A Note to Morning

No one knows when beaches began
mouthing the sea gently mysterious,
their surface the smooth, wet
inside of lips.

In low tide
docks ride high on the sand
and dogs are careful.
The morning fog
brings strange birds to pick
where kelp tried to follow the water.

The beach is naked then
(naked as my trail here
I meant to say,
but that's half a lie)
When the moon's lode
rocks the sea to madness,
it can toss docks high as birds
and vomit dogs like spittle.

There was no death when beaches began,
only the quiet dying.

Water Shed

I saw one seagull
and later its mate
wing their separate
ways lonely over the
campus.

"Strange they are
this far inland."

Then realized an oasis:
water near the surface.

Stratford-on-Grande Coulee

Near the cement walls of Summer Falls
we form the site for tourists; drill
the rock's hard core and fence ground
in ornamental flowers. To be Oriental
during war was to learn new fences and know
the mind's half-acre of silence
as graves were made in summer
with gravel crushed for grass.

Rivers were never natural to this land;
Near north, Dry Falls once brought
the swollen Columbia to her knees
until old faults and Earth's anger
broke mountains to change her bed to second best.
Now from base wells water slinks
its carrion course then sinks below.

Only gulls in parabolic flight
reject the water, the public site.

Arrears

The sound sent down canyon
caressed
drops a particle in passing--
ear altered, the echo returns
in round sounds. Returns again--
again.

The sound is the thing I think
when I send crashing on the rock ridge
my voice. Secretly frightened.
The interval begs the question of return.

Then canyon crossed
painful its way
barb broken
but round
the sound
rings
made by a pebble in a pool

Delphic Dream

That oboe in the corner of my dream
is the girl I never played
and stars are shapes drawn
from the sun; notes in the symphony

I couldn't score.
But to the center,
the benmost bore:
Return fades the future

like the secret of style.
The octave is return.
Eight arms joined like omphalos
the dark circle of the sun.

On grey-filled days I walk alone
the girl is never there,
but oboes dream obbligato
and turrets are widow walks
waking sailors lost at sea.

Song For a Soldier

Brittle after dry prayer, through vitric eyes
we marched for peace. Smiles on those faces
smiled deeper than they knew: felt the tug
of courage fumble the limp shuffle of their feet;
laughed to ease the load and turned
eyes locked across space no hand could reach.
Tripped, shutters tumbled birds from branches
and caught light millions of years away.
Though streets roll in trade, we bartered
steps for pride and stood alone as in debt.
The march came, like the cycle of a year
or some dizzy carnival ride, full circle.

I can't say anything really happened:
traffic erased our steps; business as usual
carried on; and a bullet broke my brother's neck.

Baby Jane Exposed

As Baby Jane dances
faces shatter frescoes
and ice sticks idle
to the sides of glass,
like fetid wine
stills thought
and closes public minds
so only neck ties
identify the kind.

Eyeless, Baby Jane dances time.
Ming, her porcelain face supine.
Moving her body with classic grace
like Hellenic statues without a face.

Beyond the eye
faster than sound
sonic booms stir ashes--
echoes of old rage
sucked dry as claws
in golden tide--
while silver Jets
ride waves smooth:
immaculate patricide.

Honking It Up For God

The little boy across the street
who honks the horn
is pink.

His Sunday clothes are new,
his mind's not his own.

What he doesn't understand
is mystery.

Inside the church
his parents know the process;
can conjure God
with practiced scenes.

They know nothing holds a man like fear:
a horn blown against shadows.

The Reality of Clay

In time to turn broken dreams bizarre

I learn the limits of clay.

Rolled and wedged to free the air,

each lump is silent to wet hands

that work the shapeless soil.

A potter's wheel knows no master

and trips my foot if I miss its meter.

True to its center, the wheel

makes clay dance in ellipses

until my drunken fingers

feel the rhythm.

Good clay is gentle,

has a will strong as women

and won't respond to force.

Slowly, with hypnotic song,

my puppet hands rehearsed,

the clay by ancient diadem

commands immaculate birth.

To Saints Locked in Cells

"Rise up, my love, my fair one
 and come away.
 For, lo, the winter is past
 the rain is over and gone;
 the flowers appear on the earth;
 the time of the singing of birds is come,
 and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land."
 --Song of Solomon

The day began with birds
 reaching across my window
 through the tree's bones
 where cats still prowl.
 The Preacher's dog has lost his scent
 nosing near the Parish.
 Saint Patrick's dead.
 The day is Irish.

Rejoice the ringing of the bells.

The Boarding House
 has a bent stack;
 you can see it in their windows
 or in the man's eyes on the stair.
 Today is Sunday:
 ladies display their wares.

Rejoice the ringing of the bells.

If the song of birds shattered trees
our world would be the same:
the neighbors' secret faces;
Saints hocked in hell;
men who lack conviction.

Rejoice the ringing of the bells.

