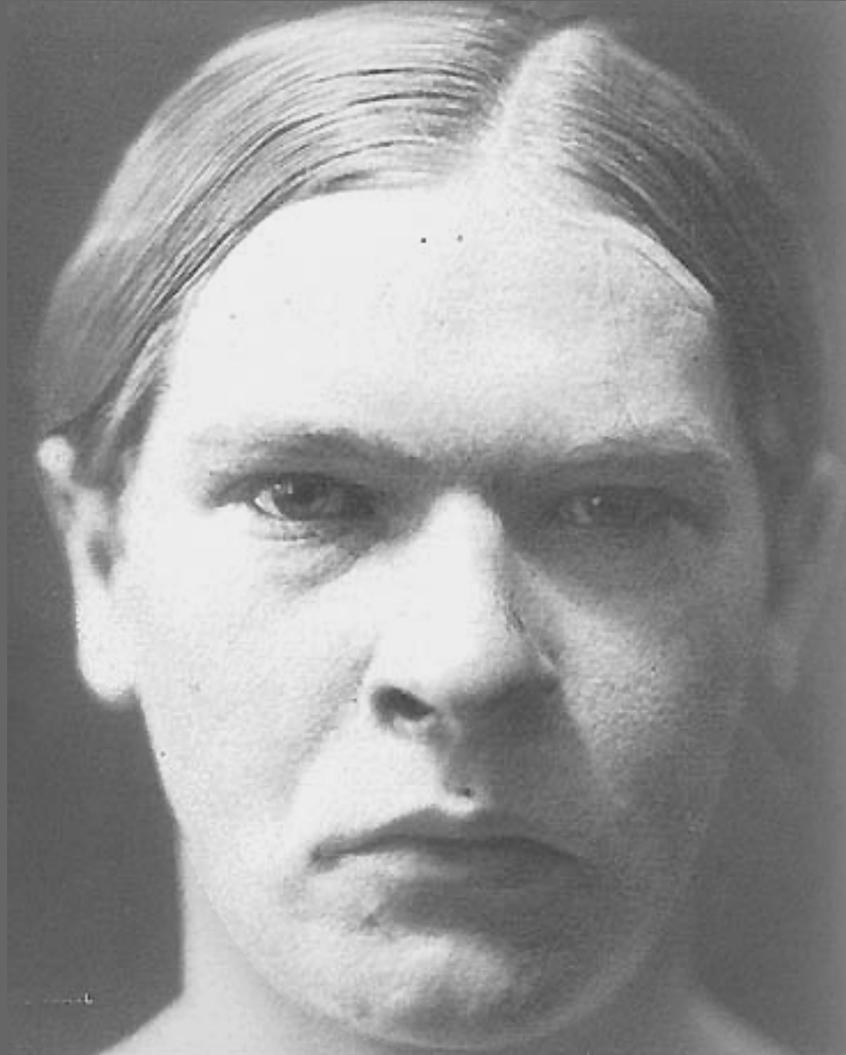


[from] **THE POEMS OF GEORG TRAKL**

Translated by Max Wickert



Note: From my versions of Trakl's collected poems, I have selected only those that saw print in journals. The book as a whole remains unpublished.

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ALL SOULS' DAY (*Allerseelen*)

Little men, little women, a woeful lot,
Are strewing flowers blue and red today
On their grave-plots turning timorously bright.
They act for death like puppets in a play.

How full of fear and meekness they appear,
How shadows loom behind black bushes! The cry
Of unborn children hangs in the autumn air
And random sun-rays flicker through the sky.

Lovers sigh in the branches. Over there
The mother rots with her child. The reeling dance
Of the living seems unreal, peculiar,
Scattered grotesquely in the evening winds.

Their life is so confused, full of grim woes.
Oh God, have mercy on women's hell-tortures
And on dirges without any hope, like these.
Still solitaires saunter in the hall of stars.

--written Winter 1968, published in *Anonym Quarterly* (No. 1, 1969);
revised 2009

BUGLES (*Trompeten*)

Under crippled willows where brown-skinned children play
And leaves blow, bugles out. A churchyard shower.
Through the grief of sycamore scarlet banners pour,
Riders flung past deserted mills, acres of rye.

Or shepherds sing at night and stags enter the circles
Of their camp fires. The forest's immemorial
Grief. Dancers come rising from a black wall,
Banners of scarlet. Laughter. Insanity. Bugles.

--written Winter 1968, published in *Anonym Quarterly* (No. 1, 1969);
revised 2009

SUBURB IN THE SOUTH WIND (*Vorstadt im Föhn*)

At evening the place lies desolate and brown,
The air impregnated with a grayish stench.
A train thundering from the vaulted bridge
Scatters the sparrows over fence and bracken.

Hovels that crouch. Paths scattered in confusion.
The cluttered gardens full of restless turmoil,
Dull promptings now and the forcing a howl.
A red dress flying in a crowd of children.

Rats whistle near the dump in love-sick choir.
Women bear baskets of entrails, a nauseous
Procession of filth and scab that rises
Up through the slowly darkening air.

And a canal suddenly spits oozy blood
Down the still river from the slaughterhouse.
The south win garbs thin shrubs in brighter hues
And red crawls sluggishly through the slow flood.

Whispers that drown in cloudy sleep. Images
That hover above the gutters as though
Memories called them from lives long ago,
Rising and falling with the tepid breeze:

Out of the clouds rise radiant avenues
Crowded with gorgeous chariots, bold riders.
Then, too, a ship comes into view and founders
On reefs. And mosques, too sometimes, pink and rose.

--written Winter 1968, published in *Anonym Quarterly* (No. 1, 1969);
revised 2009

HUMANITY (*Menschheit*)

Fixed before gulfs of flame, humanity.
A drum roll. Brows of dark warriors, their footfall.
Through fogs of blood, black iron rattling shrill.
Desperation. Night in melancholy skulls.
The shadow of Eve here. The hunt and red money.
Clouds pierced by the light. The Last Supper
Of bread and wine. The home of gentle stillness.
And those twelve men brought together
In the night. They scream under olive branches.
Saint Thomas dips his hand in the gaping scar.

--written Winter 1968, published in *Anonym Quarterly* (No. 1, 1969);
revised 2009

FRAGMENT

Rosy mirror, an ugly picture
That rises up in fragments of black.
Blood rushes like tears from eyes that break,
Toys with dead snakes in lewd desire.

Snow drifts through the stiff night shirt even as
It scarlet bathes the black countenance
Breaking apart in heavy fragments
Of alien planets, piece by piece.

A spider rises from a black
Mirror. Lewdness. Your dead, alien face,
Blood seeps through the stiff night shirt as
Snow rushes like tears from eyes that break.

--written Winter 1968, published in *Anonym Quarterly* (No. 1, 1969);
revised 2009

YEAR (Jahr)

Dark stillness of childhood. Under green-growing ash trees
Gentleness basks with a pale blue gaze. Golden repose.
A dark thing is ravished by the odor of violets. Swaying sheaves
In the evening, seed and the golden shadow of heaviness.
The carpenter hews his beams; in the twilight of the valley
A mill grinds corn. A crimson mouth curves in the hazel leaves,
A virile red bent over silent waters.
Soft is autumn, the spirit of the forest. A golden cloud
Pursues the solitary, the black shadow of the grandchild.
Decline in a stony room. Under ancient cypresses
The night images of the tears gather into a spring--
Golden eye of the beginning, dark patience of the end.

--written Summer 1968, published in *extensions* (#2, 1969).

DREAMS AND THE TRIUMPH OF NIGHT (*Traum und Umnachtung*)

1

At evening the father became an old man; in dark rooms the mother's face turned to stone; and the curse of a degenerate race weighed down on the boy. At times he remembered his childhood, filled with disease and terror and darkness, with furtive games in the garden of stars; or how he fed the rats in the courtyard at nightfall. The sister's slim shape stepped out of a blue mirror, and he hurtled like a dead man into the dark. His mouth burst open like red fruit in the night, and the stars shone out above his wordless grief. His dreams crowded the ancient house of the fathers.

At evening he gladly walked through the ruined graveyard, or watched the corpses in the funeral hall, green stains of decay on their beautiful hands. He begged a piece of bread by the monastery gate; the shadow of a black stallion leapt from the dark and frightened him. When he lay in his cool bed, he was overcome by unspeakable tears. But there was no one to put a hand on his brow.

When autumn came, he walked clairvoyant in the brown meadow. Oh the hours of fierce abandonment, the evenings by the green brook, the hunts! Oh the soul softly singing the song of the yellowing reed--fiery devotion! He looked silently and long into the starry eyes of the toad, he felt the chill of ancient stone with shivering hands, and he pronounced the venerable tale of the blue spring. Oh silver fishes of the stream and fruit falling from crippled trees. The music of his stride filled him with pride and scorn of men. On his homeward way he came upon an uninhabited palace. Crumbling gods stood in the garden, grieving into evening. But it seemed to him: Here was my home in forgotten years. An organ chorale filled him with God's trembling.

But he spent his days in a dark cave; he lied and stole and hid himself, a flaming wolf, from the white face of the mother. Oh the hour when he sank down in the garden of stars with mouth of stone and the murderer's shadow came over him. He fled with crimson brow to the swamps, and God's wrath chastised his metallic shoulders. Oh birches in the storm and dark beasts avoiding his paths in the night. Hatred burned his heart, voluptuous

joy as he outraged the silent boy in the green growing summer garden, and saw in that radiant face his own where night was master. Woe for that evening at the window when death, a grey shape of bones, stepped out of crimson flowers. Oh you towers and bells!--and the shadows of night fell on him like stones.

2

No one loved him. In rooms that grew dark, falsehood and lust burned his head. The blue rustle of a woman's garment froze him to a pillar, and his mother's nightly shape stood in the door. The shadow of evil reared up at his head--oh you nights and stars! He walked with the cripple along the mountain at evening. Rose glow of sunset rested on the icy peak, and his heart chimed softly in the dusk. The stormy pines sank heavily over them, and the red huntsman stepped out of the forest. At nightfall his heart burst like crystal, and darkness beat on his forehead. With icy hands he throttled a wild cat under bald oaks. To his right, the white form of an angel appeared, lamenting, and the cripple's shadow grew in the dark. But he picked up a rock and threw it at him so that he fled with a howl, and the angel's gentle face dissolved with a sigh in the shadow of the tree.

For a long time he lay in the rocky plow-field and watched in awe the golden tent of stars. Pursued by bats he threw himself into the dark. Breathless, he entered a ruined house. In the courtyard he drank like a wild beast from the blue waters of the well, until he grew cold. He sat, feverish, on the icy stair and raved against God to let him die. Oh the grey face of horror as he lifted his round eyes above the slit throat of a dove.

Hurrying over stairs in a foreign land, he met a young Jewess and he reached for her black hair and he took her mouth. Hatred hounded him down gloomy alleys and an icy rattling tore at his ear. An altar boy, he followed the taciturn priest along autumnal walls; under withered trees, he breathed the crimson of his reverend vestment. Oh the disc of the sun-- fallen to pieces!

Sweet torments devoured his flesh. In a desert hostel his own bleeding form rose before him, stiff with filth. He loved more deeply the lofty works of stone--the steeple with its infernal grimaces storming the sky each night, the cool crypt where man's fiery heart is kept. Woe for the unspeakable guilt it makes known! But as he went with his thoughts afire

downstream under bare trees, a flaming demon appeared to him--his sister in a mantle of hair. When he awoke, the stars went out at her head.

3

Woe to the generation of the damned! When each fate is fulfilled in polluted chambers, death steps into the house with corrupting tread. Oh for the spring outside and the song of a lovely bird in the blossoming tree! But the sparse green has withered greyly at the nightwalker's window, and bleeding hearts think thoughts of evil still.

Oh the dusky spring paths of him who muses. A righteous man, he delights in the flowering hedge, the peasant's young seed, and the singing bird, God's gentle creature; in the vesper bell and the lovely communion of men. May he forget his fate and the goad of the thorn. The brook flows free and green where his foot of silver treads, and a speaking tree rustles over his head in the night. Then he lifts the snake with delicate hand, and the heart inside him has melted away in tears of fire. Sublime is the silence of the forest, the green-growing darkness, and the mossy fowl taking wing when night falls. Oh the trembling when each knows his guilt and walks on thorny paths.

And he found in the thorn brush the child's white form, bleeding for the mantle of its bridegroom. But he stood before her in silence and pain, buried in steely hair. Oh the radiant angels the crimson night wind has scattered. All night long he lived in a crystal cave, and scabs grew on his forehead like silver. Like a shade, he went down the mountain track under the autumn stars. Snow fell and a blue darkness filled the house.

A blind man's voice was heard, the voice of the father; and it uttered a ban against fear. Woe the bent-down look of the women! The fruit and gear of a terrified race broke to pieces in palsied hands. A wolf tore the first-born and the sisters fled to bony old men in dark gardens. He sang near ruined walls, a prophet overwhelmed by the night, and his voice devoured God's wind. Oh the luxuriance of death! Oh children of a dark generation! The blood's flowers of evil shimmer on his brow like silver, the cold moon in his broken eyes. Woe to those who dwell in the night, woe to the damned!

4

Slumber is deep in the dark poisons, full of stars, and the white, the stony face of the mother. Death is bitter, food for the guilt-laden. In the brown branches of the tree, faces fall grinningly apart. But one sang softly in green shades of the elder bush. Sweet playmate, a rosy angel came near; and he slumbered into the night, a gentle, wild creature. He saw the starry face of cleanness. The sunflowers bowed golden over the garden fence when summer came. Oh industry of the bees and green leaves of the walnut tree, thunderstorms passing over. Like silver, too, the poppy blew carrying our starry dreams of the night in a pale green capsule.

Oh how still the house was when the father passed away into darkness. Fruit ripened crimson on the tree and the gardener stirred his hard hands. Oh signals of bright hair in the radiant sun. But at evening the dead man's shadow trod silently into the grieving family circle and his steps rang like crystal over the green-sprouting pasture near the wood. They gathered silently at table. Dying, they broke bread, bleeding bread with hands of wax. Woe to the stony eyes of the sister whose madness trampled at supper the brother's night-worn forehead while bread turned to stone in the suffering hands of the mother. Woe to the decaying ones, for their silver tongues were silent about hell. And the lamps went out in the still chamber, and sufferers looked at each other in silence through scarlet masks. And all night long the rain rushed down and refreshed the fields.

On the thorny wastes, the dark one followed the yellowing paths in the wheat, the song of the lark, and the gentle stillness of green branches in search of peace. Oh you hamlets and mossy stairs--a vision of fire! But with a sound of bones his steps reel over sleeping snakes by the forest's edge, and his ear follows forever the raving scream of the vulture. At evening he found a rocky desert, a dead man's escort to the father's dark house. A crimson cloud crowned his head, and he fell silently upon his own blood and image, his face like the moon; and he sank like stone, a dying youth, into the void as the sister appeared in the broken mirror; and night swallowed up the generation of the damned.

--written late autumn 1968, published in *The Goliards Anthology* (no. 7, June 1969); slightly revised 2009.

PASSION

When Orpheus stirs his lute with silver touch
lamenting a thing that died in the evening garden,
where are you that reposes under tall trees?
His lament roars in the autumn reeds,
the blue pond,
dying away under green-growing trees
and chasing the sister's shadow;
dark love
of a savage race
whose day roars away on golden wheels.
Silent night.

Under gloomy pines
two wolves have mingled their blood
in a stony embrace; a shape of gold
the cloud was lost above the footbridge,
patience and stillness of childhood.
Once more the frail corpse appears
by the Pond of the Tritons
slumbering in his hyacinth hair.
If only the cool head would break at last.

For always a blue deer,
a thing of watchful eyes under dusking trees,
guarding those darker paths
and moved by harmony in the night,
follows gentle madness;
or full of dark rapture
the music of the lute strings has rung out
at the cool feet of the penitent girl
in the stony city.

--written summer 1969, published in *The Malabat Review* (Number 13,
January 1970)

TRANSFIGURATION (*Verklärung*)

When evening falls
a blue face moves quietly away from you,
a small bird sings in the tamarind tree.

A gentle monk
folds his death-numb hands.
A white angel comes to the Virgin.

A wreath in the night
made of violets, wheat and crimson grapes
is the year of the gazer.

At your feet
the tombs of the dead fall open
while you bury your forehead in silver hands.

In silence
the autumn moon is alive at your mouth
drunk with the juice of poppies, a dark song;

a blue flower
ringing faintly among yellow-stained rocks.

--written summer 1969, published in *The Malabat Review* (Number 13,
January 1970)

NIGHT (*Die Nacht*)

Of you I sing, savage clefts
Mountains heaped up
In the storm of the night
You grey towers
Spilling grimaces of hell
Shapes of fiery beasts
Rough ferns, pines
Flowers of crystal.
Unending torment
In your hung for God
Gentle spirit
Sighing in the downrush of waters
In billowing fir trees.

The golden fires of the nations
Flare round about.
Over dusky cliffs
The glowing bride of the wind
Plunges death-drunken
The blue breaker
Of the glacier
And the bell drones
Mightily in the valley:
Flames, maledictions

And the dark
Games of debauchery
The assault on the heavens
Of a petrified head.

--written summer 1969, published in *The Malabar Review* (Number 13,
January 1970)

SEVENSONG OF DEATH (*Siebengesang des Todes*)

Spring walks into pale twilight, under sucking trees
a dark thing wanders in evening and downfall
listening to the soft wail of the blackbird.
Silently the night appears, a bleeding deer
fainting slowly on the hill.

Blossoming apple branches sway in the damp air,
what has been devoured dissolves in silver¹
dying out of eyes full of night. Falling stars.
gentle singing of childhood.

More boldly the sleeper climbed down the black woods
and a blue spring murmured in the glen
so that he lifted pallid eyelids
above his face of snow.

And the moon chased a red beast
out of his cave.
and the dark lament of the woman died away in sighs.

More radiantly the white stranger lifted his hands
up to his star.
Silently a dead thing leaves the ruined house.

¹ A howler. The original reads "*Verschlungenes löst sich*". The German verb "*verschlingen*" may mean either "to swallow" or "to tangle." Obviously the latter suits Trakl's sense better. The line should read: "All tangled things grow silvery straight."

O the decayed shape of man: forged from cold metals,
night and terror of sunken forests
and the seething wildness of the beast.
The soul becalmed.

That man rode in a shadowy boat down the shimmering streams
full of crimson stars, and from above
the green-growing boughs fell peacefully upon him,
poppy from a cloud of silver.

--written summer 1969, published in *The Malabar Review* (Number 13,
January 1970)

SONG OF EXILE (*Gesang des Abgeschiedenen*)

Full of harmonies is the flight of birds. The green forests
Have gathered in the evening to make stiller huts;
The crystalline pastures of the deer.
A dark thin is soothed by the splash of the brook, the damp shadows,

And the flowers of summer sweetly ringing in the wind.
Already twilight fall over man's brooding forehead.

And a small light, full of goodness, shines in his heart
And the peace of the banquet. For bread and wine
Are hallowed by God's hands, and with night-dark eyes
Your brother beholds you in silence asking for rest from his thorny pilgrimage.
O the dwelling in the spiritual blueness of night.

Lovingly too the silence in the room enfolds the shadows of the aged,
Their crimson torments, the lament of a mighty race
Devoutly passing away in the solitary grandchild.

For the sufferer awakes, ever more radiant,
Near a threshold of stone out of black minutes of madness
And stands in the huge embrace of blue coolness and bright waning autumn,'

Of the silent house and the forest legends,
Of measure and law and the moonlit paths of the exiles.

--written summer 1969, published in *The Malabar Review* (Number 13,
January 1970)

PSALM

Stillness—as though blind men collapsed by an autumnal wall
Alert with moldering temples for the flight of ravens.
Golden stillness in autumn, the father’s face and flickering sun.
At evening the old village crumbles in the peace of brown oaks,
The red hammering of the forge, a pounding heart.
Stillness—the serving maid hides her hyacinth brow in slow hands
Under fluttering sunflowers. Dread and stillness
Of breaking eyes fills the dusky parlor, the aged women’s
Irresolute steps, the crimson mouth’s
Flight, the trickle quenched in the gloom.
Mute evening in the garden. From low rafters
The night moth has fallen, nymph buried in blue sleep.
In the yard the groom slaughters a lam, the sweet smell of its blood
Clouds over our foreheads, the dark coolness of the well.
There follows the heavy grief of dying asters, golden voices in the wind.
When night falls you look at me out rotten eyes:
In the blue stillness your cheeks have fallen away to dust.

--written summer 1969, published in *The Malabat Review* (Number 13,
January 1970)

REVELATION AND APOCALYPSE (*Offenbarung und Untergang*)

Strange are the nocturnal paths of Man. When I walked in the night past stony rooms and a silent lamp, a copper candlestick was burning in each, and when I fell on my bed shaking with cold, the black shadow of the stranger girl stood near my head once more and I silently hid my face in slow hands. And the hyacinth had come up blue at the window, and the ancient prayer hung on the crimson lips of the breather, crystal tears dropped from his eyelids, wept for the sake of the bitter world. In that hour I was the white son in my father's death. The night wind burst in blue shivers from the hill, the dark lament of my mother—it came and it died away and I saw the black hell in my heart. Minute of shimmering stillness. Softly an unspeakable face arose from the chalky wall—a dying boy—the loveliness of a race coming homeward. White as the moon, the chill of the stones hugged my waking temples, the footsteps of the shades echoed away on crumbling stairs, a rosy dance in the little garden . . .

* * *

I sat in silence in a vacant tavern under smoke-black, wooden beams, and feeling lonely over my wine. A radiant corpse bent over a thing of darkness and a dead lamb lay at my feet. From blue decay the pale form of my sister rose up and her bleeding mouth pronounced these words: "Go pierce me, blackthorn. Ah, my silver arms yet resound with savage thunder. Go flow, my blood, from my moon-white feet, blossoming in the paths of night over which the rat darts screaming. Go flicker, you stars, in my vaulted brows. And softly my heart chimes in the night. A red shadow with sword of fire has broken into the house, has fled with a forehead of snow. O bitter death."

And a dark voice spoke from within me: "One night in the forest I broke my black stallion's neck when madness rose in his crimson eyes. The shadows of the elms fell upon me, the blue laughter of the spring and the black chill of the night, when I, a wild huntsman, started a snowy quarry. My face died in a hell of stones."

And a drop of blood fell glistening into the wine of the solitary, and when I drank of it the taste was bitterer than poppies. And a swarthy cloud hid my head, the crystal tears of exiled angels. And my sister's blood ran silently from a silver wound and fell over me in a rain of fire.

* * *

I want to walk by the forest hem, a thing of silence from whose speechless hands the sun has slipped with his bright hair, a stranger on the hillside of evening who weeps and opens his eyelids above the stony city, a deer that stands still in the peace of the ancient elder. O the darkening head lies listening without repose, or the hesitant footsteps follow the blue cloud on the hillside, follow also its solemn stars. At my side the green seed escorts me in silence, the deer is my companion on mossy forest paths. The huts of the villagers are dumbly shut and the wail of the brook brings fear in the windless blackness.

But when I went down the rocky path, madness took me and I screamed aloud in the night. And when I bent down with silver fingers over the silent waters, I saw that my face had abandoned me. And the white voice said to me: "Go kill yourself." With a groan the shadow of a boy rose up within me and looked at me with radiant eyes so that I fell down weeping under the trees, under the mighty vault of the stars.

* * *

Pilgrimage without peace through savage rocks far from the pools of evening, from homecoming flocks. Far away the sinking sun basks in a pasture of crystal, and there is terror in her wild song, in the lonely cry of the bird dying into blue quiet. But in silence you come at night when I lie awake on the hillside, or raving in the thunder of the spring. And ever more blackly heaviness vaults above the exiled head, shuddering lightning bolts appall the soul at night, your hands rip open my breathless breast.

* * *

When I went into the darkening garden and Evil One's sinister form had left me, the hyacinth stillness of night enfolded me, and I rode on a curving boat over the resting pond

and sweet peace touched my stony forehead. Unable to speak I lay under the ancient willows and the blue sky was high, high above me and full of stars. And when I died while gazing, all fear and pain died within me all the more deeply. And the boy's blue shadow arose radiantly over the darkness, a soft song. On wings of moonlight there rose, high over the green tree-tops, over crags of crystal, the face of my sister.

* * *

On silver soles I climbed down the thorny stairs and entered the chamber whitewashed with chalk. A candlestick shone silently inside, and silently I hid my head in crimson linens. And the earth cast up the dead body of a child, a shape of moonlight that slowly rose from my shadow and fell down a stony chasm with broken arms, soft flakes of snow.

--written summer 1968, published in *Chicago Review* (XX:4/XXI:1, May 1969)

THREE GLANCES INTO AN OPAL (*Drei Blicke in einen Opal*)

1

Glance into opal: a hamlet crowned with withered wine,
the grey clouds of stillness, the yellow boulder-strewn hill;
and in the evening hours the coolness of the well—
twin mirror framed by shadow and slime-covered stone.

The highway and crosses of autumn shrink and sink down
into evening, singing pilgrims and blood-flecked bedding.
The form of the lonely man moves inward then, turning,
and through the empty grove, pale angel, he walks alone.

The warm south wind blows from somewhere black. Satyrs entwine
small slender women; monks, the pales priests of luxury—
their frenzy adorns itself with lilies of beauty
and gloom, and raises up their hands to God's golden shrine.

2

With its moist touch, a drop of dew hovers rosily
in the rosemary; breath of sepulchral smells courses
through hospitals loud with wild screams of fever, curses.
Bones rise from the ancestral grave, ruinous and grey.

The old man's wife dances in veilings and slime of blue,
hair all caked with filth and filling up with her black tears.
The boys dream confusedly in withered willow tares
and their foreheads are barren and raw with leprosy.

An evening sinks, tepid and mild, through the arched window.
A saint steps from the black marks of his wounds. Scarlet
snails are crawling in slow escape out of their shattered
shells, vomiting blood on twisted thorns that loom stiff and
grey.

3

Blind men are sprinkling incense into festering wounds.
Red-golden vestments; torches; a singing of the psalms;
and girls who embrace the Lord's body like poison fumes.
Shapes stiff as wax pace over smoke and fiery brands.

A skinny, raw-boned simpleton leads the midnight dance
of the lepers. Garden of uncanny adventures;
distortions; grimacing flowers and laughter; monsters
and writhing constellations among the black thorn's tines.

O poverty, beggar soup, bread and sweet leek; the trance
of a life lived in hovels near the edge of the woods.
The grey sky hardens itself above the yellow glades
and obedient to old custom a vesper bell chants.

--written early 1969, published in *Choice* (#6, 1970)