

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 whines of the jets
pierce like a long needle.

As soon as the President finishes his press conference,
black wings carry off the words,
bits of flesh still clinging to them.

* * *

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 can-
non fire, leveling off, rice fields shooting by like tele-
phone 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 he 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.

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