



William Wantling was born in 1933 in what is now East Peoria, Illinois (but was then the twin communities of Robein and Valley View). He served in the US Marine Corps from 1951 to 1955, including service in Korea in 1952 and 1953, where he was seriously wounded. In 1958, he was convicted of forgery and narcotics and served five and a half years in California's San Quentin Prison. After his release, he earned BA and MA degrees in English from Illinois State University, but continued to struggle with drugs and alcohol, leading to various minor scrapes with the law and frequent stays in the mental and drug dependency wards of hospitals in Peoria and Normal. He died in 1974 of heart failure at the age of 40.

Wantling's poetry appeared in numerous small press publications in Australia, Britain, New Zealand, and the US, though most are long forgotten except *Second Coming*, *Small Press Review* and *Wormwood Review*, and also in various anthologies edited by Walter Lowenfels, including *Where Is Vietnam?*, *Penguin Modern Poets 12* and *Open Poetry*. In 1981, Spoon River Poetry Press published *William Wantling: A Biography and Selected Works* by John Pyros. Wantling's own books and chapbooks include:

The Search, Torrance, CA: Hors Commerce, 1964.

Machine and Destiny, Torrance, CA: Hors Commerce, 1964.

Five Poem Songs, Torrance, CA: Hors Commerce, 1964.

Down, Off & Out, Bensenville, IL: Mimeo, 1965.

Head First, Staatsburg, NY: Kiviat, 1965.

Heroin Haikus, Chicago: Fenian Head Centre, 1965.

The Source, El Cerrito, CA: Dustbooks, 1966.

The Awakening, London: Turret, 1967 / Rapp & Whiting, 1968.

Sick Fly, Cardiff, Wales: Second Aeon, 1970.
Obscene & Other Poems, Dunedin, NZ: Caveman Press,
1972.
San Quentin's Stranger, Dunedin, NZ: Caveman Press,
1973.
10,000 rpm and diggin' it, yeah!, Cardiff, Wales:
Second Aeon, 1973.
7 on Style, San Francisco: Second Coming Press, 1975.

Korea 1953

Endless weeks of zero
A lurking bunker on a barren
 hill
Waiting to receive our orders
 Probe, Capture, Kill
As if one must recompense in
 limbo
For each probe which lacked
 all sense

In that strange war that was not
a war, that came to us too late
When we enjoyed sanctioned
 Murder
And sought the purge of murderous
 hate
We found a certain inner logic to
 our violence
A game in which each player and
 his mate
 understood all rules
(each sensing his brother's center)
And at expense of this – genius of
 fools
One might purge oneself
 so clean
That love would come to our dead
 winter
 for one cannot hold
 an inner void
And if one's hate is utterly
 purged

One's intuition told
 that love could enter
And we, bold, would become merged
 with our idiot other selves
And returned to time of childhood
 Grace
Yet we became
as a pack of maddened dogs that race
 caged, snarling, for the hand
 which flings
The one small piece of rancid meat
in the center of our corrupted sand
... And the single victor cannot eat
The prize before dying in his blood's
 slow-cooling heat

The Korean

stood stiffly pressed against
 the wall
arms folded
 staring
... flinched
when the bullet sang
 fell
outward into the cobblestoned
 court
one too many holes in his head
for stealing from Americans

Without Laying Claim

without laying claim
to an impossible innocence
I must tell you how
in the midst of that crowd
we calmly pulled the pins
from six grenades
mumbling an explanation
even we didn't believe
& released the spoons
a lump in our throats

I Remember

I remember the time
Black got it
incoming knocked him back
into a snowbank
 buried him
he was Missing in Action
 all winter

spring thaw & we were
back on the same hill &
the Lt. stumbled on him
cracked his shin-bone on
Black's helmet & looked
down at Black, preserved like
a fresh side of beef
 all winter

"You Sonofabitch," he said
to Black's stiff corpse

"You Sonofabitch, if you'd
been more careful I
wouldn't hafta write
all those Goddam letters"

"You Sonofabitch" & he spit

but I'd seen his eyes
watering before he looked
straight up into the sun

Pusan Liberty

the 6x6 bounces me down the
washboard roads, I see the

sun-eaten walls of Korea, my
girl-wife & child in a mud &

straw hut back in Taegu & here
I am meeting the SEAL as he

sits on his roller-skate cart
minus arms & legs but beneath

his ass a million \$'s worth
of heroin—I make my buy

walk through the 10,000 cam-
era market-place, jeeps for

sale, people for sale, I'm
even for sale as I find the

porch of Cutie's suckahatchi
house & fix, sitting in the

sun on the adobe veranda, the
2 Chinese agents come around

to make their buy, 2 young
boys, they're hooked bad & I

charge them too much—we sit
there and fix, I fix again, the

so-called Enemy & I, but just
three angry boys lost in the immense

absurdity of War & State sudden
friends who have decided that

our hatred of Government exceeds
the furthest imaginable limits

of human calculation.

Sure

sure
I'd like to love
altogether & believe
absolutely in non-
violence & make
this a world
where children
no longer suffer
& die
where deer
can graze in our
backyards &
"passport" is a
forgotten anachronism
where everyone
understands Camus
& Schweitzer . . .

but
can you be a
pacifist
after you've killed
too many
& if one is too many
where do I stand
with *my* score?
what I wouldn't
give to go back, to
start all over

and you?

The Day the Dam Burst

& what if the dam should
suddenly burst
if suddenly I should run
headlong, frothing, haphazardly
hurling shrapnel grenades
into high-noon crowds?
if suddenly tossing aside the
dead ugly ache of it
all, I equalled the senseless
with my brute senseless act?

O My, wouldn't I
shine? wouldn't
I shine then?
wouldn't it be *I* then who
had created God
at last?

The Awakening

I found the bee as it fumbled about the ground
Its leg mangled, its wing torn, its sting gone
I picked it up, marveled at its insistence
 to continue on, despite the dumb brute
 thing that had occurred
I considered, remembered the fatal struggle
 the agony on the face of wounded friends
 and the same dumb drive to continue
I became angry at the unfair conflict suffered
 by will and organism
I became just, I became unreasoned, I became
 extravagant
I observed the bee, there, lying in my palm
I looked and I commanded in a harsh and angry shout—
 STOP THAT!
Then it ceased to struggle, and somehow suddenly
 became marvelously whole, and it arose
 and it flew away
I stared, I was appalled, I was overwhelmed
 with responsibility, and I knew not where to
 begin.