The Teeth Mother Naked at Last

I

Massive engines lift beautifully from the deck. Wings appear over the trees, wings with eight hundred rivets.

Engines burning a thousand gallons of gasoline a minute sweep over the huts with dirt floors.

The chickens feel the new fear deep in the pits of their beaks. Buddha with Padma Sambhava.

Meanwhile, out on the China Sea, immense gray bodies are floating, born in Roanoke, the ocean on both sides expanding, "buoyed on the dense marine."

Helicopters flutter overhead. The death-bee is coming. Super Sabres like knots of neurotic energy sweep around and return. This is Hamilton's triumph. This is the advantage of a centralized bank. B-52s come from Guam. All the teachers
die in flames. The hopes of Tolstoy fall asleep in the ant heap.
Do not ask for mercy.

Now the time comes to look into the past-tunnels,
the hours given and taken in school,
the scuffles in coatrooms,
foam leaps from his nostrils,
now we come to the scum you take from the mouths of the dead,
now we sit beside the dying, and hold their hands, there is hardly time for good-bye,
the staff sergeant from North Carolina is dying—you hold his hand,
he knows the mansions of the dead are empty, he has an empty place inside him, created one night when his parents came home drunk,
he uses half his skin to cover it,
as you try to protect a balloon from sharp objects.

Artillery shells explode. Napalm canisters roll end over end.
800 steel pellets fly through the vegetable walls.
The six-hour infant puts his fists instinctively to his eyes to keep out the light.
But the room explodes,
the children explode.
Blood leaps on the vegetable walls.

Yes, I know, blood leaps on the walls—
Don’t cry at that—
Do you cry at the wind pouring out of Canada?
Do you cry at the reeds shaken at the edge of the sloughs?
The Marine battalion enters.
This happens when the seasons change,  
This happens when the leaves begin to drop from the  
trees too early  
"Kill them: I don’t want to see anything moving."
This happens when the ice begins to show its teeth in  
the ponds
This happens when the heavy layers of lake water press  
down on the fish’s head, and send him deeper, where  
his tail swirls slowly, and his brain passes him  
pictures of heavy reeds, of vegetation fallen  
on vegetation. . . .
Hamilton saw all this in detail:
"Every banana tree slashed, every cooking utensil smashed,  
every mattress cut."

Now the Marine knives sweep around like sharp-edged  
jets; how beautifully they slash open the rice bags,  
the mattresses . . .
ducks are killed with $150 shotguns.

Old women watch the soldiers as they move.

II

Excellent Roman knives slip along the ribs.

A stronger man starts to jerk up the strips of flesh.

"Let’s hear it again, you believe in the Father, the Son, and the  
Holy Ghost?"

A long scream unrolls.

More.
“From the political point of view, democratic institutions are being built in Vietnam, wouldn’t you agree?”

A green parrot shudders under the fingernails. Blood jumps in the pocket. The scream lashes like a tail.

“Let us not be deterred from our task by the voices of dissent. . . .”

The ministers lie, the professors lie, the television lies, the priests lie. . . . These lies mean that the country wants to die. Lie after lie starts out into the prairie grass, like enormous caravans of Conestoga wagons. . . .

And a long desire for death flows out, guiding the enormous caravans from beneath, stringing together the vague and foolish words. It is a desire to eat death, to gobble it down, to rush on it like a cobra with mouth open

It’s a desire to take death inside, to feel it burning inside, pushing out velvety hairs, like a clothes brush in the intestines—
This is the thrill that leads the President on to lie

* * *

Now the Chief Executive enters; the press conference begins:
First the President lies about the date the Appalachian Mountains rose.
Then he lies about the population of Chicago, then he lies about the weight of the adult eagle, then about the acreage of the Everglades

He lies about the number of fish taken every year in the Arctic, he has private information about which city is the capital of Wyoming, he lies about the birthplace of Attila the Hun.

He lies about the composition of the amniotic fluid, and he insists that Luther was never a German, and that only the Protestants sold indulgences,

That Pope Leo X wanted to reform the church, but the "liberal elements" prevented him, that the Peasants' War was fomented by Italians from the North.

And the Attorney General lies about the time the sun sets.

* * *

These lies are only the longing we all feel to die. It is the longing for someone to come and take you by the hand to where they all are sleeping: where the Egyptian pharaohs are asleep, and your own mother,
and all those disappeared children, who used to go around with you in the rings at grade school.

Do not be angry at the President—he is longing to take in his hand
the locks of death hair—
to meet his own children dead, or unborn.

He is drifting sideways toward the dusty places

III

This is what it's like for a rich country to make war
this is what it's like to bomb huts (afterwards described as "structures")
this is what it's like to kill marginal farmers (afterwards described as "Communists")

this is what it's like to watch the altimeter needle going mad

Baron 25, this is 81. Are there any friendlies in the area? 81 from 25, negative on the friendlies. I'd like you to take out as many structures as possible located in those trees within 200 meters east and west of my smoke mark.

diving, the green earth swinging, cheeks hanging back,
red pins blossoming ahead of us, 20-millimeter cannon fire, leveling off, rice fields shooting by like telephone poles, smoke rising, hut roofs loom up huge as landing fields, slugs going in, half the huts on fire, small figures running, palm trees burning, shooting past, up again; ... blue sky ... cloud mountains

This is what it's like to have a gross national product.
It’s because the aluminum window shade business is doing so well in the United States that we roll fire over entire villages.

It’s because a hospital room in the average American city now costs $90 a day that we bomb hospitals in the North.

It’s because the milk trains coming into New Jersey hit the right switches every day that the best Vietnamese men are cut in two by American bullets that follow each other like freight cars.

This is what it’s like to send firebombs down from air-conditioned cockpits.

This is what it’s like to be told to fire into a reed hut with an automatic weapon.

It’s because we have new packaging for smoked oysters that bomb holes appear in the rice paddies.

It is because we have so few women sobbing in back rooms, because we have so few children’s heads torn apart by high-velocity bullets, because we have so few tears falling on our own hands that the Super Sabre turns and screams down toward the earth.

It’s because taxpayers move to the suburbs that we transfer populations. The Marines use cigarette lighters to light the thatched roofs of huts because so many Americans own their own homes.
IV

I see a car rolling toward a rock wall.
The treads in the face begin to crack.
We all feel like tires being run down roads under heavy cars.

The teen-ager imagines herself floating through the Seven Spheres.
Oven doors are found open.
Soot collects over the doorframe, has children,
    takes courses,
goes mad, and dies.

There is a black silo inside our bodies, revolving fast.
Bits of black paint are flaking off,
where the motorcycles roar, around and around,
rising higher on the silo walls,
the bodies bent toward the horizon,
driven by angry women dressed in black.

*   *   *

I know that books are tired of us.
I know they are chaining the Bible to chairs.
Books don’t want to remain in the same room with us anymore.

New Testaments are escaping . . . dressed as women . . .
    they go off after dark.
And Plato! Plato . . . Plato wants to go backwards . . .
He wants to hurry back up the river of time, so be can end as some blob of sea flesh rotting on an Australian beach.
V

Why are they dying? I have written this so many times. They are dying because the President has opened a Bible again. They are dying because gold deposits have been found among the Shoshoni Indians.

They are dying because money follows intellect! And intellect is like a fan opening in the wind—

The Marines think that unless they die the rivers will not move. They are dying so that the mountain shadows will continue to fall east in the afternoon, so that the beetle can move along the ground near the fallen twigs.

VI

But if one of those children came near that we have set on fire, came toward you like a gray barn, walking, you would howl like a wind tunnel in a hurricane, you would tear at your shirt with blue hands, you would drive over your own child’s wagon trying to back up, the pupils of your eyes would go wild—

If a child came by burning, you would dance on a lawn, trying to leap into the air, digging into your cheeks, you would ram your head against the wall of your bedroom like a bull penned too long in his moody pen—
If one of those children came toward me with both hands in the air, fire rising along both elbows, I would suddenly go back to my animal brain, I would drop on all fours, screaming, my vocal chords would turn blue, so would yours, it would be two days before I could play with my own children again.

VII

I want to sleep awhile in the rays of the sun slanting over the snow. Don’t wake me. Don’t tell me how much grief there is in the leaf with its natural oils. Don’t tell me how many children have been born with stumpy hands all those years we lived in St. Augustine’s shadow.

Tell me about the dust that falls from the yellow daffodil shaken in the restless winds. Tell me about the particles of Babylonian thought that still pass through the earthworm every day. Don’t tell me about “the frightening laborers who do not read books.”

Now the whole nation starts to whirl, the end of the Republic breaks off, Europe comes to take revenge, the mad beast covered with European hair rushes through the mesa bushes in Mendocino County, pigs rush toward the cliff, the waters underneath part: in one ocean luminous globes float up (in them hairy and ecstatic men—) in the other, the teeth mother, naked at last.
Let us drive cars 
up
the light beams
to the stars . . .

And return to earth crouched inside the drop of sweat 
that falls
from the chin of the Protestant tied in the fire.